

Guest House Newsletter, Summer 2011

Free Individual Retreats For Ridhwan Students

Guest House will experiment from now until September 30th with free private individual retreats for Ridhwan students, when there are unsold rooms available. Retreats must be contemplative, incorporating meditation, inquiry, or other Ridhwan practices. If GH is serving meals for other groups, meals will be provided for a suggested donation of \$15 a day; if meals are not being served, the retreatant can use the refrigerator and microwave in the tavern.

*"The world is radiant and beautiful but we shut it down. You start thinking, so the world gets dead again...The attitude of 'don't know' opens universes."
-- Alia Johnson*

In October the private retreats program will be evaluated, and GH will decide whether to make it permanent. If you would like to schedule an individual private retreat, please contact Laura at Laura@GuestHouseCenter.org. Retreats can be booked for one to five days, with a maximum of two stays a year.

Announcing Upcoming Guest House Programs in 2012

Exciting new programs are in the works. In November Russ Hudson will be presenting "The Enneagram and the Diamond Approach", and in September a community yoga class will supplement our popular weekly meditation class.

Guest House's 2012 programs will have a common theme oriented around the body. Diane Poole-Heller will present "Understanding Trauma in the Body: Somatic Experience With a Diamond Approach Perspective" in February. Byron Brown will present "Falling Awake: Experiencing True Nature through Movement and Sound" in April. And Jeanne Hay & Gawain Bantle will present "Tango as a Door to

Presence" in September. In addition, Leah Chyten will present a Diamond Approach introduction in March. The programming schedule, pricing, and additional information will be posted at www.GuestHouseCenter.org and announced via e-mail as soon as it is available. Register early!

Prestigious Groups Bring Strong Sales in 2011 and Beyond

Year-to-date we've seen a tremendous uptick of potential clients making inquiries about Guest House. Fortunately, we've managed to turn some of that interest into actual business! We want to convey to you a sense of the wide variety of groups that use our facility. We're seeing a steady growth in the quality and the quantity of our clients.

This coming August **Rutgers University will be renting the entire facility for a week**, presenting their work with educators and youth professionals on how to address issues of sexuality and bullying among teenagers. **Parker Palmer, another prestigious figure in education reform, came to Guest House last month**, and immediately following that retreat his organization contracted to return in 2012 to lead his workshop called "Courage to Teach", based on his book of the same name, which will focus on renewing the inner lives of professionals in education.



Photo by Laura Way

We are also thrilled to announce that thanks to the help of Leah Chyten **we were able to book the Hoffman Institute for six week-long retreats in 2012, including their graduate study course and their work with the students in Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.** Future world leaders will be meeting at Guest House during this program.



Photo by Laura Way

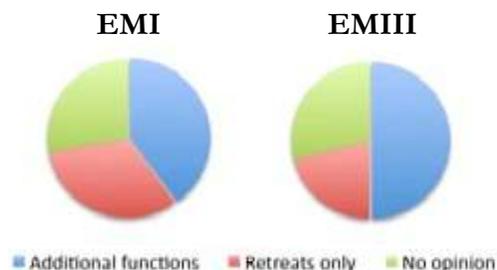
For the remainder of this year, we have very little space in our calendar; nearly every weekend from today to Christmas is heavily booked! Over Labor Day weekend, an evangelical church, “Church of our Lord Jesus Christ”, hopes to pack in about one hundred people for two nights, and a Hispanic Pentecostal church hopes to do the same over Fourth of July weekend. **The New York Open Center is using Guest House to host an off-site residential retreat on feng shui** in the middle of the week in August, and **the Four Winds Society, a group that continues traditions passed down from Peruvian Shamans, will be hosting numerous retreats with us in the fall.** The second retreat of Overeaters Anonymous this year will be held in June, and a men's group from Narcotics Anonymous will meet in August. We're honored to be a supportive vehicle for the healing and fellowship that can happen during their retreats.

EM Student Survey Results

About 63 percent of each EM group completed Guest House surveys in January and February. Below are selected highlights from the results. You can get a complete copy of the results by emailing Chair of Ten Directions, Laurie Leonard at lleonard4@gmail.com.

The survey asked whether students want GH to serve other functions in their lives, in addition to being a place they come to for retreats. The results were:

- **About 40% of EMI and 50% of EMIII respondents want GH to serve other functions in their lives, in addition to being a place they come to for retreats.** About 32% of EMI and 21% of EMIII respondents only want to use GH as a retreat center. The rest of the respondents had no opinion.



