

news  
letter  
fall  
2010

# Spring Lake Ranch Therapeutic Community Working Toward Wellness

annual  
report  
edition

Cuttingsville & Rutland, Vermont

Founded in 1932 by Wayne & Elizabeth Sarcka

In the August 2010 Management Report, Kes says that we achieved a remarkable surplus for the year due to a late surge in the census that started in June. He hits the nail on the head when he says that we need to continue our strong marketing efforts to maintain a steady and continuous resident population. The surge was not the result of any "one defining action" or a "killer innovation." Rather, in the words of Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, the surge "resembles relentlessly pushing a giant, heavy flywheel in one direction, turn upon turn, building momentum until a point of breakthrough, and beyond."

I attribute our breakthrough to hard and smart work; taking one day at a time and seeing what we could make of it. Just as we ask our residents to get up and get involved in the work of the Ranch and Rutland, the staff and board did the same. When things didn't look so good, we knocked on doors and told anyone who would listen about the opportunities for recovery available at SLR. We made changes to our registration program, taking admissions calls in the evening and opening ourselves to weekend admissions. We advertised on the radio and in print. We created a new website, which we launched in early spring. We put on two special publicity events, and we contracted with the VA. We built a new art room and used a gift to hire an artistic therapist. In addition to this, we finished our first round of outcome studies, created new resident surveys, and instituted a process to get real-time feedback from

residents. We did all this with less: conservatively managing our finances with expense-side savings of over \$300,000.

Steady growth in the Rutland program is critical to improving resident outcomes and our financial health. We need a hub for our Rutland program in the same way that we have a main house at the Ranch. At the Ranch, we need to do a better job assessing needs at the outset and supporting people when they first arrive. We will more appropriately staff a 24/7 program and create smaller learning and support communities which will give our tremendous energy more focus. We will keep the admissions, sales, and marketing ball rolling, and strive to maintain a wait list. Furthermore, we will support our staff by designing standards for key clinical positions and more effective evaluation tools and learning opportunities. Also, through increased fundraising and development activity, our new Development Director will reach out to our families and find ways to expand our donor base. Lastly, we will work hard and capitalize projects so that our buildings and grounds maintain their value and support the mission.

It is not time to relax, but time to build upon the work done earlier. It is time to compound the investments we made in the last year and continue the momentum moving forward. It wasn't one big push when we look back; it was an accumulation of hard and smart work in one direction. Decision by decision and disciplined act by disciplined act, our hard work will add up to noteworthy results in the year to come.



— Jim Taggart,  
Executive Director

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As we look ahead to this year, we will keep the momentum going by confronting facts about our outcomes and trying new approaches to improve our performance. Key to this will be professional development, support for our people in key clinical positions, and teaming in ways we have not before.

# The Never-Ending Story: *Corstart Program Improvement*

As part of our ongoing effort to improve our program and do the best we can to serve residents, we recently began a process to examine the Resident Services model and identify our strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. We began this review by asking, more specifically, the following questions: What elements of the Ranch experience do residents report have been most helpful to their recovery? What aspects of the program do we feel are essential and part of the core values of what makes Spring Lake Ranch unique? What can be done differently to better organize ourselves to meet the needs of resi-

dents? How can we better support, supervise, and educate our House Advisors and Long Term Advisors in

hope the new model might achieve and the direction we're likely to move in the coming months.



A new model of Resident Services program delivery would aim to provide:

- Increased opportunities for regular, ongoing dialogue and learning to better assist staff in work-

ing with people with mental and addictive disorders

- An increase in teaming, support, and supervision around helping residents to achieve treatment goals
- More assessment of residents' needs earlier in their stay and more collaboration with the psychiatrist and other team members in setting treatment goals
- Earlier involvement of the Rutland Program in the teaming structure to better provide a continuum of care for residents
- Greater consistency in treatment planning, coordination of care, and discharge planning for residents
- Increased coverage by Resident Services staff in the evening and weekends

These and other ideas will continue to be swirling around as we move into the fall. It is important that we be organized to most efficiently and effectively meet the needs of residents and also structure staff workloads which are manageable and sustainable.

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their work with residents? And, given the challenges of the multitasking model, how do we organize our work so that staff positions are more manageable, sustainable, and efficient?

What started as a conversation with Jim in our weekly supervision meetings has broadened to include discussions within the managers' team, the Resident Services team, the House Advisor group, and with Long Term Advisors. A core group has been driving the discussions and reviewing feedback from the different constituent groups. Our next step will be to review the outcome studies completed to date for resident feedback to see if our ideas help to solve the problems identified by residents in these surveys.

