We Welcome Our New Executive Director

When Ed Oechslie walked into the main building at the Ranch for the first time, it felt to him like a long-awaited return. “I felt I was home,” says the incoming Executive Director, who takes the helm in early May. “The warm camaraderie, the common meals, the lack of hierarchy.”

To understand this homecoming, which took a good part of Ed’s lifetime, we must follow a path that led him in one direction, then doubled back on itself. We must also know about what Ed calls “seeds,” planted early, that took years to flower.

One seed was his mother’s books on Gandhi and Albert Schweitzer that lay on the coffee table in his childhood home in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. As a boy, Ed absorbed their compassionate teachings, and his mother’s; “Hers was the view that the core of all spiritual teachings is about the power of love to overcome fear,” he recalls.

Another seed came in the fourth grade—nine-year-old Ed’s watercolor of the sun setting behind a barn, geese flying overhead. A perceptive art teacher saw a gift. The result was Saturday art classes at the Portland School of Art.

Then the path took a twist: After a little college and marriage to his high school sweetheart, Marcie, Ed worked in construction for the next twenty-two years, in sales, marketing and project management.

The seeds lay dormant—until an awakening occurred. It began as a hollow feeling. “I had a sense of not fulfilling my purpose in life. I grew up in a family where..."
mental illness and addiction were pretty rampant, and I was drawn to helping people. I felt I’d gotten off-track.”

The feeling intensified, forcing action. “In my late 30s, I knew I had to make a change. I joined a volunteer community arts program that brought together diverse populations to make art, including people with mental illness,” he says.

He wanted – needed -- more of this work. “I have to do this full-time,” Ed remembers thinking. Still writing building specs and driving sales, he earned a B.A. in Liberal Arts with a concentration in Art and Painting. He was headed for an MFA and a second career teaching art. Or so he thought. Two people who knew him well – better than he knew himself -- steered him toward Art Therapy. He earned an M.A. in the field at Southwestern College in Santa Fe, New Mexico, working at a residential treatment center for those dealing with addiction and psychological trauma. Back in Maine, after earning a Clinical Counselor license and certification as a Clinical Supervisor, he became Executive Director of the Acadia Family Center in Southwest Harbor.

Another seed sprouted. In his work with addiction, Ed saw the amazing benefits of Motivational Interviewing, an unconditionally loving approach that echoed his early steeping in the healing power of kindness. “It’s an unconditional positive regard for the client. This person is loved right from the start. It opens up a very real dialogue between two people.”

Ed speaks of Spring Lake Ranch with gladness that such a place exists, and that he has found it. “Here’s a place putting into action all the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. A place proving that management does not have to be hierarchical and authoritative. Where people are respected and loved, whether they are staff or residents.”

His plan, after a period of listening and observing, is to act as “vision-holder” for SLR. “I want to put together a plan with the board, staff, residents, trustees, friends and supporters that’ll start with the question: ‘What is so right with this program . . . and how can we do more of that?’”

Ed Oechslie is finally home.
“It is easy to forgive a child who is afraid of the darkness. The tragedy is when men are afraid of the light.” –Plato

I had a strong spirituality. I believed in the interconnectedness of all things. I believed in the awesome power of nature, whether in a thunderous surf or simple rain. I believed, above all, in the transcendent power of love. The day I was committed because of what I was later told was a manic break, it all disappeared. I was put on a massive collection of drugs and I became afraid of anything that felt spiritual or transcendent, anything that felt like a higher level of consciousness. I didn’t want to get locked up or broken again. My addiction to alcohol worsened, and I disappeared into rage and sorrow. There came a point when I lost all traces of who I had been.

At that time, it was live or die. I was standing too near a grave. I decided to try, in earnest, to get sober. This didn’t just mean from alcohol; it meant dealing with my serious addiction to prescribed medicines that I had for anxiety, sleep and pain. I honestly did not think I could make it through those first weeks at rehab, but I did. I towed the line. However, trauma and anxiety, on top of Obsessive Compulsive disorder and Bi-polar, left me exhausted. I didn’t know who I was, on which bedrock I could safely stand. I knew everything that I couldn’t do; my old ways were toxic. But I didn’t know how to trust, and I certainly didn’t know what I could believe in. It felt like something had ended, but I couldn’t find a new beginning. At this crossroads, my Dad explored Spring Lake Ranch.

