

Non-Profit Happenings

Our Village Community Center is a Farm, an Orchard, a Barn, a School

by Nancy Kurtz

“We’re known as a ‘farm’.” Annie Thomas, Our Village Community Center’s Executive Director says, “but our focus is increasingly on families.” The inter-generational mentoring envisioned and ongoing involves “capturing stories and knowledge of our elders, which is so important to the children and to us,” while offering family support and therapy, as well as honoring and encouraging the individual child’s natural abilities and desires, giving time and space for movement and play indoors and out. “We observe some real magic. It’s soothing to see kids who’ve been in school all day just come, run and move and get fresh air.”

I’m sitting with the “bad-assed women’s group”—a trio of passionate advocates of and workers at Our Village—Annie Thomas, Sego Lily teacher “Miss Laura” Hines, and Susan Baffico, self-proclaimed “keeper of the trees”.

The story at Our Village, is continuously unfolding. It begins with the holistic “head, hands, heart” philosophy derived from the Waldorf School, and extends to the child’s connection with other people, young and old, as well as the natural world. The school’s play area itself is extensive and in line with Our Village’s core philosophies. Nonetheless, as Baffico tells me, “The secret ingredient is the dirt.”

Our Village’s pre-school’s first location was at Moab’s Youth Garden Project. It was ten years later that Thomas found the perfect place of their own, a 5-plus acre farm on the west side of Moab that was once owned by “Farmer Ray” Alger, who did not want to see his treasured home offered on the general market. Annie’s children would go across the street to play at the farm, and she jumped on the chance to acquire it. “We saved it from being developed in 2018.” Annie says.

Behind Tex’s Riverways on 500 West you enter a different world. There is a school house for the children who attend Sego Lily pre-school, a tree house behind it for kids to clamber on and behind that the picturesque red barn and the treed garden area that houses horses, chickens, rabbits, and goats. Beside the trees there are play areas full of animals, tree stumps, vegetation, and, of course, piles of dirt.



“I learn from these children every day,” says Hines. “95 percent of five-year-olds are creative geniuses, we all have it initially. The children remind us.”

The Farmers Market at Our Village started three years ago with a grant from Utah Health and Human Services. Accommodating local food producers and held on Thursday evenings throughout the summer, this market has proven to be a connecting point for Our Village.

And there is a desire for even greater interface with the community—“a lot of people still don’t know we’re here.”

It’s Friday morning and we’re sitting at a picnic table under the trees. Baffico encourages me to get the word out about the farm’s desire to welcome more volunteers on Friday mornings, 9 till noon, when the 50 or 60 fruit trees and the entire garden area open up to anyone who can help mulch, prune or, weed, depending upon the season, providing the perfect opportunity to interact with this unique locale.

For more information: <https://www.ourvillagemoab.org>. 435-260-0294

Grand Area Mentoring: Two Decades of Youth Support in Moab

by Program Staff

For 21 years, Grand Area Mentoring has connected caring adults with local young people who benefit from extra guidance and encouragement. Founded in 2005, the program serves youth in kindergarten through 12th grade who choose to participate. Mentors meet with their mentees weekly, spending time talking, playing sports, doing art, exploring interests, and working toward personal goals. Last school year, the program supported 77 students, yet demand continues to grow; many more youth are waiting for a trusted adult to step into their lives.

Research shows why mentoring matters. A groundbreaking four-year randomized controlled trial by Dr. David DuBois and Dr. Carla Herrera—the largest and longest study ever conducted on community-based mentoring—followed 1,350 youth across 17 agencies and found powerful, lasting results. Compared to their peers, mentored youth showed dramatically lower rates of violent behavior (29.6% vs. 43%), recurring substance use (18.2% vs. 31.4%), and suicidal ideation (16.6% vs. 28.4%). High school dropout was cut in half.



Moab’s outcomes mirror this national evidence. The latest Grand Area Mentoring report shows that youth in the program get in less trouble, earn higher grades, attend school more often, and—perhaps most importantly—100% of parents report that their children are happier and feel better about school. These outcomes grow from the same core strengths highlighted by the national study: long-lasting relationships, individualized support, and mentors who meet young people where they are.

“In a world short on belonging, mentoring delivers.” After two decades of service, that truth rings as clearly as ever in Grand County.

Get Involved

If you’ve ever wondered how to make a difference, January is the perfect time; it’s National Mentoring Month. Join us for Grand Area Mentoring’s next **New Mentor Orientation on January 28th, 5:15–7pm at the middle school** (pizza dinner provided!). RSVP by texting or calling (435) 260-9646 or emailing grandareamentoring@gmail.com.



Not able to mentor weekly? Support the program with a donation. Contributions help recruit, screen, and train mentors; sustain matches that last for years (500% longer than the national average!); and provide the art supplies, games, puzzles, sports equipment, books, and other materials that help mentors and mentees connect.



Castle Rock Ranch Protected Forever

On December 1st, Canyonlands Field Institute partnered with Utah Open Lands to sign a conservation easement placed on Castle Rock Ranch, a 157acre property in Grand County, Utah. The easement ensures that this remarkable landscape with its fields, wetlands, sagebrush, and unforgettable red rock backdrop, is now permanently protected. The property sits in the shadows of Castle Rock, Parriott Mesa, and the La Sal Mountains. For those who know this valley, it’s a place woven into memory; a landscape that defies imagination.

Canyonlands Field Institute (CFI), the landowner that placed the conservation easement on Castle Rock Ranch, is a Moabbased nonprofit education organization whose mission is to cultivate connection to self, community, and nature by creating inclusive educational pathways to the outdoors. As CFI looked ahead, they made a valuedriven decision: to ensure that no matter who owns the ranch in the future, the land itself remains an open space with continued ranching operations, serving an enduring legacy that celebrates the landscape in Castle Valley.

“Throughout this process, Utah Open Lands has guided us to live our value of stewardship, with a wealth of expertise that made it possible for us to see this vision through,” said Michele Jordan Johnson, Executive Director of the Canyonlands Field Institute. “They are an exceptional partner.”



Utah Open Lands Executive Director Wendy Fisher echoed Johnson’s appreciation, noting the deep alignment between CFI’s mission and the values that underlie land conservation. “CFI’s commitment to their mission, working with kids of all ages to nurture a reverence and understanding for and of the natural world is demonstrated in an extraordinary way in their decision to place a conservation easement on this land.” Fisher continued, “Their commitment to community is powerful and it was a pleasure to work with a group so passionate about these amazing environs.”

With this easement now in place, the legacy of Castle Rock Ranch - its agricultural fields, riparian areas, and sagebrush habitat, and sweeping red rock vistas that define the valley - will remain forever intact. The ranch will continue to support ecological health, local identity, and community.

After placing the easement, CFI found the perfect buyer in Castle Valley local Colin Fryer. “We knew that Colin had a special place in his heart for this ranch, as its once former owner,” said Johnson. Colin Fryer intends to keep ranching the property and is committed to the tenants of the conservation easement. Johnson also thanked board member Sue Bellagamba for her diligence in seeing this incredible legacy preservation across the finish line.

“My first introduction to Mr. Fryer was working on a conservation easement,” said Fisher. “You always hope that the next landowner will have a conservation ethic and Colin does.” said Fisher.

For both Canyonlands Field Institute and Utah Open Lands, this protection is seen as a win for Castle Valley, for Grand County, and for anyone who believes that the Utah landscapes that shape us are worth protecting.



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