

Margaret Austin Center NEWS

SUMMER 2012

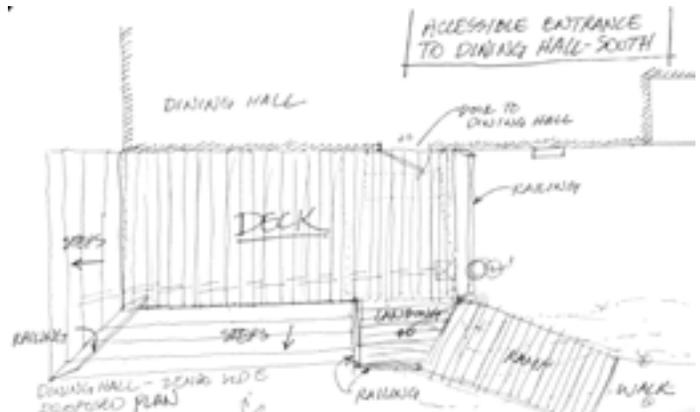
PRESERVING THE MARGARET AUSTIN CENTER FOR THE FUTURE

If you have been out to MAC in the last year, you might have noticed small improvements—a new stove, handicapped accessibility for the Zendo and the Caretaker's and Teacher's Cottages, and a new patio. But they are harbingers of greater things to come. After years of deferred maintenance, the MAC Board is undertaking major projects to preserve the Center.



First, there's the Zendo. Our beloved Zendo was built sitting on the ground, with no foundation. As you can imagine, after 30 years, the floor bent and bowed as it settled into the soil. It's also been feeding termites for years. Originally we hoped simply to give it a concrete foundation. But after much consultation with builders and housemoving professionals, we determined that the best way forward was to dismantle the current building, save the useable materials, and rebuild. However, we are keeping the same building footprint, design, and architectural touches, such as the purple brick and interior pillars. We've been most fortunate to have Steve Jackson with Artisan Builders as the general contractor. He helped build what is now the Edgar House while at the University of Houston and understands our dedication to the land and Margaret's spirit. Construction will be this summer and we'll celebrate with an Open House on Sunday, October 7th (see page 6).

And as this is written, the dining hall and kitchen are getting a new metal roof; the existing roof leaked like a sieve. The replacement is being made just down the road in Navasota, Texas.



Planned deck and ramp addition on the dining hall.

But that's not all. Phase 2 of this work will move to the Edgar House, which also needs new skirting where the building has been in contact with the ground, general repairs, and a new roof. Finally, to make the dining hall truly accessible to all, we will be building a ramp from the brick path to the dining hall door, with a small sitting porch for the landing. (See drawing above). Our goal is to finish this work in the summer of 2013.

The MAC Board has been working over the last year to bring these much needed improvements to fruition. With your continued support, we can make this happen in 2012 and 2013, laying the foundation for the next 30 years at the Margaret Austin Center. It is definitely worth it!

For the Board,
Kathey Ferland, PRESIDENT
Carolyn Kelley, FACILITIES COMMITTEE CHAIR

MAC'S NEW TELESCOPE OFFERS AN UP-CLOSE & PERSONAL LOOK AT THE STARS

Ever notice how big and bright the stars look on an autumn evening at the Margaret Austin Center? How in the summer time, every star in the Little Dipper shines crisp and clear?



The astrologers and stargazers of the South Texas Astrology Retreat (STAR) sure have.



Stargazers with the South Texas Astrology Retreat

For going on six years, this group has made an annual journey to MAC to gaze at the night sky. They're so passionate about this pastime that they've donated a powerful new telescope to MAC so that all retreat groups can have a closer look at the heavens.

