



New directions, outreach for *Friends*

The November meeting of *Friends of Mountain Shadows* proved a watershed event, introducing key members of the MSSG board of directors and charting new directions.

--A full house of 30 persons filled the Office. They included Bill Vergeer of the Knights of Columbus, who announced a donation of \$4,400 to Mountain Shadows Community Homes. The funds were raised in the annual fall K of C Tootsie Roll drive--and set a single drive K of C record. Thanks were gratefully extended to Vergeer and Drive Chair Col. Lou Silva, and to 12 residents who with Mary Lou Swarner participated directly in the solicitation of donations outside Escondido stores.

--Development of the Recreation Platform is delayed pending a review of how well the current architectural concept meets client need, it was announced.

--Donna Ponamorenko, former Pine House Manager and among the longest tenured staff, was introduced as the new Director of Activities. She replaces Michelle Ridgeway [see story page 2].

The 2-hour meeting sparked vigorous input and debate on the evolving role of *Friends* under MSSG's new nonprofit organizational status. Part of that role will continue to be support for a growing list of residential activities. Part of it will be expanded community awareness as Mountain Shadows continues to need and harvest volunteer assistance from hundreds of people.

"One of our priorities is to get the Mountain Shadows story better known," said Portia Bibb. "We need to make some media, community outreach and gain exposure that we are a major nonprofit corporation in the area with a vital mission," Bibb said.

"And, we want and require greater community involvement. There are many people looking to help out there. We have to tap into that great pool of assistance."

Facility Report

Wade Wilde, Executive Director of MSSG, offered his Facility Report, noting that Mountain Shadows "is in good financial position [as of 11/23/02] to weather the state's current multi-billion budget shortfall and Medi-Cal cutbacks."

Without the nonprofit restructuring, which allows us to do more with less, Wilde added, "we would be in a much more precarious position. Our timing was fortuitous." Note: MSSG now owns all 18 group homes and their property.

Operationally, "all has been going very smoothly," Wilde said. Part of that is Wilde's putting in the long hours needed for systems transition and meeting new nonprofit reporting requirements.

"Still, we've got to tighten our belts and weather the financial storm," Wilde said. "It cycles, and things will eventually get better. But for now, it's batten down the hatches and be glad we've got some reserves to protect us from dire emergencies."

Check out our website

Biographies of our distinguished MSSG board members are available on the Internet at <http://www.mountainshadows.ws>. Plus, you find updates on what's new. Check us out, and keep current on what's happening or look at back issues of this newsletter. And while you're visiting our home page, be sure to give us your email address and comments.

Introduced were board members Dick Marrs (president), Mary Ellen Alton (secretary), Carol Haskin (who is also president of *Friends*), and Wilde. Changes in board structure of late: Ken Melton, the man who put the nonprofit financing package together, joins as a director. Robert Chakarian (three time golf tournament chair) takes over board treasurer duties.

Mary Lou Swarner asked and received a warm standing ovation of thanks to Wilde for making the transition "enlightened and seamless."

Pres. Carol Haskin announced that the Recreation Platform fund has reached \$28,500. This would provide about half the construction costs for an envisioned 30 by 45 foot structure.

But the board is reviewing the project. Besides changing the look of the campus, the current Platform design would accommodate only half of all residents at any time--thus preempting campus-wide activities. "It's not big enough and it doesn't meet our future level of needs," said Doug Cook, who heads up a review task force. "It might be better, for instance, to build two smaller units."

Haskin, after a short break, told the group that she sees *Friends* now as volunteer driven. "I see *Friends* as a group which finds and cultivates volunteers," she said. "To continue to support the socialization of our residents, we need more service- and church-group help.

"In this regard, we want to reshape our mailing list to include more community contacts. Develop phone and e-mail communication chains. Take a more professional approach to organizational management. The question is: What are you willing to do, individually, to support Mountain Shadows Community Homes?"

Friends meetings in 2003

Friends meet quarterly on the third Saturday of the month at 11 a.m. in the MSCH Office. Meeting dates: Feb. 15, May 17, Aug. 16, and Nov. 15.



Ridgeway legacy: the glue of social bonding

By Brian Wiersema

Just tracing the logistics of Mountain Shadows' Halloween dance tells you a lot about the creative grit of Michelle Ridgeway.

With military precision, some 117 residents under Ridgeway's direction were bused and vanned from Mountain Shadows on West El Norte Parkway to the Knights of Columbus hall on West Valley Parkway.