The Ranch has a gift that I didn’t think a treatment center could have. It is something that no money can buy. It simply has “heart.” There are measurable things that I can quote, stellar educations and levels of training, but that would miss the exact point of the Ranch. Whether taking care of animals on the farm, or building a barn, picking basil or apples, or cutting wood, teamwork creates a bond. The healing is in the talks that evolve during breaks or at meals. Staff relate to residents with deep care and often continue their support as residents progress through different levels of care. People are hired to do a given job, but they do so much more. When I began to write again, sober this time, and brought a smile to a reader’s face, I realized that something had changed. I believed in something. It wasn’t fancy, but it was transcendent. It was the healing power of interdependence, of community; it was the power of honest relationships and genuine care.

I began to keep my head up and meet people’s eyes. In time there was a glass wall between me and the past. I could still see it, but though it was visible, it was at a distance. I started to smile, as I once had. My family and friends said it was like having the old “me” back. They were happy and relieved beyond description.

One special afternoon, near the end of my three months stay at the Ranch, I played music with two staff members up at the Chapel. The fall leaves were visible through the west window, russet and gold. The music, all improvisation, was truly beautiful. There was moss, deep green and shimmering like satin, growing inside the building itself, and a warm fire burned inside a cast-iron stove. It was a nearly perfect experience. I realized then that I had come full circle. I had been held and supported and believed in, and I was ready to hear the crash of the ocean’s surf again, and the pure rhythm of the rain. I trusted myself, despite my illnesses. I believed that I could make a healthy and fulfilling life for myself. And I felt profound gratitude to Spring Lake Ranch. I began to stand in the light.

-Sarah
This year marks the 80th anniversary of Spring Lake Ranch. I would like to say thank you to all our friends and families who have supported us in the past and to those who have responded to this year’s annual appeal.

For SLR staff, helping our residents and their families in times of crisis and need is rewarding. We find it uplifting to watch a resident regroup and begin to reclaim their life and dreams in our community. It is encouraging to know that we also have your support.

While we still have more work to do to reach our fundraising goal this year, we’ve had a number of new donors join us in this year’s appeal. One family who gave a generous first time donation said:

“…I’ve often thought about the many other families out there who have loved ones who are struggling with the same challenges, who don’t have the financial means or insurance coverage that will help make the Ranch program possible. That is a place of hopelessness . . . For a parent, the Ranch is a place of hope for your child’s future, a place where there is the time and space for recovery and healing. It was time for me to do my small part to help another family regain hope!”

Another family who began giving generously this year said:

“The Ranch is a very special place. We have been thinking that it has more impact to send larger donations to a few organizations than to send a small amount of money to many charities. Our son joined the Ranch community to please us and left the Ranch with a much better understanding of himself. He has turned his life around and for that we are very grateful.”

We would like to extend a special and enthusiastic thank you to all of our new donors. Whether you are a new or long-time supporter of SLR, you are helping us change lives in very meaningful ways. With your support, our tradition will continue. To learn more about the ways you can support Spring Lake Ranch, please see the “Support Us” tab on our website at www.springlakeranch.org.

Steve Sebastian
Development Director

Spring Lake Ranch is very honored and grateful to have received a generous bequest from Dr. and Mrs. Hampton Carson. Their family’s close relationship with the Ranch goes back to the mid-1970s. Their bequest and all planned gifts help safeguard our ability to fulfill the Spring Lake Ranch mission well into the future.

For information about making a planned gift to SLR or joining Enni’s Legacy Circle, please contact Steve Sebastian. 802-492-3322; steves@springlakeranch.org

Development News

Wicker Tables

one day,
there won’t be a reckoning,
not even a peep of dismay
will force open the skies,
and there won’t be a lesson
to be learned.

henceforth,
i will only say true words.

henceforth, etc.
‘don’t speak ill of the dead.’
right.

while we’re at it,
let’s not watch the forgetful

branches flop on the soil,
let’s not listen for the trains
scuttling through the
flipped back night.
on and through all of it,
the wicker tables,
the front-lit porches,
the county league
softball games.
is this it,
yes, yes it is

-Noah, A Ranch Resident
Premier Ranch Art Show

Picture a winter night at the Ranch. Portraits, abstract paintings, handicrafts and pottery, by both residents and staff, line the game room walls. This was the setting of the premier Ranch Art Show.

