GRAHAM PARKER

It was in early December last year that the Trustees asked me if I would be willing to step in as Interim Executive Director at Spring Lake Ranch (SLR). I had retired last summer after 36 years of working in Vermont’s community mental health system and had adjusted all too easily to my new lifestyle. Some, including my wife, would say I was “way too comfortable” in that role: biking, sailing, kayaking, playing music, and riding my motorcycle filled up the days well. So, helping to run the Ranch was not on my bucket list; after all, I had just bought a mid-week ski pass for Okemo and planned on resuming downhill skiing for the first time since I had broken my hip ten years earlier. Then again, how could I resist!

I had almost become the Executive Director of SLR twice before, so this was a chance to close the circle, to see what I had missed and, hopefully, help out in a time of need. Four months later, I can happily report to having no regrets. Everyone has been so welcoming and we have great staff and residents doing truly inspiring work.

I did not want to be a lame duck during my tenure as Interim Director, so I intended to keep a steady helm and course while continuing the evolution of our vision plan. Lynn Pilcher, the leadership team, and the whole community have done a wonderful job in helping to move the Ranch to a more integrated clinical focus while maintaining the core values and importance of our work program. The program committee has been hard at work tweaking the new daily schedule which now incorporates individual and group therapy sessions on the Hill. The work program has been incredibly flexible in adjusting their crews, working closely with the clinicians; all have risen to these new challenges.

Most importantly, our residents love the expanded options of individual therapy and the new groups such as smart recovery, smoking cessation, hearing voices, and women’s group. To better prepare both staff and residents for transition to the Rutland Program (and back to the Hill for respite when occasionally needed) we have initiated a monthly meeting of staff from Rutland and Cuttingsville to help smooth out the process and improve communication all around. We have whimsically named this the Bridge Club and it is proving extremely useful.

Other committees are also hard at work preparing for a CARF accreditation in the fall, Electronic Health Records next year, along with our ability to accept insurance for our clinical work. Trustees and staff are working hard on other committees focusing on risk management, development, and governance. A new health and safety committee is just being formed to update our policies and procedures while linking them to CARF. In Rutland, we are exploring direct referrals and expansion of our Aftercare Program in Rutland and beyond. At Royce Street, thanks to the generous help of our donors, work is about to start on a new kitchen. The Vision 2020 oversight committee has been meeting weekly and has been particularly helpful to Lynn and myself during this time of transition. All this, while the Board in general and the Finance Committee in particular, make sure we have a sustainable future.
In January, we hired Amy Bowen as Work Program Director. She has settled in quickly and we are already wondering how we existed without her. I guess all those years at Farm and Wilderness were a perfect preparation for life at SLR! We are close to hiring a new Clinical Director too; someone who we all feel will complement our team perfectly.

The last link fell into place last week when the unanimous choice for our new Executive Director, Brian Hansen, accepted our job offer and agreed to start in early May. Social work wasn’t his first career choice – he initially dreamed of being a professional ice hockey goal tender and played at the junior level before becoming interested in humanitarian work and supporting vulnerable cultures. He then had two spells as a House Advisor at the Ranch, and has been studying psychology through Harvard with plans for an advanced degree in Non Profit Management. For the past seven years he has been leading important humanitarian missions such as famine relief in Afghanistan,Iraq, Sierra Leone and, most recently, in Bangladesh. So, team work features large in Brian’s life and we look forward to welcoming him to our community.

While I wait to pass on the baton, I have asked Brian to introduce himself to you below.

Keep well,
Graham

BRIAN HANSEN

I would like to extend my gratitude and appreciation to the Spring Lake Ranch community, members, residents, employees, and Board of Trustees for offering me the great privilege to be the next Executive Director of SLR. Please also let me take the opportunity to thank everyone who gave their time to meet with me during my two-day visit to the Ranch in early February. It’s a rare situation to be able to interact so closely with the people that make up an organization prior to taking on a leadership position. The candid conversations we had during my visit reminded me of what makes SLR so special and these discussions made me fully confident that I want to be part of such a unique community for the years to come! Spring is the season of change and transition and I look forward to joining the team and working together as we navigate this season, both externally and internally. I look forward to seeing those of you I’ve already met and meeting those of you who also hold Spring Lake Ranch near to your hearts.

Best,
Brian
From the Kitchen: Maple Shortbread Cookies

It’s the time of year where maple is on every Vermonter’s mind, and the Ranch kitchen is showcasing it in many delicious dishes and treats, like these maple cookies. Ranch syrup can be purchased 24/7 at springlakeranch.org. Proceeds benefit the Sarcka Scholarship Fund.