It took six vehicles, six drivers, and two or three round trips each to deliver 92 residents in wheelchairs and 25 ambulatory residents to their biggest off-campus bash ever. And under the watchful, clipboarded guidance of QMRP and "transportation director" Denise Kadar, the precious cargo was delivered in just over half an hour.

The flamboyantly costumed event required two-dozen church group youth volunteers from Gateway Community Church in Escondido, and nearly that many combined staff and family member helpers. Tony Ponamorenko rocked the house as guest disk jockey. [Tony's wife Donna is the new activities director. Please see story on page 3.]

"The whole event was just so wonderful," said Ridgeway, 34.

It was also Ridgeway's last big event as the Activities Director for Mountain Shadows Community Homes (MSCH). To say she will be missed is an understatement.

On Oct. 31, Ridgeway bowed out. On Nov. 3 she began her new job as special education teacher for children with communicative disorders and socialization difficulties for the Bonsall School District.

Ironically, Ridgeway's teaching passion was reignited at Mountain Shadows--in a great socialization pilot: MSCH's August summer camp.

Ridgeway came aboard in July 2000 as Mountain Shadows' first full time Activities Director. Over two years, she blazed a trail of innovation, getting residents involved and moving them with her enthusiasm--and with her faith and hope in them.

Today, Ridgeway lives in Fallbrook with her husband John, three cats, one puppy, and five rabbits (one of which is named Peter Cottontail). She holds a community college degree in Deaf Education and a degree from San Diego State University in

Communicative Disorders and Special Education. Prior to joining staff here, Ridgeway was a teacher to deaf youngsters at St. Mary's School in Escondido.

Last year, Ridgeway inaugurated the MSCH big dance era with a Halloween party at the 1st Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints. The follow-up was a 2002 Summer Luau and Dance at the K of C hall. "But Halloween Dance 2002 was the first time we were able to bring in all the residents," said Ridgeway. "That's a *big* undertaking."

Ridgeway pumped life into residents' ski trips, Las Vegas and Disneyland junkets, and games and sports closer to home. She enticed residents to greater participation in Special Olympics, more tournaments, and new sports.

And Ridgeway got *into* her roles: dressed as the Easter Bunny in April and as Santa's Elf at the Christmas party. In 2001 she was Morticia (from the Addams Family) for Halloween. Last year, she was the Great Pumpkin.

No one got bored at the Halloween Dance 2002. There were various costume competitions. Apple House got the top collective prize. Honors also went to 13 individual residents, including Debbie Rawlings of Willow, Tara Nason of Birch, and Mike Norris of Spruce.

Refreshment were cupcakes and punch. Pumpkin seeds flew in pumpkin carving competition. Staffer Vanessa Gradilla of Palm won a DVD player for "most dedicated." Gradilla--as a volunteer--began helping Ridgeway early on the morning of the Oct. 26 dance. She purchased supplies and decorations and worked into the night.

Others contributed with brooms and mops, including Executive Director Wade Wilde and Keith Mitchell (father of Ivan in Jacaranda). They stayed late at the hall, cleaning bathroom, hallway, and auditorium floors.

"The dance was a big team effort," Ridgeway said, who also praised parents Carol Haskin and Mary Lou Swarner for "their enormous effort".

"It was a hugely difficult decision for me to leave Mountain Shadows," said Ridgeway. "It weighs on my heart. But it's not like I'm leaving. I'll be around here helping in a different way."

She considers her new August summer camp "one of my greatest accomplishments". {Continued on page 3}

MSCH sets Feb. 20 Open House

Mountain Shadows hosts its annual Open House for professionals in the developmental services field on Feb. 20. Care executives from throughout southern California will attend.



... Michelle Ridgeway

Indeed it was a classic lesson in the tonic of client socialization. During the camp, Ridgeway felt she scored huge successes, especially with Tangelo resident Jake Ibarra and Jacaranda's Ivan Mitchell.

"We played games together," said Ridgeway, "went on field trips, did arts and crafts and music, made our own snacks. Had story time, water play--a lot of water play--and puppet shows. We practiced a play, had a bug hunt day with fake insects, and brewed up a 'bug jello' of gummy worms and all sorts of weird things you can eat."

"Ivan Mitchell, who never talked much before summer camp, was encouraged in his communication skills. And when camp ended after four weeks he had gone from 'yes' and 'no' answers to initiating conversation." Mitchell is blind and utilizes a wheelchair.

"Ibarra served as a paid assistant, and he was terrific," said Ridgeway. Ibarra, with cerebral palsy, has the use of two fingers (to drive his electric wheelchair) and his voice.

