



guesthouse

NEWSLETTER
2020 Volume 1

GH Weathering the Pandemic



Like businesses everywhere, Guest House is responding to a serious pandemic. We have been tested in many ways—floods, tornados, record snowfall, maintenance emergencies, financial challenges—but never like this. The bad news is that we’ve had to temporarily shut down in the face of cancellations that now stretch into June. The good news is that we are being proactive, calling on a resiliency that springs from the professionalism of our management and staff, as well as from the widespread support of the Guest House community.

Guest House shut its doors in mid-March, and all staff were furloughed so they could qualify for unemployment insurance. Our dedicated team offered to work

with substantial pay cuts, even for free, but in the end realized the impossibility of keeping the facility open. Charlie Schillberg, our assistant executive director, wrote the board of directors to say he was impressed by how there was “No fighting, no yelling or bargaining. Just understanding and stoicism.” He was also moved, he wrote, by “the speed, thoroughness and effectiveness with which the staff moved to shut everything down. They could have dragged it out to benefit themselves, but they knew that was not best for GH.” We bow to each and every one of them.

Of course, food had already been purchased for upcoming retreats. Chef Alan made the staff a beautiful breakfast, then

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GIVING CORNER

COVID-19 Emergency Fund

The temporary shutdown of Guest House represents an enormous loss of revenue during our normally busy spring season and, perhaps, beyond. Our employees have been furloughed, but we still have ongoing costs. To help our retreat center and our staff, the board of directors has established a **\$60,000 Guest House COVID-19 Emergency Fund (The COVID-19 Fund)**.

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Because of the overwhelming amount of applications inundating state officials, unemployment insurance checks have been slow to arrive for our beloved employees. Even when these checks are delivered into their mailboxes, they may not be able to cover all basic costs, especially for those with families.

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Essential Contemplations

If ever there was a time when we need to rely on our spiritual practices, it is in this time of quarantine. Our current isolation is an ideal opportunity to reaffirm practice and its sustaining effects on our souls.

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“Spiritual practice is not just sitting and meditation. Practice is looking, thinking, touching, drinking, eating and talking. Every act, every breath, and every step can be practice and can help us to become more ourselves.”

—**Thich Nhat Hanh**

.....

“You create a path of your own by looking within yourself and listening to your soul, cultivating your own ways of experiencing the sacred and then practicing it. Practicing until you make it a song that sings you.”

—**Sue Monk Kidd**

.....

“Practices...will help you to go beyond the usual level of experience. You cannot establish your inner orientation with the mind, but the heart knows when you are headed in the right direction. The mind becomes quieter...[I]n becoming still, the mind opens to a new dimension of itself to assist the heart on the quest for truth, so we venture into unknown territory and begin to learn to know in new ways.”

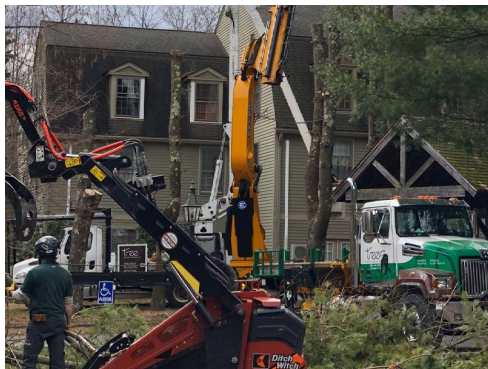
—**A.H. Almaas**

NEWS

GH News

Given the emergency that we are all weathering, the focus of our resources and attention is currently the survival and eventual reopening of GH. The below projects were completed or put on hold before we had to shut our doors.

BACK TO THE GARDEN Two majestic sequoias still stand sentry to the left of our main entrance. But the seven white pines—whose roots threatened to again buckle our newly paved driveway, and whose shade promoted building mold and moss on our entrance portico’s roof (with no Elton John around to kick it off)—had to go. The chipped remains will eventually find their way



A specialist crew removes the dangerously positioned pine trees that dwarfed the building

onto our trails and around our labyrinth. This has given us the opportunity to create a new garden to greet visitors to GH. Headed up by facilities director Rich Kerrigan and GH board member Jane Bronson, the new garden plans (pictured below) feature:

- low, shade-tolerant evergreen hollies and rhododendrons, and several taller dogwood trees
- shade-tolerant perennials—hostas, astilbes, hellebores, ferns—which bring in lower plantings and add color and texture



Landscape plans



Dogwood trees will be a gorgeous core feature of the new landscape, especially in bloom

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Furnishing GH While Reducing Waste

Here's how a 160-square-foot shipping container of desks, nightstands, dressers, chairs, artwork, drapes and mirrors, destined to be destroyed and disposed of, instead became a donation to Guest House, thanks to Rich Kerrigan and the GH staff. We're going to take a narrative break and let Rich tell the story himself.

