

News
letter
Summer
2014



Spring Lake Ranch

Therapeutic Community
Working Toward Wellness

Cuttingsville & Rutland, Vermont

Founded in 1932 by Wayne & Elizabeth Sarcka

While thunderstorms were predicted throughout the day, the sun prevailed and was a welcome addition to the first annual Spring Lake Ranch Paddle Battle fundraiser held on Saturday, August 2nd, at Plymouth State Park in Ludlow, Vermont. Over one hundred residents, staff, and friends of the Ranch joined in on the fun-filled afternoon which raised over \$10,000 for the Sarcka Scholarship Fund. Scores of volunteers made sure that the day was smooth sailing.

The day began with delicious Ranch-made snacks and bidding on an array of silent auction items, which ranged from various getaways and experiences to books and event tickets. What made the auction unique was the many Ranch-made items that included several clocks and birdhouses, decorative boxes, and a stunning handcrafted canoe made by the Rutland Program Boat Building Shop.

Guests headed down to beautiful Echo Lake where Gary Meitrott's percussion school, Drum Journey of Earth, was playing West African drums at the water's edge. There were seventeen racers in all; some raced in kayaks and some in canoes, but when the cow bell rang they took off at once! There were four waypoints, including the start and finish line, where racers had to paddle to and collect a playing card. In the end, racers had five cards to prove that they completed the race properly. Team Angie Craig (Ranch



Guests mingling post-race

Farm Manager) and John Freeman (Ranch Physical Plant Manager) took first place with each subsequent

Paddle Battle a Great Day in the Sun!



The Paddle Battle race begins

boat paddling to the finish line to a cheering crowd and drumbeats.

A wonderful lunch, catered by Stemwinder, was waiting at the pavilion for hungry guests. Former residents, who had been at the Ranch in the 1970's, sat and ate among staff who remembered them and current residents who were inspired by them. Old-time fiddle music by the Bogstompers had people dancing and tapping their feet. It was a truly beautiful day.

As the auction closed, awards were presented to the race winners and even to participants who had the best five-card poker hand. The raffle drawings closed the event and, in true Ranch fashion, most everyone helped with clean-up.

And in true Becki Bates-fashion, she found me as I was packing my car up and said, "This was a really, really amazing day! I was thinking that it could have been a disaster but it was great!" It will be great again next year—stay tuned for details!

A LOOK TOWARDS OUR FUTURE

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For years now, whenever I drive up to the Ranch, I park my car in the parking area in back of the Main House. One day a few weeks ago, (for no particular reason) I decided to park in the visitor's parking lot across from the circular drive in front of the Main House. Getting out of my car on a breezy, clear, cool summer morning, I was suddenly struck with the memory of how much I used to love living on the Hill and a fresh appreciation for how breathtakingly beautiful and soul-restoring the place can be. Why was that realization so powerful that day and not necessarily any of the other hundreds of days I'd driven up there in the last twenty years? I can only guess that it was the change of perspective. I

looked from a different angle, therefore saw from a different angle, and noticed what I had not seen in a very long time.

Spring Lake Ranch has provided uncountable numbers of people the opportunity to view their lives from a fresh perspective. Perhaps it is the resident who is asked for the first time (perhaps in years) to view herself through the lens of strength and ability to contribute to the community rather than through the filter of perceived impediments to full participation. Or it is the new young house advisor, used to primarily looking at life through the eyes of a student, asked to assume the role of

leader. All of us who have spent any time at the Ranch have benefited from the opportunity to see ourselves anew.

As you know, the Ranch spent much of 2013 developing a new strategic plan. Input from all stakeholders was sought. Current and former staff, current and former residents, families, professionals, trustees, and members were asked to identify the best of the Ranch and envision a future of unexplored potentials, innovations, and strengths. From that process, a strategic plan for the future was born.

In April of 2014 we officially launched the committees which are charged with doing the work of bringing this vision to reality.

It occurs to me that my experience in the parking lot that morning in an odd way mirrors the strategic planning process. We collectively look from a different angle at that which we know so well, and celebrate its achievements, and envision anew its possibilities.

The dreaming is easy; making the dream a reality is not. As I think of the work that lies before us, I am struck by how lucky we are to have Lynn Pilcher as our new Executive Director to help bring us along this path. In her note to the staff and membership in the weekly newsletter after her appointment as Executive Director, Lynn touched on these same themes of growth, change, and

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possibility. When Lynn first arrived here twelve years ago, neither she nor we could have envisioned the twists and turns that would lead us to where we are today, both in our individual lives and in the life of the Ranch. In her own words, "We are a living, breathing, changing organism: what we bring and what we take make the community what it is as well as shapes each one of us."

