

# President's Letter

to Alumni and Friends of

## DEEP SPRINGS

Number 4

Autumn 2003

### L. Jackson Newell President

**Improvisation** is the unheralded core of education at Deep Springs. The necessity of responding to a capricious stream of urgent demands defines community life and constitutes the secret ingredient in a Nunnian education. Old L. L. knew what he was doing when he sought a remote location, put agriculture at the heart of the operation, and limited the size of the college to several dozen people. Learn to think imaginatively and act communally, or you may suffer and your college could perish!

It may be instructive, therefore, to examine the occasions that have demanded improvisation over the last six months:

- Our 2003-04 operating budget required serious trimming to prevent a crippling deficit at the end of the current fiscal year (June, 2004).
- The Forest Service and our Range Management Team concluded that riparian areas on our Crooked Creek Allotment in the White Mountains have been stressed by recent drought seasons followed by heavy rains this summer and must be rested from any grazing for at least two years.
- Two visiting professors notified us—just a fortnight before their classes were to have begun—that serious health problems precluded their travel to Deep Springs.
- A first-year student incurred multiple serious injuries when he fell from a rope he was climbing the day after he arrived in July. Iris Pope (in her nurse role) ordered his emergency evacuation to Northern Inyo Hospital in Bishop.
- Our physical infrastructure failed in several critical situations, presenting us with the challenge of (a) retrofitting collapsed trusses in the Green Shed roof, (b) installing a new 50-HP booster pump and piping system to pressurize our field irrigation lines, (c) replacing lightening-damaged transformers that serve our deep well pump, (d) repairing multiple fractures in our field irrigation lines, (e) fixing several breakdowns in the kitchen refrigeration system, (f) solving a puzzle involving a contaminated domestic water line to the dairy, and (g) mitigating the effects of a 1.35 inch rainstorm in late August that overwhelmed some of our diversion dykes and flooded our roads.

**Budget Matters: Being Taken By Surprise** Forging this year's operating budget required heavy work and inflicted some pain. Everyone at Deep Springs understood the fiscal problem we faced, accepted level or reduced salaries and benefits gracefully, and resolved to live with restricted funding for many of our program budget lines. The faculty, staff and students all appreciated the Trustees willingness to authorize expenditures slightly in excess of revenue forecasts in order to prevent across-the-board salary cuts.

Now that the auditors have closed the books on the fiscal year that ended June 30, I can share some good news. We ran a \$39,000 surplus for 2002-03. Invention and exertion combined with chance to make this happy conclusion possible. Total revenue exceeded the previous fiscal year and total expenditures declined, enabling us to move from a \$90,500 deficit last year to a surplus on June 30, 2003. How did this happen? On the revenue side of the ledger, the imaginative and persistent efforts of the Annual Giving Committee led by **Will Cowan** (DS43) and **Joe Gibson** (DS81), the Investment Committee led by **Bill Hoffman** (DS56), and Assistant-to-the-President **Diane Seidenverg** paid off handsomely. Further, foundation support for operations reached an all-time high. Fortunately, the economy also began to rebound and the return on some restricted endowment funds increased.

On the expense side, we saved nearly \$100,000 in personnel costs, enough to compensate for larger electric bills, higher insurance premiums, and hay purchases necessitated by pump problems last year. The savings accrued mainly from our decision to go without a professional maintenance person the whole year, a professional cook for ten months, and a long-term scientist for six months. We have **Ken Mitchell**, **Robley Williams**, the **Student Body** and others to thank for making these savings possible. Lopping off staff and faculty positions, of course, is no more than a temporary solution because the hidden costs of deferred maintenance, sacrificed quality of life, and lost educational opportunities for our students cannot and should not be sustained. Thanks to remarkable teamwork inside and outside the valley, however, we adapted and got through the year in the black. Being fully staffed again, with the exception of the long-term science professorship after **Jack Holt** leaves at the end of autumn semester, our challenge for the current year is sobering. The budget tightening we did early this summer was clearly merited, and it offers our only hope of avoiding red ink at the end of this fiscal year.

