

Billy Club Visioning Retreat

February 27 to March 1, 2009

Saratoga Springs, CA

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

A warm thanks goes to all who worked hard to make this weekend such a success! It was a pleasure to dream together and to manifest the Billy community we long for, in all its play, ritual, and hard work.

Table of Contents

- ▲ Overview
- ▲ Retreat Schedule
- ▲ Session Minutes
- ▲ Working Group Reports
 1. Billy HomeLand Dreams
 2. Fundraising
 3. Additional Fundraising Notes
 4. Mastering & Mentoring
 5. Outreach
 6. Rebuilding from Core
- ▲ Appendices
 1. Billy Mission and Values Statements
 2. Billy Board Working Agreements
 3. "History of the Billys" by Ron Vanscoyk

Participants

Bill "Blackie" Blackburn*	Joe "Guiseppe" Balestreri
Bob Ullrich	John "Big Franny" Foley
Bruce "Three" MacDonald	Ken Kunert
David Brin	Marcus Borgman
David Hedden	Mark Hoffheimer*
Doug von Koss	Mike Goldstein
Duane Gammill	Richard W. Evans
Ed "Edwina" Craig	Ron Vanscoyk
Ezra Cole	Ruven Hannah
Fred Dickson	Scott Selmanoff
Ike Dullinger	Stefen ("Stuff")
Jack Pilling	Steve "Moonriver" Rockwell*
Jim "Dancing Sage" Gilson*	Todd Pederson
Jim Hughson*	Tony Berno
	William Stewart

* Billy Board members

Retreat Co-coordinators:
Minutes & Administrative Support:
Ritual:

Bill Blackburn & Steve Rockwell
Jim Hughson, Steve Rockwell & Marcus Borgman
Jeffrey Alphonsus Mooney & Doug von Koss

Overview

The plan for the retreat was threefold: to collectively “dream” about what the Billys can be and what initiatives are dear to our hearts, to “strategize” about how we can get there, and then to create “tactics,” action plans and volunteer groups to actually move us forward to achieve the results we want. (The retreat schedule follows, and our individual dreams are summarily reported in the session minutes attached.) To the best of our abilities we met together as Billys and attempted to reach these “business” goals without losing touch with our Billy process: ritual, heartshares and collaboration. We didn’t do brainstorms with a flipchart and a facilitator, we did heartswirls in a circle with a talisman that called forth our best selves. It was co-generative and fun. As our participants reported, “it felt like a retreat”, yet we achieved a great deal of our goals!

The Billy community is arguably the best there is for gay/bi men anywhere *and* we face challenges, much like the rest of our culture. Our intention in coming together at this retreat was to discover ways we can organize to be more successful in our aims and make our gatherings more relevant in our lives. We specifically aimed to address the fact that Billy Board members are overstretched with work and unable to both accomplish their corporate responsibilities (foundation budgeting, legal matters, office oversight, developing policies and procedures) and attend to the projects that the community wants undertaken (better Gatherings, a robust website, no-one-turned-away-for-lack-of funds, etc.). To the board’s relief, the retreat participants quickly agreed upon priorities and jumped in to forming working groups to address these needs. The initial plans and ideas of these “breakout groups” are reported hereafter.

Our Mission and Values Statements, which you’ll find in the appendices, grew out of the efforts of the past two Visioning Retreats to claim our community values as a path into our future. Sometimes this vision contrasts sharply with our current reality: busy lives, more distractions, lotsa work, higher expenses, less money, more needs. Higher venue and food costs require more scholarship requests. It was reported that Saratoga Springs is likely to change hands sometime in 2009, although there are no specific plans for the site’s future at this time. We naturally had concerns about how this might effect our gatherings and our emotional ties to the land. Through heartcircle, ritual and time on the land, we honored that part of our selves and our history that Saratoga Spring has created, sent energy to David Carroll, and worked to gain as clear an understanding as we could of the nature of Saratoga’s current financial situation. As the Billyland Home group reports, the Billy Foundation itself has little resources to call on to “save” Saratoga, but there are possibilities that individual Billys are still pursuing to support David and to retain this magic parcel for our use.

As much as we like each other, I think all of us were surprised at the comraderie and the amount of work we achieved this weekend. We have begun some serious discussions about our roots and “Billyland”. We have two ongoing groups committed to developing Billy ritual/mentoring and fundraising for the organization. We have the beginnings of an outreach group. We have a new Billy Board member. (Thank you and welcome, David Hedden!) And we reached true consensus on a thorny issue: the future of May Day as a Billykin gathering. (The consensus statement is given at the end of the session minutes.) Instead of dividing us, though, the process brought us even closer together into an

acknowledgement and celebration of the fact that there really are reasons why we are together and that we can rely on our friendship and trust in one another.

It's particularly notable that the working group with the most participants on that Saturday was focused on fundraising. It's almost unheard of for fundraising to gain as much attention in a touchy-feely organization as the Billys. It was because we came to see that increasing numbers of Billys are unable to attend gatherings due to the costs and the lack of sufficient scholarship funds. One third of Visioning Retreat participants chose to join the fundraising working group and two new funding projects are already being launched as we write.

The one area of concern that did not achieve a critical mass in the breakaways that day was outreach. We're all pretty much convinced that we need to reach new potential Billys but the men who participated in this retreat elected to focus their energies on other concerns. Nevertheless, we hope an outreach effort will be take shape over the next year, to replenish our community as individuals naturally evolve and their circumstances change, and to connect with the many men who hunger for the heart-centered community of men that we co-create.

Next Steps? We could use more hands on our working groups, more help with our website, more board members. If you are interested in reaching out to men who need the intimacy and connectivity that we can experience together, please get involved and touch base with any of the retreat participants. We're a great group of men who are stepping forward to meet our challenges and support one another!