Like so many Ranch events, the art show was a product of collaboration between staff and residents. Sarah Ashley, a former gallery director and art consultant, a current resident and a mover and shaker in the creation of the art show, says, “Lydia, a house advisor, is an artist. She mentioned to me something about really wanting to do an art show, but she didn’t want to tackle it alone.” Sarah Ashley was eager to help make the event a reality. “I always want art in my life one way or another,” she says.

Lydia and Sarah Ashley, with the help of two other committed staff members, Doug and Kayla, hosted weekly brainstorming meetings, where all community members were welcome. “Everyone was so supportive and helpful in their own way,” Sarah Ashley says. A number of residents and staff artists submitted their work. Finally, it was the big night.

“As people came in, we saw them looking amazed and appreciative of the talent here,” says Sarah Ashley. “You know someone is artistic, but if you are a musician or singer, you can showcase your art more. A painter, for example, has fewer opportunities to show it.”

Even inexperienced artists submitted work. Sarah Ashley says, “I think everyone is artistic and creative. It is just a matter of letting yourself go there. A lot of times you hear, ‘I can’t’ or ‘I’m not creative.’ You have to let yourself. Art is one of the most unmediated ways to show yourself to the world.”

ART Continued on page 11
We all know that purposeful, collaborative work is key to the Spring Lake Ranch approach to recovery. In this first article in a series, we explore the many facets of work crew with members and leaders of various crews.

Ranchers eagerly describe how great it feels to learn new skills. “I’ve learned a ton of new things,” Mae says. “I never split wood before! Just today, I learned how to use a loom and how to weave! That really feeds my soul. It makes me feel good about being here, not at home where I was not really doing anything productive.”

For crew leader Eric, skill-building often means helping others take a leap into the unknown. The potential rewards are vast. “It’s encouraging people to try doing things they’ve never done before, knowing that sometimes they’ll fail – and that’s good. Because then there’s an opportunity for them to improve and succeed. That’s the real magic. They’re building self-esteem, and then they’re able to genuinely succeed at something. Meanwhile, the reality is, whatever they do will be okay.”

Mae can attest to the benefits of pushing yourself beyond your comfort zone. “Splitting wood was the most challenging thing I’ve done here. The maul was dull and heavy. How was I going to split this thing in half? You fail, you fail, you fail – finally, you split your first piece of wood, and it’s like, ‘Oh my God!’ It’s such an amazing feeling.”

When it comes to personal growth, all agree that work is a banquet. Says Zach quietly, “There are a lot of positive qualities in myself I had forgotten about. Being here with a lot of positive reinforcement and no negative pressure has helped me get a lot of confidence back, to re-focus, and to realize there are things I’m good at.”

Growth can result from completing
what you start. Says Diana, “My favorite thing on a crew is actually finishing something, because I never do that at home. It’s nice to actually go through with something and not give up before I even really try. One of my biggest issues is learning that you’ll finish but it doesn’t have to be today—so I don’t need to freak out. It’s knowing I do have time.”

For both crew members and leaders, giving up control can be an important lesson. Says crew leader, Doug, “At times, I’m proud of my ability to sit back and let other people make choices about how they’re going to do something.”

Diana, too, is learning to back off. And she’s pleased with her new ability to be a team player. “I’ve learned with Gardens art projects, that I get really invested in them. And I found, when other people came to work on them, I had to rein myself in, not to need so much control over what other people are doing. I’ve experienced a whole new feeling of collaboration, telling myself, ‘This isn’t your mosaic.’ I’ve learned what it means to work on something together, to let go, to let it take its course. To have my work flow with someone else’s and not force it to look perfect. That’s huge for me.”

Self-confidence replaces self-doubt when you’re confronted by your own talents and dedication. Diana says with pride, “I have not missed a single shift at the candy store. We’ve completely revamped the store and I had so many ideas—a notebook of plans! I need to work on actually believing in myself.”

The fact that the work at the Ranch is real, and vital to the welfare of humans, beasts and land, boosts that budding belief in self. Says Zach, “It’s really nice to know you’re working to help the place run.”

Work continued on page 11
Clay—Work with Hands and Emotions

During my stay at Spring Lake Ranch, I began Hauschka Artistic therapy with Beatrice Birch, who works with Ranch and Rutland Program residents. I have been participating in her clay group for almost a year. At first, everyone formed a sphere and from there, followed a progression of transformations, increasing in complexity, and learned to keep a sense of balance in the shape we were trying to perfect. We have moved on from making three-dimensional shapes, to making human faces. Members of the group predetermine the final outcome of what they would like their faces to portray. Along the way, each of us will take turns discussing the traits, age, sex, and possible emotions of each clay face before us.