BY RICH KERRIGAN

In February I was talking shop with my brother, Kevin Kerrigan, chief engineer at a large hotel in Rhode Island. Corporate was doing a “refresh” of its 100-room facility, Kevin told me. Because the contractor hadn’t found organizations to which to donate the furnishings, he was having to pay his staff to destroy and dispose of it. Saralyn (our executive director) and I were moved by the potential opportunity and sprang into action.

The next phase was slated to begin within a week, but Kevin offered to donate whatever items Guest House had a use for. Saralyn and I quickly headed for Rhode Island and assessed which items would suit Guest House. We had no idea where we would store that volume of desks, nightstands, dressers, chairs, artwork, drapes and mirrors before incorporating them into guest rooms. But because of the urgency of the situation, we decided to rescue everything we could and figure that out later.

We reserved a temporary 160-square-foot storage trailer, a 20-foot moving truck, and some Guest House muscle and waited for the contractor to give us the nod. Guest services/event coordinator Ben Doran and I spearheaded the retrieval and storage plan while lead housekeeper Ruth Morales and Saralyn evaluated each guest room for items that needed to be added or could be switched out.



Shipping container filled with goodies for GH

When the time came, Ben and I were able to save two full truckloads. GH staffers Keith Bowen, Kelly Augustin and Tim Luneau helped us pack the shipping container with 71 furnishings, and then cram our housekeeping storage with 17 rolling desk chairs, fill up room 312 with 62 pieces of framed art, and overfill the gym with 30 framed mirrors and 18 pairs of black-out drapes—all within two days of authorization to proceed. That totals an estimated \$7,200’s worth of donated furnishings.

Much of this is destined for the newly renovated third-floor guest rooms, including the writing desks and matching rolling desk chairs long hoped-for by some of our recurring writers’ groups. Many other spaces will be likewise freshened with the new donations. Excess items, along

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Desks, dressers, ottomans



A sample layout, minus the phone of course

GH Weathering the Pandemic

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offered what was left first to staff with small children, then to the remainder of our employees. “The smiles on their faces, and the faces of those who saw them, broke my heart,” Charlie wrote. All remaining perishable food was donated to Brian House—a charity founded by the late Mal Winkley, a former GH board member and regular at our Wednesday night meditations—which distributed it to 18 households in the community.

We have cut all non-essential expenses and retained only a skeleton staff to conduct regular rounds of the facility to ensure systems are working, no leaks are sprung, and also to keep us current with ongoing monthly costs. These include minimum utilities, mortgage and interest payments, taxes and fees, et cetera.

Marianne Hile, our director of retreat services and group sales, remains in close contact with all of our groups so they can rebook for the fall or 2021. She has been receiving numerous expressions of concern and well wishes from our regular guests that attest to the deep connection many have for GH.

At time of writing, we were approved for federal assistance under the \$2.2 trillion stimulus bill known as CARES that Congress approved in late March. We are currently comparing the benefits of the various options and paths.



Brian House Facebook post

Executive director Saralyn Kerrigan has had several conversations with the local fire marshal, who contacted Guest House about our willingness to serve the public health effort if needed. Naturally, we are determined to do our part to help our community. We have been assured that the State of Connecticut would conduct a thorough two-stage cleaning and sanitizing

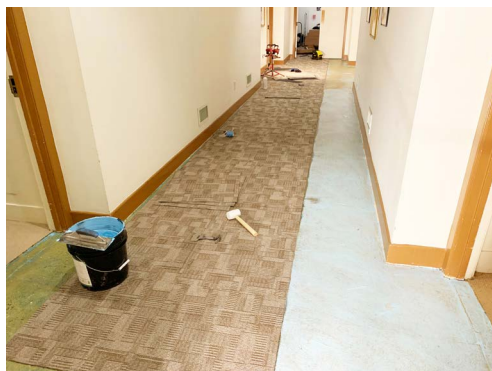
process before re-opening our doors to retreat groups, and that none of our staff members would be put at risk of exposure to COVID-19. We have not, as of yet, been pressed into service in this way, and may never be. But we are prepared and eager to serve our community's needs should this be required.