"Jake [Ibarra] was our leader. He knew to ask staff to do the things that he was unable to do. But mostly, Jake was like a caring big brother to other camp residents. He was the one who brought Mitchell literally into conversations."

"Summer camp was the culmination of my experiences and teaching skills. It was certainly the most fun I've had at Mountain Shadows. And it's what inspired me to go back to teaching."

Stacy Kendall, Director of Residential Programs at MSCH, summed up Ridgeway's contributions: "Michelle always put the residents first and never wavered on this motto. She would think of them before herself. She is the most unselfish person that I have ever met. She truly cares about the people."

Ridgeway's evolving methods since 2000 are like a blueprint of MSCH's habilitative concept: social bonding in a stimulating environment, where the helped become helpers. With her infusion of ideas, high morale picked up another notch. But she is shy about taking the credit.

"It was never just me. It was staff and upper management that made a spectrum of new activities and their positive outcomes happen," Ridgeway said. "I could start and plan things, but it was staff that totally carried them out. They are the backbone of Mountain Shadows."

Ridgeway developed close personal friendships with Ibarra, Zachary Ward of Palm, and Alyssa Lane of Jacaranda. "They were all very good to me," Ridgeway said.

"What I will miss most is the camaraderie of Mountain Shadows, the support and friendship that everyone gives one another. You don't find that in too many places. The depth of goodwill and rapport that we have is rare."

Activities beat goes on under Donna's leadership

Donna Ponomarenko, the new activities director, stepped into her job in late November--just in time for the busy Thanksgiving-Christmas holiday season.

Her thrust is business as usual for campus activities, more smaller programs, and attracting and cultivating community volunteers. "We want to link and maintain programs to sustain the momentum of habilitative social action," Ponomarenko said. "Clients love interaction with one another and the community. We are all socially driven."

Ponomarenko began working as one of Mountain Shadows' first specialists in 1997. In that year, she also began as a community assistant for outings, with UCP. "The value of trips is doing new things," she said. "But they also nurture a sense of belonging."

The new activities director is married, to Tony. He does computer inventory. They have one daughter, Summer, age 23. Ponomarenko began her career as a teenager, working in convalescent homes.

She was a customer service agent for Signet Armorlite (optical lens manufacturer) for 22 years before joining the Mountain Shadows team seven years ago. Ponomarenko was Pine's House Manager from 1998-2002.

"Our residents take great pleasure in doing small things," she said. "One new focus is on doing more crafts, such as the flower arrangement program we started. I pick up fresh flowers. Residents turn them into home floral arrangements."

Ponomarenko will continue house and independent outings, but add an overlay of something clients can do every day: "Something as basic as playing games has proved popular--and we're getting the involvement of people who otherwise seldom participate."

Over the Christmas holidays, Ponomarenko introduced a travel plan with two drivers. "On school break, the residents of Jacaranda and Palm saw a lot of outside action--and had special in-house activities, too," Ponomarenko said. "We're moving."

New church groups will be coming aboard, she said. "And we'll continue to tap into community donations and business discounts."



Reorganization for better care: title shifts in houses

As initially explained in a Nov. 21 letter to parents from Executive Director Wade Wilde, leadership positions at the house level have been reorganized. The title "House Manager" will be eliminated. It will be replaced by "Team Leader," and now there

Memorial fetes Joey D.

Memorial services were held for Joey Desisto at Spruce House on Dec. 4. More than 40 persons attended. Several spoke of Joey "just being Joey".

Stacy Kendall, Director of Residential Programs, was the Spruce QMRP/Admin. when she first met Joey eight years ago. She recalled that he had come to Mountain Shadows shy and unstimulated after living in nursing homes. "He became a very active friend and neighbor here," Kendall said. "He changed from being withdrawn to being very sociable."

The memorial featured music by Frank Sinatra --Joey's favorite singer. Tributes also came from Stacey Miller, Fred Lindahl, James Arp, Wade Wilde, Judy Bunch, Todd Antrim, and others.

Joey passed away on Nov. 15 at a local hospital. He was 70 years old. He was buried at a Los Angeles-area cemetery, joining three brothers who had preceded him in death.

Antrim, Spruce House Manager, said that Joey had been a popular Circus Day king--and annual honorary Ringmaster. "He dressed up in top hat and cape, white tee-shirt, and black slacks. And loved his role with the late Harry Cook (Ringmaster) in the Circus Day Parade," said Antrim.