As of this writing, we are still in the midst of these discussions, looking at different staffing scenarios and schedules, teaming structures, and new roles, especially for our Resident Coordinators and Long Term Advisors. It would be premature and presumptuous of me to outline any specifics of a model change in this report, but I do think it's worth sharing some of the big ideas of what we

# Ups & Downs

## At the Rutland Program

We've had to say good bye to a lot of good friends this year. There is a profound sadness that has settled over all of us involved with the Rutland Program, as each of us assimilates and privately processes the loss of people and pets we had thought would be present for many days to come. So we plant trees and place photographs around the Town House to remind ourselves how fortunate we were to have had the pleasure to have them in our lives at all.

And we remind ourselves also that there is much to look forward to as we continue to live our lives together. This year, that means tackling the challenges in the strategic plan. The really pressing matter this year is to outline the program standards and professional development that will enhance and support the work of the Rutland Program advisors.

We are growing in resident numbers and must maintain appropriate staffing levels. To that end, we've brought in two new advisors to join the Rutland Program team. It is crucial to understand how we wish their experiential learning curve to unfold, and how they can fit into the overall scheme.

Our offices at Royce Street and 26 Washington are already too small

to house these two new advisors, who joined us in October, but I am confident that Jim will come through with the new hub (not to put too much pressure on him or anything).

There also seems to be a great deal of movement within the context of the program itself, whether into different living situations, school, work, thinking, or perspective. I suppose that's the nature of our work. Residents are transitioning out of the program, some wholly and others partially, as we experiment with the idea of effective long-distance support, piloting the idea with a few of our existing clients.

From a staffing standpoint, Rebecca

Swisher has taken off for California, having worked hard for us in one capacity or another. She is going to miss us!

Thanksgiving and all the other holidays are just around the corner, though I am just realizing that we missed our "End of Summer Bash." We will have to think of some other way to mark the changing of the seasons.

The key is to get back into anticipation mode, embracing what we have had and what we will continue to have as the days unfold.

— Jane Quigley  
*Rutland Program Director*



# Development

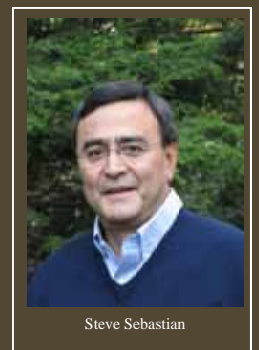
## Developments

**After 20 years in the Development office, Alice McGarey-Martin encounters a fork in the road, and picks a different ... prong. As she settles into her new role as Outreach Director, and as Steve Sebastian takes over as Development Director, they share some thoughts on the change.**

SLR: What are you most looking forward to in your new capacity?

Alice: Promoting SLR at conferences, in our materials and in advertising the program has been a part of my job for years. It was never an area that I could give the full attention it deserved. I look forward to improving our communication and networking with all those who might make referrals to the Ranch. We have a great program, and it's critical that those treating patients with mental health and addiction issues are familiar with our name, our model, and our longevity. Technology is making that easier to do through our website, links to other organizations, Constant Contact messages, and social media opportunities. Inviting professionals to join our community for lunch and to experience Spring Lake Ranch

firsthand is our most convincing promotional opportunity and I hope to do more of that. I'm also very excited to be working with Rachel in ad-



Steve Sebastian

missions and having more direct contact with families and potential residents who need our services. They

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# Kitchen Shift

There's no better place than the Spring Lake Ranch dining room on any given day at high noon. Get a taste of SLR's best dishes in this feature, fresh from the oven.

## SEASAME PINEAPPLE CHICKEN

You will need:

4 fresh pineapple slices  
3 tbsp pineapple juice  
1 ½ toasted sesame seeds  
3 tbsp honey  
¼ tsp rubbed sage  
4 boneless/skinless chicken breasts  
cooking spray

Combine pineapple juice, sesame seeds, honey, and sage. Stir well.

Place chicken on a broiler pan that has been coated with cooking spray.



Brush chicken with juice mixture. Broil 8 inches from heat 6 minutes. Turn chicken, and baste again. Broil 4 minutes. Baste pineapple slices with sesame mixture and broil 5 minutes, turning once. Transfer chicken to serving platter. Cut pineapple slices in half and arrange on each chicken breast.

