For about six months now, I have had the privilege of providing the psychiatric coverage to “The Hill” portion of the Spring Lake Ranch program. In this period of time I have learned a lot about the day-to-day functioning of the program; and I have had the pleasure of getting to know many new people, Ranchers and staff. Six months is a good period of time to reflect on what I have learned and what more I need to know to provide the best possible psychiatric care for our resident guests. And it is a good period of time to reflect on what I have come to learn of the history of The Ranch and to envision how it can carry its special mission forward in the 21st century.

I first learned about the Ranch in 1980, when I moved to Vermont to begin my residency in Psychiatry at UVM. I was so intrigued by the program, that I came to visit it that first year. Soon thereafter, I met Dr. Hans Huessey, who was the psychiatric consultant to SLR, in his role as a Professor in the Department of psychiatry at UVM. As any of you who ever knew Dr. Huessey will know, he conveyed great enthusiasm for the mission and the accomplishments of The Ranch. I closely followed Dr. Huessey’s footsteps in a number of ways in my professional career, providing similar psychiatric consultations to programs in Vermont and New York. And I have tried to convey my appreciation for innovative programs like SLR in the teaching opportunities that I have had with medical students, residents, and fellows in the UVM Department of Psychiatry programs where I have had an Assistant Clinical appointment.

In the past months, I have had a few opportunities to learn more about the history of the Ranch, by viewing homemade documentaries produced by Michael Wells, re-reading an article written by Dr. Huessey 50 years ago, and from conversations with present and former staff. In recent conversations that I have had with Michael and Phyllis Wells, I have tried to imagine the motivation and purpose in the minds of Wayne and Elizabeth Sarcka when they created Spring Lake Ranch. The videos capture the spirit of community that literally produced the Ranch. Dr. Huessey’s article “Spring Lake Ranch-A Pioneer Halfway House” amplified this picture of Ranch life with his understanding of “Therapeutic Community” which he saw as the soul of psychiatric treatment at SLR. It is clear to me that many people are drawn to SLR by this enlightened philosophy of mental health treatment; and many remain affiliated, in many different ways, because of the kindness they experienced here.
Shipwrights begin the construction of a wooden boat by first laying the keel. We in the Rutland boat shop began the construction of our Stand Up Paddle board (SUP) in a slightly different manner. Devoting numerous sessions to laying out paper patterns, cutting plywood, planning and sanding the cutouts, learning how to scarf (attach) the plywood cutouts to one another, we finally reached the point when we could begin to put the pieces together. Called the “Stitch and Glue”, we began by fastening with wire (the stitch) the internal frames to the sides. Then we stitched or wired the bottom to the sides. Finally our form was beginning to take the shape of a paddle board except, with the wire stitches sticking out from the sides and bottom, our paddle board gives the appearance of just having encountered a porcupine.

Our next step will be to caulk or fill the seams with a paste like glue. When the glue dries we snip off those wire quells, put on the top, fiberglass the entire board, put on some fittings and we will be ready for a launching from the Ranch dock. I have the pleasure to work with several clients who enthusiastically let me lead them from one new task to another. Scarfing introduced them to block planes and epoxy gluing. The simple task of cutting plywood gave them experience with circular and scroller saws and a Japanese hand saw. And the stitching, while no hand tools were involved, they learned the art of getting one’s hand into tight spots to thread fine copper wire through narrow holes.

Reflecting on our varied work one client noted he had learned a good deal about finish carpentry, “it’s very therapeutic for me. I’m really enjoying working on the project.” I’m learning a lot of new techniques, we are slow, thorough and working to be precise. Our other apprentice shipwright talked about the excitement of seeing our weeks’ of work finally taking shape and looking like a paddle board. Launch photos to come!

-Andy Richards-Peele, Rutland Program Case Manager
From the Ranch Kitchen
Corn and Chickpea Patties with Avocado Buttermilk Dressing

Makes: 4 servings
Prep: 20 mins
Cook: 15 mins

INGREDIENTS
Oil for sautéing
1 onion, chopped
1 cup corn
2 cups cooked chickpeas, drained and rinsed
½ cup bread crumbs
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
½ teaspoon honey
½ teaspoon ground cumin
Salt and pepper to taste
Avocado Buttermilk Dressing

DIRECTIONS
Sauté onion in small amount of oil until soft.
Place corn in food processor. Add onion and the next 5 ingredients and pulse until well combined but not pasty. Transfer to mixing bowl and blend. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
Shape into 4 patties. Broil patties until brown about 6 minutes. Flip and brown other side.
Serve with avocado buttermilk dressing - recipe follows.