"Joey had a lot of intelligence and a lot of personality," Antrim said, noting Joey's distinctive look in gray beard and suspenders. "He loved KFC extra crispy fried chicken and cole slaw. Joey loved simple pleasures immensely."

Joey's favorite expression was "you're my friend, I like you". He was a talker not prone to sitting down for more than a few minutes. Questions bubbled from the wealth of Joey's curiosity. A plaque remembering Joey will be placed on a stepping stone in front of Spruce. It reads, "In loving memory of our friend Joey Desisto, the Ringmaster. March 14, 1932-Nov. 15, 2002." Judy Bunch, mother to Eddie who lives in Spruce, said, "Joey is missed deeply. He was a wonderful friend to my son. They had come to Spruce about the same time, in 1992. Who was Joey? He was a person of enthusiasm, and a human being without pretense. His role in life was just being Joey."

will be seven new positions--Residential Coordinators--in place supervising up to three houses each.

Changes were effective Jan. 1. The reorganization was made to increase the number of hours devoted to hands-on care, and to make house management more professional.

New Residential Coordinators are Lupe Sierra (Apple, Plum, Maple); Lisa Love (Pine, Ash, Cedar); Rachael Duenas (Willow, Birch, Crepe Myrtle); Sherri Buck (Oak, Elm, Spruce); Rosie Mata (Olive); Cheryl Mitchell (Lemon, Orange, Tangelo); and Christina Davidson (Jacaranda, Palm).

"Under the old system, our House Managers were stretched thin trying to do administration, leadership, training, shopping, records, planning, and care," said Executive Director Wade Wilde. "Within the new order, the administration components are handed off to the Residential Coordinator (RC)."

The new RC will be responsible for all the managerial functions that House Managers had.

"Team Leaders will direct the care provided in houses, and each will have the same qualifications that House Managers had," said Stacy Kendall, Director of Residential Programs. "The management concept here: adding more direct care contact and generating better administrative oversight."

Christmas party gala

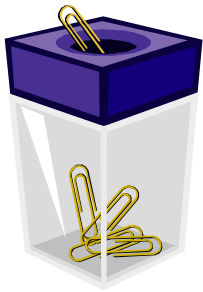
The annual Christmas Party for residents Dec. 14 saw spirited action and people having fun. Many thanks to parent volunteers and a dozen helpers from Broadway Baptist Church in Escondido.

Kickoff featured a Mexican-theme holiday potluck with everything from nacho chips to a tangy artichoke dip, provided by *Friends* President Carol Haskin. There were bread loaves, tamale pie, variations on bean casseroles, and wondrous deserts.

Wade Wilde, before residents arrived and got involved with Santa (Kiwanian Keith Warren), injected one somber note. Giving each parent a list of California legislative contacts, and a sample "Medi-Cal Cuts--Myopic Economics" letter, he urged a fax and email blitz directed at Sacramento. [See 'Notes' page 5.]

"The state proposes across-the-board 10% cuts in Medi-Cal, our sole source of funding. That would eliminate about \$525,000 of our income annually, a Draconian change," said Wilde, Executive Director of MSSG. "Make your voice heard on this issue."

From 12:30 to 4 p.m., a parade of residents--by house--gathered in the parking lot and went in the Office to visit with jovial Santa. Each received a personal wrapped gift from *Friends*.



Notes from the Executive Director's desk

THE BAD NEWS BUDGET

By Wade Wilde

I am quoted on page one of this issue, saying that Mountain Shadows "is in good financial position [as of 11/23/02] to weather the state's current multi-billion budget shortfall and Medi-Cal cutbacks." Little more than a few weeks later the picture had changed drastically. The state is now proposing to reduce compensation to providers by 10 percent.

This is calamity waiting to happen. It is a rash, penny-wise and pound-foolish approach that could devastate the private developmental services industry--and cost taxpayers more, much more, in the long run.

Time to get out those phone calls, faxes, and emails to state legislators and the governor's office. I am very serious. Medi-Cal rates slashed could be the straw that broke the camel's back. Providers are, at best, hanging on by their fingernails.

Providers throughout California like us are *already* closing their doors, not because of care issues, but because they can no longer afford to operate. They're drowning in red ink.

At the current levels of reimbursement, private care for persons with developmental disabilities cost one-third of that at state developmental centers. So what happens when the providers are driven out of business? Their residents are forced to move into the more institutionalized state developmental centers. Where care costs *three times* as much!

Sure, California budget numbers are in dire financial straits. But there's just no more blood to be squeezed from the developmental services industry.