At Guest House, we push on!



GH News

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White Barn hall during and after installation

SNUG AS A BUG As part of our ongoing spiff-up of Guest House, we've pulled the rug out from under you. Or, more precisely, out of the elevator lobby and the hall leading to the White Barn. In its place we now have a brand new floor covering that looks a lot better than the scuffed, traffic-worn and dreary former carpet. When we open our doors for business again, your experience underfoot will feel considerably enhanced. This project was completed just before we were forced to shut down.

I ♥ GUEST HOUSE A secret fan of Guest House left three heart-shaped rocks at our door. While we don't know who, we thank her/him for holding GH so fondly in their heart.



Maitri-Cash Silent Retreat Moves Online



Good news! Sandra Maitri and Eugene Cash's **Silent Retreat for Diamond Approach Students** is still on for June 17-22. And here's even better news: *Rather than in person at Guest House, it will be held online, which means it is now open to a much larger audience of Diamond Approach students and teachers across the U.S. and the world.* This aligns with the Ridhwan Foundation's prudent response to the current pandemic, which is to hold all school retreats

CHECK FOR UPDATES

guesthousecenter.org/silent

WHEN: June 17-22, 2020

PRICING: TBA

online until it is safe for groups to meet again physically. The move to online will also make the retreat more financially accessible to a greater number of people. *This is the first time Cash and Maitri will be making this immensely popular retreat so widely available.* As such, it represents an unparalleled opportunity to immerse oneself in a six-day deep dive into the soul, while being guided by the orientation of this unique spiritual path.

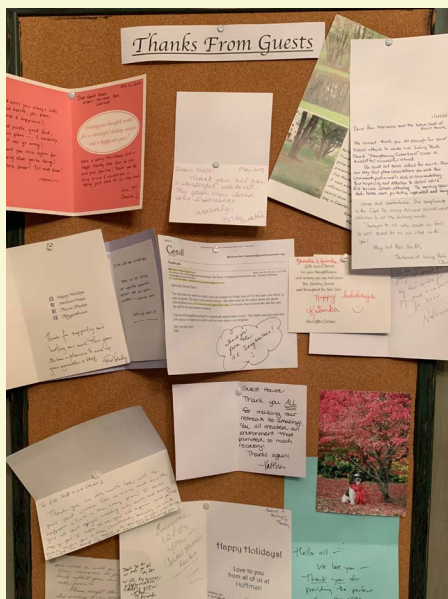
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ALAN'S KITCHEN



An Exercise in Gratitude

As we realize that many of you won't be able to see Guest House at your normal time this year, or perhaps not at all in 2020, we wanted to share a new addition to the facility: our gratitude board. Right next to the elevator on the first floor, we have started posting all the gracious and caring cards we receive from guests and teachers. They warm the hearts of the staff when we walk by and we wanted to share them all with you. When you next can make it back to Guest House, make sure to stop by and read what others have to say.



NEWS

COVID-19 Emergency Fund

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While we've cut all non-essential expenses, GH must still maintain minimum utilities, security, mortgage payments, a skeleton staff to keep up with basic accounting functions and site inspections. Director of retreat services and group sales Marianne Hile will continue to remain in close contact with Guest Groups so they can rebook for the fall and 2021. Some of our regular groups have already done so, and we have received inquiries from new groups as well.

In addition to these ongoing costs, our primary concern at the moment is our dedicated staff. Many on our staff have no safety net. Some have worked additional jobs to make ends meet. ***We want to continue to pay our share of health insurance premiums for those on Guest House's plan, and assist those on their spouses' plans who need help with premium payments. We also want to provide limited resources for other emergencies our employees will face such as: keeping up with rent, making co-pays, buying groceries, or an unexpected need to relocate or take in a relative.*** It's serious.