- A variety of possible GH events outside of retreats were presented to the students to determine their levels of interest. **The most desired events in EMI were a reunion of EM students; small groups/private sessions; and social events.** The most desired events in EMIII were participating in volunteer work to improve GH; inquiry/book discussions with a teacher present; and social events.
- If there is a gap of at least three months between retreats, 31% of the EMI students and 63% of the EMIII students would like GH to organize an event

during the gap; 31% of the EMI students and 11% of the EMIII students do not want GH to do this.

- About 79% of EMI students and 68% of EMIII students would like GH to invite students from both EM groups and the Boston DA group to special events, rather than just students in their own group.
- Only 15% of the EMI students and 26% of the EMIII students want to be more involved in decisions that are made about GH operations.
- About 59% of the respondents said that if the prices were significantly lower they would be much more likely to attend GH programs. Another 28% said they would be somewhat more likely to attend, and 14% would still not want to attend GH programs.

At the May board meeting the survey results were discussed. The number of students who would like GH to be more than a retreat center was large enough to convince the board that GH has a role in supporting the EM groups' sense of community. However, rather than trying to predict the needs of the groups, GH will rely on feedback from the groups themselves as to what procedures or events they would like created.



Photo by Laura Way

The board had previously discussed the idea of creating an event this summer to help fill the gap between the EMI May and October retreats, but the level of interest EMI expressed was not strong enough to support this. However, this function will be served in part by the fundraising parties that the Resource and Development Committee is planning for late summer and fall. These parties will be in a variety of locations, including New York City, and should be a good way for community members to socialize and keep in touch, as well as a way to raise funds for GH. In response to the survey results, these parties will be publicized to the Boston and DANY groups, as well as EM, and former EM students will be invited.



Photo by Laura Way

As EMIII students were particularly interested in a volunteer day, GH will try to plan such an event. In response to the level of interest expressed in attending GH programs if the prices were lower, the board's Finance and Program committees will discuss the possibility of offering discounts.

Buildings and Grounds News

The Buildings and Grounds committee has been very active this spring. Among its many accomplishments were installing a new window treatment in the White Barn, having the piano room sofa re-upholstered, inventorying and laying out every room, and re-hanging all the art.

GH is very grateful to committee chair, Jorge Arango and committee members, Don Shaw, Waltraud Ireland, and Jane Bronson for all their hard work to improve GH.

Thanks are also due to Steve and the facilities department for recent improvements, including making the library and White Barn annex usable as attractive new meeting spaces, planting a vegetable garden that will be overseen by Chef Steve, and creating a new outdoor fire pit.

Why We Ask

The Resource Development Committee knows everyone's strapped for cash these days, so we thought it important to reiterate why we your donations are critical to the life of our retreat center. Your contributions are what enable Guest House to charge well below market rates for all the Ridhwan groups, including Emerald Mountain, Seminary and Boston. It is the policy on which we were founded. Without your donations, we wouldn't be able to do that. Please be generous. And consider naming Guest House in your will and estate planning. If you have an IRA, you can easily add GH as one of the beneficiaries simply by changing the list on your account. It requires no legal process and would be tax deductible.

We also wanted to let you know that we're getting creative with our fundraising efforts. **We'd like to help you organize a series of parties at which fellow students could perform. Everyone would get together (a desire indicated on the surveys) and raise money for a great cause. The party season will kick off August 7th at Jorge Arango's house in Westchester.** Watch for "Save the Date" notices as this idea develops. If you're interested in hosting, cooking for and/or performing at one of these, please contact Jill Berman at berman.jill@gmail.com or Josie Sentner at Josie1112@aol.com.

Thanks for your support!

The Guest House Interview: Laura Way, Registrar and Housekeeping Supervisor



Guest House: The Emerald Mountain community knows you as the person who tracks registration and payment for retreats. What do you do the rest of the time?

Laura Way: What haven't I done! I'm supervisor of the Housekeeping department, organizing, scheduling, and ordering, and also up to my elbows working alongside the girls [the other housekeepers.] I've done just about everything except Executive Director. Besides registration and spreadsheets for Emerald Mountain, I coordinate daylong events and some groups. When the kitchen is short-staffed, I've washed dishes and prepped food. I've done special projects, like the in-room binders. I'm also the Guest House photographer. I wouldn't want it any other way. I love being busy, working with everybody.

GH: You've been here since Guest House first opened its doors. What has working here been like for you?

LW: It was life changing. I feel passion and energy, feeling a part of something, like a tight family unit, part of a small society. The staff here, we're intimate, good bad or indifferent.