The Orion SkyQuest XT6 Classic Dobsonian Telescope was selected for its durability and ease of use for beginning stargazers. Fully mobile, the telescope can be carried—in either one or two pieces—to any area of the grounds. With it you can see up-close views of planets, deep space objects, and the moon. The telescope is kept in the caretaker's quarters along with its instruction manual, a planisphere, and two magnification lenses. While "Dobi" is easy to use, he does take some prep work and practice to get used to. We are working on an easier-to-read set of instructions for him, but in the meantime, if you have a bit of patience and start the prep work before sundown, you should have a happy night of stargazing.

You'll get the best views of planets and space objects when the sky is darkest, on and around new moons. The planisphere (kept with Dobi) will help you navigate the night



The wonders of the star-studded skies over MAC!

sky. It's adjustable for the hour and the time of year, and it includes a guide on how to locate deep space objects. Or you can print out your own star map at <http://skymaps.com/downloads.html>. These maps include planetary positions as well. Once you make sure the viewer is lined up with your point of view through the scope (to be done during the day) then you should use the 25 mm eyepiece to locate the space object. After finding the object you can switch to the 6 mm eye piece for a closer look. But remember: this will narrow the field of view so it is easy to lose your target. And the earth rotates, so your view will need frequent adjustments.

Melanie Schlossberg, the coordinator of STAR, is available for occasional caretaking weekends, so if you'd like a personal lesson in the ways of Dobi or would like to incorporate the telescope into your retreat's evening program, feel free to contact her at melanie@oldmoonastrology.com. For more about STAR visit www.texasastrologyretreat.org.

MEET OUR BOARD

Margaret Austin Center is guided by a volunteer board. Although many of us are new to the MAC Board, we have been around MAC for many years. We asked Jim Tiebout, who joined the Board in 2011, to share his experience with MAC. As you can tell, there are many ways of making a contribution.

Observations from the Cook

I attended my first meditation retreat at the Margaret Austin Center in 1990 and have been volunteering in one capacity or another ever since — from raising the tree canopy and cutting the grass, to sheetrocking Krantz House with Bruno Breitmeyer's "Gypsum Kings." I've seen many changes at MAC over the years, and I think that Margaret would be pleased to see the evolution of her "farm" to its present form.

Perhaps the biggest impact has come from the addition of the kitchen and dining hall. In pre-kitchen days, each retreatant brown-bagged his or her own food for the weekend. Warm days would bring out a huge congregation of Igloo coolers.

The kitchen allowed us to prepare group meals, leaving the retreatants to focus more deeply on their practice and not have to worry about what to eat. The first time I cooked for a retreat, Jane Elioseff and I shared the planning and cooking duties for the weekend. At that time, I was intimidated at the thought of having sole responsibility for feeding a

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Margaret Austin Center

MAC CALENDAR

Aug. 31-Sept. 3

Modern Buddhism—The Path of Wisdom And Compassion, hosted by Chittamani Kadampa Buddhist Center

www.meditationinaustin.org/away

Kadampa Buddhism emphasizes the importance of meditation, the need to be truly happy, and how to cultivate a good heart to help others. This retreat offers a chance to step away from the busyness of everyday life, immerse ourselves in beauty, and enjoy Buddha's teachings with spiritual friends. Accommodations and vegetarian meals are included. Everyone is welcome!

Sept. 7-9

Mindfulness Meditation Group With DaeJa Napier

carol.bellman1@gmail.com

512-917-7615

Teacher DaeJa Napier will lead this retreat, which is open to both new and experienced practitioners of Insight Meditation/Vipassana. The retreat will include sitting and walking meditations, Dharma talks, and opportunity for personal inquiry with the teacher.

Sept. 21-23 Balanced Living: Women's Yoga Retreat With Jenn Wooten & Angie Knight

events@yogayoga.com

512-707-9642

Learning how to connect more fully with others begins with learning to connect more fully with ourselves. This weekend retreat will provide the opportunity for both through yoga, collaboration, and communion. We'll explore ways to become more present in our relationships with others by becoming more present in our relationship with ourselves. The day will begin with a centering hatha flow class and will end with gentle partner yoga and Thai yoga massage.

