

Guest House Newsletter

April 24, 2009

Guest House, 318 West Main Street
Chester, Connecticut 06412
www.guesthousecenter.org

Dear Students,

For now, the purpose of the Guest House Newsletter will be to provide you with information regarding the functioning of Guest House as a home for the Work on the east coast. Much has happened since we closed on the property in April of 2008. Improvements to the property, plans for future improvements, the hiring of Jake Hesse as our Executive Director, the engagement of committed staff to cover the running of our retreat center, the creation of by-laws, the hosting of many retreats – all this and much more has been accomplished in a very short period of time. Hopefully, this newsletter will create a sketch of where we are now, as well as a glimpse of what we hope lies ahead. We welcome suggestions for changes or additions to the newsletter, and offer the following as a beginning to what we hope will become a useful addition to our work together.

Included in this issue:

- Information on staff, committees, their members, and some committee functions
- Events of the last year
- Organizational accomplishments
- Extending your retreat experience
- Transportation information
- letter from Alia
- letter from Jake

Who's Who:

Staff

Jake Hesse, Executive Director
Adam Fuller, Director of Sales and Marketing
Janet Kass, Retreat Coordinator and Guest Relations Manager
Rhonda Nutile, Office Manager
Josh Hollander, Executive Chef
Laura Way, Registration Coordinator and Housekeeper
Will Galvin, Maintenance Manager
Liz Rountree, Housekeeper



microphotograph, black pearl, Kay McKay

Board of Directors

Josie Sentner and Jill Berman, co-chairs
Cory Greenberg
Leslie Chyten
David Schulz
Waltraud Ireland
Susan Weiley
Laurie Leonard
Walter Link
Jerry O'Halloran
Don Shaw
Bonalyn Mosteller
Patricia Simko

Finance/Legal Committee

Committee responsibilities include:

- Oversight of finances and accounting, tax returns, financial planning, and annual audit
- Direct and recommend for board approval the annual budget and long-term financial plan
- Review monthly financial performance reports prepared by the Executive Director
- Select and oversee audit firm
- Responsible for compliance and communication with bank and other lenders
- Review insurance, occupancy permits, and compliance with government regulations
- Delegation of spending authority to Executive Director

Committee members are:

Jill Berman
Jane Bronson
Cory Greenberg
Jake Hesse
Jerry O'Halloran
Josie Sentner

Financial Update:

This April marks the first anniversary of our purchase of Guest House. Looking back, 2008 was indeed a start-up year with many surprises and challenges. But the finance committee is pleased that Guest House has achieved the financial targets that were set for 2008 before we opened the doors last June.

Like all organizations now, Guest House faces big challenges, and the economic environment presents many factors whose influence is unknown. However, we can report that for the first three months of 2009, our revenues from rentals from Emerald Mountain and other groups, with ongoing donations, is on track to meet the full-year budget of break-even operations and financial sustainability.

Despite the weak economy, we are getting a good response from groups interested in holding retreats at Guest House. And our bookings continue to increase. The evaluations from groups that have held retreats at Guest

House are very positive, and many plan to return in the future. However, in order to provide a cushion for the possibility of reduced revenues over the next nine months, we have reduced our expenses and postponed some capital projects and improvements that were not included in our original plan. But we have completed the capital projects that were targeted at the time of purchase.

The committee, Jake and his staff, and the board continue to be cautious about the business environment but confident that Guest House will do well in 2009.

Resource Development Committee

Josie Sentner
Jill Berman
Patricia Simko
Laurie Leonard
Jan Jack
Jake Hesse

Governance Committee

David Schulz
Waltraud Ireland
Walter Link
Alia Johnson
Jill Berman

Executive Committee

The purpose of the committee is to assist the Executive Director and Council of Teachers in long-term strategic planning within their respective areas of involvement, and to assist the Board of Directors in functioning effectively by suggesting Board agenda items and periodically assessing the effectiveness of committee work. Its members are:

Jill Berman and Josie Sentner, co-chairs
Cory Greenburg
David Schulz
Waltraud Ireland

Facilities and Forest Committee

The purpose of the committee is to ensure proper maintenance and appearance of the buildings, approve all significant plans and for physical changes to buildings or grounds, and develop policies and procedures governing the use of the retreat center. It also will assist the Executive