*Continued from page 2*

Any ideas you may have are welcomed!

As for the year in review, several accomplishments are worth noting. We changed the schedule around a bit, in an effort to offer more supports and activities for residents in the non-work program time of 4-10pm and on the weekends. We now regularly have two to three staff members available in the evenings for duty and activities, a full-time Recreation Coordinator, and five AA & NA meetings per week available for residents to attend. This change has provided more supports for residents in the evening hours, a time when many are struggling with how to occupy their time and manage loneliness and other distressing feelings. There are still improvements which can be realized, including finding ways to increase resident participation in activities, but the accomplishment of additional staff presence is worth noting.

The Outcome Studies Committee has worked hard this year to develop a Resident Survey as well as a parent survey to solicit feedback about our program. Kes Boynton has been compiling the data from the resident surveys and we will be reviewing

this information to better understand our residents' experiences and to improve the program.

A new educational group is now offered to incoming residents who have an identified substance abuse history. This was a result of the recommendations of the Addictions Committee last year, that all new residents have a basic understanding of the addictions process, and identify some tools in helping them to move towards sobriety. In the year ahead we will continue to focus on how we can improve

❖ **BO A RD Notes** ❖  
*Spring Lake Ranch  
Therapeutic  
Community  
welcomes our new Members  
and Trustees*

### Members

*Muffie Milers  
Barbara Morrow  
George Nostrand*

### Trustees

*Barbara Aicher  
Kathleen Ford (returning)  
Eldred French*

upon our addictions programming and aim for better outcomes for residents.

In May we said good bye to Pam Grace, who had so ably welcomed residents and their families to Spring Lake for over 20 years. Stepping into the role of Admissions Director has been Rachel Stark and also Alice McGarey-Martin, whose new role will combine admissions and outreach (for more about Alice's job change, see our feature on page 3). We have found that the increase in availability of our admissions counselors, both during the day and into the evening hours, has resulted in a significant increase in our resident census. Last, but not least, we are very pleased to welcome back Sarah Knutson as a Resident Coordinator. Sarah has previously filled the roles of House Advisor and volunteer helping in admissions. We look forward to her able assistance in the days ahead, especially as we develop and continue to refine our program. Rounding out the Resident Services team, this report would be incomplete without appreciating the dedication and diligence of Becky Wilson, our Health Coordinator, and the experience and expertise Paul Sgalia has brought to his role as Resident Coordinator nearly 20 years.

*Lynn Pilcher,  
Resident Services Director*

# *C O M M U N I T Y* First and Foremost

Spring Lake Ranch is in essence a “therapeutic community”, not a community which happens to offer

sufferer, plus there is the stigma attached to the illness which adds to the problem. This results in

“real” world counterparts as possible. By participating in our community, our residents learn the practical work and relationship skills which prepare them for successful lives outside the Ranch, not for lives as chronic mental patients or substance abusers.

Besides the key factor of being *real* members of a community, our residents also benefit from being *valued* members of a community. For many of them this is their first time to experience this and it tends to have a dramatic therapeutic impact. The staff plays a key role here in exploring with the residents their strengths, and then encouraging them to share them with the community. Typically, as they gain strength and confidence, our residents go from being supported by fellow community members to being supporters of fellow community members.

Place a true therapeutic community within a beautiful natural setting (which itself has its own powerful but more mysterious healing properties) and you have a model for mental health treatment which has served Spring Lake Ranch well for the past 80 years. I hope it will continue long into the future.

*Kip McKay,  
House Advisor*



therapy. Our residents’ participation as real and valued members of our community is in itself one of the most healing experiences they gain with us. This is an important distinction because it is tempting to graft on clinical therapies to the Ranch program which end up diluting rather than adding to our core strength.

What does it mean to be part of a community, and why is it so beneficial to our residents? In modern societies even the average citizen is often alienated from his community, compared to traditional societies. This is clearly unhealthy. We humans have evolved as social beings, and whatever our personal inclinations are, we need to feel we are a part of a greater social whole. This issue becomes even more acute when we are suffering from mental illness. The illness itself tends to isolate and alienate the

acute loneliness, painfully low self esteem and great frustration.

When residents come to SLR they really do join our community. This does not happen in a token way, which is the situation in psych hospitals or drug treatment centers. At SLR the distinctions between staff and residents are minimized to the greatest degree possible. We all work, eat, play, and live together. And these communal activities are kept as much like their



# Highlighting Our **New And Improved** Ranch Facilities

**HOW 'BOUT THAT.** > The Greenhouse is really green these days. Thanks to a new paintjob, the outside is just as beautiful as the remodeled interior.