Retreat Schedule

Friday

7:00 pm	Welcome Circle	
7:10 – 8:00 pm	Dinner	
8:30 – 11:00 pm	Launch of Retreat	Dreamwork: our wishes and intentions for a Billy future

Saturday

7:30 – 8:30 am	Breakfast	
8:50 am	Reconnection Experience	
9:00 am	Morning Circle	
9:15 am	Saratoga Springs Healing/Ritual	
10:00 am	Directed Heart Circle	
11:00 – 12:15 am	Creating Strategy re Main Topics of Concern	working in Breakout Groups to identify desired end results, etc.
12:30 – 1:30 pm	Lunch	
2:00 – 5:00 pm	Tactical Planning	working in Breakout Groups to create Action Plans
4:00 pm	Board Break-Out Session	special session for those interested in joining the Board
5:00 pm	Action Plan Reports	Breakout Groups report plans
7:00 – 8:00 pm	Dinner	
8:30 pm	Free Time	Salons re topics of interest

Sunday

7:30 – 8:30 am	Breakfast	
8:50 am	Reconnection Experience	
9:00 -11:00 am	Completion of Retreat Work	
11:00 am	Heart Circle	
12:00 pm	Closing Circle	
12:30 – 1:30 pm	Lunch	
1:30 -2:00 pm	Clean-up	remove belongings from rooms; leave site clean & ready for use

Session Minutes

Friday Evening: Launch of Dreamwork

Question: **“For me a sustainable Billy Community would look like ____;
(sustainable in the sense that I would be able to sustain my love and interest
and contribution to the organization if it ____)”**

Joe Ballestreri	more of the same: love, community, heartcircle & support. Doing Billy “gardening” in my own neighborhood (more/better potlucks?), local outreach and focus in a small world as a contrast to wider connections at gatherings.
Ezra Cole	eyes, hearts, lives touching. Where is meet is not important; the priority is being together.
Todd Pederson	ditto
Ken Kunert	ditto. the possibility of being real with each other
Ron Vanscoyk	Rebuilding by taking it all the way down to our foundation.
Fred Dickson	youth participation; having future generations to pass the torch on to.
Stefen	a Billyland “home”
Richard Evans	dream: rebuilding the house/or sell and move on; outreach/or sunset
Steve Rockwell	I need contacts with Billies every week, but 4 hours of contact/work is enough. I love gatherings, but probably can’t commit to more than 2 a year ongoingly.
Jim Hughson	personal responsibility & ownship by all; many hands
David Hedden	more candles & chanting like tonight’s opening (I’m looking to volunteer)
Ed Craig	focus on wisdom, dream state, dance. We are good at creating dream-spell.
Scott Selmanoff	participation by all generations, agrarian fundamentals around land, creating a new model that is manifested into reality
Ruven Hannah	old and yew/young friends; more creativity, more volunteerism
Doug von Koss	first identifying the threats/opportunities in the world, then deciding how to act in response. place of spiritual expression/ritual, and an influx of new people
Bruce MacDonald	I need to step up and be more than just there at Gatherings. Board?
Mark Hoffheimer	connection to my self in heart space; brotherhood, service out of gratitude (dana), learning how to ask for help
Mike Goldstein	intimacy (this is as close as hearts can get), being visible, sharing lives
Bob Ullrich	organic interconnectedness, supportive community, respect for each other. I can chip in more.
Jim Gilson	internal reflection, witnessed self-accessment, amazement at what I learn, instant exhale (can let down guard, move from head into heart), don’t need a particular place/site, notaflof, endowment fundraising
Alphonsus Mooney	mentorship, radical generosity, to be welcomed
John Foley	radical generosity & rebuilding. I need a ground zero, a place to be recognized and needed. Perhaps out own land, but perhaps a hot tub and portapotty to go. Co-breathighn saved my life.
David Brin	heart-centeredness
Marcus Borgman	I fantasize about the board and Resource Coordinator quitting, releasing the legacy/responsibility/burden/baggage
Ike Dullinger	friendship, sharing a vision
Duane Gammill	creating a home for all Billys who are not here yet; taking ownership
Jack Pilling	hugs; more hugs. The principle of Keep It Simple Stupid.
William Stewart	“how to be in this (Billy) world” as this world is changing. responsibility, finding economic resources, “stewardship within ourselves”. land, water, love.
Bill Blackburn	something evolutionary, taking us to the next level (challenge & growth). “Hands are the work organ of the heart, I see one hand picking up the work, while the other hand is reaching out to those who need in.”

Saturday Morning: What is the core work to be done?

Doug von Koss	a gathering place of heart education
Mike Goldstein	a place for growing intimacy
Ike Dullinger	workshop: create the conditions and it will grow
Jim Gilson	intimacy & core connection in heartcircle with men; ritual, fun, service, reflection, witnessing diluted by logistical concerns, our 6 gatherings a year, the needs of a 501(c)3 organization
Mark Hoffheimer	intimacy, building & affording community; being in practice (support/compassion/generosity), creating a vessel where people feel safe & nurtured
David Brin	healing (intimacy, service, tolerance, acceptance, heartspace, fun); wounded as a child (gay), judged and marginalized; instruments for changing society (our love is a force)
Joe Ballestreri	moving from the "strain of insularity" and bringing dana to a larger world; learning how to do what we do in "real life", converting Billy energy into bringing to the world what needs doing (supporting the work of individual Billys in the world); more Billy energy where I live; leaving assets to the Billy Foundation
Ken Kunert	contribution (Billys respond to crisis, to personal needs, to gathering)
Ron Vanscoyk	Core = ways to inspire Gay male connection between men who share lifestyles; finding gay community informs who I am in the world
Steve Rockwell	Living in a heart process that relates to nature and the natural world.
Richard Evans	Dreamspace; need core to come back to from our marginalized world; AIDS work; edge of being practical about Billyland, but \$ is a distraction, our dream can combine \$, physicality and heartdream ("Humboldt House" example)
Bob Ullrich	Lack of pretension, judgment & gossip, tolerance, interdependent community
Bill Blackburn	Heart isn't "personal" its "universal"; healing ourselves/brothers/the environment/the world
David Hedden	Communicate our intimacy, our heart, our intention: word, smiles, chant, dance, mailing, phone calls
Ed Craig	Noticing that the size of our group (~30) is conducive; learning how to Dream and learning how to let the Dream be; surrender (not defeat but getting out of the way to let it happen)
Scott Selmanoff	"I love you" is the core; deepening deep space, entering heart to become who we are; teepees, 18-25 year-old gathering, hospice,
Duane Gammill	Billytown living community; outreach programs are vital, keeping us sustained and purposed; deepen consciousness of our history; discovery of ancient ritual, building spirituality, touching
Fred Dickson	I don't want to go to the analytical, it blocks spontaneity. Here the little boy is allowed. "Recess" from my serious life.
Marcus Borgman	Hope we can stay in our container, and not boil out.
Ezra Cole	Renewal 7 community; as we get comfortable with spirit our surroundings will support us and change. Child, Victim, Sabatuer, Prostitute: we all share Billy.
Todd Pederson	Men need this: heartspace
Bruce MacDonald	Found acceptance and a sense of my partner (Joe Ray) who let me be everything I am. Outreach, HIV work
Jim Hughson	"Florida" = slowly opening so that the center is open & available; learning how to allow it to happen; practice
John Foley	a doorknob
Jack Pilling	intimacy (non-drugged, real)
Stefen	homeland, breathing together, forming a "practice" together between gatherings; building life boats for dark times
William Stewart	Heartcircle

