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Profile Story

Joe Galliani: The Creative Greenius

Beneath the dense smog of the LA Basin lies a green dragon. Protector of the air, nemesis of the oil industry, champion for environmental justice. But this isn't some fairytale. Some know him as Creative Greenius. Others who are not keen on his environmental agenda call him the Big Green Mafia Don. His friends call him Mr. Joe. Whatever he goes by, Joe Galliani is not a man who is easy to overlook. From the first time I met Joe, his vivacious energy filled the living room at Thanksgiving in a way that I never forgot. Since meeting him, I have closely followed his life of activism, continually inspired by his in-your-face advocacy that has been the backbone of much of South Bay's environmental movements for the last 7 years.

Mr. Joe calls Torrance, a city in South Bay LA, home. Los Angeles has a notorious reputation for being one of the most polluted cities in the country. As he lets most people know, within a 12 mile radius of his home there are 12 refineries, including one that, until a year ago, was home to the infamous ExxonMobil. These refineries spew hazardous greenhouse gases that create much of the hazy smog associated with the area. More than 90% of people in the LA Basin breathe air that is harmful to their health. Much of these areas in LA that deal with the most pollution are lower income, minority areas. Joe knows this, and has made it his duty to fight for the rights of these people in an effort to protect both people and the environment.

Joe Galliani is the chair for South Bay Clean Power and one of the leading organizers for South Bay Los Angeles 350 Climate Action Group, an organization whose goal is to work together with their community to address the impacts of climate change and respond to those issues in order to preserve and protect their coastal home in LA. His Facebook profile offers a self-described warrior of the environment, and accurately so: "Wherever evil seeks to destroy the now of the less fortunate and the future of our younger generations I will be there to speak truth to power and monkey wrench the machines of injustice. I will be there and be ON it. That is my job". Joe has helped with community projects ranging from replacing people's high energy consumption Christmas lights with more energy efficient ones, to installing solar panels on low income houses. He not only talks the talk, he walks the walk.

From Corporate to Activism

For 25 years before he became the Creative Greenius, Joe was a creative director and writer for some of America's most successful and demanding corporations. While he has always had a hint of green in him, in 2006 when he went to go see Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* was the moment when Joe's head was completely turned around on climate change activism. A year later on his 50th birthday he went on a 7 day loop trip in Yosemite and made the announcement to his wife and friends. He told them, "You know, I've made a lot of money up to this point and almost all of the work I have done is disposable and it doesn't mean anything outside of what it was meant for." He wanted to use the same talent that made him a lot of money in corporate America to focus on environmental issues.

His work with South Bay 350 started out in 2009. During a 350 meeting that had been called to discuss plans for the national day of activism that was coming up, the assumed leader of the event made an announcement. She said she had good news and bad news. The good news was that she was pregnant. The bad news was that it was going to keep her from leading that effort. Then she asked if there was "anyone stupid enough to raise their hand and take over," and Joe's hand went in the air and that's how he became a leader for 350. While agreeing to become the committee leader may have been somewhat of a whim, Joe's dedication to South Bay 350's work is anything but that.

Protector of the Land, Protester for the People

Protests are nothing new to Joe. In 2009 he helped organize a protest called The Amazing Human Tide Line where 1,300 plus people formed a giant line along the beach to show where the rising tide would be in a few short years if climate change is not addressed. In May 2016, Joe and other South Bay 350 activists convened with thousands of others in downtown LA for the Break Free From Fossil Fuels Protest. On February 18th, 2017 he and others headed to the Torrance refinery to take a stand for the health and safety of local communities.

