

Blooming Acres Enters New Era

by Howard Bloom

In 1998 we (Howard and Sherri-Ann Bloom) opened Blooming Acres, a farm community for children and adults with complex and multiple special needs. Since then, the programme has grown from its grass roots in recreational camping and weekend retreats, to a year round community that provides full time care to hard to serve special needs individuals.

Blooming Acres now operates two facilities: our farm programme, with its ten residents in Oro-Medonte, and Snow Valley Lodge in Springwater, Ontario (outside Barrie).

With our two facilities operating at capacity we now support a combined seventeen individuals. We employ over thirty-five full-time employees, who with steadfast dedication, look after our guests twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Our little grass roots programme (we used to collect a few hundred dollars a weekend) has now grown into a substantial operation. Our annual budget for front-line and specialized staffing (our largest expense) is over one million dollars. This, combined with the other expenses involved



The guys loving their new home at Snow Valley Lodge

with our operation, such as utilities, supplies, automobiles, food, programming and insurance, all serves the needs of our complex group of children, and also has a significant impact on our local economy. Our staff are local, our suppliers are local, our trades are local; we are local.

To address the growth of our business, to better meet the needs of our clientele, and in light of the fact that we are a social service agency who receives the majority of our funding from the province and operates with an expectation of very little profit, we have entered a new era for our community.

Sherri-Ann and I have founded Blooming Acres Residential Care Homes as a not-for-profit, registered charitable organization. With this in place, we have begun to raise the funds to fund and enhance our current programme, and grow our community to serve the desperate need that exists for quality programming for hard to serve special needs individuals. We look to future growth in children and adult services and day programming at new locations in Barrie and Orillia.

Sherri-Ann and I have worked in the not-for-profit sector in the past, with expertise in the area of fundraising and capital campaigns, and are extremely proud to have evolved Blooming Acres Residential Care homes in this direction. It is an excellent fit for our organization and for how we operate. The support of Simcoe County residents and businesses will enhance our capacity to do good work for complex people.

To learn more about Blooming Acres, please visit our website at www.bloomingacres.com.

Howard Bloom is the founder and Executive Director of Blooming Acres. Howard is part-time faculty at Georgian College, Orillia Campus, in the Child and Youth Worker Programme. Howard holds a Masters Degree in Education from the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, and is completing his doctorate at U of T in Adult Education.