Avocado Buttermilk Dressing
1 avocado peeled and mashed
½ cup sour cream
1 ½ teaspoon Dijon mustard
¼ cup lemon juice

Combine all ingredients and enjoy!

Where are they now?
Catching up with former Rancher Spencer

“I'm currently working as a Coldwell Banker Real Estate agent. I finished my training yesterday. I'm happy and am having fun. I got your note in the maple syrup box. That meant a lot so please tell everyone that. I am also getting ready to take my driver's test to get a license. I've gotten some gigs for professional photography and have worked for a newspaper called the Sun Sentinel out of Ft. Lauderdale.

I miss you all very much and look forward to talking to all of you sometime soon. But for now I thought this update was in order. I owe everything I am today to you and the Ranch and I want to make sure you all know that. Thanks for passing this along.”

One of Spencer’s photos taken during his time at the Ranch
Earlier this year, three former house advisors returned to the hill to lead the community in a workshop: ‘Ranchers Search for Meaning’. As a true testament to the cultural heritage and sense of connection among people who’ve been associated with the Ranch, Amy Fairbanks (2000’s), Kurt Shaffert (1990’s), and Suzanne Lynch (1980’s) never worked together or even in the same decade, but nonetheless pulled together a workshop to present to the community, using their collective talents and interests, because they love the Ranch and wanted to give something back.

The following piece was developed during the workshop by House Advisor Melissa Redd.

*It seems obvious and intuitive to me that the Heart of Spring Lake Ranch is the lake. I mean, it is right there in the smack-dab middle of the name and I’m pretty sure it is what first caught the eye of the ranch’s founders back in the 1930’s. Today and, I imagine, through the years, staff and residents alike find their way to the lake’s edge whenever they need a moment of deep introspection, solace, solitude. Taking that trek up, up, and then back down, down, down to stare out at or dip beneath the glassy surface feels like a re-set ritual. In a sense, it’s absolutely baptismal; a plunging, a cleansing, a transformative renewal and rooting of the mind, body, and soul. That is, essentially, at the heart of what we do at the ranch as well. We plunge, cleanse, renew, root, and transform. It is happening in our bodies as we embrace physical work, good eating, and abstaining from harmful substances. It is happening in our minds as we set our intentions and path and work our way forward with guidance. That's the other great thing about this baptismal process, we are all in the water together. In some ways we are a swirling mix of intentions and personalities, preferences and abilities, and yet it works. We are all out in these baptismal waters together, taking deep breaths to plunge under and transform together.*
When I left home last January I wasn’t sure what was set before me. At that point in time I had no idea what I wanted to do with my Life nor was I sure if I even wanted to survive.

I had destroyed relationships with friends, my family, as well as acquaintances and I was a disappointment to myself. I hated who I was and whom I had become. I had literally become my own worst nightmare and I didn't think there was any way out of the weedy despair that grew around me. I was full of self-pity, anger, resentments, excuses, "I'm Sorry’s", and the one word I dislike the most "hate". And with all the blame and anger that I put forth and threw at others like a time bomb, I nearly should have been throwing at myself. In the end of it all I had to give up the most important thing in my life 'Kinsman'. I don't think the loss of giving her away really sunk in until my parents had found a new home for her. There was always this little bit of a light of hope that sat inside me thinking I would get her back.

As time passed through my stay here I gained a new companion. Zoey has become a very significant part of my recovery here at the Ranch. She has gone on runs with me that were far beyond her ability, hikes in all terrains, and many leisurely swims down at the lake in the afternoons and on the weekends. She has sat with me while I cried up at the chapel, wrote in the tall grass, and watched fire flies dance in the darkness of the night. There is a piece of security that I hold on to with her presence- Often times she reminds me of Kins and when I even think of the thought of the two of them together I know it would be a brawl. The act of protection, loyalty, commitment, and companionship holds only with one for the strength of jealousy feeding its way in.