Saturday Morning: Breakout Topics

The areas where we commit to do sustainable work & development for the Billys.

<i>Topics garnering personal commitment of visioners:</i>	
Billyland	Establishing a "home" territory David Hedden, Fred Dickson, John Foley, Stephen, William Stewart
Fundraising	Fundraising generally and scholarhip (notaflof) David Brin, Jim Gilson, Richard Evans, Scott Selmanoff
Mastering/Mentoring	Mastering and mentoring Billy dreamspace and ritual; evolving to the next level Doug von Koss, Duane Gammill, Ike Dullinger, Jack Pilling, Ken Kunert
Outreach	Passign the hearflame to future Billys; "gardening" our neighborhoods, local outreach & inreach Joe Ballestreri, Mark Hoffheimer
Rebuilding	Rebuilding by taking it down to a core foundation of fundamentals; Keeping It Simple; realism Ezra Cole, Mike Goldstein, Ron Vanscoyk, Ruven Hannah

<i>Topics proposed, but not supported by personal commitment of visioners:</i>	
	Increasing personal visibility & creativity
	Growing a sense of organizational "ownership" & responsibility
	personal responsibility & owneship by all; many hands

Sunday Morning: Circle regarding the number of Billy-only and Billy+Billykin Gatherings

Concern was expressed that while our ongoing consensus is to have equal numbers of Billy-only and Billy+Billykin Gatherings, in practice we have more Billykin Gatherings if MidWinter Gatherings are not held.

Consensed: May Day 2009 will go forward as a Billy+Billykin gathering.

Consensed: In future years when there is a Billy-only MidWinter Gathering, May Day will be open to Billykin; and when no MidWinter is held, May Day will be a Billy-only gathering.

Stand asides: Mike Goldstein and Stefen.

Working Group Report 1 – Billy HomeLand Dreams

In Circle: Fred Dickson, John /Big Franny/ Foley, David Hedden, William Stewart

While the notion of BillyHomeLand has been a topic of conversation among Billies for many years, it had particular immediacy at this winter's Visioning Retreat, on account of the limbo status of Saratoga Springs. However our circle was unable to formulate any action plan, because the subject was too complex, and the vision too unformed, to admit of such specificity.

We began with a discussion of Saratoga Springs, as explained by Fred, who has followed the unfolding story closely from his vantage point as an investor. We felt that this was useful information, but more as a case study than as a starting-point for any potential group purchase of Saratoga Springs, which (we all agreed) would have to be an independent project, not under the auspices of the Billy Club.

Big Franny described his vision of a Billy-owned space that would consist of a modest house in the country, where three or four Billies would live and would offer respite space to other Billies in need of temporary shelter. His inspiration, he said, came from a house in Portland owned by Manifest, which is a non-profit organized by sometime Billy Bart Church, where transients can visit for a few days with consent of the residents.

William spoke of his dream of living in intentional residential community with other gay men, and of his sense of how it might come to pass. He said that this might or might not dovetail with the idea of a permanent home for the Billies, since there is no consensus at this time as to what "Billyland" might mean.

David articulated what was clear to all of us, that our topic of discussion was simply too amorphous for us to coalesce into a working group with specific tasks and goals. We are all drawn to the dream of having a space for gatherings and perhaps an associated residential community, secured for Billy use through ownership or agreement with an independent group of Billies stewarding land for such purposes; but making this real will require commitment and intention far beyond what a 90-minute circle could generate. If Billyland is to take physical form, it will most likely happen as a result of some self-starting cluster of Billies taking their own initiative, and then seeing whether their dream can converge with the needs of the larger community.

Working Group Report 2 – Fundraising

Attending the fundraising breakout meeting were:

Jim Gilson, David Brin, Bob Ullrich, Richard Evans, Todd Pederson, Bruce McDonald, Scott Selmanoff, Steve Rockwell, Bill Blackburn

Peter Deutsch and Jim Gilson have been working on the endowment process.

Please contribute to these ideas and add ideas in any way you can.

thank you,
scott selmanoff
sam33@mindspring.com

No Person Turned Away For Lack Of Funds

Suggested Strategy:

1. Creation story of the Billy club:
 - who we are?
 - what we want?
2. Planned giving campaign:
 - bequests campaign
 - Billy angels
 - major gifts.
3. Annual gift letter:
 - well written letter by the president to ask for donations.
4. Endowment process
 - a mechanism to receive money and gifts
 - open a bank account immediately
 - set up a system of choices for giving such as:
 - general foundation fund
 - billy emergency support fund
 - richard locke scholarship fund
 - planned giving
 - bequests
 - major gifts.
5. Donor intent:
 - money doesn't usually come unrestricted
 - many times the donor wants their named scholarship to last in perpetuity
 - endowments are restricted funds
 - grow the endowment to keep up with inflation.
6. Poz/Neg gathering
 - Bill Blackburn has some experience with this.
7. Richard has a friend in sf who has offered to help fluff our grant writing.
8. Grant for prevention and poz health.
9. Create a 2 year operating reserve fund invested conservatively to tide over during times of economic downturn.