We are immensely grateful for those who have donated their room and board from planned retreats or sent extra checks to see us through this pandemic. We are hoping that everyone who loves Guest House and the caring staff who hold the space for our work will feel moved to contribute to this fund with any amount they can afford. We don't want anyone to fall through the cracks during this challenging time. And we want Guest House to be here when this crisis is over. We expect COVID-19 is eliciting a lot of contemplation throughout the Guest House community—what it means to be a caring human being in the world, what is really important in our lives, how we can deal with the fear and unknowing that present themselves to us every single day through the news and through personal friends and acquaintances who may be sick. We firmly believe that kindness is *always* right action.

Please be as generous as you're able and donate today. Visit us online at [guesthousecenter.org](https://www.guesthousecenter.org) and click on "GIVE" at the top right corner of the home page. We thank you in advance for anything you can do.

Giving Is Easier than Ever!

DONATE TODAY
[guesthousecenter.org/give](https://www.guesthousecenter.org/give)

Become a Monthly Sustainer Your donation will be automatically paid every month until you say otherwise. Go to our website's giving page, select your monthly contribution, and click "subscribe" to sign up. It's simple, and it gives Guest House a dependable base of support throughout the year.

Join the Guest House Legacy Circle For many of you who love Guest House but cannot afford to reduce your assets or current income now, planned giving offers a means to support Guest House in a significant way after your death by naming GH in your will or as a beneficiary of your IRA, savings account or life insurance. Please contact us at friends@guesthousecenter.org to learn more.

Furnishing GH

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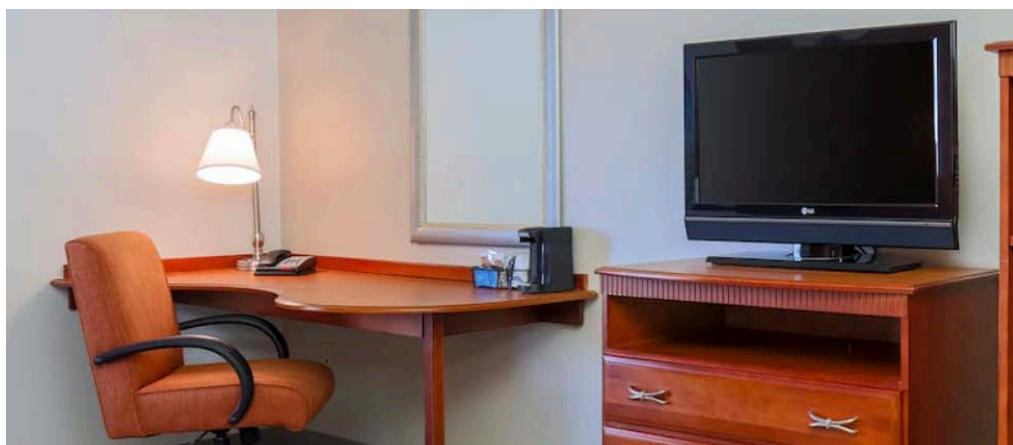
Lots and lots of art!

with retired artwork and furnishings from GH, will be sold if they are of reasonable value, stored for potential future use, offered to staff and/or charitable organizations, or disposed of (but only if there are no other alternatives).

We are grateful to have been able to seize an opportunity to reduce and reuse so-called "waste." Guest House has already offered to remove any unwanted items that come from the final phase of the hotel's remodel, so we can give them a new life in Chester, Connecticut.



Beautifully framed bathroom mirrors



Another sample layout, minus the TV of course

Silent Retreat Online

(Continued from page 5)

Guest House and these master Diamond Approach teachers are currently working on ways to help support the transition from in-person to online retreat, including offering guidance about setting up the ideal conditions at home to get the most out of the retreat. Final logistics are still in process, but it is likely the usual format of this retreat will be augmented with practice periods students will do on their own. We will keep you informed of developments, but you might want to set aside those days on your calendar now, so you don't miss this unique opportunity.

CHECK FOR UPDATES

guesthousecenter.org/silent

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Please stay tuned. We should have more information for you shortly. In the meantime, if you are interested, or know fellow DA friends who might be interested, please send us an email at: charlie@guesthousecenter.org to make sure you and they are on our mailing list of silent retreat announcements. We hope to see many more of you online.



Friends of Guest House 2019 Honor Roll

Thank you all!

Amy Abelow
Kathy Abrams
Towne Allen
Marie & Donald Amoruso
Sherry Anderson
Rosanne Annoni
Jorge Arango
Robert Ball
Gregory Beck
Barbara Bennett
Jill Berman
John Brett
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