Lynn's long history with us, as well as her new fresh angle of observation, uniquely suits her to the task of leading us on this path toward unexplored potential where we honor the best of what we are and strive to be the best we can become. I'm looking forward to the journey.

The annual all-Ranch canoe outing on the Connecticut River



-Kathy Ford, President, Board of Trustees



Summer on Spring Lake

McGee House Closes Its Doors

What had promised to be a significant new offering in our Rutland Program, McGee House Integrated Recovery, has needed to close due to a continued low census there and high costs associated with maintaining the building. While the opportunity to lease the Victorian mansion adjacent to the Town House on Washington Street seemed too good to be true, the reality was that the building was a nightmare to heat, required ongoing support of our maintenance staff, and didn't have the census to break even.

The Board of Trustees approved Executive Director Lynn Pilcher's recommendation to close the program by September 1st. According to Lynn, McGee House was "the right program at the wrong time and likely in the wrong building." It is her hope that the community will not see this attempt to start a new program offering as a failure, but rather as a learning experience. The groups and approaches developed by the staff at McGee House will be presented to Rutland Program staff with the idea that this programming may be used with clients at Royce Street as well as with clients living independently, if appropriate. The type of dual-diagnosis support and structure offered at McGee House clearly has its place in our continuum of care. The clients who did participate in the McGee House program spoke highly of the support they received and the ways in which it helped them on their respective paths of recovery.



Paddle Battle race winners

Thank you to our Paddle Battle Sponsors!

Wilcox Pharmacy
The Royal Group
Green Screen Graphics

Black River Produce for their donation of food
The Inn at Waters Edge for the use of their dock

Reflections on a Season of Healing

Arriving at Spring Lake Ranch, I was somewhat apprehensive and unsure of what to expect. I knew that I was attracted to the idea of living and working in community; I knew that mental health and substance abuse issues had rendered my life unmanageable and that I needed help returning to a place of health and wellness.

But what I found over the course of nearly six months spent as a resident on “the hill” far exceeded my expectations. The holistic approach to therapeutic treatment that Spring Lake Ranch nourishes allows residents to gain confidence in themselves and their abilities, fostering an environment where individuals not only receive comprehensive clinical care, but also experience deep personal growth.

While not always easy, community living is a uniquely rich experience, one where friendships are forged and each individual’s distinct gifts and abilities are valued. For me, Spring Lake Ranch was a place where I rediscovered a part of myself that I had lost somewhere along the way, the part that values small things and simplicity and takes pride in a task well done. Working on crew—whether the tasks be feeding animals and mucking stalls, split-

ting wood, collecting maple sap, weeding garden beds, chopping vegetables, or sanding bed frames—gives residents meaningful and manageable tasks to accomplish, work that actively contributes to the community. Personally, I found that working on crew was the most significant therapeutic aspect of my time at the Ranch, as it engendered responsibility and gave me a sense of being an actively contributing member of the community, rather than merely a “patient” or a “case.” The staff members at Spring Lake are both highly professional and deeply caring. I am very grateful for the support I received from my clinical team, as well as the house advisors and work program staff.

In many respects, I feel as if my time at Spring Lake Ranch allowed me to step out of the chaos, unmanageability, and unhappiness that had come to define my life and into a place of recovery and wellness. The regularity of a daily schedule and work program, genuine friendships with both residents and staff, and access to twelve-step meetings all contributed to a season in my life that I look back on as one of deep healing. It is a season that I will always cherish.

-A Former Resident



May Day celebration at Spring Lake Ranch

From the Ranch Kitchen

Blueberry Bisque

INGREDIENTS

2 c. fresh blueberries
2 c. water
1/3 c. granulated sugar
1T. brown sugar
1 cinnamon stick
1 lemon thinly sliced
2 c. plain yogurt
1 c. apple juice

DIRECTIONS

Place blueberries, water, sugars, cinnamon, and lemon in saucepan. Bring to a boil and turn down to simmer for fifteen minutes uncovered. Drain through a sieve into a bowl underneath. Chill the sieved liquid. Just before serving, whisk in yogurt and apple juice. Garnish with blueberries. Enjoy!



Giving Back A Gift to Future Generations

I am happy to have been able to donate two beautiful parcels of our family's lakeshore property on the southeast side of Spring Lake to Spring Lake Ranch Therapeutic Community last year. My parents, Wayne and Elizabeth Sarcka, founded Spring Lake Ranch in 1932. They, along with some of their relatives, bought various parcels of land around Spring Lake, which made up the original Ranch holdings. At one point it came to about two thousand acres of land!