Suggested Tactics:

1. Contact people to help write the creation story.

2. Ruven has offered to help coordinate a talent no talent show in S.F.
3. Jamie has offered to help coordinate a talent no talent show maybe in vallejo, maybe with food.
 - suggestion, to ask donor to cover costs of event/sponsor.
4. Membership/dues: David Grossblat is looking into that.
5. Auction/ raffle at July gathering.
6. Garage sale
7. Dances: David Cooney has a large studio in sf that might be available.
8. Billy boutique
9. SF gay pride: (Scott Selmanoff is looking into a, b, c)
 - a. collect donations at the "entrances"
 - b. sell bottled water and organic fruit. (a fruit stand)
 - c. sell beer and wine.
 - d. collect the money from working at the security tent last year.
10. Expand our fund raising on the website.
 - There is and excellent fund raising model on the spirit rock web site.
11. Contact the Mendicino Foundation and send a new hello letter out because they sent out a dear toby letter.
 - ask Marcus to please write a letter.
12. Walter in New York City suggested having a major donor call other people to ask to contribute.
13. Have a thank you dinner to honor past presidents.
14. Have a quiet special way to honor and thank all donors.
15. Contact different foundations to see which one is the best fit for our needs.
 - What would be the criteria of finding a foundation to manage our funds?
 - a. if they can manage the endowment portfolio
 - b. if they are indemnified
 - c. if these foundations have suffered losses as a result of current financial crisis
 - d. foundation information can be found online
 - e. Mendicino Foundation
 - f. Sonoma Foundation
 - g. Humbolt Foundation
 - h. Tides Foundation
 - i. Horizon Foundation
 - j. San Francisco Foundation
16. Daniel mendel is having a fundraiser march 28, 2009 at heartwalker studio in oakland.

Working Group Report 3 – Additional Fundraising Notes

by David Brin

Hi Billy Board, Marcus, Finance Committee, and Fundraising Volunteers!

I've offered to volunteer my efforts to raise money for the Billys. I'm happy to work with anyone else who is interested in this task.

Very briefly, I am a magazine editor, but for the past 10 years I have been editing alumni magazines, which means working with fundraisers. I've picked up a few things over the years.

Scott S. is writing up notes from our break-out group on Saturday. Here are some additional notes from me about fundraising in general and for the Billys in particular.

I believe that currently people who make donations to the Billys are given a choice of giving to the emergency fund, the Richard Locke Scholarship Fund, or to operating expenses – general fund. The Saturday breakout group recommended that the Billy Foundation start an endowment fund and to allow giving to the endowment as a fourth choice. There may be legal ramifications of having an endowment fund, so that needs to be researched. It will probably be many years before income from the endowment would make a substantial impact on the budget of the Billys, so this is long-term. I think we should also consider another category, in fundraising language “unrestricted gifts,” or gifts “for the Billys’ greatest need.” This allows you to put the money where it’s most needed at the moment, whether it be the emergency fund, the operating budget, or whatever. One idea is to designate income from the endowment as unrestricted.

Endowment Campaign

After the endowment account is opened, we should have an “endowment campaign.” This means essentially letting people know that we have an endowment fund, and that they can give to it. . . . We should explain what an endowment is (not everyone knows.) This “campaign” could take the form of a letter from the President of the Board to all Billys, and could be timed to be mailed (yes, I recommend snail mail for this) approximately 6 months after the “annual appeal” (the yearly letter asking for money from the President of the Board.) I can write a draft of the letter for the endowment campaign, to be edited by Mark, Jim G., Marcus, and/or anyone else.

Grants from Foundations and Government Agencies

It sounds like Richard Evans is willing to take this on (and has done some work already). I have done some grant writing and am willing to help with this, but I think my efforts could be used in other areas.

Planned Gifts

We should also spread the word about “planned giving” (fundraising language for gifts left in an individual’s will.) I believe we’ve received some money this way, and I believe some Billys have designated the Billy Foundation in their wills. . . . Individuals should probably be able to designate which “pot” of money their planned gift would go to: scholarship fund,

unrestricted, etc. One possibility for undesignated planned gifts would be to put them in the endowment fund.

Annual Fund

The Annual Fund, in fundraising terms, is the campaign that asks constituents to give a gift to the organization once per year. My sense is that what we have in place now is working fairly well. We need to be sure everyone is given an opportunity to donate, and I think we've done that with the President's annual letter. It could be ramped up to 2 asks per year, (spring and fall, for instance) and that could be tried at some point, but I'd like to see an appeal to the endowment fund for the second letter of the year.

Mailing List

Our mailing list is one of our greatest assets in fundraising. It should be updated as often as necessary and efforts should be ongoing to keep it current. Two methods that may or may not have been researched (as to their cost effectiveness) are a change of address request (can't remember what this is called now) and NCOA. For a fee, the post office will send you the forwarding address of an individual who has moved within the last year. (That's how all the catalogues catch up with you even though you've moved.) The statistics are surprising – something like in one year, 1 in 5 people on a typical mailing list have moved. This makes the service worth paying for, because we can't ask them for money if we don't have their address. And yes, you can use email, but it is by far less effective than snail mail. NCOA – national change of address – is a service of the post office that will merge their data base of changed addresses with another data base (ours). Most organizations that can afford to run NCOA once a year.

Matching Gifts

It's always a great incentive to have a matching gift. In addition to the gift itself, you have a good fundraising tactic for your annual givers. I know we've had matching gifts in the past, and we should attempt to determine if these individuals might give a matching gift again, or if there might be new donors who would be interested in making a matching gift.

Major Gifts

What I am most interested in right now is major gifts. For the Billys this probably means gifts of \$5,000 and above. In many nonprofits, in spite of healthy annual funds that may raise a substantial amount of money, major gifts will account for 95% or more of the total funds raised. This is why I think they are so important to us. I would like to see a major gift effort in place, and I am very willing to head that effort. This effort would need cooperation from several people in the organization. First we need to identify individuals with "capacity." In other words, who has the capability of making a major gift? If an individual does not have "capacity," we're "barking up the wrong tree" if we ask him for a major gift. Marcus, board members, and anyone else in a position to know should be asked about which Billys may be in a position to make a major gift. Obviously, this needs to be done discreetly and the information needs to be confidential. Often it's no secret anyway, and I do not mean to imply that there is any reason to be apologetic about fundraising, which is crucial to every nonprofit organization. Once a list of individuals is identified, we need to decide how we are going to ask for the gift. This can take some strategizing. If we know a Billy who is friends with this individual, we (I, a member of the fundraising committee, or a member of the board) could ask this individual if he would be willing to ask his friend for a

gift. “Asks” are almost always for a specific amount, determined by what we think the capacity of the potential donor is. (“Would you consider a gift of \$5,000 to the Billy Club?”) If we can’t identify a friend of the potential donor, generally the President of the organization makes the ask. (Compare: “Hi, I’m the chairman of the fundraising committee, and I’d like to ask you for a gift of \$10,000 to the Billy Club” to “Hi, I’m President of the Billy Club and I’d like to ask . . .”)