Oct. 4-7

Metta Retreat With Howie Cohn

Hosted by Mariposa Sangha

Katheyferland4@gmail.com or www.MariposaSangha.org

This retreat will focus on developing Metta or Loving-kindness. Metta is one of the four brahmaviharas or divine abodes. This retreat will be held in silence and is appropriate for both beginning and experienced meditators. Howard Cohn is a founding teacher at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in the San Francisco area. Howie has studied with many Asian and western teachers of several traditions, including Theravada, Zen, Dzogchen and Advaita Vedanta, and has been strongly influenced by contact with the Indian master H.W.L. Poonja.

Oct. 12-14

WELL LIFE Yoga & Meditation With Elizabete Gomes

elizabetegms@yahoo.com

Please join us for a delightful weekend practicing meditation and yoga at the peaceful Margaret Austin Center. We will enjoy nourishing food, laughter, and light-heartedness as we come together to celebrate life and discover how to tap into the wellspring that nourishes and guides each of our lives.

www.welllifeplace.com

Oct. 26-28

Rising Hearts Yoga Studio With Hanif Hekima

hanif@risingheartsyogastudio.com

Hatha & Raja Yoga Retreat. Students of all levels are welcome. Enjoy morning and evening yoga and meditation sessions, plenty of time to relax and reconnect with nature, and delicious health-conscious meals from one of the best retreat chefs in the country.

OPEN FOR BOOKING

The following dates are available for retreats.

Dec. 14-16

Jan. 11-13

Jan. 25-27

Feb. 1-3

Feb. 8-10

Feb. 15-17

GRATITUDE

DONATIONS

The Margaret Austin Center gratefully acknowledges donations made in honor or memory of the following individuals in 2011 and 2012 (as of July 17).

IN MEMORY OF:

SANDY BESIG, through her estate

JANE ELIOSEFF

William W. Bell
Nancy Cotton
Robert & Susan Hawkins
Mark & Elizabeth Kilbride
Dorothy Lurie
Marilyn Jones & Brad Morris
Mark & Barbara Paull
Staff of Fullenweider Wilhite

ED SABO

Anonymous Donor
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Kimberly Nelson
Anne Daniel Pons
Jim Rosborough
George Rothschild
Patti Young

ULLA ELISABET SVENNING

Todd Little

IN HONOR OF:

MICHAEL WALKER

Patrick Baum

Contact Brad Morris to find out more about how to name Margaret Austin Center in your will, at brad_morris@usa.net.

CARETAKERS



Curtis



Elizabeth



Greg & Debra



Laura



Jill & Don



Marti



Sam



Stephanie & James

We are also most grateful for our volunteer caretakers who stay onsite during retreats and serve as MAC “ambassadors.” Their service is invaluable to our organization.

Unlike volunteering with other non-profits, committing to service work in a traditional sense (a regularly scheduled few-hour shift) isn’t practical at MAC due to our remote location. Our volunteers fill a unique and mighty important niche, generously devoting their entire weekend and occasionally a week or longer, to provide assistance 24/7 to our retreat guests. If you are a caretaker and would like to share your funny or poignant story of caretaking, we’d like to hear from you.

Sometimes the gift of a volunteer’s time to MAC comes with a monetary benefit as well. Several of our volunteer caretakers work for companies who sponsor a “matching” program, sending us a generous check for the hours their employee spent in service to the center. Other companies donate their products to nonprofit organizations, and MAC is currently in line to receive updated office/computer equipment later this year.

New volunteers are always needed and much appreciated. Our Caretaker’s Quarters is a separate furnished apartment for your use during the retreat and will accommodate two people for those who prefer to share the role.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer caretaker, have questions, or would like to volunteer in another way, please let us know by contacting Giselle, giselle@macenter.org or 979-836-4657. Thank you to all who submitted photos.



