

Field for Treasure

The Bethlehem Farm Newsletter

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2

SUMMER 2007

The Farm Community Grows!

"I am so blessed to call these wonderful, committed, passionate people my friends and companions." - Russ Plywaczynski

BF caretaker

Colleen Fitts

Colleen comes to Bethlehem Farm after three years of planning and long-distance work with Bethlehem Farm. After attending Loyola University Chicago, she spent two years working at Nazareth Farm, got married to Eric, moved to Morgantown, WV, and graduated with a Master's Degree in Social Work from West Virginia University this May. Colleen loves working with her hands, whether it's working on the farm vehicles, framing walls, or creating unique quilts. On quiet evenings at the farm, you'll find her enjoying the view from the porch hammock chair.

Eric Fitts

After graduating from Loyola University Chicago in 1999, Eric spent three years working at Nazareth Farm, substitute taught for a year in Wisconsin, worked for two years at Wheeling (WV) Jesuit University as mentor of the Mother Jones House, before marrying Colleen. Eric graduated with a

Master's in Public Administration and a Certificate in Non-Profit Management from West Virginia University this past May, in preparation for his role as director. Eric's previous involvement with the Farm includes three years of work in various roles on the Advisory Board. Eric splits his time between the garden, the worksites, and the office.

Brian DeRouen

Brian grew up in Northern California and after high school left for four quick years of college in Indiana. Now more than 10 years later he has not returned to California but has called Indianapolis, Detroit, Dayton, and now Pence Springs, WV home. Brian comes to Bethlehem Farm from the University of Dayton where he studied Theology in Grad School, met and married his lovely wife Kathleen, and most recently was the Environmental Sustainability Coordinator. Brian has a passion for Social Justice, Nonviolence, and during free time at the Farm is exploring the hills and hollows of the area on his bicycles.

Kathleen DeRouen

Kathleen grew up and lived in Southwest Ohio before moving to

West Virginia. She most recently worked at the University of Dayton as a campus minister where two years prior she received a masters degree in Pastoral Ministry. Kathleen married Brian soon after graduation, and for their honeymoon they drove around the country visiting family, friends, and beautiful national parks. Kathleen enjoys traveling and her adventures have taken her to many places both in and out of the country. Still on the list of places to visit are Alaska, New England, Europe, and many more.

Larry DeRouen

Larry was born in Texas and lived in Ohio before moving to the Farm. The adjustment from living in the house to life in a pasture has been a bit challenging but the abundance of crab apples which have fallen within eating distance have helped to ease the transition. Larry loves belly rubs and is passionate about the movement to shut down factory farms, which is close to his pot belly piggy heart. All who meet Larry immediately recognize him as Brian's son as he clearly got his father's good looks.

Road Repair Complete

We want to say a huge THANK YOU! to all who enabled us to repair our half-mile driveway this spring. Those of you who have been here before probably remember a rather bumpy ride up to the Farm. Now thanks to many of you who donated, and thanks to our local driveway expert, Grant, Bethlehem Farm's driveway has been graded, many tons of rock and gravel have been laid, the road is now wide enough for two vehicles to pass each other, and it now has the necessary number of large culverts that will channel water away from the road as well as proper ditches to carry the water to the culverts.

We are grateful to know that the passage between Bethlehem Farm and the community will now be safe for our volunteers, caretakers, and community friends. Now that we can be more assured of the safe condition of the road, we will be able to explore ways to expand our programs and community outreach in the winter months.

A special thank you to Tom Murray and to the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston!

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BETHLEHEM FARM WISH LIST:

- Prayers
- Stamps
- Paint brushes
- Weed whackers
- Band saw
- Scroll saw
- Belt sander
- Portable air compressor
- \$5,000 to pay off the road repair loan
- #2 Phillips screw bits
- Compact Fluorescent light bulbs
- More prayers