< **AS IF WE NEEDED ANOTHER REASON.** Enjoying the lake got a little bit easier this summer when we replaced the old dock with a stronger — and longer — model. Dive in!

## ❖ *STAFF*Notes ❖

“Good bye” doesn’t begin to cover it when you’re talking about Pam Grace. A fixture in the community for decades, Pam’s contributions have been stunning in scope and depth. We miss her terribly. Rachel Stark has bravely moved into the Admissions Director position, well aware of the size of the shoes to fill, but she’s doing a great job!

A warm welcome to three new faces in the Rutland Program: Diane Northrop, Katie Netsch, and Felicity Scorse. Meanwhile, longtime friend Rebecca Swisher has taken off for California with her new husband, former House Advisor and Rutland Program fixture Nick Meraz.

Former House Advisors are invading the Resident Services team: Sarah Knutson and Alex Sauer are back at work as Resident Coordinator and Assistant Resident Coordinator, respectively.

## *RECREATION*

Recreation at Spring Lake Ranch is a wonderful way for residents to come together outside the work program to share in fun activities and get to know each other. Over the course of this year, recreational opportunities have grown and expanded. There are now activities available every week night, such as pottery, yoga, a viewing of Planet Earth, a ladies game night, and as usual, the Friday night town trip. The weekends continue to offer a variety of opportunities to residents such as hikes, movie trips, art gallery events, reading in coffee shops, bowling, rock climbing, and this summer saw the popular Summer Stage series, which brought residents and staff together to share their talents with the SLR community.

Not only has the availability of these trips grown, resident involvement has also increased over this year. Trips are filling up at a record rate and residents are getting excited for the activities that are happening. Some trips offer residents the chance to step outside their comfort zone and enable them to gain a sense of accomplishment. Residents who thought they couldn’t make it to the top of the mountain will come to me the next day expressing how great they feel that they completed the hike.

The weekends are not the only time that residents are coming forward to take a leadership role. We have one resident who is a certified yoga instructor teaching yoga to others two times a week. The Recreation Council is still going strong, with residents wanting to take a more active role in the planning and completion of different activities, and the newly formed ladies game night has proven an excellent opportunity for female residents to come together, get to know each other, and share in some laughs (oh, and some of my homemade cookies).

Overall this year at the ranch has been a rewarding experience that only seems to keep getting better. Every resident has something great to offer the community and I always look forward to seeing what they will bring.

— *Ashley Potter*,  
Recreation  
Coordinator

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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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*Executive Director* Jim Taggart  
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## *Spring Lake Ranch*

*Therapeutic Community*

1169 Spring Lake Road  
Cuttingsville, VT 05738

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call us at a time of stress and vulnerability, and we can offer a supportive ear and an experience that restores hope.

SLR: What drew you to Spring Lake Ranch?

Steve: My association with SLR started in 2006 when my son became a resident. As I watched him progress through the Cuttingsville and Rutland programs, it became very clear to me that SLR was indeed a very special place. I became an active volunteer; first as a parent and then later as a Member and Trustee. This new role allows me to combine my business background and passion for SLR's mission with a deep understanding of SLR's unique approach to helping its

residents and their families. I look forward to serving SLR in my new capacity with the goal of ensuring that we will be able to fulfill our important mission for many years to come.

SLR: Any final thoughts before you leave the development office?

Alice: I've worked to expand and develop our fundraising opportunities for the last 20 years, and it's been a privilege to get to know so many of the families, former residents, and friends who have been so generous to the Ranch over many years. I have enjoyed working closely with the Members and Trustees of the Ranch in our Annual Fund Drives, Capital Campaigns and other events that have allowed us to improve our facilities, offer finan-

cial assistance to residents, and expand our programs and services. I'm looking forward to passing on 20 years of knowledge about the Ranch and our supporters to Steve. His experience as a parent of a Rancher makes him a great choice for leading our Development programs into the future. Steve brings new ideas, enthusiasm and more flexibility to visit with donors.

SLR: How is the changeover going?

Steve: I joined Alice in early September and we immediately launched into the Annual Fund Appeal process. A group of Trustees and Members helped personalize many of the appeal letters and they were all mailed out on time. We're off to a good start. Thank you Alice for all of your many contributions!