Jim Tiebout, MAC board member and cook

large group. Just cooking the morning oatmeal was a challenge, as we tried to figure out how much to cook and how large a portion people would eat. A watershed moment came when I attended a weekend workshop at the Jade Buddha Temple in Bellaire. All the meals that weekend were provided by the members of the temple, prepared on-site in a big kitchen. The food impressed me so much that I wanted to learn more. A member invited me to volunteer in the kitchen on Sundays, which I did for six years. It was there that I developed my wok skills and learned about cooking for large groups.

MAC’s kitchen has also continued to evolve. It started with a standard 4-burner gas stove that was eventually upgraded to a 6-burner Vulcan stove, and it now features a new professional 10-burner stove with two ovens and a hood with a fire-extinguishing system.

Today, MAC and I continue to evolve together; I now serve on the board of directors and get to help make the decisions about new construction projects for MAC — including a new roof over the kitchen and dining hall. I would like to thank everyone for their support of my cooking practice.

Jim Tiebout



IN MEMORIAM

The Margaret Austin Center has lost three great friends in the past year, with the passing of former board members John Sieber, Jane Elioseff, and Ed Sabo.



John’s 30-year history with MAC dates back to when Margaret Austin owned the property and would allow local meditation groups to camp at her farm. After her death in 1992, John was part of the group that banded together to buy the farm and continue Margaret’s legacy: providing a

sanctuary for spiritual seekers, this time as a non-profit retreat center. He chaired MAC’s work on facilities and (with Ed Rogers) designed the kitchen/dining hall and other buildings.



Jane was also an original MAC leader and board member who worked extensively to organize the MAC supporters in the early 1990’s, apply for grants, prepare and edit MAC’s written materials, and lead various groups at the Center. Jane gave generously to MAC and served to promote facilities

accessibility for those with disabilities. Jane’s presence inspired many.



Ed came to MAC more recently, but he made a big impact in his short time here. As publisher of Houston’s *Natural Awakenings* magazine, he spearheaded numerous marketing and printing projects for the center. He used his strong business acumen to give us more financial direction and oversight. Ed

served on MAC’s board in a number of capacities, most recently as president.

These dear friends were pioneers of vision and light. Their gifts will be with us always.

John Eldridge and John Howard, Jr.

MEMORIAL FOR JANE

Join us on Sunday, October 7 at 2:30-3:00 pm for a short service for Jane Elioseff led by John Eldridge, and the spreading of Jane’s ashes at the farm. Jane’s memorial will be followed by a MAC Open House (see next page).



SAVE THE DATE
Celebrate the Future of
Margaret Austin Center
October 7, 3-6pm

Join us on Sunday, October 7, from 3 to 6 pm for an Open House to re-connect with old friends, make new ones and tour the rebuilt Zendo (see pg. 1 story). You'll have a chance to create a piece of artwork that will become a part of MAC itself. Appetizers by our renowned Chef Michel Laib. Entertainment.

RSVP from September 1 to September 30
to giselle@macenter.org or leave a message at 979.836.4757. Please let us know if you will attend to help us plan the quantity of food needed.

The Margaret Austin Center is a rural retreat center established to provide spiritual, educational, and healing groups a quiet and affordable setting in the rolling hills outside Chappell Hill, Texas. Originally the vacation home of Margaret Austin, the Center has welcomed retreat groups for more than 25 years. Margaret passed away in 1992. Since 1993, the Center has been operated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. We seek to give all our guests the opportunity to explore their chosen path, to experience the open countryside, and to relax and renew their spirit. This is Margaret's legacy.

MAC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Kathy Ferland, PRESIDENT**
- Carolyn Kelley, SECRETARY**
- Marilyn Jones, TREASURER**
- John Eldridge**
- James Tiebout**

MAC STAFF

- Giselle Ostman**
RETREAT MANAGER
- Cheryl Ross**
OFFICE MANAGER

PRESORTED NONPROFIT
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REMINDER: Send us an email at info@macenter.org to let us know if your email has changed.

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