Cultivation

Sometimes part of the process is “cultivated” a prospective donor before asking for a gift. This means giving them special treatment in some way before asking. (If you wanted to fund the construction of a new library on your university campus, you would invite a prospective donor to campus, give them a special tour, take them out to lunch, etc.) I really don’t know what form this would take for us. Perhaps we could solicit ideas from board members and others.

Past Presidents’ Lunch or Dinner

I do have an idea for a related event that I brought up at the break-out group on Saturday, and the guys in the group liked the idea: a lunch or dinner for past presidents of the Billy Club. I am willing to take this on as a special project and do as much of the arrangements as I can. This might be something to do every other year. The reason I like this idea is that in addition to the gratitude we owe them, our past presidents are a tremendous resource. They could be turned to for advice about fundraising, for example. They are Billys who have had a deep commitment and have given much to the organization. It would be relatively easy to rent a private room in a restaurant, let them order from the menu, etc. (I am willing to fund this or do the fundraising for it.) I feel certain that even though this would be purely a “thank you” with no asking for anything involved, pressing concerns of the Billy Foundation would not be far from people’s minds, and asking any of these individuals for help at a later date would be far easier.

That’s it for now. Let me know if you’ve got comments or suggestions (dbrin@2davids.com). I’m eager to get going and I think the first step is to draft a letter asking for gifts to the endowment, but I’d like to get an official go-ahead. Next step would be to start work on the major gifts.

Thanks,
David

Working Group Report 4 – Mastering & Mentoring

Submitted by Duane Gammill

STRATEGY

- ▲ Billy Rituals foster brotherhood and intimacy.
- ▲ Billy Rituals bring participants into the present moment.
Meaning: brings our minds and spirits to the gathering and effectively releases noise or concerns that are not related to the gathering.
- ▲ Billy Rituals create Billy Space.
Meaning: participants feel connected to each other and/or Billys who are not physically present.
- ▲ Billy Rituals ground us in nature, keep us tied to Earth, or create a symbolic connection between participants and the planet.
- ▲ Billy Rituals may honor thematic or otherwise related elements.
Example: honoring the earth, fire, rain, wind, north, south, east, and west.

TACTICS

- ▲ Establish a Ritual Subcoordinator position to be filled for all gatherings.
- ▲ Develop a framework of gathering rituals in the form of an outline to be added to the gathering manual.
- ▲ Create space for Billy Magic
Meaning: weave rituals throughout the course of the gathering to direct the flow of energy for the sake of deepening intimacy and community.
 - Welcoming / Opening the gathering
 - Initiation for new Billys
 - Raising energy
 - Lowering energy
 - Closing a night before bedtime
 - Ending the gathering
 - Grief
 - Honoring the four elements and directions
- ▲ Develop a list of Billy Ritualists
Meaning: a Billy Ritualist is a Billy who practices or advocates the observance of ritual

Billy Ritualists: Doug von Koss, Jeff Alfonsus Mooney, Richard Applegate, Ken Kunert, Roland Hulstien, Ruven Hannah, Bill Blackburn, Steve Rockwell, Jack Pilling, Three, Duane Gammill

Working Group Report 5 – Outreach

Outreach: A report from the 2009 Visioning Retreat- Passing the Flame to New Billys and Cultivating Neighborhoods by Joe Balestreri in discussion with Mark Hoffheimer

What and Why: Our goal is to keep the Billys and Billy culture vital for many years to come. When society is on shaky ground, heart-centered communities increase our ability to weather hard times. We're looking for ways to increase attendance at gatherings and local activities and increase individual involvement in heart circles, potlucks, governance, heart circles, etc.

Who: Like-minded folks, guys of color, youth, former Billys.

How: Outreach via Internet, print and other media. Improving word of mouth, person to person outreach skills. Purposeful networking with like-minded groups. Billys as a group volunteering with non-profits (officially or not, depending on the organization) with the indirect benefit of getting our name out there while doing good works in line with our ideals.

*We discussed the idea that local activities, potlucks, heart circles, low-cost campouts, talent shows and fundraisers introduce potential members to all that's good about the Billys.

Brainstorming: The Billy Recruitment Corps! (No, it's not about wearing smart quasi-military outfits)- just getting old Billys to commit to introducing our organization to all those guys who'd benefit from knowing us and who in-turn would bring new heart centered energy with them, whether they know it yet or not. Perfecting the elevator speech-describe the Billys in 30 seconds). A voluntary workshop, salon or support group at every gathering on improving personal recruitment skills. A welcome wagon. Following-up by phone or e-mail with newbies.

More brainstorming: Pass the word beyond the gay and bi communities, caring straight folk and lesbians will pass the word to their gay boyfriends in need. Support local gatherings, (urban and rural), low cost campouts- Billy style, major gatherings organized by local Billys in their region, "how-to" guides for setting-up potlucks and other local events

Many Billys have, in the past, been adverse to publicity, word of mouth suited us just fine. These days energy is waning at our big gatherings and even locally. As a group we're getting older. Costs for gatherings have increased. The ideas presented here are presented with the hope that at least some of them will help us, the Billys, continue to be a vital force for our own lives and in the larger community beyond. We have to get creative. We have to recognize the realities. When I think of life without gatherings, well it's been very much worth the cost to my pocketbook and yet, if local Billy culture, which costs very little and requires less organizational energy fades-out, it doesn't bode well for the larger Billy community. We need both aspects to be healthy.

Billys are welcome to join me in a committee (support group) to work on gathering new souls to our family, thanks Joe Balestreri (Giuseppe) amato@sonic.net 707-331-0191

Working Group Report 6 – Rebuilding from Core

Tearing Down to Core Foundations and Rebuilding The Billies

This small group started by identifying the desired result: sustainability.