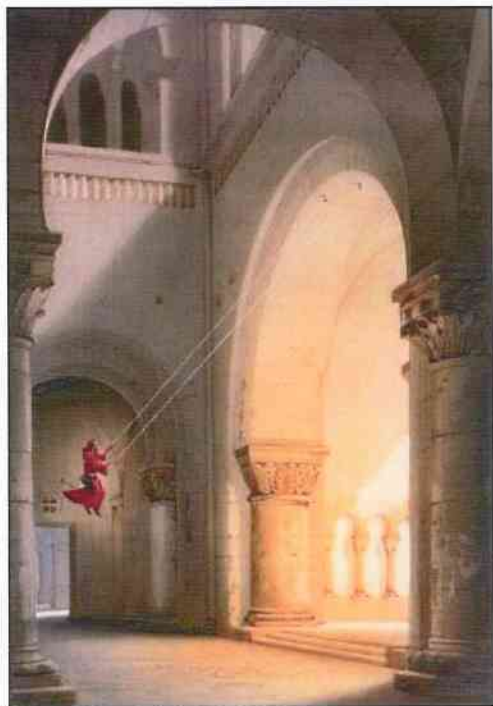
Director in preparing and implementing a master plan for the development of facilities and the surrounding environment in alignment with the Guest House mission and purpose. Its members are:

Waltraud Ireland
Don Shaw
David Schulz
Jorge Aranjó
Tracey Kirshenbaum
Tomar Levine
Joey Jacob (Boston group)
Jan Wilcox
Sydney Cash
Brian Wood
Jake Hesse

Events:

New Year's Eve Celebration

In December, Guest House hosted a New Year's Eve celebration which included wonderful food, a reading of Finnegans Wake, music by Todd Carter and his band, The Looking, and a giant bonfire at midnight, built by Will. Discussions are in progress to plan a celebration at cost in the hope that more students and significant others will be able to join us for New Year's, 2010.



Hans Werner Sabm



Hameed's Visit

In September, Hameed visited Guest House during a Holy Ideas weekend. He taught a session, answered student questions, then traveled into the city for the Guest House benefit at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. He was deeply touched by the space, and the abundant evidence of the intelligence, love, and guidance that brought us here to Guest House.

Boundless World Retreat

In October, Alia taught the first retreat at Guest House that was open to Diamond Heart students, as well as those unfamiliar with the Diamond Approach. It was an unusual opportunity to experience the Work with fellow students, and those close to them who are friends, significant others, and co-workers.

Guest House and the Larger Community

In February, Guest House initiated a free 12-week meditation class for local residents in the area. Jan Jack and Adam Fuller conduct the one-hour class every Wednesday evening. The class includes meditation instruction, a 20-minute meditation, and an opportunity for discussion of participants' experience and questions about meditation. The class has grown from 8 people the first night, to around 30 per session and includes a number of residents from Chester Village West (a retirement community across the street), along with Chester residents, business owners, and residents of nearby communities. Sharing tea and cookies in the dining room after the meditation has provided the opportunity for staff to answer questions about Guest House, Diamond Heart, and meditation.

Volunteer Weekends

Volunteers helped enormously after we closed on the property, clearing many elements left over from Guest House's previous incarnations, and making space for us to begin our work together. Then volunteers helped prepare Guest House in the tight turnaround time between the ending of an Emerald Mountain III weekend, and a Holy Ideas retreat which coincided with Hameed's visit.

On the weekend of April 4-5, Noell Goldberg coordinated another volunteer weekend. One student brought a lasagna dinner for all those who arrived on Friday, and volunteers and Guest House staff shared the meal. On Saturday and Sunday, Laurie Leonard guided students in the harvesting of email addresses for groups and teachers who might be prospective customers of Guest House. Guest House staff worked with volunteers to build a fence, landscape areas around the building, clear the walking trails of dead trees, branches, and leaves, re-seed lawns, continue improvements to the trail heads and surrounding areas, and clean and organize interior spaces. The advance preparation by Guest House staff was immensely helpful in creating a supportive field in which to work. We made time for meditation each morning and one afternoon, and met on Sunday afternoon to discuss and offer feedback on our experience of the weekend.

We are hoping to have a mid-week volunteer event that would take place on October 13 and 14, with Guest House again providing rooms for anyone arriving the day before the actual work begins. In addition, we are considering making volunteer opportunities available for those wishing to come the day before a retreat or stay an extra day in order to provide volunteer support for various projects which will be announced later.

If you have questions about these upcoming events, or would like to offer your help, please contact Noell Goldberg at noellgoldberg@gmail.com.

