

The Story of Earth Rebirth



TAKING THE PLUNGE

Like many start-ups, Earth Rebirth began with two guys and a passion to fuel ideas to grand scales. Andrew Sartain and Dylan Joiner came together as undergrad student athletes at the University of Oklahoma. Fueling each other forward, they obsessed with what was wrong with the world and what they could begin doing to fix it. The childhood dreams of Andrew to 'revolutionize the zoo industry' carried a deep undertone as the two searched deeply to find root in their efforts. The final conclusion was that the only way to correct anything was to correct people's perceptions. After countless of documentaries, research, and reflection, Andrew and Dylan set out to build the first edition of www.earthrebirthnow.com. The website was released in December 2010 as an informative website covering various social and environmental issues. Shortly following its release, the duo looked towards a way to improve their influence.

The ideas to implement change were far too grand to remain behind a simple website, so the two began the tedious process of researching and building a charitable organization. Andrew said, "Many people wonder why we chose to be a nonprofit organization. The simple fact is that the hardest resource to come across is people. By building our business plan around the community, Earth Rebirth can focus on the right ideas and the people doing it for the right reasons. If you can offer something that people need you can find a way make money in time, but making an impact was the priority." So on March 1st, 2011 Earth Rebirth was incorporated as a business operating in Oklahoma and on January 13th, 2012 was approved under the IRS tax code for 501c3 tax exempt status as a charitable organization.

FINDING OUR WAY

There is a big difference between knowing what you want to accomplish and knowing the best way to get there. During the first two years of operations Earth Rebirth steadily built a name at the University of Oklahoma and in the city of Norman. A group of friends in Kansas City, Dylan's hometown, decided they wanted to contribute to the beginning of this idea. So they organized several awareness events to fundraise for

Earth Rebirth and even adopted a highway near Kansas City. Three cornerstone programs were created in the beginning of 2012 - Garden Your Own Growth and Homemade Sustainability and Taking H2Ownership. These programs dedicated to Food, Energy and Water served as the fundamental platform for Earth Rebirth to expand outreach into the community.

Three clean up events were held in Norman the first year under the ER Program, Taking H2Ownership. Garden Your Own Growth landed the first of our partnerships with Loveworks, an after school leadership program for middle school children. Andrew and Dylan met with the kids weekly to teach gardening concepts and shed light on the benefits of healthy living. While doing so, ideas on how to expand this program to a new standard were rolling. This continued into Spring 2013 until Loveworks moved locations in Norman. Earth Rebirth's website was redone in 2012 by Wafflehaus Media as a blog and news oriented





website. Articles by Andrew Sartain were published both here and by the Oklahoma Daily weekly for about a year. The middle of 2012 came with some adjustments as Dylan graduated and left the state shortly after to chase other dreams.

NEW FACES, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

But each time it seemed Earth Rebirth needed to adjust, someone showed up to help energize the team. Cory Thacker came on board in December 2012 full of energy and ready to dream big. Cory joined through an idea to set up a book exchange in one of the bright red phone booths on campus. This soon became the Borrow-a-Book campaign. The project went on to build a social

media presence with BOB the Borrow a Book amassing over a 100 followers and exchanging thousands of books over the course of four years. In January 2016, renovations on campus corner caused BOB the Borrow a Book to become out-of-service indefinitely. Other team members that came on board full of passion included Stan Khrapak, an adult education graduate student at the University of Oklahoma who joined in late early 2013. Stan committed to the Garden Your Own Growth Director position and the goal of setting up a garden at every school in Norman. Within a year and a half Stan led the GYOG program on a spree of setups, taking Earth Rebirth from three school gardens to eight.

2013 brought on new opportunities as Earth Rebirth worked on larger scale projects that focused on the entire community rather than just campus. Andrew was added to the Environmental Concerns Committee, an advisory committee to OU President David Boren.