From that point of view we discussed whether to use a “top down” approach that looked at everything we are currently doing with an eye to eliminating outdated or unsustainable elements, or a “bottom up” approach that starts with what we want and build the organization around those elements. In general we thought both approaches have merit and should be considered.

A brief history was provided of how Billies came to be, starting with two-night, three-day camping events and evolving over time into six gatherings a year. The original intent was related to the need to discover the community of gay/bi men in rural areas, and as time went by the additional purpose of outreach to HIV/AIDS community became another component of the Billy Club.

“TOP DOWN” DISCUSSION

We then discussed the cycle of gatherings, and the current structure of the club, with these points considered:

- ⤴ Do some gatherings lose money and should be eliminated?
- ⤴ Could we hold some gatherings that were more simple and less expensive, such as camping during good weather, and that might be more interesting to rural Billies?
- ⤴ Gatherings had evolved to include 20 or more sub-coordinators, and perhaps could be simplified by consolidating functions into fewer positions, resulting in more ease of coordinating and presenting gatherings.
- ⤴ Gatherings could have more simple meals.
- ⤴ Gatherings could have less decorating or simplified logistics.
- ⤴ Some gathering elements could be simplified or eliminated, such as talent shows, rituals, workshops.
- ⤴ We could eliminate some gatherings to have fewer events each year.
- ⤴ We considered whether we should close the office, or move the office, to reduce overhead in that way.
- ⤴ We considered whether the resource coordinator was an essential function, or could we eliminate paid staff to reduce overhead?
- ⤴ We considered whether the emergency support fund was an essential function or one that could be eliminated to minimize administrative work?
- ⤴ We considered whether we might eliminate the scholarship fund, but quickly acknowledged that it is an essential function.

Following discussion of these points, we arrived at an understanding that:

- ⤴ The cycle of five or six gatherings a year was essential to generate sufficient operating costs to support the office and resource coordinator.
- ⤴ We arrived at the understanding that some gatherings don't generate revenue to support overhead, but do break even for gathering costs.
- ⤴ The office was thought to provide an essential function that has become an important focal point for gay men in Mendocino, although it was acknowledged that

the majority of men are now in Sonoma, San Francisco, and other points outside Mendocino;

- ⤴ The resource coordinator was considered an essential function for club operations that takes the pressure off Board members and volunteers, who were already managing a huge commitment to leadership of the club.
- ⤴ Further discussion might occur to confirm these conclusions over the next few months, as deemed appropriate by responses to these conclusions.

Other important topics considered:

- ⤴ Some variations or changes to the “Billy kin” or “Billies only” gatherings was a topic that needed further discussion.
- ⤴ Some economy could be realized from minimizing paper mailings, using more electronic communication, mailing postcards with “save the date” information, and directing Billies to log onto the website to register or print the call;

In conclusion, the “top down” discussion resulted in some minor suggestions to reduce costs, but validated that all the elements currently in place served the club well, and could not be easily re-organized without unintended consequences. An example of that is elimination of one or more gatherings that results in reduced revenue for overhead, reduced work for the resource coordinator, and further contribute to a downward spiral of revenue. It was felt that the current operations did represent essential functions.

“BOTTOM UP” DISCUSSION

As time was running out, a brief discussion of a “bottom up” approach resulted in identification of a partial list of core values, in no particular priority order, that would require further discussion to turn into an organizational plan. Some core values mentioned were:

- ⤴ INTIMACY (emotional, spiritual, but not necessarily sexual)
- ⤴ COMMUNITY
- ⤴ COMMUNICATION
- ⤴ RENEWAL
- ⤴ INCLUSION
- ⤴ NEW BILLIES
- ⤴ Taking a SABBITICAL from gatherings to put together a new organizational vision.

Again, these values are in no particular priority order, and time ran out to complete a more exhaustive list and build a set of suggestions for objectives to integrate these core values into an organizational structure.

Summary prepared by Ezra.

Appendix A – Billy Mission & Values Statements



Billy Mission Statement

The mission of the Billys is to foster community, intimacy, and personal exploration among gay, bi, and queer men through shared values and heart-centered brotherhood.

Billy Values Statement

We are a heart-centered community woven together by shared values and by our shared experience as gay, bi, and queer men.

We strive to be present and mindful with ourselves and each other and to foster:

- compassion, generosity, honesty, and respect for ourselves and for others.
- responsibility for ourselves, to each other, and to our community, including those in need.
- personal expression and growth.
- fun, frolic, and fabulousness.
- celebration of our sexual and spiritual natures.
- an environment conducive to our physical, emotional, and sexual health, safety, and wellbeing.
- welcoming and active integration of new Billys as well as openness to friends and family who share our values.
- diversity that embraces differences including race and ethnicity, class, age, body type, HIV status, physical ability, education, and financial circumstances; we welcome gay-identified transmen.
- the building of bridges to other communities that support our mission and share our values.
- authenticity.
- reverence for nature.
- commitment to resolving conflict through active engagement.

We encourage ourselves to be present and mindful by advocating an environment free of drugs and alcohol at our gatherings.

We envision the creation of a world based on principles of nonviolence, sustainability, cooperation, service, and the building of deeper wisdom through shared perspective.

Heart Circle is our central ritual and consensus is our process; they embody our values.

Appendix B – Billy Board Working Agreements

1. We agree that our process for decision making is consensus. We understand that consensus values include: full participation; shared responsibility; mutual understanding; and inclusive solutions.
2. We agree that meetings shall start on time.
3. We agree that one person speaks at a time.
4. We agree to treat each other with courtesy and respect.
5. We agree to keep an open mind. We will listen to the whole idea before responding.
6. We agree to keep communication focused on concerns rather than on an individual's position. We will speak to the issues; personal attacks are not acceptable.
7. We agree to be brief in our words when we can, cognizant that others may wish to speak. We need not repeat or rephrase another's words when we are in agreement.
8. We agree to stay engaged when we have disagreements. We will not walk away. We will try to understand.
9. We agree that when conflict arises, we will address it.
10. We agree that if conflict does arise, a board member shall intervene as necessary.

