

THE UVA BUG

You are about to be bugged. Not, this time, in the sense of being bothered (well, maybe a little) or eavesdropped upon, or even exposed to a swarm of insects. I am proposing to use this word to describe something small, numerous, noticeable and able to get under the skin of unsuspecting larger creatures, and making its presence known (or felt?), something that we could create.

At the UVA summer potluck picnic last Monday, as part of a brainstorming session on UVA's future, Bob Theis suggested that we (UVA) consider adopting a widespread practice among labor unions to create a small, clear, distinctive symbol or logo, roughly circular in shape suitable for use in various sizes from roughly a quarter coin to even a couple of feet. This symbol, according to Bob, is commonly called a “bug” because they are often small as insects, and for their ability to be in many places—sometimes seemingly everywhere.

Bugs are useful to unions, and could be equally useful to UVA because they are an easy way to indicate or announce the organization's presence at a place or event, or the group's approval or endorsement of a product or object—and generally used to gain and further recognition of the group's existence, presence and even power. There were invited folks at Monday's picnic who knew virtually nothing about us, and if we're honest with ourselves we have to concede that a majority of the inhabitants of the Uncompahgre Valley also don't know we exist and certainly not what we stand for. Soooo. . . I think we need a Bug (and other things as well, but a Bug ought to be pretty easy, with the potential to really help).

Beyond being able to be small and ubiquitous, what else should our Bug be (or have)? It should identify whose bug it is by having our name on it. It should express as clearly as possible our values and reasons for existing. And it should associate us with this place where we live, work and play. I woke up in the wee hours of Tuesday morning and started brainstorming the design several of us had roughed out the previous evening. I consulted my Golden Guide of Familiar American Insects to confirm details of our choice for our bug—the foundation for our version. The name of our group remains the same, but selecting words and ways to clearly, concisely convey our value and mission involved some head scratching and talking to myself. What I'm presenting here is clearly a rough, first draft and will require much input and ideas from others. But I'll explain my thinking on what I'm proposing here. There will be tons of other ideas. Which is neat, because going through this process prompted interesting thoughts on things I hadn't considered for some time.

My proposed Bug (see attachment for my sketch) consists of several concentric circles forming three rings and a center field. In the outermost ring which is the widest, are the outlines and some features of a Lady Bug (or Lady Bird in the Guide), the small orangeish beetle with black spots, that can clumsily fly and is liked by gardeners because of their appetite for aphids. Most people have seen them and know what they are. Our Monday night brainstorming group thought Lady bugs would serve well, not only because they are bugs in name and fact, and reflect directly the labor union term for them, but more importantly, they are living creatures, relating to our link to nature with its many ramifications, and also importantly, are desirable to have around, and for avid gardeners and others familiar with them, could serve as a link to agriculture, a longtime interest of our group. I would envision our bug would have the same orangeish color and black spots as the real thing as well as identifiable legs, broad head and antennae. Imposed upon the center of the back of the Lady bug would be the next two concentric rings and the center field.

In the outermost of these rings would be the name of our group, the UNCOMPAHGRE VALLEY ASSOCIATION arranged as shown on the sketch. In the next ring would be four words which explain as well as four words can, our values, mission and work (an impossible task!). The four words I chose were CARE, LAND, JUSTICE and COMMUNITY.

There is much to consider in this selection, but I started with the motto we chose for our group some years back: “Caring for our community and the land that sustains us”, hence three of the words that tell people what we are about. The fourth, JUSTICE, was included because it has been a keystone in our work and that of our mother organization, Western Colorado Congress starting decades ago in securing basic rights for landowners facing right-of-way condemnation proceedings for a power line, to a recent gravel pit proposal and ongoing concerns about the treatment of immigrants and laws that affect them. In my mind the other three words did not adequately capture our concerns and activities in this area, and I thought for those encountering our organization for the first time, this term might act as a critical consolidation of their interest in all of our work and commitment. In any case JUSTICE is fundamental to a good society which we support at all levels from our local community to the planetary. A good society in a good place provides much on the way to a Good Life—the goal in Ancient Greece. Quite a journey for a bug!

The field at the center of the Bug is intended to convey graphically not only some characteristics of the LAND as discussed above, but also some of the character of this wonderful place that we care for. The horizon outline is of Mt Sneffels, the most recognizable mountain at the head of our valley which appears near the top of the field. Underneath Sneffels in the center is a big “S” curve of a river. On the left side of the river is a schematic spruce tree, and under that a corn stalk. On the right side is the outline of a deer and below the deer, a stick figure human being. The mountain and the river are clearly features of our valley. The tree, corn stalk, deer and human are all shorthand for the beautiful, diverse landscape that we have been attempting to steward for the last three decades.

A final word about a BUG and the idea of associating UVA with an insect. An eagle, an elk or a lion would be much more “heroic” or “majestic”, certainly more common, and I'm sure some would feel a more appropriate icon. An eagle or lion can do things on their own, and often in an elegant way. Bugs commonly rely on numbers, often working quietly. But the cumulative impact can be enormous—good or bad. We (UVA) are a membership-based organization and rely on the efforts of many. Out of necessity, but also out of conviction, we have approached our role in society in a more bug-like, democratic way. And if this approach carries with it a sense of humility, it can also be associated with honesty, and in no way needs to be associated with a lack of fervor.--witness a locust plague—but also a garden cleansed by lady bugs!

Can a Bug succeed where hundreds of words struggle? I'd like to give it a try, hence this letter. Let me know if we're on to something, and if we are, how to improve it—there is nothing sacred here. And even if all this carrying on doesn't really have legs, (or wings), it has been really fun having “a bug in my ear”.

Stu Krebs

P.S. The Bug could be produced as small quarter-sized stickers to be used as our endorsement on a wide variety of things from fruit at the Farmers Market to posters hung around town promoting events we support. It could be produced on small pins of the type worn in political campaigns or on shirts, sweaters and jackets used for everyday wear. In a larger size it could be a bumper sticker and would certainly appear on any communication or other object associated with our group—much like the Rotary Club Cog or the Lions Club “L” that we were looking at on the wall Monday evening. In short,

it could appear anywhere it was useful, appropriate and effective. And if we pulled it off well, “anywhere” could approach “everywhere”, to expand awareness of our fundamental values and mission, and our unique niche within the spectrum of organizations and groups in our community.