



... to be a relevant institution for generations to come,
actively working with others to create communities
committed to peace, justice, civility
and compassionate behavior.

... to embrace the diversity of life,
creating an environment to energize
people to work for positive change.



May 2009

Message from The Chair

By: Trudy Deyle, Chair, Mountain Board of Trustees

Under the policy governance model adopted a number of years ago for The Mountain, the Board of Trustees sets broad “Ends” (or goals) for The Mountain. We also set the broad parameters within which we then leave it up to staff to do their job, using whatever “means” (or methods) they deem most appropriate to accomplish the ends. The board monitors organizational performance in achieving the ends, and staff compliance in operating within the set parameters.

In a collaborative process with staff, the board set out in 2008 to refashion the ends statements for The Mountain to reflect the expanded vision held by the board and the staff. In its first 30 years, The Mountain has been a source of personal transformation for many youth and adults. Board and staff are convinced that The Mountain has an even greater potential to be a force for both personal and societal transformation. To fulfill this potential and to be financially viable, we agree that our vision for The Mountain must expand, while staying firmly rooted in our past and building on those things The Mountain has always done well. We agree on a dual emphasis for the future. It is a retreat center that draws people away from their day-to-day lives and brings them to a place and a state of mind that is tangibly and palpably different than they experience anywhere else - a retreat center that embraces hospitality as a spiritual practice and offers valuable time in nature. It is also a learning center committed to cultivating generations of social change agents, inspiring participants to look at the world differently, feel inspired to make it better, develop the confidence to do so and take compassionate action. Both the retreat and learning centers will continue their commitments to youth and young adults.

The board began our “Ends” work by discussing to whom we are morally accountable in terms of this expanded vision. We agreed on the following statement: The Mountain Board of Trustees is morally accountable to those who believe in and work toward peace, justice, and environmental sustainability, including individuals and organizations who embrace Unitarian Universalist principles.

Then, after reviewing thoughts on programming sent to us in advance by staff, the board had a collaborative session with staff to brainstorm goals for The Mountain.

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energizing people for generations to come

CEO Report

By: Tom Warth, President

“A ship in harbor is safe but that is not what ships are built for.” William Shed

This morning Jane and I listened to a message at UUTC (Unitarian Universalist Church of Transylvania County – Brevard, NC) with the title “Gratitude.” The speaker challenged us to take time in our busy lives, as we deal with our own and the larger issues of our communities, nation and world, to acknowledge our gratitude, how much we all can be grateful for. As I reflected on his words, The Mountain kept coming to mind - my deepest gratitude for “it” and all that “it” is.

Having recently received feedback from more than 400 survey respondents as part of our work with a marketing consultant, so many words and thoughts were expressed, all describing the “it”, all that could be under the umbrella word – gratitude. We heard “spiritual place, nature glory, transformative, youth, hope, empowerment, change, peace, discovery.”

Psychologist Robert Kegan observes that “who comes into a person's life may be the single greatest factor of influence to what that life becomes.” I am grateful for the many, many people who have come into each of our lives on The Mountain – relationships, experiences that I am sure have greatly influenced “what our lives have become.”

Our Mountain, yours and mine: a place, an organization, and an experience for which we can all express our gratitude.

These are unprecedented times – an economy turned upside down, the environment under extreme stress, two active wars in the Middle East and 100s of active wars here in our own country – wars of violence, of class, wars over rights, equality and health care. The list is long, the challenges huge. Such times call for The Mountain. “A ship in harbor is safe but that is not what ships are built for.” The Mountain (the place, the staff and trustees, members and donors), was not built to stay in safe harbor but to venture out, open its doors and its arms to the greater community – to be of service in “tough seas.”

The Mountain is strong, and focused on the future with many visionary initiatives on the “drawing board.” Following are some of the reasons I can say this so confidently.

Efficiency

A significantly smaller, year-round staff is doing more supported by vibrant, growing programs for volunteers and young adults – please read Alisa’s article on the Young Adult Residency Program. Stay tuned for an “older adult residency program” (OAR) to be launched this fall.

The staff is consciously conserving energy wherever it can (utilities, gasoline consumption) and engaging guests in “taking care of the place.” Food staff, while continuing to

serve tasty, high quality food are keeping costs below normal “market rate” increases.

The Mountain’s Board of Trustees has done significant work this past year in more clearly defining its role, as Trudy writes in her report. With this clarity comes more efficiency in doing the “true” work of a governing board – setting the objectives, measuring performance, ensuring financial stability, and actively challenging the staff to keep The Mountain relevant and effective.

Quality

A recent program participant wrote on her evaluation, “The very air I breathed was charged with energy.” From the 400 participant survey mentioned above to the most recent participant evaluations, The Mountain continues to offer high quality experiences. Transformation is almost a daily event on The Mountain.