(12/13/99 Council Meeting – consensus
modified 5/18/2008 – consensus)



Appendix C – “History of the Billys” by Ron Vanscoyk

Beginnings: a Billy Story

Beginnings are so important. Yet where does the tale of the Billys truly begin; and what is true of a tale from only one perspective when it is about a thing that affects so many? Well, my perspective is all I have so this is what I remember from my point on this wheel.

The genesis of the Billy Club, I believe, actually started a couple of years before the first gathering in 1988. My neighbor on Greenfield Ranch, a nurse named Lynn Meadows, came to me and Jackson and Terry and Richard with the story of a young man in the Ukiah hospital dying of AIDS who was alone with no friends or family. This seemed absolutely tragic to her that anyone would have to go through this with no support whatsoever. In talking, the idea of creating an AIDS volunteer network formed -- soon began the first training for MCAVN (Mendocino County AIDS volunteer network).

Not surprisingly for this rural county, our first clients were men who lived in the hills. Having an isolated lifestyle made living with AIDS much more challenging, and made it more important to find other gay men who lived rurally so we could support one another.

This was also true for those of us who did not have AIDS, yet longed for contact with other gay men since we were so few and far between. For me, personally, I loved living the homesteading, back-to-the-land lifestyle, yet I felt isolated from my gay identity with no place to meet others or even to know how to discover who and where we all were. (This was a decade before the internet became widespread.)

In our discussions of such issues we decided to put out a call for a “Good Times Gathering For Rural Gay Men” for Memorial Day weekend in 1988. The genesis circle for this first gathering were Steven Day, his partner Michael Huddleston, Henry Horton (all men from around Laytonville), Terry Brown, Richard DiGiulio, Jackson Branum, and Ron (that’s me!) Vanscoyk (all from Greenfield Ranch).

Terry had been talking to Shelly Martin from the Health Department, and it turned out there were funds for AIDS education that would contribute refreshments and supplies to help this event go well. We scheduled the party (because really that’s all it was and all it was intended to be) to be held at Henry Horton’s house in Laytonville. Henry also arranged for overnight use of the Triad house. This was an amazing house on a hill overlooking the Laytonville valley. It had a whole hidden wing of the house that you accessed by sliding back a wall bookshelf. It was shaped like a two story horseshoe with a hot tub in the middle and decks all around. What a fun place for a get together!

We knew a few rural men (very few!) and there was a list of names from a potluck lunch that had happened a couple of years back, and some names given us from a bar that existed for a few months at Lake Mendocino, and a few more from another bar at Clearlake Oaks in Lake County. Altogether we had a list of twenty-seven names.

Terry did a cut and paste call (you know, scissors and paper) that he and Richard and Jackson and I sat around our dining room table licking stamps and stuffing envelopes to send out.

The day of the event saw sixty-five men show up, and we had ourselves a time! What a delight to see so many gay men together and share stories of our common lifestyle. In that first circle we didn’t go much deeper than to say our names and where we lived and a bit about what drew us together; but we sure had some thigh slappin’ fun with a fiddle on the porch, eating together, then going up the hill to the Triad house for the night and, finally, all departing the next day with “whajushappened” grins on our faces.

Well that was certainly good enough to do again!

The second gathering was scheduled for Labor Day weekend that same year (1988) at Jackson’s and my place on Greenfield Ranch just west of Ukiah. This time we had a list of over sixty names and, sitting around our kitchen table addressing and stamping and stuffing envelopes, we kinda got lazy and didn’t want to hand write the return address on all of them. We asked Richard and got his consent to use the rubber stamp for his hand made card business that he called “The Billy Club”.

Now a bit about that name... As it happened, when Terry and Richard got together, Richard had recently broken up with a man named Terry and didn’t feel nearly as warm to the name of this new man in his life as he did to the man himself. Wanting to speak affectionately to each other (as lovers do) they fished around for another affectionate name they could call one another. Annette seemed a bit too demure, and Bronco seemed a

bit too bold. Billy -- now there was a name even Goldilocks would like -- just right! It is indeed a name of affection to this day. (Imagine we could have been the Annette Club!)

So Richard, an incredibly talented artist of hand-made cards, began selling his cards and wanted a name for his card business -- which brings us back to the story of us lazy bumpkins sitting around the dining room table not wanting to hand write all of the return addresses to the second gathering call.

Richard's rubber stamp had not only the name "The Billy Club", but also their P.O. Box address, which would serve perfectly well for a return address. Voila, out went the sixty-one calls.

We were delighted and surprised to have well over a hundred men show up for this two-day gathering. The circle stories went a bit deeper as we shared more of ourselves -- there was no doubt we were onto something!

Two men who lived in Manchester on the coast were so delighted at the energy we conjured that they offered to host a gathering at their place the following Memorial day in 1989. Being that country folk often had dogs at home, we thought it might be ok to allow folks to bring their dogs. Omigod! There were well over thirty dogs that showed up at the third gathering, and what an experience that was! Dog poop everywhere, dogfights during meals -- it became known as "the dog gathering". There was as much attention on the dogs as there was on each other. From this experience came our policy of no pets allowed at gatherings. This also was the gathering where Bob and Roy from Heartwood discovered the Billys.

The fourth gathering was back to our land on Labor Day weekend of 1989 -- this was the gathering that debuted our first talent/no talent show. What a discovery that we could entertain ourselves so thoroughly and delightfully! Our connection to one another began feeling like a heart-centered community of friends and we really began looking forward to this time together.

During the following year (1990) we began inviting some of our dear friends from the more urban bay area. Well, it was one of those sparks-hitting-drytinder moments. The ensuing flood of bay area men proved to be quite a splash on our networking-of-rural-gay-men experience. Many feelings were shared in heart circle regarding protecting our rural gatherings from the onslaught of the higher population of urban men.

Many rural Billys felt that the Billy Club was the only thing going for gay men who lived in the rural counties, whereas the bay area offered many venues for gay men to get together. As the sharing deepened, we became conscious of the fact that the bars and discos didn't really create the opportunity for coming together and meeting in such a rich way. Turns out those coming from urban areas were feeling isolated as well. What was happening at these gatherings was a different nurturing than was available in all the city venues.