In the meantime, our return to a balanced budget last year—and the credibility it lends to Deep Springs—will render great benefits as we deal with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (which has a commanding interest in our fiscal health), the **Berger**, the **Darling**, and the **SahanDaywi** foundations, and the many alumni and friends who sustain the college.

**The Ranch: A Sea Change in the Mountains** After 86 summers on the Crooked Creek allotment and over 60 years using Cow Camp, nature and chance have conspired to suspend an era in Deep Springs history—and perhaps end it. Head cuts or gullies that slice into mountain meadows and dry up springs were started in the White Mountains over a century ago when sheep grazing was introduced, followed by herds of cattle much larger than good practice now allows—perhaps three times the number currently in our herd. When grazing permits and practices changed in the mid-1960s, the damage slowed and a state of equilibrium appeared to be in the offing. Our **Range Management Team**'s observations and recommendations, and the good efforts that **Geoff Pope**, **Iris Pope**, and successive student cowboys—currently **Alex Blasdel** (DS00) and **Phillipus Kiep** (DS01)—have made to implement them are making a difference, but their progress is now being overwhelmed by long-term weather trends.

Over a decade of severe drought, offset only occasionally by a good water year, and an emerging pattern of severe summer thunderstorms in the Eastern Sierra are taking a heavy toll. Plant cover is weakened by the combined effects of drought and grazing, leaving meadows and streambanks vulnerable when flash floods rip down them. As a result, new gullies are cutting

into riparian areas where stability had been achieved. We all agree that resting the allotment is the only responsible thing to do. There is reason to believe that the situation is still reversible, even if the weather does not improve. The irony, of course, is that no ranching operation has tried harder to exercise its stewardship responsibly than Deep Springs—yet forces beyond our control are mitigating against the outcome we seek.

Again, however, good fortune promises to offset the bad. Our recent acquisition of the **South Oasis Allotment** in Fish Lake Valley (thanks to former TDS chair **Paul Todd**) is now our ace in the hole. With that BLM permit for 477 animal unit months (AUMs) of grazing per year, we gained almost as much as we may lose in the White Mountains. We can probably continue our cattle operation on its present scale, although we will need to respond imaginatively to the challenge of a significantly different range, even as we strive to increase the overall efficiency of the cattle operation and our stewardship of the land. These tasks are entirely appropriate for a college with our philosophy and ideals. We must all accept the charge given us to open a new chapter in Deep Springs' ranch history.

**The Academic Program: Nimble on Its Feet** We have had to adjust to three unavoidable changes in our faculty ranks over the last 12 months. One year ago, **Jack Holt** had to put off his arrival as long-term scientist from fall semester to spring semester. Biologist **Robley Williams**, already hired to teach one course last fall, readily agreed to take on additional courses and the problem was solved. Then in June, **Raymond Seidelman**, the scholar we hired to teach the integrated course for the entire student body this summer, called me with devastating personal news just two weeks before he was to arrive. A medical diagnosis required immediate surgery. Faced with this challenge, we turned quickly to a plan I have long wanted to try as the subject of our summer seminar: a course on the **Natural History of the Eastern Sierra**. Using our immediate environment to study the natural and physical sciences, and consider the relationship of human beings and civilization to the natural world, would appear to be a perfect way to stimulate the interest of Deep Springs' students in science—and to attune them to the unique features of the area that is their home for two years.

We were indeed fortunate on such short notice to enlist **Jack Holt, Jeff Lustig, Ross Peterson, Phil Pister, Sharon Schuman, and Eric Simandle** for different dimensions of the chosen theme. We were able to forge an overall plan of study into which fit to create an effective sequence. Starting with Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and selections from Thoreau and other nature writers, the course proceeded to examine the hydrological, biological, geological, and human cultural dimensions of the Owens Valley and Deep Springs Valley, as well as the Inyo, White, and Sierra Nevada Ranges. The blend of classroom and field studies (including three-day geology field trips) balanced about equally by the end of the course, and student enthusiasm ran high throughout the summer.