Organizational Accomplishments:

Sales and Marketing:

- Exceeded 2008 sales goals
- In 2009, Guest House hosted several different groups. In addition to the Emerald Mountain groups and the east coast Ridhwan seminary, Guest House hosted the Enneagram Institute, a staff retreat for Aspirations School in Brooklyn, a Transcendental Meditation group, and others. In the coming months, we will be hosting John Kabat-Zinn and Saki Santorelli, Michael Shandler who teaches Radiant Mind work, Somatic Experiencing training, and Charles Ridley, who will lead a training in biodynamic cranial work. Churches, schools, not-for-profits, and conferences are also on the schedule for the year.
- Scheduling of hospitality groups for 2010 is well under way, with sales already equal to the sales of 2009. We are only a quarter into the year, and our marketing activities are expanding.
- On the program front, we have had to cancel the Money program and the Inquiry Intensive, but we are happy to report that the first of Leslie Chyten's three-part introduction to the Diamond Approach was well received, and Alia's Soul Psychology class is beginning to fill up.

Buildings and Grounds:

- The grounds look beautiful, with daffodils up and blooming. Newly seeded areas of grass and new plantings will also soon add to the increasingly polished look of the grounds.
- A landscape architect has been engaged to come up with a long-range plan for the property. The main focus, for now, is on road side planting that will provide screening of the White Barn, Parmalee House, and the deck, and will enhance the look of the property. This is a major project, and will probably be addressed over time.

- Several students are planning a vegetable garden which we hope will be the beginning of increased sustainability and intelligent use of the property's assets and potentials.
- In addition to the work done during volunteer weekends, the huge metal antenna by the trails was taken down. This was part of a major property and basement cleanup in which two dumpsters were filled with garbage and another two filled with recyclable metals.
- Art in the building was recently assessed and we are awaiting information about the value of various paintings, furniture, and decorative objects that came with the purchase of the building.
- Insufficient lighting in the bedrooms is being addressed. The wattage to the rooms will be increased, and members of the Facilities and Forests Committee (F&F Committee) are in the process of replacing dark lamp shades with lighter ones.
- We are finishing the sheet rocking and wallpapering projects in the piano room, lobby, tavern, rooms 312 and 314, and the pool room.
- Planning and discussion continues regarding the placement of a teachers' lounge connected to the White Barn or another location that will best serve teachers' needs.
- Lora Lynn has gifted Guest House 2 kilns, work tables, and glass for a stained glass and fused glass studio. Jan Wilcox has also contributed materials and we hope to have the studio set up soon.

Extending a retreat

For students who would like to extend the retreat experience or arrive early, for a reduced room rate of \$65, they can make reservations for an overnight stay at GH on the night before a retreat begins, or they might wish to stay over the night the retreat ends. Food is not included. This will be useful, also, if a snow storm or other such travel-

challenge is predicted for the day a retreat is scheduled to begin since students will have this option of arriving the day before.

Transportation

Guest House will continue providing van transportation to and from the Old Saybrook train station, picking people up from the 5:45 and 6:49 p.m. trains on the Thursday a retreat begins and taking people to the train on Sundays at 12:20 and 2:20 p.m. when the retreat ends. Students wishing to be picked up or dropped off at the train station need to register for this service, and Laura Way is the Guest House contact person should you have questions.

In addition, students are now supplementing the van pick ups for those unable to reserve a spot on the van, or for those who are arriving at times outside the scheduled van service times. Susan Moore coordinates supplemental student transportation for Emerald Mountain III. Ralph Curcuru coordinates for the Holy Ideas group. You will be sent an email prior to each retreat with information about which student in your group is available to pick people up from the train at specific times. Since this is a student-generated addition to the service Guest House provides, it is your responsibility to contact the appropriate student and not Guest House should you need a ride at an odd time.

Should you be unable to access a ride in the van or with a student, the following are local car services:

Essex Taxi – 860-767-7433 – approximately \$30 and reported to be occasionally unreliable

Car-Mac – 860-388-2842 – approximately \$25 and reported to be very reliable. This is a private car service

Hello to students and friends.

Nearing the anniversary of our coming into Guest House, I'm remembering the first night of teaching our group here. I wondered, after fifteen years of meeting in many different places, with people and teachers coming and going, will the work be the same, if not nomadic and fluid?

We make strong structures for the groups in order for them to be real containers for the work to happen. The schedules, the fees, the boundaries, the practices, all of them provide a structure within which the soul can do her inquiry, and within which we can work together. These containers are a kind of support. But 42,000 square feet of support?

