

As Y2K looms, Estero man offers silver-backed currency

By: Chad Gillis
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Bernard von NotHaus is modest. He has no desire to see his smiling portrait on the front of a dollar bill. The thought of people across the country asking for change for a "von NotHaus" at local gas stations and banks has never even crossed his mind.

Bernard von NotHaus shows the currency he has developed in anticipation of the turn of the century. His American Liberty Currency is backed by silver. Lisa Krantz/Staff

He simply wants to oust the Federal Reserve and replace it with a form of silver-backed currency - his currency.

"It's in response to bringing back what is often called old-time religion," von NotHaus said from his mother's home in Estero. "And old-time religion is simply a return to value. And that means a value-backed currency, which is an extension of bringing back value to the social, political and economic systems."

An economist who's been working on a natural-based currency for 25 years, von NotHaus kicked off his national tour two weeks ago after celebrating the opening of the latest American Liberty Currency redemption center: his mother's home.

For the next few months he will be traveling around the country in a motor home, making stops at the 100 American Liberty Currency redemption centers scattered across the United States. Von NotHaus will also be spreading the word about silver-backed currency.

On April 1, von NotHaus released a book to go along with his currency titled, "Y2K Money: Your Survival Currency." He is backed by NORFED - National Organization for the Repeal of the Federal Reserve Act and the Internal Revenue Code. More than \$100,000 in Federal Reserve notes have been exchanged for American Liberty Currency so far.

NORFED began almost one year ago in Evansville, Ind. Von NotHaus would not comment specifically on the number of members involved with the grass roots political entity, but said membership is in the hundreds.

His idea started out as a local currency for his home state of Hawaii. Von NotHaus wanted to boost the state's economy by providing a form of competitive certificates for independent businesses.

Since then, he has taken his interests national. And who better to have on your side when battling the powerful Federal Reserve and Y2K than your mother?

"There's a lot of publicity about Y2K and there's no solution to it," said Suzy Notthouse, who spells her last name differently than Bernard for family historical reasons. "They say get plenty of water, get plenty of money out of the bank, get candles and be prepared. Prepare for it like a hurricane. I think (the idea of an alternative national currency) will build because people are afraid of the unknown."

Notthouse lived through the Great Depression. She remembers what it's like to be without basics such as food. This experience, she said, has made her prepare more for the disasters that many say will befall the world on Jan. 1, 2000.

"Doctors bargained for food," Notthouse said, commenting on life in America during the 1930s. "You could pay the doctor with a chicken or a dozen eggs or a pound of butter or whatever you had."

Notthouse said owning silver certificates would have definitely helped her family during the financial struggles brought about by the Great Depression.

Since going through the monetarily lean years leading up to World War II, Notthouse says she has constantly kept her freezer full of frozen food and her cabinets stocked with canned food, which she doesn't even eat.

It's this type of fear of the unknown that von NotHaus is hoping will ignite interest in his currency before Y2K.

"Other people are getting extra gasoline and other people are getting food," von NotHaus said. "I'm out here stomping for NORFED saying this is really a time when we could bring back a value-backed currency, which would be the best thing for our country ... without a doubt."

Von NotHaus said his system is extremely easy to understand. People wanting to exchange Federal Reserve notes can go to a redemption center and place an order. Once the order is received, the redemption center notifies the warehouse, which in turn sends the amount of silver certificates requested to the redemption center. Seventy-two hours later the original silver seeker can pick up silver certificates.

William Gibbs, Coin World news editor, said only governmental bodies are allowed to produce a nation's currency. But, he added, what von NotHaus is doing is not illegal.

"Only the government has the right to issue a legal currency," Gibbs said. "... That does not prevent individuals from doing what Bernard is doing - as long as one does not run afoul of federal regulations."

Gibbs said von NotHaus is somewhat widely known in the coin and currency collecting world. He also said Coin World, a weekly magazine devoted to coins and currencies, does not feel the need to investigate von NotHaus' legitimacy.

"Clearly with anything of this nature you have to make sure the company has what they say they have," Gibbs said. "(American Liberty Currency) is strictly a private currency that is entirely backed by the issuers of this currency."

Claudia Dickens, spokeswoman for the U.S. Treasury Department's Bureau of Engraving and Printing, said American Liberty Currency is **legitimate**.

"There's nothing illegal about this," Dickens said after the Treasury Department's legal team reviewed the currency. "As long as it doesn't say legal tender there's nothing wrong with it."

It's simple. It's legal. And von NotHaus hopes to be the first person to give Alan Greenspan and the Federal Reserve a run for their money.

"It all boils down to the redemption centers and my mom," he said.