Finally, **Jaideep Singh**, a Berkeley scholar we hired to teach a multi-cultural history course this fall, called me on August 16 with the news that doctors had just ordered him to take seven to eight weeks of complete bed rest. Curriculum Committee chair **Max Gasner** (DS02) and others brainstormed six alternatives for replacing Jay Singh, and the student body held two meetings to assess them. The result was a plan to hire biologist **Eric Simandle** to teach evolutionary biology, and/or humanist **Katie Peterson** to take on a second course this fall. Simandle

could not clear his calendar, but Peterson willingly filled the gap. Once again, we appear to have landed on our feet after a severe bump.

These late adjustments notwithstanding, the academic program is purring along. With the advice and consent of the student body, I have extended the faculty appointments of anthropologist **Gary Gossen** and comparative literature professor **David Arndt** (DS84) through the 2004-05 academic year (which will be David's sixth and final year), and comparative literature professor **Julie Park** has passed all hurdles for a similar extension with the exception of the required scholarly progress review that is now underway. Arndt and Park share the humanities position. Students are engaging the academic program very seriously, the visiting faculty ranks seem to be more effective than ever, and the Curriculum Committee is directing increased attention to academic policies pertaining to late submissions, incomplete grades, academic overloads, and the like. Looming just over the horizon is our next regular re-accreditation review by the **Western Association of Schools and Colleges**. The institutional self-study and peer visitation will take place during the 2004-05 academic year. Alumni will be called upon, once again, to respond to a survey to track the education and career achievements of our former students. I thank each of you in advance for the crucial assistance you provide in this important re-accreditation review.

**Physical Plant: Entropy Meets Its Masters** Age and entropy exact a noticeable toll on a physical plant the size of ours. We continue to replace or repair outdated equipment, a problem that has been much on our minds because we had to defer many fundamental maintenance tasks last year when we went without a mechanic. Fortunately, **Les Smith**, our new maintenance director, is a master at fixing everything from balky engines to contaminated water lines, and collapsed roofs to loose joints in the tables and chairs. And he is a fine teacher; the student mechanic's assistants rarely have been taught to do more on their own. Some things Les and his assistant cannot do, of course, such as replacing high voltage (480 volt) transformers. Ken Mitchell and his student farm team proved themselves able to install the new 50-HP Darling Pump Works at the lower reservoir, a huge task on which they and Geoff Pope labored for many weeks. Finally, our new cook and BH manager, **Mike Bodine**, has been working with an array of challenges, including refrigeration units that could not cope with the summer heat, kitchen exhaust fans that failed, and rodent-borne sanitation problems that demand immediate attention. We salute Mike Bodine and Les Smith for hitting the Deep Springs ground running, and for bringing new energy and insight to this community. **Debbie Smith**, Les's wife, who seems to pitch in at every turn, is also a splendid addition to Deep Springs. All in all, we are gaining steadily on the problems our infrastructure continues to present.

**The 86<sup>th</sup> Year Reunion: A Sense of Place (and a whale of a good time)** Reunion chair and co-chair, **Ed Keonjian** (DS55) and **Jack Murphy** (DS78), bolstered by the able and generous efforts of **Mike Bodine** (chef), **Ryan Erickson** (SB President), **Ellie Gossen** (librarian and landscaper), **Gary Gossen** (professor and dean), **Karen Mitchell** (gardener), **Linda Newell** (special projects), **Diane Seidenverg** (in the office), **Johan Ugander** (LC), and the entire student body, put together one of the most stimulating reunions in memory. The theme, "A Sense of Place," focused on the remarkable physical and cultural legacies of Deep Springs Valley. Illustrated lectures explored the geology of the eastern Sierra region (professor **Jack Holt**), the evolution of plant and animal life in the valley (**Jack Murphy**), several millennia of Paiute habitation (former visiting professor **Michael Delacorte**), and the early European explorers who traversed the passes and crossed the valley (trustee **Ross Peterson**). Field trips enabled those interested to visit specific sites discussed by the four presenters,

and an open-air night lecture, presided over by the planet Mars, taught us the history and nature of radio astronomy—and afforded everyone a chance to ask our featured guest, Owens Valley Radio Observatory astronomer **Tony Beasley**, questions about the telescope array proposed for Westgard Pass. An informative panel on the state of the college, two gala evenings of music and entertainment, many excellent meals, and cool, clear weather combined to round out a near-perfect weekend.