And new this year is our obligation (an obligation joyfully embraced) to the proper, judicious management of the conservation easement. All staff take seriously – from cleaning up the trash, to trail maintenance, to signage – their commitment to see that all participants have the opportunity for quality experiences “on” The Mountain and “in” nature.

With every program offered, every retreat hosted, every guest welcomed, The Mountain expects to be the best at what it does. But fulfilling this commitment doesn’t just mean introducing new programs and reaching new constituencies. It also means reaffirming its commitments to The Mountain's values and its heritage. The past, the present and the future come together at The Mountain.

As we enter our fourth decade, we are all justifiably proud of our past, bumps and all. But most importantly it is the future that gives energy and purpose to The Mountain. There is a Greek proverb that says, “Give me a place to stand upon and I will lift the world.”

Now more than ever The Mountain must be such a place for us all and the next generations to stand upon, to lift the world. We are capable of and should expect nothing less of “it” and of each other, for this is what “this ship” was built for.

In gratitude,



ps. For the numbers, please read the soon-to-be released Annual Report of 2008. It will be available on the website and hard copies will be mailed in response to requests made of The Mountain's office.

Young Adult Residency Program

By Alisa Pykett

On May 4th the second session of The Mountain's Young Adult Residency Program was completed; the four Residents were Lauren Haffner from Indiana, Dylan Bidgel from North Carolina, Tessa Diem from Michigan and Maggie Hess from Virginia. This new 15 week program runs in the Spring and Fall of each year and helps cultivate the next generation of social change agents by providing the space for young adults to reflect, build community, serve and pursue their passions. The program consists of five components: 1) Personal Growth and Awareness, 2) Community Experience, 3) Understanding Social Change and Issues, 4) Professional development and Leadership and 5) Community Service.

The Service component is central to the experience. Residents engage in service to The Mountain community through their work in the kitchen, housekeeping and maintenance. For many of the young adults, this is their first experience of full immersion - living, working, being - in a community committed to working for the common good. The Mountain provides opportunity to contribute one's skills and energy to a shared vision and thus is a model for engaging with the communities to which the Residents will return. Every 2-3 weeks, Residents volunteer as a group with other organizations. This service component gives them hands-on experience contributing to the community. Follow-up reflection pieces and discussions help them explore what service means to them. Volunteering also raises awareness of social and environmental issues, provides an opportunity to learn about different organizations and exposes the Residents to other people who are working for the common good.

Community service opportunities are selected based on the Residents’ interests. On a local level, Spring 09 Residents served and prepared meals with Bread of Life, completed trail work with Friends of Panthertown, and at the International Friendship Center, did office work, helped clients with English and staffed the food pantry. The Residents also volunteered with Presbyterian Community Outreach in New Orleans, hanging drywall in a duplex that housed three generations of one family. During Katrina, this house flooded forcing the family to live in two FEMA trailers on site ever since. Residents had the opportunity to meet and talk with the family. The 11 year-old boy would rush home from school to help the Residents work on the house. The Residents said that these interactions with the family were the most meaningful experiences for them because they placed a human face and story to an issue that they had been hearing about for 4 years. The group was not putting up the drywall on just any ceiling; rather they were helping get this specific family back into this home.

Throughout the Young Adult Residency program, the Residents explore the question, “What is my role in working for the common good?” Doing service helps young adults realize that they exist in a world that needs them to be engaged and active. Their communities need them to work with others to develop creative ways to meet human needs and protect human rights in both volunteer and professional capacities. As one Resident commented after the week long service trip to New Orleans: “Beforehand I was held back by doing service of that kind because of the immensity of the work that needs to be done coupled with my acute feelings of smallness. While I still feel small in the face of the great work that needs to be done, the trip did instill in me a firm conviction in the importance and worth of every action and gave me a vision for the ripples an action can have in a given community.”



Lauren Haffner, Dylan Bidgel, Alisa Pykett, Tessa Diem, Maggie Hess

Message From the Chair (Continued from page 1)

The result of this session was a long list of possibilities that were subsequently grouped under several broad statements. At our May 2008 meeting, the board agreed all that was needed for the ends were these statements. After a final review, the Board officially approved them in December, 2008. Then, staff set to work on proposed means for accomplishing the new ends.

We are now working with them to develop measures of performance for each end. These measures will involve quantitative data, financial and environmental audits, direct observation by the board, annual board review of programs and outreach efforts, review of feedback from program and guest evaluations, and an annual Board survey of a sample of program participants.

The board continues to be impressed with the focus and cohesiveness of current staff. Based on the ends and beginning with the recognition of what The Mountain has done best in its 30-year history, staff developed a comprehensive Blueprint for Strategic Action for the expanded vision. They next created a very specific 2009 operating plan to begin implementing the Blueprint. Rest assured that The Mountain is in good hands on a day-to-day basis. What is unique and special about both the place and the organization is being preserved and built upon.

Watch for program news on our website: www.mountaincenters.org