CDSS Governing Board Meeting 2011

by Jackie Algon, for the Board

This year's Governing Board meeting was jam-packed. It took place May 12-13, in Easthampton, Massachusetts, in the same building where the CDSS headquarters will be relocating in the fall. The Eastworks building is an old factory that is being refurbished as office and commercial space. The bright warehouse offers an exciting edgy feel that will surely offer inspiration and new perspectives for the CDSS office staff, Board and visitors.

The meeting began Wednesday afternoon with a continuation of last year's communications workshop, led by local consultant David Specht. Office staff and most of the Board members worked on articulating and understanding the status of CDSS. Following this useful work, the workshop attendees adjourned to Alisa and Allen Dodson's home for a wonderful evening of reconnecting over a barbecue dinner, thanks to our hosts' creative cooking skills.

L to r: Board member Linda Lieberman and CDSS Vice Prez Jenny Beer looking at the map of where Exec meetings have been since 1996; photo by Max Newman

Early Thursday morning, the meeting officially kicked off with the introduction of our staff and two new Board members, Jesse Pearlman Karlsberg and John Mayberry. CDSS President Bruce Hamilton pointed out that this meeting would be different from any other we have experienced, since we are saying goodbye to our beloved director. "Brad kept our organization on an even keel for twenty-eight years, and we are grateful to him for sustaining CDSS through that long period of time. What lies ahead," Bruce continued, "is enormous opportunity and uncertainty, and getting it right is the responsibility of the Board."

Brad responded that it has been great working for the Board and directing CDSS, and that he leaves with a great deal of respect and good wishes for the Board. He then answered questions pertaining to his report and the reports of staff members including the status of camp registrations, the online members' directory, office relocation, and development. Later, the Board honored Brad with gifts of appreciation, including a director's chair decorated with his new title, CDSS Executive and Artistic Director Emeritus, and two commissioned dances: a contra and an English country dance, to be composed and choreographed in his honor by Debbie Jackson and Steve Zakon-Anderson, and by Jonathan Jensen and Gary Roodman, respectively. The Board, staff and Brad all enjoyed a relaxed break over tea and a rich chocolate cake during these festivities. The gifts from the Board were the first of many thanks; more celebrations of Brad's tenure are planned for the future to allow wider participation from CDSS members.

At the Thursday morning session, Debbie Jackson, recent Board member and chair of the transition task group that was set up to handle details related to the executive change, introduced Judy Freiwirth, Psy.D., from Third Sector New England, a nonprofit that specializes in capacity building. Judy brings over thirty years' consulting experience with nonprofits. As our Transition Consultant, she will facilitate and help guide CDSS through a successful transition over this next year and will be working closely with the Board and staff. This will include conducting an organization assessment, helping CDSS identify priority organization development needs, helping CDSS set its strategic directions for the future, assisting with board development, and leading the hiring process for the new Executive Director. She will also provide support to the new Executive Director and the organization after the new ED is hired.

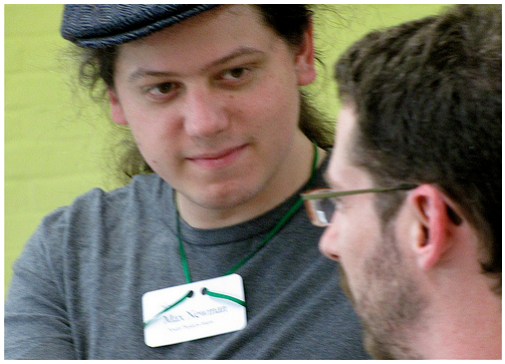
Judy led an exercise to help the Board and staff to envision our future and to begin the process of surfacing the skills to seek in the next CDSS director. While this will not result in a full-blown strategic plan, it will serve as framework for the Board, staff and the new Executive Director to flesh out, once s/he is onboard.

The Board welcomed interim director Marie Dalton-Meyer's explanation of the scope of her work at CDSS. Marie also comes to us through Third Sector

New England. She and Brad have already spent time transferring information about the Executive Director's job and ongoing projects, and Brad remains available, should Marie have specific questions. Marie will be onsite with the staff three days per week, and will attend both Family Camp at Ogontz and English & American Week at Pinewoods this summer to ensure she gets a strong flavor of what CDSS offers its members and the spirit of the dance, music and song communities. Staff expressed their appreciation of having interim leadership during the transition. They are pleased that Marie's quiet, accessible manner will offer a wealth of nonprofit experience.

Stephen Stiebel, Board and Finance Committee member, told us that Linda Maguire will assume the CDSS Treasurer role and chair the Finance Committee, filling the positions vacated by Rhonda Beckman. We look forward to Linda joining us at the next Executive Committee meeting in July. As CFO for a multinational company in her "day job," she will apply her knowledge to these major responsibilities for the Board.

As we did last year, there was time for Board members to talk on Thursday with several of the staff about their tasks and concerns, and this time was also repeated the second day of the meeting with the remaining staff members. Everyone has found this interaction useful in appreciating the issues that are on the staff's plates. Max Newman, CDSS intern this past year, presented his perspective on the importance of speaking about CDSS with our constituents. (See Max's blog, www.cdss.org/blog, to read about his ongoing work to enhance communication about CDSS.) There were reports from the Pinewoods Camp Inc. Board, the Communications Task Group, the Youth Task Group, Awards Committee, and the Nominating Committee. The Board approved the incoming slate of committee and task group members and there was discussion about this being Bruce Hamilton's final year as president of CDSS. The nominating committee representatives presented their plan to develop the slate for next year's officers.



Above: Board member David Means during the envisioning exercise; below: CDSS staff member Max Newman (l) and Jesse Pearlman Karslberg; photos by Linda Lieberman

Thursday's meeting ended with Jesse leading a Sacred Harp song. Following dinner, prepared by Jacki Haney, CDSS office manager, and her husband Mark Leibold, we had an evening of English and American music and dance led by Board and staff members. It was a cheerful time that re-energized us for the work remaining on Day Two. One young fellow who was passing through the shops in the building noticed our dancing and joined in; we gave him a membership form to join CDSS and he indicated he'd sign up!

On Friday morning, following some business matters, the Board and staff spent time evaluating what we learned during the past months' work. Since we've not changed senior leadership for many years, it was important to reflect on the process and to assure our actions were as optimal as possible for future decision-making.

There was discussion of how and where to capture good ideas that bubble up when we don't have a project to apply them, but might profit from them at a later time. After this, we had further discussion on the strategic exercise of the prior day, clumping the concepts created on Day One into a few categories that will help guide future work on the Plan.

Before ending the meeting, Bruce and the Board thanked outgoing Board members Carol Barry, Rhonda Beckman, Mark Weinstein and Debbie Jackson for their dedication and service to the CDSS Board, and we applauded the remarkable care and feeding that the staff offered us throughout the meeting.

The meeting ended with Bruce leading a ballad about partings (Bay of Biscay-o) and the Board members and staff, weary but satisfied, headed in different directions for a weekend of dancing with local groups.

The CDSS Board meets face-to-face annually. Between these meetings their work is handled with two onsite meetings of the "traveling" Executive Committee in different affiliates' locations, and at least four additional Exec meetings as teleconferences. In addition, throughout the year, Board members handle ongoing work remotely as a whole and in task groups.

The next Board meeting will be April 19-20, 2012; onsite Exec meetings will be November 12, 2011 in Winnipeg, and February 11, 2012 in Abuquerque.