God in your Back Pocket

By Jason Hilton, Summer Servant

With compassion in their eyes and soot covering their clothes, I witnessed high-schoolers and their chaperones work long, hot days in the ashes of Brian Boyle's home, badly damaged by an electrical fire in late June. Working through the summer heat and pouring rain, volunteers would only put down their shovels to hear Brian talk about candle-making, working alongside Dorothy Day, the numerous projects he has volunteered for, or his son and two daughters. After meeting such an amiable man and realizing what their service and company meant to Brian, not a soul walked onto that site and left untouched. The most moving moment came on my third day working at the house, a little more than a week after the fire. We had spent two full days focused on cleaning up Raphael's room, which included a couch, enough ashes and wood to fill a couple dozen wheel barrows, and more than fifteen trash bags full of clothes, shoes, insulation, and other unsalvageable items. Arriving on that third day, I saw Brian upset for the first and only time during my two weeks with him. He was mad at himself for forgetting to tell the groups to be looking for a pair of jeans in Raphael's room with a belt on them. In a pocket of those jeans was a pocket knife that Raphael's grandfather had given to him. Raphael had reminded his dad about this important keep-sake, but this message wasn't relayed to the groups before bagging up all the trash from the room. So Brian asked us to go through the bags and look for the jeans. As I'm hearing this, I was thinking 'Does he seriously expect us to sort through all those bags? What if the knife fell out of the pocket? What if he left them in another pair of pants?' But before I even began thinking about how to go about this, three volunteers were already on their way to the bags. Two of them had just gotten to a bag when the third opened up a bag, and pulled out a pair of jeans right off the top. They just happened to have a black leather belt around the waist. He felt the pockets, reached inside one, and pulled out a pocket knife, neither burnt nor rusted, but as good as new. That just goes to show that God is everywhere, even in an old, burnt-down house overlooking a small West Virginia town.



A workcrew takes a break to flex their muscles and enjoy the view from Brian's future living room.

New Board Members!

Katie Noonan

Born and raised in Louisville, Katie attended Loyola University Chicago. She then moved to Baltimore, where she worked with teenagers on probation in the city. She attended law school at night at the University of Baltimore while working with the legal side of the juvenile justice system. This fall she will begin working with a Baltimore firm focusing on real estate law. In October she will marry Brian Clark, and the two will live in Maryland with their dog, Widener.

Allison Loecke

Born in Illinois, educated in Minnesota and Ohio, and most recently employed at Xavier University, Allison loves to rock out on air guitar and square dance. Other passions include peanut M&M's, the West Wing, and her forever boyfriend John Denver. She is the proud mother of Winona, her kitty who loves to flush toilets.

A Word from a Distant Relative

By Matt Losco, Archmere Academy

My time at Bethlehem Farm has been the best experience of my life. I went with twenty-two people I didn't know, well or at all, and I made friendships that will last a lifetime. We laughed, we cried, but most importantly, I think we all discovered something about ourselves. My time at the Farm was as refreshing as it was enjoyable; however, the consummation of the experience came at our final nighttime prayer. We all discussed, in a circle, where we had seen God that week. I was last to go, and I used that opportunity to dig deep into my heart and find God. About halfway through the group, I found Him, and everything clicked; the pieces fell into place and I knew what to say. After years of yearning for what, if anything, I meant to others, I saw that very meaning. Like God, I simply had to look deep in my heart. I realized that I meant a world of things: Companionship, optimism, steadfastness. I found what I was worth to my friends, to myself, and I cried for two reasons: The enormity of the revealed secret, and the overwhelming joy that inundated my entire being. I was transformed; I had found hope. Hope for friends, for the Earth, but most of all, for the future, a future that my friends and I will start. I have found, through Bethlehem Farm, that although hope may be buried or lost, it is always there; we just have to look. As long as we continue to hope, the world will be a better place. Thanks to Bethlehem Farm, I have a hope, a light. I am the Body, you are the Body, we are the Body, and inside each of us is hope, a light that never goes out.

Fundraising Update

Thank you to our donors for your generous contributions! We have raised \$48,912 towards our goal of \$80,000 for fiscal year 2007 (10.1.06 – 9.30.07)!

As a result, we were able to strengthen our retreat programs, serve the local community effectively, and develop the Farm facilities for future growth. We have built more bunks for larger volunteer groups, completed the road repair so everyone has safer travel to and from the Farm, acquired a generator for use in times of power outages, and increased our spending on low-income home repair projects 10-fold.

This year has been a turning point for

Bethlehem Farm. Our Caretaker community has grown from one to five (and will be six by the end of the summer), so we are taking on much more service work in the local community. Since we have not yet met our fundraising goal, some projects and future growth are on hold while we struggle to make ends meet. We could do more towards our mission with the generous help of your contribution.