As we work with the clay, we have many interesting discussions about what we feel as we move from one expression to another. I have found this process to be a revealing opportunity for everyone to provide insight and to be reflective. We had one interesting discussion about the difference between sadness and depression. This discussion initially resulted in our examination of the face one person was forming, which was ultimately going to be a face that would portray sadness. When the topic of sadness versus depression came up, the group’s general consensus was that when you are sad you are feeling something consciously, for a reason, and that there is more expressiveness to sadness than there is to depression. Depression seems to be expressionless, void and empty of any animation.

Everyone in the group has had the opportunity to learn something about themselves, whether it is learning to work through frustration or realizing how the act of making an expression on one’s own face might arouse a real emotion. Perhaps the most valuable experience of the whole process is the benefit of working in a group where you have the opportunity to see each others’ progress. The group also seems to make progress as a whole. Some members of the group have decided on a progression of emotions. I chose shock, anger and peacefulness. Someone else chose to model female faces capturing young, middle, and old age. Others chose to portray faces that are emotional polar opposites. As we continue to work together as a group, often our initial planned progression of emotions would evolve, as we gained insights from one another.

We look forward to discovering what more there is to learn as we continue to explore together.

Lauren
A Rutland Program Resident

NEWS Notes

- George Nostrand gave an in-service presentation to staff that focused on the Wellness Recovery Action Plan. This is a workbook based support tool where individuals write a personalized plan detailing how they can best stay in balance, what stressors they need to be alert to, and what they wish to have happen if their symptoms require intervention or hospitalization.
- The Rutland Program now offers three dual diagnosis groups and WRAP support.
- Resident Services has redesigned its Dual Diagnosis support. We have two levels of classes which explore dual diagnosis issues and self advocacy.
- Freakishly hot days in March cut the sugaring season short. Woods Crew members and many community volunteers made 300 gallons of syrup.

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**Keeping Things Flowing**

Maintaining our physical plant is a never-ending challenge. The real headaches do not come from the constant flow of repairs, but the big items, like preserving our infrastructure.

At the Ranch, we are in the process of trying to provide continual back-up electricity to all the major facilities, which means installing new generators in each building. Another, less palatable Ranch matter is the septic system and its unconfined leeching field. Our pump station needs to be replaced by a more secure and accessible unit.

The Ranch secures water from two municipal springs. The water is stored in cisterns, treated and piped by gravity to our buildings. Problems with steady chlorination, broken pipes, and trapped air continue to plague our staff and, ultimately, folks trying to take showers. Large fixes will involve new piping and comprehensive electric water treatment sheds.

Then, there are smaller hassles, like fire pond maintenance. In the event of a fire, the continued existence of most Ranch buildings would depend on fire trucks pumping and spraying water from our two small “fire” ponds. Over time, the ponds become filled with sludge, and the roadside hydrants become clogged. Recently, John Freeman, our physical plant director, donned a wet suit, and dug out the pond with the help of an excavator. Both hydrants have been tested by the fire department, and are set to go.

It is hard to believe that beaver ponds are part of our infrastructure, but, when they fail, all hell breaks loose downstream. Our beaver friends create capricious dams that hold back enormous amounts of water. Sometimes, during rainstorms, the beaver pond water roars down along Spring Lake Road wreaking havoc on our friends and neighbors. We keep constant eyes on the beavers’ dam to avoid floods.

*Kes Boynton
Business Manager*
Historically, ice cutting on Spring Lake began long before the Ranch existed. There was a time when ice was cut each winter on lakes and ponds in Vermont and was loaded onto trains headed for ice boxes in New York and Boston. The ice trade in Vermont ended in the 1920s; however, the Ranch continued this annual winter tradition. In my first winter at the Ranch in 1989, ice cutting was alive and well under the zealous leadership of Work Program Director Peter Grace.

This year, upon my return to the Ranch as Farm Manager, I was enthusiastic about renewing the practice of cutting ice. Given the warm temperatures this winter, I started checking the ice depth in mid-December. To my dismay, it was less than three inches thick right up until the second week of January. Then, the nights got colder, and by the first week of February the ice was over 12 inches thick.