As I am getting ready to prepare for my departure from the Ranch- Self reflection and evaluation have truly been a potent thought on my mind. Although I have been here for almost 8 months, it is only a stepping stone moving forward into what the future holds ahead of me. And as much I try not to get ahead of myself in thought, and cherish these simple moments, embracing all the light, textures and taste of this beautiful place that I have experienced- The full circle of Life simply comes back to gratitude.

Thank you to my Mom and Dad for giving me this experience and opportunity to grow spiritually and mentally. I know it has been just as challenging for you as well. But I want you to know that I love you both and I wouldn't ask for anything different than the two amazing people that you are. I love you and Thank You.

-Sarah, Rutland Client
NEWS BITS

- Liz Lawson is not only taking on the role as Business Manager at Spring Lake Ranch but taking on the role as Mom at home! We welcome Maya Karle—daughter of Liz and Adam, born on April 20th, 2016.
- Tom Conry, former Human Resources Director, completed his 5 month hike of the Appalachian Trail this month.
- Our newest additions to the Hill are our 5 healthy and happy calves born the first weekend of August. We are anxious awaiting the arrival of the youngest!
- Restructuring of our Rutland Program has led us to eliminate some existing positions. We give lots of gratitude to Danielle Geiger and Kim King, Overnight Support Specialists in Rutland and are thankful for the work and care Mark Dube has provided both to the Townhouse Property and Rutland Maintenance Crew.
- On July 19th we wished Bruce Allen a Happy Birthday and a Happy Retirement, after 7 years as Shop Crew Manager. We celebrated with cake and Contra Dance on the tennis court. We are so grateful for your years of commitment and energy, Bruce! You are greatly missed!
- Former House Advisors Mindy D’Ippolito and Lisl Hacker welcomed to the world their second son, Rye Samuel D’Ippolito-Hacker on August 15th! Everyone is happy and healthy, and Asher is a very proud big brother!
- On August 31st we said Happy Retirement to 8 year Business Manager Kes Boynton. From his guitar playing in the living room to his steadfast presence for lunchtime dishes, he will be a missed member of the community. Thank you for years of dedication and book keeping! We hope you visit, Kes!

WELCOME!

- Cynthia Hanson, who staffed the Med Room for the winter, has joined us as a Clinical Team Leader
- Mary Mitiguy is our new Human Resources Director
- Dawn McBeigh is our new Nurse
- Ingrid Wisell is welcomed as the Assistant Business Manager
- Phil Zoppo (and furry sidekick Stan!) is back in the pastures as the Farm Assistant
- Theresa Hoffman—this is Theresa’s 5th time working at the Ranch since 1993; she has been a House Advisor, Woods and Maintenance Work Program Leader, Life Skills Coach and is now back as a Clinical Team Leader!
- Ray Pratt is welcomed to the Ranch as the new Shop Crew Manager
- Alice McGarey-Martin is back working on special projects, continuing her decade’s long SLR legacy
- Brad Young is joining us as a Clinical Team Leader, having experienced the Ranch first in 2007 as a clinical intern

NEW HOUSE ADVISORS

Erin Keller  Lucas MacFee  Samuel Allison

WISH LIST

With your tax-deductible donation of any item on this list, you actively become a part of our mission to support and empower people with mental health and addiction issues by providing opportunities to grow and thrive. Contact Heather at heather-erb@springlakeranch.org to help!

- Outdoor Seating for our Improved Front Porch ($1,250 new)
- Temporal Thermometer
- Professional Grade Digital Scale
- Laptop Computer with Disc Drive
- Ranch Subscription to The New Yorker (or other stimulating magazines/papers)
What brought you to the Ranch?

My wife Rachelle and I were in the Peace Corps on the other side of the world in the Solomon Islands when we learned about the Ranch through a Peace Corp newsletter in which the Ranch advertised. I remember that Rachelle immediately got chills when she read the first paragraph. Since there was no internet we wrote a letter to the Ranch and we heard back about a month later. We came in February 1999, worked on crews and loved it. We officially started as House Advisors in August of that year. We originally thought that this would be a transitional job!

What has kept you here?

The whole package…when you put together the day to day encounters, great food, fresh faces, the opportunity to work in the outdoors, it felt too good to be true. There are always social opportunities at every corner and the opportunity to help and challenge others while I challenge myself at the same time.

Tell us about living here/raising Aren and Micah here?!