Sometime during this period is when Dave Carroll bought Saratoga Springs and began hosting the Billy Gatherings; and Bob and Roy invited us to celebrate the New Year at Heartwood for the first time, but the mists of time have made vague to me the exact timing of these things. I do know that Jackson and I hosted the summer gathering in that third year with two hundred thirty Billys showing up, and was it festive!

A bit about the first Heartwood gathering holds some interest in our evolving history. It was at this gathering where, for the first time, we were at a location that had women in their community -- wondrous, heartfelt, conscious women and straight identified men who took to us and we to them. The loving Billy energy was palpable and irresistibly enticing to this wonderful healing community/school. They asked to join us in our heart circles. (I believe one Billy left the gathering at the thought that a woman would sit with us in heart circle.)

They were invited to join us at one heart circle and that was one of the more powerful circles I have ever attended, with all hearts opening at Lisa's story. We still recognized the value of being together, just us gay brothers, and also the value that can be had by opening our circle from time to time to include other dear ones. The Billys now have some gatherings for Billys only, and some where we can invite our dear "Billy kin" to join us.

During the first few years of getting together, all the work of putting on gatherings was done by volunteers. Mainly Terry Brown was holding the office together, which was located in a back room in The Dragon's Lair, the import and handcrafts shop that Jackson and I owned. As the gatherings got bigger and more frequent, that task was becoming quite a commitment, and burnout was a real issue.

One night in 1993 I got a call from an exuberant Billy brother, Doug Murphy, who had the revelation that the Billy Club should form as a 501c3 non-profit corporation. He felt this would greatly benefit that which we do, and allow us to do and provide so much more. I, personally, had reservations regarding this shift towards what I perceived as developing a bureaucracy. At the same time I knew that, with volunteer burnout, the Billy Club

could fade away. This new approach would draw a circle together to oversee the ongoing evolution of the Billys and, at that time, this seemed vital to its survival. I guessed it would depend on who stepped forward to be on the Board (would they see themselves as directors or as nurturing stewards?) and how connected to the community would they be?

Thus was formed The Billy Foundation with a Board of Directors using the consensus model of decision making. Throughout the ensuing history of the Billys, I have always been impressed with the heartfelness of those who have volunteered to serve on the Billy Board of Directors. Their many contributions, to this day, are a core reason why The Billy Club is alive and kicking up its heels!

One of the avenues by which the Billy Board engaged the community was with the implementation of an Advisory Retreat. These were overnight two day retreats where invitations to attend were sent to Billys who were active in being coordinators at the events or being on a committee, or some other participation. It was an attempt to provide a conduit for the Community to come together with the Board to advise and exchange ideas. At these retreats we looked at how the Billy Club was evolving. At an early retreat we came up with our first mission statement. After a couple of these retreats we recognized that, really, what we were doing together was fostering our future. To capture this sense the name was changed from "Advisory Retreat" to "Visioning Retreat".

It was about two years after the Board of Directors (BOD) formed that we passed through one of our crucibles as an organization/community. The Billy gatherings had always had a policy of no one turned away for lack of funds (NOTAFLOF). We were evolving with the fact that gatherings were no longer held on homesteads. . . we actually had to pay for venues. Plus, the cost of food and cooking and more was having an affect on our operating funds. It also seemed that the policy of "pay what you can" was evolving into "pay what you want to". In other words, the income was down and the outgo was up, thus creating an imbalance that was sliding us into financial crisis.

The Board of Directors, seeing this, passed a directive that, from now on, one could only attend a gathering if one could afford the fee. The following gathering at Saratoga Springs was in an uproar over this handing down of a decree from the BOD changing a policy that had always been a core value throughout our history. It was felt that the community at large had not been notified that there was any financial problem, thereby not given the chance to come up with other, perhaps less drastic, solutions to this issue. In life, it's often the case that a crisis sparks growth, and this was no exception.

Many things evolved from this crisis. A Visioning Retreat (our first by that name) was planned to come up with a solution to this dilemma. At that retreat the Scholarship policy was formed.

Among the values that became a giant "Aha!" for me at this retreat (so many "Aha!'s" have come to me through this journey with the Billys), was in the discussion of how Billys could contribute if they were low on funds. I thought it quite rational and fair that, if a Billy didn't have money to contribute, he could contribute energy by working at the gathering. As this discussion deepened we all realized that this was setting up a class system wherein those who have less money become, to some degree, servants of those who have more. We decided to continue the policy of asking all gathering attendees to volunteer for gathering duties; that these duties be shared equally by all, regardless of what one can afford to pay. Indeed, the very word, community, derives from two Latin words: *com* (with), and *munitas* (tasks). That we are all equally responsible for the tasks of our coming together is what gives us a stronger feeling of being in community with one another.

We also implemented Advisory Circles [aka Community Circles] to be held at every gathering as a regular conduit of communication between the Board and the Community so there would always be opportunities to tap into the wisdom of the community at large.

During the next gathering at Heartwood, the first advisory circle discussed the value of changing the language of "Billy Board of Directors" to "Billy Council". It was felt that this more reflected how this circle operated and that it would draw a different energy from those involved. Rather than the feeling of directing the Billy Club as a hierarchy, they would feel drawn to work together in counsel with one another as part of the community rather than from without.

In 1996, we also saw the need for hired staff: an office manager (rather than having the Board micromanaging everything). The Board asked several original Billys to join them in the selection process. It was very hard to choose between the wonderful heartfelt Billy applicants, but Charlie Seltzer became our first Office Manager. After two fabulous years at the helm, Charlie was ready to move on to other things and we were faced with the hiring process again. From Charlie's input about his experience, it seemed that "Resource Coordinator"

was a more apt title for the position than was “Office Manager”. Scott Love then became our first “Resource Coordinator” in November of 1998. The efforts of the person who holds this responsibility is truly the ‘lube’ of this community. Thank you so much, Marcus (Borgman), for carrying on this vital work with such a good spirit and with such competence!

So where does one go in trying to capture the essence and evolution of the Billy Club? There are so many layers and so many stories. If we find that what we do together has value in our lives, may we feel open and free to talk about it amongst ourselves and with others. I feel the more we tell and hear our stories, the more possibility that we may find a way to define this value.

We are continuing to evolve as a community in a very uncertain world. I believe the world can use many of the values that our community embraces. I wonder how the Billys will evolve as we walk forward in our continuing history?

Ron Vanscoyk