Growing up on the Ranch, Spring Lake was a big part of our summer recreation program. Kids and Ranchers took lessons from the wonderful recreation directors we had over the years—Ray Sparks, Walt Kabis, Jim Haddick, and General Norm Smith were all strong recreation leaders in the forties and fifties.

I donated the land because it was time to find other stewards for my property. I hoped that the Ranch and my Vermont family, the children and grandchildren of my cousin Ray Sirjane—who worked at the Ranch for many years—would be the new stewards of the lake property. In my view, the outcome was the perfect solution all-around. Six members of the Sirjane family will manage a parcel on the northeast side of Spring Lake and the Ranch will manage the other parcels.

The two Ranch parcels were appraised as charitable donations at \$165,000 last fall. Because I placed conservation easements on the land, in collaboration with the Vermont Land Trust and the Conservation Fund, it is protected in perpetuity, and its value is a fraction of what it would bring if it were able to be developed.

It is good to know that the property will be enjoyed by Ranchers and others for many decades to come. This was a win-win for all concerned. I am sure that the forest and land will be much loved and well cared for. Enjoy!

-Anne Sarcka



Young Ranchers Annika and Lefa enjoy the day

❖ STAFF Notes ❖

WELCOME!

- ❖ Brian Commins, Recreation Coordinator
- ❖ Mark Dube, Rutland Maintenance Coordinator
- ❖ Terri Harrington, Rutland Driver
- ❖ Margi Hilstad, Substitute
- ❖ Kim King, Overnight Support Staff- Royce St
- ❖ Jesoni Kuruyawa, Overnight Support Staff- Royce St
- ❖ Maryesa Nichols, Substitute
- ❖ Lynn Pilcher, Executive Director
- ❖ Jenna Rosenwasser, Substitute

NEW HOUSE ADVISORS

- ❖ Allyson Berger
- ❖ Will Donovan
- ❖ Isabel Elliott
- ❖ Dave Rapp
- ❖ Melissa Shulman
- ❖ Sigrid Stanley
- ❖ Mischa Weisman

CONGRATS!



- ❖ Former House Advisors Cole Whitaker and Mikaela McAndrew –Davis were married on Saturday, August 8th. They will be shifting their talents and the warmth of their personalities to the Killington Mountain School where they will be dorm parents.



Spotlight On.....

Rachel Stark Director of Admissions

Interviewed by Stephanie Krzywonos

What brought you to Spring Lake Ranch Therapeutic Community?

I found Spring Lake Ranch while interning at Merck Forest in Rupert, Vermont. I heard about this place that helps people with mental health and addiction issues through work and I had to check it out. I, too, spent several years struggling with addiction and mental health issues and experienced firsthand how work can teach you so much about wellness while I was at Merck.

Could you tell us a bit about your background?

I am from Pittsford, New York, and the youngest of four girls. I went to undergraduate and graduate school for business and worked in Manhattan for sixteen years in corporate banking. After a five-year struggle with drugs and alcohol, eleven rehabs and three or four visits to a psychiatric unit, I finally stayed somewhere long enough to learn to live life on life's terms. From there I rebuilt my life. Living and working here is integral to my wellness and gives me an opportunity to give back and offer hope. I am reminded on a daily basis how hard the struggle

can be, but also how very healing it is to be in a place where people care about one another and work together towards wellness.

What is your role here?

I am very proud to be the Director of Admissions. I work with families and professionals to find the right programs for their family member or client. If it sounds like a person might be a good fit for our program, we gather all of their paperwork, submit their application through the admissions committee, and then invite them to the Ranch for a twenty-four hour visit. Once here, I orient them and their family to the Ranch, introduce them to the team they will be working with, and make sure they get settled in. In addition, I work directly with three residents at any time as a resident advisor, mentoring them through the Ranch, providing feedback and encouragement, and communicating with their families. I've also been known to throw a few bales of hay and feed a lamb or two!

What is your hope for the future of the Ranch?

I guess if I had one wish it is that we can make it more affordable to more people. This is one of our

primary strategic objectives and I am hopeful we will make meaningful strides lowering the barrier sooner rather than later.

Anything else you'd like us to know?

I love what I do. This is where I am meant to be. Working at the Ranch has taught me so much about the importance of being kind and patient and that listening can be just as valuable, if not more valuable, than talking. I feel living and working here does as much good for its employees as it does its residents. It is a place where everyone can grow.



*-Rachel Stark
Director of Admissions*



Are you low on Spring Lake Ranch Maple Syrup?