I like that they are in a rural setting, and one that is out to create community. Everywhere they look there are opportunities to learn and grow. I like that they see their dad chooses to work where he lives. I sometimes feel bad that we are so far from the traditional neighborhood like where I grew up. There were tons of kids and we’d leave the house in the morning and have to be called home for dinner in the evening.

What’s your role at the Ranch?

I’m in charge of woods crew. We do seasonal work - firewood and trail maintenance in the fall, sugaring in spring, keeping the grounds in the summer – all while being available to residents that I am working with. My favorite part is the day to day work - coming together with people to get a task done and getting to know people in the process.

Do you have a favorite Ranch celebration or tradition?

Yule is pretty special. Seeing the wonder in our kids eyes, the torches, everything instills in me the magic of that celebration.

What do you do when you’re not working?

A good deal of my time is family oriented, trying to be a good dad to my kids, trying to strike a balance between my own interests and family times. I like kayaking, art projects, gardening, mountain biking, recreation of a variety of sorts. I enjoy getting curious with the kids about learning new things….getting down on their level and pondering the universe is most important.

Is there something that people might not know about you?

I can be quiet and I can be quite over the top! Something else is that all my time here I have never been on gardens crew but I have found that I love gardening! We harvested 260 cherry tomatoes the other day.

Also, I received my graduate degree from Naropa Institute where I studied art therapy and counseling. I find some of the skills I learned there get put to use here at the Ranch every day.

Director’s Note

As you receive this newsletter we are just about to embark on our First Annual Family & Alumni Weekend on October 15-16. The event combines two ideas, namely, an alumni event to provide a time for Ranchers to return to the Hill for fun and reconnecting, and an opportunity for current and former resident / client families to come together to learn, share, and support one another.

We’re excited to have with us two keynote speakers: Diana Clark, JD, MA whose consulting business focuses on healing support strategies for families, particularly those with addiction issues; and Jennifer FauntLeRoy, MD, our consulting psychiatrist in Rutland, who will model (with volunteer participants) the reflecting team and family support central to Dialogic Practice, or Open Dialogue, an innovative practice of working with clients which comes from Finland. In addition, we will have a panel of family members who will share their experiences of supporting a loved one with a mental illness and/or substance use addiction and learn about the resources of NAMI, among other topics.

Lest we find ourselves sitting for too long, there will also be time for recreation and group activities including yoga, hiking, contradancing, and of course, the 3rd Annual Paddle Battle! Altogether, we hope the weekend will provide opportunity for fun and friendship. I hope you will be able to join us. Please give Heather a call if you have any questions, wish to register, or otherwise become involved.

-Lynn J. Pilcher
Dr. Huessey’s article was also enlightening as to the nature of psychiatric treatment generally 50 years ago, provoking in me further reflection of how my field has changed, especially as I have watched it change over the past 40 years. Dr. Huessey noted that "many [guests] have had lengthy psychoanalytic experiences" prior to coming to SLR., and "over half of our guests are on some kind of medication". The situation now is essentially reversed: virtually every resident is on a medication (usually multiple medications) and only some residents have been in long-term therapy. But in other ways the existential situation for residents is the same: much has happened in their lives which they have to understand and cope with; and on the basis of that understanding, build personal strengths and supports, and develop a plan for the future beyond the Ranch.

The role of the clinical staff is critical in this endeavor. First of all, our task is to help gather all the information, the life story, the medical record that will help our residents better understand the nature of the problems that brought them to the Ranch and their strengths that they will work to develop. My role in particular is to help manage the myriad medications, but to do so I rely for my diagnostic formulation on the conceptual understanding that the clinical staff generate with the residents. The clinical team has grown significantly in the last couple of years, reflecting the requirements of this therapeutic task as well as regulatory oversight. So for multiple reasons, this therapeutic process is more formalized than the Sarckas or Dr. Huessey ever imagined.

Our task now is to integrate these regulations and the many innovations in mental health care in recent decades into the conceptual genius and historical success of the Ranch. We need to see these regulations not as our foe (or even the bane of our existence) but as a spur to provide quality care within the context of scientific research and evidence-based practice. The sciences of brain function and clinical psychology have given greater evidence and clinical validation of the therapeutic utility of a living and working community like Spring Lake Ranch. We have to make this work within the context of the economic realities of the 21st century.