The state's proposed Medi-Cal cuts threaten the very existence of Mountain Shadows and hundreds of providers like us. We are 100% dependent on Medi-Cal. There can be no shifting of costs. That's all there is. There isn't anymore. Make yourselves heard.

DONATIONS ACCEPTED HERE

Having alluded to what could be *our* dire straits, I remind readers that Mountain Shadows is an IRS-approved nonprofit organization. Thus, we can accept (and you can write off) donations. Cars, boats, computers, cash, furniture, lots, homes, whatever. Think about us, close to home. And give generously.

JOHN IRELAND'S HOME VISIT

Staff at MSCH have walked that extra mile in getting John Ireland home for December holiday. Big thanks are due to QMRP/Admin. Lale Laubach, Kaylee Gray, and Chrystal Allen. Laubach and Gray brainstormed the idea. Allen flew with John Ireland, 39, in a four-day visit to his parents' home in Nampa, Idaho (near Boise).

The trip went from Dec. 9 to Dec. 12--not nearly long enough for parents Linda and John Ireland. But it was John III's first visit home in 10 years--and his first time on an airliner (Southwest).

"We were just elated to have John here for four days," said mom Linda. "It was something you dream about and hope for. We had no idea someone in his condition could make the trip until it was suggested by a [MSCH] staff member." John lives in Lemon House.

The Irelands are especially close to John because they almost lost him. At age 16, he suffered massive brain stem damage in an auto accident. Following that he was in a coma for two months and comatose for an additional four months. "He was not expected to live," Linda said.

For four days, John was visited by family and neighbors. Took in the views from the 3-acre Ireland homestead, to the Owyhee mountains south and the Boise mountain range northeast. Watched it snow Dec. 10.

"Having John here was terrific, wonderful," said Linda. "We missed him terribly. His visit was a moving, emotional experience. He's such a special person, with a wonderful sense of humor and a great attitude about life. I loved being a mother to him again."

"I have to say something about Mountain Shadows," Linda said. "It's a place you dream about but don't think can exist for real. The way they run things, with activities for clients to do and see and experience things, is something that one cannot imagine--at least in Idaho."

"On a number of occasions, I have wished that other parts of the country could see and emulate what a wonderful place Mountain Shadows is."

Chrystal stayed the four days, caring for John. "I felt like she was my daughter," said Linda. "We had such a fine family affair."



Mountain Shadows Support Group Winter 2002-03

Stacey and the Bibbs: they throw a whale of a party!

What time is it? Ask a select group of nine residential revelers, and they will tell you. It's time to party--at the home of Portia Bibb, four times a year. Every year.

We caught up with Portia on Dec. 14, when she was stirring up a batch of banana pudding--just before son Stacey, 28, and his gang arrived. That bunch--and it's always the same--includes the guys from Tangelo House and residents Kenny Lewis, Travis Groff, and Patricia Gregory. They are treated to the same menu: broccoli casserole, pizza, hot dogs, banana pudding, Baskin-Robbins ice cream. Only casserole accents change.

"They know there are going to get tons of broccoli and tons of bananas," said Portia, the Director of Special Events and Alumni Relations, Graduate School of International Relations and Pacific Studies at UCSD.

The support crew numbers 20. It includes six staff members (including Sharon Fabian, Stacy Miller, and Lale Laubach). There are also visitors from Community Interface, two Merritts (Bob and Dorothy; they bring the ice cream), and six members of the Vargas family. Plus,

sometimes Wade Wilde, who shows up as Santa or some Halloween beast.

Quarterly themes: summer treasure hunt, Halloween costume bonanza, spring wheelchair golf and soccer, Christmas' White Elephant present-theft game.

Guests arrive about 5 p.m. The big meal is always first on the agenda, followed by games and a family video. "Monsters Inc." and "Shrek" are very popular.

What's also consistent is that "the party is for the residents," said Portia. "They are in charge." And, yes, they do tend to take over." One year, they challenged staff to see who could throw the most tennis balls into a basket. Staff had to do it blindfolded, and they lost every time.

Party evolution began in 1997, and for three years it was held bimonthly. In 2000-01 Portia changed that to quarterly "to keep things fresh," she said. "You want it to be something they look forward to. Not routine or every day. We want it to continue to be special."

Portia and Stacey's father Gary Bibb bring their expertise to the party. Gary is a special education teacher at Aseltine School. Portia is a former high school teacher for nonreaders at Normandy High School in St. Louis. They understand Stacey's showing off his "goofy" parents. ###



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