The first ten-day (retreat) we ever had, I cried when the students left. I was so moved by the energy and by the people. This community of EM students came in that have known each other for years, and their arms opened up and embraced me. I love all the groups that come through here. Each group affects me differently. Sometimes it's electrifying, as if everything's buzzing. Other times it's quiet. It's exhausting sometimes, just being in the space where work is being done, not even doing the work.

It's been amazing in so many ways, to watch the whole place grow. Being part of this little seed that has grown into this really grounding and solid place. This place, as much as I help it thrive, it helps me thrive as a person.

***GH:** You have a great sensitivity to what goes on here.*

LW: I remember as a kid being very aware of energies around me, but as a kid I couldn't understand it. I lost that part of me. Either I found it again or it found me. Working here brought it to light again. It's easy to close yourself off from that space and create a wall instead of open up to it.

***GH:** How do you see your relation to the Guest House mission?*

LW: If the building wasn't clean and organized, I don't think people would feel safe enough to open up emotionally. We remove the chaos and clutter out of their lives. I think the team in place now really capture the essence, all our girls feel ownership towards the place. We want that to show. I love being here and I think it shows. There are so many of our repeat groups that I feel a part of. It's such an amazing feeling that sometimes it's overpowering to explain to people - hard to explain how gratifying and moving it is.

***GH:** What is your background?*

LW: I grew up not even a fourth of a mile from here! My mom worked here when it was the Inn at Chester and so did I, as a server in the tavern and as a housekeeper. I've done hairdressing, child care, medical assisting, working with

patients with dementia, and having my own pet-sitting and grooming facility. Now I breed quality golden retrievers with incredible temperaments and beautiful structure. I'm proudest that I've been a foster parent, and I fostered and adopted my daughter Becca together with Will (Guest House's Maintenance manager).

***GH:** What do you aim for, for yourself and your department?*

LW: To continue putting our best foot forward, and enjoy working with one another. And to keep getting stronger in myself. Like a tree: able to bring my branches and leaves out, but also to grow my roots deeper.

Board Member Interview: Jane Bronson



***Guest House:** How did you come to serve on the Board?*

Jane Bronson: When Alia first thought about a center, I had to wrestle with this. I wanted to support her but because I wasn't in Emerald Mountain, I wasn't clear what my place was. But because I was in ITTR I was asked to be on the Council of Teachers, and later became the COT liaison to the finance committee. Next I was asked to be on the Search Committee for the new Executive Director. One reason I'm on the board is because of what I brought to the

Executive Director search – the ability to sense into the energy of the person or the situation. I feel that I also brought a certain amount of presence from my own maturation process in the Diamond Approach, which lends itself to a capacity to ground situations, to hold the overview and feel the flow of the unfoldment. This seems to help other people get another perspective, deepen, to find the right proportions of things. Now I also sit on the Buildings and Grounds Committee.



Photo by Laura Way

GH: What is your background?

JB: I went to college for physics, but I fell in love with design, and went back to school for it later. I'd found something natural to my soul. I spent a number of years working as an interior space planner and architectural project manager where I coordinated projects from conception to build-out. Whether spatially or energetically with people, I found I was a good person to hold the big picture, make certain everyone was on the same page and get a project focused and

happening. I'm still occasionally involved in interior space design.

GH: Are these native capacities, or do you learn through experience?

JB: I learn by doing, and certain inherent capacities move to the surface. What is being used is my capacity to hold the whole space architecturally, organizationally, energetically and develop ideas in an incremental way. I can envision how to make things better, but I'm more an organic and developmental person than someone who has grand visions and tries to make them happen.

I found Diamond Heart in 1992 through a workshop at Esalen. Finding Diamond Heart felt like discovering the glove that fit my hand. I've never been on any other path; I sampled a few others but they paled by comparison. The grist of everyday life is also a great teacher; for instance I've also learned a great deal from my two daughters.

GH: As a Board member, what are your goals for Guest House?

JB: The way I work is antithetical to making predictions. Whether with my artwork or Guest House, I work with what's in front of me and see where it is trying to go...what is emerging. To me Guest House is evolving and seems to have it's own life in a sense. It's great to be part of something so alive. All these individuals are willing to be open, to work together, get off their positions and see what's true and see what works, be in collaboration. It's exciting to work with a group where I have a particular voice to add to the party and so does everybody else, and together these pieces are forming a whole. I love being engaged where everyone's being real in their own way and bringing their capacities. It's rich and things are happening, Guest House is evolving and growing. It's like my own process: I can see where I've come from, I can align with where I feel myself unfolding but I really have no idea where I'm actually going to end up.