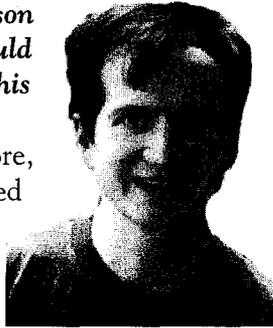


## Daily Progress: An Interview with Hanno T. Beck

Hanno Beck is the President of the Benjamin Banneker Center for Economic Justice and Prosperity, the Baltimore-based organization which has created, over the last six years, a robust World-Wide-Web platform on which Georgists can make their voices heard in unprecedented numbers. Here are his thoughts on beginning the fifth year of his flagship publication, The Progress Report.

**Benjamin Banneker seems like the sort of person who didn't believe in the word "impossible". Could you tell us a bit about your choice to name this organization after him?**

We are located slightly southwest of Baltimore, Maryland. Benjamin Banneker was born and lived just a few miles from here. It is certain that Banneker understood the importance of land and location in an economy. To survive as a poor black farmer in a slave state where racial prejudice was normal, is impressive. Still more impressive is to decide, as an old man, to take up astronomy and to proceed from there to predict eclipses, calculate the ephemeris for several almanacs, and join the team that surveyed the boundaries of the Federal District that became Washington, DC. Banneker simply paid no attention to his poverty, his race, or his advanced age, and moved forward to fulfill his life's potential. That is an inspiration for anyone who has ever been tempted to quit because of adverse circumstances or the opinions of others.



**Just for a start — give us an idea about quantity. How many people see the Banneker Center's World-Wide-Web presentations?**

Banneker Center web sites — there are 21 of them, encompassing several thousand separate pages — have been viewed by more than two million individuals. On a typical day, over 3,000 page viewings occur.

It's hard to make sense of these numbers in a vacuum, so here is a little comparison. In 1987, I was on the staff of the city magazine of Austin, Texas. We had 18 full-time employees. And we reached the same number of people each month that the Banneker Center, with a regular staff of one volunteer, is now reaching via the World Wide Web each month.

**The Progress Report has sought to fill the niche of "non-partisan daily news, focusing on economic justice". About what portion of the pieces it runs are explicitly Georgist? What are some of the benefits and drawbacks of this broad strategy?**

Opinions differ as to what makes an article Georgist. Must it mention Henry George? Must it refer to land value taxation? Would every article in favor of democracy and human rights be Georgist? Others can debate

these questions. I simply try to make sure that anyone viewing *The Progress Report* sees links to several articles of lasting Georgist value — but everyone has his or her own taste. If I concentrated on publishing something specifically Georgist every single day, we'd have to close down because (a) we would quickly run out of new material, and (b) people would stop visiting *The Progress Report*. Variety is the spice of life. Web sites that sound just one note over and over do not prosper. The beauty of Georgism shows best with a background, just as a painting needs a frame and a wall.

Some web sites, the HGI's being a notable example, make efforts to transform a visitor into a Georgist in one fell swoop. That is very good. But *The Progress Report* is not trying to do that — rather, it is a news service where Georgist ideas get the full attention that they deserve, and the result is a unique and exciting news product.

***Once people do visit The Progress Report, what things keep them coming back? What are some of the ways that you assess its effectiveness?***

*The Progress Report* is our largest web site and since it is a daily news service, we make changes to it seven days a week and have done so for over four years. On any given day, about two-thirds of our visitors are there for the first time, and about one-third are previous visitors returning for more.

I don't know exactly why people come back again and again, but it is true that we offer a unique combination of news and views that you cannot find among the "mainstream" media. You also cannot find our viewpoints on web sites that merely parrot one "liberal" or "conservative" point of view. Our aim is to publish little-noticed material that is of interest to people who care about Justice, no matter what the source.

Also, we sometimes print items with which we disagree. One of our hopes is to stimulate discussion, not just to preach one set of answers.

There is no easy way to assess our impact, but our audience has grown by more than 35% every year. Every day we receive email messages and letters to the editor. Our online "discussion room" is noisy — and the participants are often new names, not previous Georgists. We are building a constituency for worldwide economic justice, with Georgism at the core.

***Are some of the Banneker Center's web sites tailored for newcomers who know nothing about Georgism?***

We have several such sites. My personal favorite for newcomers is the *Ask Henry* search engine — which gives links to all other Georgist web sites in the world, and features a searchable index of every word of every page of just those sites. A newcomer can choose his or her own interests, topics, etc., and find the Georgist web sites that are most relevant to those interests. No need to guess which Georgist WWW site to recommend to a particular person — just recommend *Ask Henry* and they'll find what suits them best.

***What are some of the pieces you've published that have gotten the biggest reactions?***

Dr. Fred Foldvary has been writing weekly editorials for *The Progress Report* since its debut in 1997. We have published debates, angry diatribes, fables, reprints from classic Georgist literature, interviews, tall tales, you name it — but many of Foldvary's editorials rank at the top of our popularity list. Fred is an expert at addressing major current issues with a reasoned, Georgist viewpoint. We need more such articles from Georgists all over the world.

***What can your Georgist colleagues do to help make The Progress Report more effective?***

Most Georgists would love to be listened to by one or two nonGeorgists. Well, if you write an article for *The Progress Report* and it appears on the front page, many, many people will notice what you say. Depending on how popular your article becomes, you might wind up reaching tens of thousands of readers, far more than usually see a Georgist book or pamphlet. Write your thoughts on a subject of current interest — politics, economy, environment, society, whatever you like — and send them to me. My dream is to wake up one day with too many, not too few, good articles to choose from. What an enjoyable burden that will be!

***What's next for the Banneker Center?***

We are quite busy maintaining and enhancing our current projects, and our hopes for expansion will not meet reality until we find more funding to support new efforts.

The Banneker Center is a nonprofit organization but not of the 501(c)(3) variety, so our journalistic range is not hampered by any requirement to be non-political — but, alas, contributions to us are not tax-deductible.

We own and operate 21 different Georgist-flavored web sites. We also provide hosting and storage space for the web sites of several other Georgist organizations. Anyone who likes what we are doing and wants us to do more is invited to make a donation. I can promise you that the Banneker Center will utilize your contribution with the utmost frugality! And we are not so wild about the word "impossible", either!

**SOME BANNEKER CENTER WEBSITES**

**The Progress Report**

[www.progress.org](http://www.progress.org)

**Economic Justice Discussion Room**

[www.progress.org/progs/wwwboard](http://www.progress.org/progs/wwwboard)

**Ask Henry**

[www.askhenry.com](http://www.askhenry.com)

**Citizens' Dividend**

[www.progress.org/dividend](http://www.progress.org/dividend)

**Green Tax Shift**

[www.progress.org/banneker/shift.html](http://www.progress.org/banneker/shift.html)

**Corporate Welfare Shame Site**

[www.progress.org/banneker/cw.html](http://www.progress.org/banneker/cw.html)

**Sprawl Information Center**

[www.progress.org/sprawl](http://www.progress.org/sprawl)

**Green Economics**

[www.progress.org/green](http://www.progress.org/green)

**Prosperidad (in Spanish)**

[www.prosperidad.org](http://www.prosperidad.org)