It's easy to order online at www.springlakeranch.org!

Reflections of a House Advisor

Since I am leaving the ranch soon, I've been reflecting on how much I have personally grown in the nearly two years that I have been here.

Sitting with Tom, the Human Resources Director, for the exit interview recently, I talked about my initial difficulties, feeling a lack of connection since I hadn't yet developed deep relationships with others, feeling unsupported in the face of demanding situations, fearful of what might happen if I couldn't "figure it out" in time.

I wondered aloud, questioning if I had been reached out to on that emotional level, if I had been aware of it, whether with my "I don't need any help" mindset I would have been receptive or not. Could I have been vulnerable then? Could I speak or understand that language yet?

Sitting here writing this now, I remember us laughing at this point in the conversation: why didn't I get how safe opening up actually was? This is a therapeutic community—a *therapeutic* community. It is safe. This is the place to allow oneself to soften the hard edges of life, to open up, to allow all of those seemingly terrible monsters out to breathe and get some fresh air, to become more knowable and thus less frightening.

In my time at the ranch, there were a lot of challenges. There was discomfort. There was a lot of "I don't know what to do's." There was a lot of realizing, in

between the forgetting, that there are no perfect answers. There was hardship in figuring out how to be with the intense suffering of others whom I had grown to care about deeply. Impelled by this pain and confusion, the search began for how to be with all of this and not be overwhelmed.

As time went on, I made progress and was better able to be with whatever was going on with more ease and less tension, more discernment, and felt better able to respond appropriately in any given situation whether by deed, word, or thought.

I came to the ranch for various reasons: for the community living, for the rural lifestyle and work, and also to learn and be helpful with those who were experiencing great struggle in life. So I did these things at the ranch: leading work crews, modeling (or attempting to model) healthy behavior and relationships.



And then there was a time when a dynamic came to light: I'm having a conversation with a resident and the table turns. I'm asked about myself, which is nice to

hear since it is usually me asking about others. I open up in response and talk about my personal life. They listen as I expand and they offer advice and a different perspective. The listening is accompanied by a shift in tone from the resident as they ask more questions, expressing more interest. This tone is one that I am familiar with, one that I have found myself using.

Wait, wait, wait...hold up a minute. Who's helping who here? There's discomfort. I'm supposed to be all together and everything, the helper. Who does this person think they are? They came here to receive, me to give, right? What's going on now?

As staff members we talk about healthy boundaries for house advisors, how to be appropriate and helpful, and who's here to "receive" and who is here to "give." But it can be easy to forget that there are two sides that are involved. In giving there is also receiving; in receiving there is also giving.

On one level, this might translate into modeling healthy behavior, in being open to receiving help (with limits imposed through an awareness of ones' role here of course), when done in an authentic and non-manipulative fashion.

Additionally, after having experienced the joy of giving and generosity ourselves, how might we take joy in receiving so as to al-

REFLECTIONS *continued on page 8*

Spring Lake Ranch Therapeutic Community supports and empowers people with mental health and substance abuse issues by providing opportunities to grow and thrive. Through shared experience, meaningful work and active participation in an accepting, diverse community, we help each person develop the confidence and skills to recover.

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Executive Director: Lynn Pilcher • *Consulting Psychiatrist:* Jennifer FauntLeRoy, M.D.

Newsletter Editors: Heather Brown, Stephanie Krzywonos • *Photo Credits:* Stephanie, Rachel, Phil, Andy, Heather



Spring Lake Ranch

Therapeutic Community

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REFLECTIONS *continued from page 7*

low another to experience the joy of giving? (Although giving and receiving may be more complex than that, too.) When listening to someone, being there with them, one might be “giving” them an ear, a sounding board, outside acceptance and approval, while the other is receiving this. But the other person is giving something which the listener receives: their trust.

In life at the ranch, we provide opportunities for growth for one another. Challenges arise here and the ranch is a safe place to discover how to best work through them and take those cultivated skills with you wherever you go.

Whether I am a staff member, a resident, or whatever the case may be, this is how we all might experience the ranch and life in general. Through our experiences we all have the potential to open our lives and to see the moments that comprise them as workable.

While I've learned and grown a lot in different ways, the ability and the confidence to be able to work with whatever comes up, especially with awareness of my own limitations, has been one of my greatest lessons. In getting honest with yourself and with others, a path appears which had hitherto not existed.

-Nathan Kleban completed his work as a House Advisor on June 6th, 2014. His next adventure has taken him to Salinas, California, where he is living and working in community with The Franciscan Workers of Junipero Serra.