Cory built an interactive website offering better outlets to those who want to contribute to the cause, known as ER Website 3.0. Earth Rebirth managed to partner with several professors at OU including, Dr. Travis Gliedt and Dr. Darren Purcell, who took administrative roles over Earth Rebirth internships. Students were offered the opportunity to receive class credit working for Earth Rebirth. One intern receiving class credit in the summer of 2012 quickly grew to 13 interns in Fall 2013. Spring 2014 brought 19 and Earth Rebirth quickly became known as a success story created by OU students.

RAISING THE STANDARD

As 2014 approached, the Garden Your Own Growth program decided to amp up our community wide goals. We decided that setting up a garden was not enough for these students. We wanted to show students how to sustain a lifestyle. After adding several new school garden partners like Norman High Garden, Kennedy Elementary and others, our team started organizing a fundraising campaign to raise the standard. Earth Rebirth organized a Kickstarter campaign in an attempt to raise \$10,000 to build an Aquaponics system at Norman High School. The goal was to build a system that could produce a significant portion of the cafeteria supply in

conjunction with our outdoor garden year-round. The campaign lasted 30 days and was set to end on December 31st 2014. Kickstarter is an all-or-nothing platform, meaning a campaign must raise 100% of their goal or no money is collected. With roughly 24 hours left in the campaign, Earth Rebirth had only reached about 53% of our \$10,000 goal. Somehow, a surge of donors came in the last 12 hours of the campaign and we reached a total of \$10,297.



2d



249 likes

uofoklahoma The Borrow-A-Book project is going strong on campus corner! Stop by, borrow a book, and return it when you're done!

steadvthere love it!

YOU CAN NOT FAIL IF YOU DO NOT TRY

To kick off 2015, our team of about 12 volunteers was ecstatic. We had talked about advanced gardening ideas with schools, but we were waiting for the right opportunity. The goal was to make Norman High Garden a standard for Norman schools. Nobody on our team had any experience building an aquaponics system. But we knew what we were capable of if we put our minds to it. The system was officially turned on in May 2015. Food from the aquaponics system is now used in the cafeteria, food pantry program and at the Norman farmer market.

The success of Norman High Garden helped spark interest throughout the community of our organization. About a month after raising the money for the Norman High Garden, Ihloff Salon and Spa reached out and said they would like to sponsor our organization with employee-based donation program. Not long after, our team was gardening at Reagan Elementary and a teacher came up to us. “I have always wanted to do this at home for my kids, is there any way you could help us?”



At that moment, Garden Your Own Growth consulting was created to help homes, businesses and groups grow their own food individually or collectively. Small instances like this began to create a small window of opportunities in early 2015 that we felt must be pushed. Steadily, schools began reaching out to us and by the end of the year our GYOG program had grown from four partners to nine school gardens. Earth Rebirth has always operated on little to no funds. So with a few thousand dollars available for new projects, we decided to go big. Cory heavily pushed for the idea of community space in Norman. It had been discussed before, but was seen as an investment several years away. We began a soft search for potential business locations in downtown Norman. As an organization focused on “green initiatives”, we know location and access would be critical to success. We found a few spaces in downtown that were small, unused and had the potential for grow space. Both landlords blew us off; one said, “I feel I can get more money from another business or someone a little older.” The other simply saying he wanted to sit on the property for a while. Cory and Andrew had made a habit of grabbing a drink to brainstorm at the downtown Norman restaurant, Blu. In early January 2015, Cory came into one of these brainstorms with more excitement than usual. He excitedly said, “I have to show you this building. It is incredible and it is right around the corner.” He wasn’t kidding, we walked about 2000 feet around the corner to the intersection of Porter Avenue and Comanche Street. Right across from Chase Bank sat a large, empty space. Huge. All the lights were on and it seemed the floor was being used to store giant templates for a mural. It turns out the templates were the work of Rick Sinnett, renowned artists and creator of the giant bird mural over downtown Norman. This building would be amazing as a community center, surely we couldn’t afford it. But we wrote down the number and attempted to call the next day anyway. Shortly after, we scheduled a meeting with the landlord to see the space. A few days later, we sat in front of the building waiting on the landlord anxiously.

*Current Story End Date
January 2015*