**Kudos: Who's Who** We have recently congratulated a number of recent alumni for national scholarships that have come their way. It was pleasure at the Labor Day Reunion to express our esteem for three senior alumni who have been singled out for high honors: **Bill Allen** (DS42) and **Ed Wesely** (DS45), each of whom were chosen to receive the Deep Springs Medal for exemplary lives of service in the Nunnian tradition, and **Bill vanden Heuvel** (DS46), who recently received the Four Freedoms Medal at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York. These alumni continue to inspire us with energy and courage to forge a more just and humane world.

**Trustees in Transition** Under the leadership of TDS chair **Jeff Johnson** (DS55), the board has been reshaped for the coming year. **Raymond Jeanloz** (DS70) retired as a Trustee of Deep Springs at the end of the September 1-2 meetings. He served two stellar terms, chairing the Academic Affairs Committee and serving on the Succession Committee over the last four years, bringing his rich professorial experience at UC Berkeley to bear on everything from accreditation reviews to faculty recruitment and academic policy. Trustee **Michael Stryker** (DS64), a physiologist at UC San Francisco, will succeed Raymond as chair of the Academic Affairs Committee, moving over from his leadership of the Budget and Operations Committee. Business executive **Kurt Gilson** (DS80) will succeed Michael as chair of the B&O Committee and **Ross Peterson** will preside over the Safety Committee. **Madeleine Pelner Cosman**, who served as a trustee from 1995 to 1998, will return to the board in the position vacated by Raymond Jeanloz. Cosman, who lives near San Diego, is an attorney specializing medical law.

**The Presidency: Who Will Lead Deep Springs?** The Presidential Search Committee is working hard on its assigned task. Chair **Michael Stryker** announced at the Trustees Meeting on September 1 that the number of candidates under active consideration had been reduced to seven, three or four of whom will be selected to interview at Deep Springs. These finalists will be named by the end of September, and their interviews will be scheduled the last week of October. Following a period of student, faculty, and staff input, the Search Committee will rank the finalists and forward its recommendations to the **Trustees of Deep Springs**. To provide a generous period for preparation and transition, the board hopes to announce the next president by the first of the year. He or she will take office on July 1, 2004.

**Conclusion: Mind Over Matter** Returning to the theme of this letter, demands to improvise come in many forms, which can be enervating or invigorating—depending on the frequency and severity of the problems. The most important factor, however, is the quality and temperament of the people who respond to the challenges. In my judgment, Deep Springs is currently served by students, staff, and faculty who see problems as opportunities and make the most of them. This is a can-do bunch, creating as fine an environment as one could hope for to both educate one another and prepare a new generation of leaders to face an uncertain world. After nearly nine years, it is still a distinct pleasure for **Linda and me** to be here.

# DEEP SPRINGS COLLEGE

## UPCOMING EVENTS

2003-2004

November 9

Gathering in San Francisco

November 12

Gathering in Seattle

November 15

Gathering in Portland

December 1

Gathering in Washington DC

December 3

Gathering in New York City

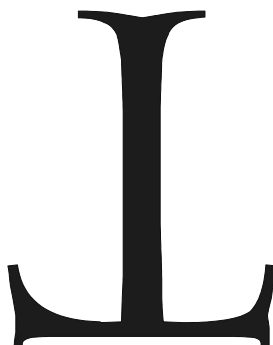
December 5

Gathering in Boston

March 25-27, 2004

TDS at Deep Springs

## Autumn 2003



## Since 1917

Printed by Community Printing  
and Publishing, Bishop, California

Presidents Letter Number 4  
Fall 2003

Deep Springs College  
Deep Springs, California  
HC 72 Box 45001  
Dyer, Nevada  
89010-9803

Tel: 760.872.2000

Fax: 760.872.4466

For a copy of our brochure  
including an application  
please go to our web site  
[www.deepsprings.edu](http://www.deepsprings.edu)

Produced by:

Diane Seidenverg

Editorial Assistants:

Michele Holt

Linda Newell

**L. Jackson Newell, President**

**DEEP SPRINGS**

**HC72 BOX 45001**

**DYER, NV 89010-9803**

**Non-Profit  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Dyer, NV  
Permit No. 1**