**INGREDIENTS**
- ¾ cup light brown sugar
- 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup pure maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 egg yolk
- 3 cups unbleached, all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt

**PREPARATION:**
Beat together the sugar and butter with an electric beater on high speed for about 3 minutes.
Add maple syrup, vanilla, egg yolk and mix for 1 minute.
Sift the flour and salt directly into the butter/sugar mixture.
Beat at medium speed for 2 minutes.
Shape the dough into a ball, wrap in plastic, and refrigerate overnight.

**TO MAKE COOKIES:**
Preheat oven to 350° F.
Grease two baking sheets
Divide the dough into two equal portions. Working with 1 portion at a time, roll out on a lightly floured surface to about 1/8-inch thick.
Cut out shapes with a cookie cutter and place on prepared cookie sheets, about 1 inch apart.
Gather scraps, reroll and cut out as many additional cookies as possible.

On Our Bookshelves

*Strong Spirit, Steadfast Heart: The Life and Times of Elizabeth Man Sarcka*

In this new autobiography, Elizabeth Sarcka relates the major themes of her exceptionally purposeful and inspiring life, highlighted by the founding of the Ranch in 1932 with her husband Wayne, which they operated for 30 years. The stories are supplemented with her poetry, paintings, letters, photographs and the remembrances of others. They were compiled by the Sarckas’ daughter, Anne, with the help of Elizabeth’s great-niece, Laura Jinishian.

In the book Elizabeth expresses gratitude for the many Ranchers and staff who, over the decades, helped convert an old farmhouse surrounded by swamp at the end of an often impassible road into an important center for healing; for the families who had faith in the Ranch; and for the friends, colleagues, and neighbors who pitched in and supported it in difficult moments. It includes recollections by Judy Elkin, former trustee and current member; Grace Brigham, artist, teacher and longtime Shrewsbury resident; and former Ranch director Michael Wells.

The book is in Vermont libraries in Shrewsbury, Rutland, Montpelier and Barre, and in New York City at the Queens Library, Richmond Hill branch. It is for sale at Pierce’s Store in Shrewsbury, and by mail from Anne Sarcka, 8 Park Ave., Apt. #3, Montpelier, VT 05602, asarcka@vtlink.net, for $35.35 including tax and shipping. Part of the proceeds will go to the Spring Lake Ranch Scholarship Fund. Anne will be filling orders after March 23.
Staff Spotlight

AMY BOWEN | WORK PROGRAM DIRECTOR

What was your background before Spring Lake Ranch?

My work in educating in outdoor settings began about 20 years ago. I was in graduate school reading the works of Dewey and Friere, and had the opportunity to facilitate exploration of saltmarshes and forests with Boston Public School middle schools for a summer-school program on Outward Bound’s Thompson Island. The combined experience sparked a passion to educate beyond the walls of a school building. It wasn’t until I had the opportunity to develop an urban youth-led farm program in Los Angeles that I realized the immense value of connecting people with their place and themselves through meaningful work. For the past 13 years, I’ve led programs with wilderness exploration and farming as their central components: from our small urban farm in L.A. to being a director at Farm and Wilderness. Simultaneously, through the years I’ve worked as a consultant with organizations committed to justice and inclusion—offering training and consulting work all over the country (colleges and universities, professional baseball teams, marines).

What brought you to the Ranch?

I know the work that happens here is important in the world. I had a very close friend who was a resident here and it was a wonderful experience for this person. I’m passionate about fostering growth through meaningful work, so the job description here jumped out to me. I was also drawn to the idea of programming happening all year, through all the seasons. I’m excited about all the learning for me that will happen here, especially in the area of mental health.

What can a typical day look like for you here?

I assume things will change a bit as time goes on. This first month I’ve been trying to spend as much time as possible working with the crews. I’ve also carved out time to sit down and chat with folks who have been here, trying to learn about the components at the heart of the work program. I’m really enjoying the balance of working outside and doing more strategic work in meetings. At least once a week I try to go to the gym and play basketball with the residents (I didn’t mention in that first question that I also coached at a Division III college in the Boston area for a few years—I love playing even though the knees don’t work quite the way they used to!).

What are some of your first ideas for the work program?

My goal is to support the amazing things that are already happening in the work program. The four department heads are amazing—in both their skill/expertise in their area and in the way they collaborate with this community to provide meaningful work. My first goal is to come in with fresh energy and find ways to support them. Additionally, I’m amazed at the work the House Advisors are doing with the work crews. I look forward to working with a future Clinical Director and the clinical team to continue to build quality programming for today’s residents. I also look forward to building on the outdoor and adventure programming we offer.