It turned out to be a fantastic week of bright sunshine and temperatures in the mid 30s. Peter Grace joined us early in the week to help open up the ice and to pass on his sage advice on the practice of ice cutting at SLR. Farm Crew headed up ice cutting and other crews joined in throughout the week. The week went by fast, and we ended up with 250 blocks stored in the ice house.

Although trying something for the first time can be intimidating, people seemed to quickly find their place, whether it was using the saws, spuds or ice tongs, or helping to drag the blocks of ice to the navy truck. The comments I heard from residents were encouraging. Many people remarked how beautiful the crystal-clear blocks of ice looked as they were pulled from the lake. Michael was inside the ice house and when another resident peered in, he said, “Look here, it is like we are standing on jewels.” He later remarked that even if we never had any use for the ice, it was worth it. It feels to me that the intrinsic value of cutting ice is not only about the utility of the product, but about what one takes away from the communal experience of doing this work.

This year the ice will be used by one of the Farm & Wilderness camps and possibly by an alternative energy festival held each summer.

-Paddy Martin
Farm Manager
Work continued from page 7

Work at the Ranch can ignite a spark. That spark can flame into a passion that leads to satisfying work after the Ranch. Says Doug, “Finding your niche in the collective effort is meaningful. You’re not just filling a space that any old person could fill. You’re unique, and your contributions really matter. That makes this place a world different from so many other places.”

Mae’s life path may have started in the Ranch kitchen, where she tenderly cooks the morning’s pancakes. “I became the breakfast cook about a month ago. Knowing I’m filling their bellies makes me feel so good. I know people enjoy my pancakes and appreciate all the love I put into them. What I really want to do when I leave here is learn to make cheese. I’ve applied for a couple of internships in Vermont, and hopefully I’ll get the opportunity to work on a dairy farm.”

While working on Woods crew, Diana, too, made a discovery about herself that may shape her future. “I never realized how important it was for me to be outside until I came here. I definitely have to work on incorporating being outdoors into my life once I leave the Ranch.”

All agree the Ranch community acts as a safety net, making learning, failing, and achieving possible. Says Mae, “I was out with Chip and we were yucking it up and ended up with a huge pile of wood. This is so satisfying. It means so much to me. The sense of community here is just overwhelming. For me, it’s so important to be part of something bigger. And you instantly find that here. If you’re not good at something, no one’s judging you, no one’s laughing. They know there’s something they can’t do. Everyone here understands pretty much what everyone else is going through.”

On March 23, 2012, residents and staff voted on their favorite Spring Lake Ranch dish. The winner is:

Barbara’s Blueberry Crumble

Filling:
8 c. blueberries
2/3 c. sugar
4 tbsp. cornstarch

Crumble Topping:
2 c. flour
½ c. sugar
1 tbsp. baking powder
1 tsp. salt
½ c. butter
1 c. half n’ half
1 egg

Maple Whipped Cream:
1 cup cold whipping cream
½ cup maple syrup

Preheat the oven to 375°. Mix the filling ingredients in a 13” x 9” pan, and bake until bubbly (about 20-30 minutes). Now, mix the dry ingredients in a large mixing bowl. Next, blend in the butter. Once blended, lightly mix in the half n’ half and the egg. When filling is done, drop the crumble topping by heaping tablespoons onto the filling. Heat the oven to 425°, and bake the whole crumble for 20-25 minutes. The crumble topping should be golden brown. Use an electric mixer to whip the maple syrup and whip cream. Continue whipping the mixture until it holds semi-firm peaks. Serve the maple whipped cream on the blueberry crumble, smile, and enjoy a taste of Ranch cooking.

Barbara Favreau
Chef Manager

ART Continued from page 5

The event was a triumph in many ways. “I worked with a lot of artists who had substance abuse problems,” says Sarah Ashley of her time as a gallery director, “and most feared their gifts would go away without using drugs. The art show proved that the gift is still there—you can still tap into it sober.”

On a personal note, Sarah Ashley says, “The event allowed me to sort out what happened in my life before I came here, and allowed me to see a new direction. It looks different than a gallery in NYC, but it has all the pieces I love.”

Sarah Ashley and many other Ranchers hope the event will expand to become a tradition.
Spring Lake Ranch is a non-profit, therapeutic work community in the Green Mountains of Vermont, an alternative treatment center for people with mental and emotional illness.

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Looking for us at the Main House? We’re all on work crew.
Come join us on page 6.