Everything in our lives must be questioned regarding whether it is a support for our realization or a distracting burden. Many of us have wondered this about Guest House, whether we are very involved or not so involved. We have watched all those involved, including me, with concern for whether this project is too costly of attention and energy. We know, of course, that whether something is a distraction or a support depends largely on how we approach it. Do we forget ourselves to do practical work, or can we bring our awakesness to it? And how much we bring our awakesness to anything is governed among other things, by the limitations of our realization.

So what I have seen so far is that all of us sometimes have fallen short of our complete openness and awakesness in the process of working with or responding to the project of Guest House. At the same time, the Sufi saying "to increase your capacity, increase the necessity" is definitely reflected in how much we have stepped up to the challenge of "welcoming all" as the poem says. The fact that many kinds of programmatic, marketing, landscaping, maintenance and improvement, food service, etc., tasks are going on every day, makes the place feel like a living organism which is definitely in service of our work.

Personally, being off the board and the committees, though participating with them as needed, I am much more free to function as a teacher and a "research and development"

resource for the work. It is inspiring to me to see how many people come forward to work on many aspects of the space and the work. And being in somewhat regular contact with the staff makes me aware of the constant ongoing and mainly invisible support that keeps the whole thing going.

And Guest House is a wonderful support for our work. In our groups, the presence continues to grow and the work periods have taken on much more of a tone of living-presence-body working. The atmosphere in the meeting room, the beauty and spaciousness, the regularity of being here, actually removes the distraction of all the different places and situations in which we have done our work. The presence of other groups who come here adds to the feeling that the space is fulfilling its purpose.

The College of Teachers continues slowly to develop, and we are learning that there are not many resources yet for our students to attend additional programs. The Teachers support the ongoing Diamond Approach work in terms of our groups, the meditation class, Leslie's introductory classes here at Guest House and the New York Open Center classes which are serving as introductions to our work. We are contemplating starting a new group, Emerald Mountain Five, next year, but don't know yet whether the need will be there.

I continue to seek ways that our work can be supported by students being able to be here and work here in new contexts. The volunteer weekends are a great example, and I think that people sometimes extending their stays after weekends might help it feel more like a home here.

The mission of our enterprise is the realization of each student. I think we are serving that mission, and this is just a tiny piece in the personal, private path of each person. The main event involves each person's responsibility and grace bringing us closer to what we love.

Love, Alia
Guest House, April 20, 2009

From the desk of the Executive Director

Spring has finally arrived here in Chester CT. The daffodils are in full bloom and buds are just beginning to show on the trees. It is an exciting time of renewal after the long cold winter.

I also feel renewed after dealing with a serious health matter. I want to thank you all again for your concern, support and well wishes. It gave both Jerilyn and me a strong sense of community, even though we had just arrived.

The Guest House Center is also renewed and revitalized. The grounds are looking better than ever. The garbage area has been cleaned up, and we will be planting clover in that area which makes the hiking path more accessible and welcoming. Trees have been trimmed and removed where necessary. The fence around the basement driveway has been completed as required by the Fire Marshal. The inside got a shining too. The staff has been working diligently to prepare the property for a very busy spring and summer season.

I want to acknowledge and thank the volunteers who spent a weekend here in early April. Their efforts went a long way in helping us move ahead with various projects. We also had a crew updating our email lists which was a big help. Many thanks to all who joined in. It is heartwarming to see such volunteer participation!

In collaboration with the board and various board committees, I have identified and prioritized a Capital Project Budget for 2009. In addition to upgrading and maintaining the property, I am beginning to focus some attention on our business practices. Some areas that need attention are upgrading business equipment, reviewing staffing models, and exploring various payment options for our programs and retreats. All of this is with an eye for making Guest House more efficient and user-friendly. For example, at present the Emerald Mountain retreats are coordinated separately from other public programs and are not listed on our

website. Those classes listed on our website have the option of payment through *Paypal* and are

charged a 3% surcharge for this convenience. Emerald Mountain students do not have this option available and can pay only with cash, check or money order. At the May board meeting we will begin investigating the option of payment with credit cards for all students. We hope to come up with a solution that will make this easier for everyone.

This is an exciting time as Guest House moves into its second year. Thank you to Emerald Mountain and all those who have made this retreat center possible. As we continue to support the Diamond Approach work and also bring new programs and classes here, we look forward to a successful and fruitful year.

Thank You,

Jake Hesse
Executive Director