What makes working here rewarding and unique for you?

The people. I love spending time with the residents and hearing about who they are, and it’s exciting to have a part in creating meaningful experiences for them. The staff and residents have been so kind and welcoming and authentic.

What can you be found doing when you’re not at the Ranch?

Hiking, cross-country skiing, contributing to our little homesteading projects, or playing board games with my family (husband Sten, daughter Seven [age 11], son Isaiah [age 9]).

I’d love to hear your stories and ideas about what the work program at SLR means to you. Feel free to get in touch with me at amyb@springlakeranch.org.

Top: Amy Bowen; Bottom: Amy and her family in the Rocky Mountains
Last September, on the first day of class at the Eliot Pearson School for Child Development at Tufts University, we were told by the president of Tufts that anyone who had also attended Tufts University for undergraduate studies (like I did) could now be considered a “Double Jumbo.” The Tufts sports teams are called “The Jumbos,” hence anyone who has gone to Tufts twice is apparently a “Double Jumbo.” Double Jumbo. Now, this term is so horrible that I almost walked right out of the auditorium, got in a taxi to the nearest beach, and walked right into the ocean, Kate Chopin style. Thankfully, I resisted the urge, and just successfully completed my first semester at Eliot Pearson. I bring up this anecdote as, if we apply Tufts’ President’s logic to my recent past, I could be called a “Double Rancher.” I first stayed at the Ranch over several months from 2014 to 2015 and then found myself returning for almost all of 2016. But while the term “Double Jumbo” makes me ill, I am very proud to be a “Double Rancher.”

When I first visited Spring Lake Ranch in 2014, following an extended relapse and suicide attempt, I had already been to three different rehabs. The highly respected hospital in Belmont Massachusetts had been impressive and well-intentioned, but shallow, and the famous rehab/youth prison in Houston had been a nightmare, so I must admit I did not have much faith that Spring Lake Ranch could help me. A farm? In Vermont? And there’s no internet in our rooms? And I may have to weave? Or chop trees? Or build chairs? Or feed goats? You want me to work with freaking goats? How in the world could that help me not want to die? Or not to drink? Or not drink until I die? Still, I was not left with much of a choice – oh, the plight of the privileged and parent dependent twenty-something – and I watched my parents drive down the hill back towards New York. Towards home.

Those first months of my first stay at SLR were hard. I arrived just as winter was coming in and it was a particularly brutal season. We had thirty straight days where Vermont set a new record for frigid temperatures. I responded to my internet deprivation by overspending on DVDs and graphic novels -- anything to escape the boredom and monotony of living in Vermont. Because of my alcoholism I was asked to attend several AA meetings a week. Unfortunately, AA has never been easy for me to invest in, and my frustration with AA made me lash out at other people trying to help me. Still, the staff let me come to terms with my new environment, and I found some peers I had shared interests with. Probably as soon as my sixth week I got into a groove working on the Farm crew and bonding with a small group of fellow clients. While I think the cliché that you cannot tell the clients from the staff is a bit silly, the staff did a great job relating to me and meeting me where I was at.

Meanwhile, the Ranch had set me up with a therapist in town and he was a great match. I finally began to address the link events from my past might be having on my present self.

When it came time to leave the Ranch, I knew I was going to Boston to have a major medical operation. In the hard recovery time after the procedure, I relapsed, and the Ranch was kind enough to welcome me back. I was very nervous to return, even though I was so familiar and fond of SLR, because I was embarrassed that I had relapsed. Amazingly, I did not receive an ounce of shaming or disappointment from any of the staff. It was fantastic to see everyone again, many friends from my first stay had remained in the Rutland area, and I eased right back into the SLR community. That second stay I had multiple health scares related to the procedure and SLR stuck by me. It would have been very easy for them to say I was too sick to be there, but they trusted me, and I can never thank them enough for that.

I was able to reunite with my previous therapist and build on the work we had done together. I reached, and I cannot believe I am saying this, a breakthrough of sorts on reconciling my past. My last achievement at the Ranch was that after years of running away from thinking about graduate school, I managed to take my GRE and begin the application process.