The final \$31,088 will be hard to come by in less than two months time, but we are confident that we will meet our goal with the continued generosity from caring individuals who see the critical need for Bethlehem Farm's work in this world.

- Eric Fitts, Director



FUNDS RAISED SINCE
OCTOBER 2006

Volunteers are hard at work putting on Rick and Sean's new roof.



“Welcome Home”

A Poem by Kevin Chalifoux
of Xaverian Brothers High School

Struggling at home
It's hard to stay awake
And realize you're the one
Who will come to make
All things new and great.
The challenges seem hopeless
And all around is despair
Then I dropped all my worries
And came here, into the open air.
My burdens were all lifted
And suddenly my spirit grew
For here, Your Spirit's all around
And I'm fresh; new.
I can now feel you with me
Together with friends or alone
This phrase always brings me back to You:
WELCOME HOME

The Bethlehem Farm Experience

By Jonathan Shepherd, Walsh Jesuit High School

The sun rises and your vision is fixed
On a place where all seems perfect.
Beyond the mountains and pasture,
Lies a place that forces the heart to beat faster.
Where evil turns to good, and all come together,
To form friendships that will last forever.
Raised on a mountain of the horizon to scope
Out the twilight with a sense of hope.
Feeling as you're on top of the world,
Where all of the mystical feelings unfurl.
Whether a dreary day or stormy night,
Faith keeps dreams clearly in sight.
This special venue is the home of Atonement,
In which all live for the moments
Where we come together as a community,
To function in a cycle of loving continuity.
The atmosphere is filled with electricity in the air,
And emotions are expressed without a care.
Stretched to extreme depths beyond the stars,
Is the abyss of freedom by little or by far.
Representing an epitome of heaven on Earth,
As new faith lives are given birth.
Relieving our souls of infinite vice,
To lead a journey free of strife.
This special place is a blessing from above,
A place where we have come together and learned how to love.

Bethlehem Farm

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Colleen Fitts explains the need for a new mission statement:

Have you ever tried to explain Bethlehem Farm to someone who hasn't experienced it? We have—and we get so excited about the various aspects of our mission, that we have been known to get a little wordy in our explanations. In an effort to have a concise declaration of who we are and what we do, we tightened up our “mission statement,” which you see above. We think that our enhanced mission statement will be very helpful: it can help you and us explain what we are striving to do, and it can continue to act as a guide for us as we make decisions about the path and growth of Bethlehem Farm. Check it out-- we hope that it speaks for itself.



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Bethlehem Farm Mission Statement

Bethlehem Farm is
a Catholic community in Appalachia
that transforms lives
through service with the local community and
the teaching of sustainable practices.

We invite volunteers to join us
in living the Gospel cornerstones of
community, prayer, service and simplicity.

A Reflection on our New Mission Statement

By Eric Fitts

I will reflect on our mission from three different perspectives: sacrifice, celebration, and creation. For this edition, the subject will be Celebration.

Celebration

As a people on a journey, we are always becoming, always working towards our goal, always striving to grow in faith, hope and love. Amidst the poverty we encounter on a daily basis, it can be easy to see only more work to do, an endless horizon of bringing about the reign of justice. In the context of this journey, it can be easy to forget about all the good that has been done along the way. It is important from time to time to celebrate the fruits of our mission, to step back and recognize the difference between where we are now and where we have come from.

In this spirit, we celebrate:

- *the movement of the Holy Spirit in preparing our hearts for this work
- *the donation of the property from the Kirwan family 2 ½ years ago
- *Russ and Julie's arrival in January of 2005
- *our first volunteer group in March of 2005
- *our dreams coming to fruition after all the planning and hard work
- *the completion of our heating system and road repair projects
- *roofs that no longer leak, ramps for the wheelchair-bound, homes for the homeless
- *friends and neighbors who have welcomed us so warmly to this corner of West Virginia
- *the great gift of self given by
 - +current and past Caretakers
 - +our many summer servants
 - +the advisory board: Tom, Liz, Julie, Jana, George, Allison, and Katie
 - +Dan Chmura in designing and installing our heating system
 - +our donors, both large and small, who enable us to exist
 - +the adult, college, and high school volunteers who grace our home each year
- *2 ½ years of programs, outreach, retreats, lives transformed, and harvests

Most of all, we celebrate the beginning of lives being laid down for one another.