But Mr. Joe is a fast-paced man full of determination and while setting environmental goals for the distant future is part of his work, that is not where his main focus or passion lies. South Bay 350 decided last year that 2017 would be the year of escalating. While Joe recognizes

that marches and protests do have effect, he and his comrades realize that more is needed if their goals of climate change regulation are going to be reached. One of Joe's inspirations for this progression of activism was Bill McKibben, an internationally known author and environmentalist who is deeply invested in the impact of climate change. In a speech that Joe attended, McKibben told his audience something that Joe is now advocating for. "The people who need to fight and put themselves on the line are the older generations. We cannot ask our younger people to participate in nonviolent civil disobedience". Joe added his own personal footnote to this saying that, "An arrest could hurt a future career, especially in the Trump world we are living in now. Same goes for people of color. They are living in neighborhoods where the police do not treat them very well".

On April 29th there will be a climate mobilization in D.C. that Joe and his colleagues will participate in, but from their home base in LA. While their concerns have increased with the uncertainty of the Trump administration, Joe and his comrades are still planning their act of civil disobedience but they're working to adjust plans so that they can be as effective as possible. With so much going on in LA, South Bay 350 felt that it would be most appropriate to support their fellow protesters from the other side of the country in order to draw attention to the greenhouse gas-spewing refineries here in LA.

They are focusing their protest on the harbor area refineries, the locations of the front line communities of color that are most impacted by these pollutants. In these areas, it's not unusual for kids of 4 years old to be getting inhalers because they have asthma from the poor air quality. One of Joe's and his team's goals is to not just enter this neighborhood and push their own agenda onto these affected people. "When working in low income communities of color, you don't want to have a bunch of white people come into a neighborhood and tell them what to do. We go in, ask them what we can do to help, what are they already doing that we can help with" Joe told me when we discussed the upcoming protest. Environmental injustice is a big ticket item on Mr. Joe's list of things to end but he is very diligent in involving those affected instead of imposing his plans on them, something that many activists tend to overlook in these movements.

The Future of the Fight

The issue of environmental racism is a subject that Joe and I are both passionate about and have talked about before during conversations. While speaking with Joe about his work, I

asked if he could explain what environmental racism was in a simplified way that more people can understand. His answer was this: “Environmental racism is about the issue that things happen in a white neighborhood and there is an immediate response and when it is in a black or brown neighborhood, not so much. The other part of it is whenever they’re looking to put up a new toxic operation, they’re going to stick it in a poor neighborhood where people are poor and powerless so they can’t do anything.” A clear and concise answer that gives an even more in-depth look into the reason behind his acts of activism. All you have to do is drive by these neighborhoods and you can see it, location relation of toxic industries to lower-income neighborhoods is plain as day.

This issue is starting to be addressed more frequently in politics as has been seen in Flint, Michigan over contaminated water sources and the nation-wide protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline. Previous presidential candidate Bernie Sanders was one of the first politicians to openly and boisterously address this massive problem that is seen across the states. This and Bernie’s environmental agenda lead Joe to become apart of the Feel the Bern movement.

On August 10th 2015, Joe was asked to represent South Bay 350 at Bernie Sanders’s campaign rally. The event drew in so many Bernie supports that even standing room became limited. During his fiery opening speech, Joe identified Bernie’s long and intense fight for the environment. In a passionate call to arms, he addressed the environmental injustices that many LA residents knowingly face and the certainty he held that Bernie would unquestionably combat such injustices for the good of the people. The crowd of 27,500 people cheered vehemently in approval every few lines, feeding off of the high energy Joe emits, especially when he’s talking about the environment. Every word reflected the sentiment of saving the environment that Mr. Joe firmly shares with Bernie. “It was surreal,” Joe said.

Joe Galliani has a number of big ticket items on his to-do list coming up in the next few years, and has the energy and people to get them done. His devotion to the environment and the people is enormous. From the Keep It In The Ground fossil fuel fight, to the Shut It All Down movement that is working to close down dangerous gas facilities in LA, Mr. Joe can be found on the front lines loudly and very proudly fighting on the right side of climate change. As one of Joe’s favorite environmentalists, Bill McKibben said, “If it is wrong to wreck the climate, it is wrong to profit from it!”