I am now living in Boston, attending graduate school, and approaching three years sober. I know that every place that tried to help me, even the ones I hated, all contributed something to my well-being. But it is at Spring Lake Ranch that the idea I really could get better and stay on track was made possible. The work program made me actually want to grow up, break the cycle I was in, and find work that made me happy. After years of losing friendships and relationships, socializing with like-minded peers made me confident I could do it in the “real world” when I left the Ranch. And while AA never clicked, the Ranch and my therapist worked with me to have plans and strategies to handle cravings. I know I would not be where I am if not for Spring Lake Ranch. It is a special place. And you get to work with goats!
Residents at the town house in Rutland have been participating in an eight-week cooking series co-led by Case Manager Lynn Dorsky and Intern Emma Hileman. The group gets together every Thursday evening to make recipes and sample foods that they haven’t tried before, such as a recent meal that featured roasted fennel. Some of the recipes have included chicken piccata, a family pasta recipe from a resident’s grandmother, pecan crusted salmon, Mary’s barbeque chicken, roasted green beans and cauliflower, peanut butter cookies, and more! The co-facilitators have also gone to the grocery store with clients to shop for their individual needs and started individual recipe boxes to write down particular recipes that they enjoy. An emphasis has been placed on nutrient dense foods and learning how to navigate a grocery store to find healthier items. Budgeting has been incorporated into the lessons and will continue to be an element in the following weeks. In the future, Lynn and Emma hope to begin focusing more on the logistics of hosting and having a proper kitchen set up to be able to cook for more than one. So far, there has been a great reception from the participants and we expect the exuberance for the cooking group to continue.

In Memory

The Ranch would like to remember those in our greater community who have passed away since our last newsletter:

Walter Epstein
Cynthia Ann Gibson
Sandy Milens

Photo by Royce Street Resident Josh

Sonia Goldenberg has delighted the community with her lifelike paintings of animals, such as this one.
On several days since I began at Spring Lake Ranch January 7, we’ve woken up to snow. I’ve become acquainted with the different shoveling routes each crew covers first thing in the morning on our beautiful snowy days. From there, I’ve had a chance to jump into the various work crews and experience the projects with the residents.

On Farm Crew, we see the consistency and tangible value of caring for our animals each morning and afternoon. Farm Crew department head Carl has the philosophy of making sure all our animals always have food. I’ve been to a lot of farms, and it’s great to see how content and healthy our animals seem. The residents confidently show me the different aspects of our chores. In between chores, our Farm Crew has been working on the upkeep of our haying machinery, painting a mural, and carding our wool. As with any farm, ours has provided opportunities for creativity and problem solving. For example, one day I worked with the crew building a new feeder for round bales.

The Gardens Crew has offered a wide variety of tasks for the crew participants. Along with other crew members, I was able to learn the basics of weaving. When I was in the studio I saw varying stages of weaving projects which went on to be sold at our farmers market, such as rugs, guitar straps, dog leashes, scarfs, and felted mittens made from sewn-together woven projects. Others were working in the “People’s Kitchen” (PK) on granola, cakes and snacks.

In the Shop, crews worked hard to finish a batch of 10 beautiful, new chairs for our dining room. Although I wasn’t present for many of the stages, the final result is astonishing. I understand that many were involved with the design and implementation of a process that worked well. Additionally, they’ve been working on building blue bird houses and helping to construct a stand needed for sap collection.

There are a few residents that sign up for Woods Crew week after week. When I was out there with them, I could see why: they enjoy hard work! One day Woods Crew department head Doug could barely keep up with the crew as they followed him with his chainsaw to split and stack wood. It was amazing to see how much fire wood they created in an afternoon while also optimizing a new sugarbush for next season. Woods Crew has also been working to get the sugar house and supplies ready to go.

As I write this, all the crews are working together to finish tapping trees for our buckets. Next week we’re heading out to tap our lines. Hopefully within the next couple weeks, if you drive up the hill, you’ll see billows of sweet steam rising from our sugarhouse.
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.

Telephone 802-492-3322 • E-mail info@springlakeranch.org • Online www.springlakeranch.org

Abbey Harlow (Development and Communications Manager) and Amy Bowen (Work Program Director) joined the staff on the Hill in January.

Maureen Kamphaus joined the Rutland program team as a member of the Royce Street Support Staff.

Dianna Bessette became a full-time staff member of Royce Street Support Staff.

Christina Davis joined as Overnight Support Staff for Cuttingsville in December.

Patricia Dannenbrink joined Spring Lake Ranch as Overnight Support Staff in April 2018 after serving as a Dual Diagnosis Specialist in Merced County Mental Health in CA for over 10 years.

Rhys Michael Karle (son of staff member Liz Karle) arrived 10 days past his due date, on 12/24, as a welcome Christmas gift to his family.

Spring Lake Ranch provides financial assistance to many of our residents’ families in both the Cuttingsville and Rutland Programs, which is made possible through generous donations to the Sarcka Scholarship Fund from friends like you. Visit www.springlakeranch.org or call 802-492-3322 to make a gift today.