



MAKING A difference

Peacehaven Farms

by Melinda Billings
Photography by Sarah Billings

Your Name:

Melinda Billings

What organization do you work with?

Peacehaven Community Farm

What is Peacehaven Community Farm?

Peacehaven Community Farm is a sustainable farm located on 89 beautiful acres of organic gardens, rolling pastures, and lush woodlands. It is an affordable housing community that provides a permanent home for adults with special needs in a supportive and family-like environment. Peacehaven was started with a dream for place where:

- everyone is valued
- everyone can contribute
- everyone can become the person they are meant to be when in a nurturing and supportive environment

Peacehaven recently dedicated its first residential home, Susan's View, which was completed in October 2014. This home has private bedrooms and bathrooms, along with a shared kitchen, dining area, living room and laundry room. Core members, the residents with special needs living in the home, reside in the home with a home coordinator and three resident assistants. Peacehaven's "first family" moved into the home in November 2014.

There are plans to build additional homes. Ultimately, Peacehaven will be the home for 30+ adults with special needs. All homes will feature Universal Design so that as core members



Starmount residents Laura and Sam Ellison are frequent volunteers at Peacehaven.

age, their home at Peacehaven will continue to accommodate their needs.

How long have you been working with the organization?

I have been employed at Peacehaven since February 2014. Prior to that, I volunteered occasionally.

What types of tasks do you perform for this group?

I am the Communications Coordinator. I keep our web site and social media sites updated; I produce all written materials including a semi-annual newsletter. I also work on special events and special projects as needed.



Steve and Maddie Billings at Peacehaven for the recent dedication of the first residential home, Susan's View



How do you feel this organization impacts our community and city?

Peacehaven is a unique model for an affordable housing community for adults with special needs; it is unique for our city and for the United States as a whole. Our name says it all - it is a working farm that offers a job for everyone. It is a place that values and receives the gifts of all people; a place of peace and a haven.

A core ethic at Peacehaven is the hope that learning and growth be an opportunity not just for individuals with special needs living and working at the farm but also for those who participate in working and volunteering. Without this mutual growth, Peacehaven cannot reach its full potential as a community supporting individuals with special needs and our community at large. Another way Peacehaven impacts our city is the commitment to sustainability and energy conservation in its residential units as well as in its agricultural operations. Susan's View incorporated numerous green building technologies and a solar photovoltaic system was installed, making Susan's View the first net-zero "group" home in the United States.

How can others get involved with this organization?

The needs of Peacehaven Community Farm will change with time and the seasons, but there are many ways people can get involved. Join in our garden workdays on Saturdays during the growing season, March thru October. Organize a group from your work, school or church to help with these workdays or to serve lunch. On our website, www.peacehavenfarm.org, you can explore ways to become involved with our core members in Susan's View. Like us on Facebook for farm updates and volunteer opportunities.

The support of a diverse and dedicated group of volunteers - growing vegetables and relationships - is what gives Peacehaven life. Our volunteers appreciate community, enjoy the company of people that may be very different from them, and value the opportunity to get their hands dirty to support the growth of fresh, local food. Their age range has been between 2 and 92 years.

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Susan's View, Peacehaven first residential home for adults with special needs

Melinda Billings by the gardens

What drew you to work for this organization? I worked for 16 years in a corporate marketing department. After a mission trip to Mexico with my church, it became clear to me that I was being called to explore vocational opportunities in the nonprofit sector. I feel "alive" knowing that my daily work impacts the lives of other people, and is not just impacting a bottom line.

to find affordable, life-giving housing opportunities for adults with special needs. I have never been happier with the work that I do, the people that I work with, and the many, many people that I come in contact with that are part of the Peacehaven community.

How long have you lived in the neighborhood? Since 2009

What is your favorite part of living in the neighborhood? The people that I get to see every day; the walks I take with the Zack, my dog, the closeness to Friendly Shopping center and the short commute to Kiser and Grimsley.



Melinda Billings, Jeff Piegari, and Donna Piegari at the dedication of Susan's View. Jeff will be one of the core members living in Susan's View. Jeff's mom, Donna, is a teacher at Sternberger Elementary School.

Who are the members of your family? Husband, Steve; two daughters, Sarah and Maddie; black lab mix, Zack

Special Note: Peacehaven community farm was recently named the 2014 nonprofit of the year by the Guilford Non-profit Consortium.

There is a quote from Frederick Buechner - "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." This describes my work at Peacehaven to a tee. I feel that God called me to Peacehaven and I am doing work that I love. And the need is great in this community

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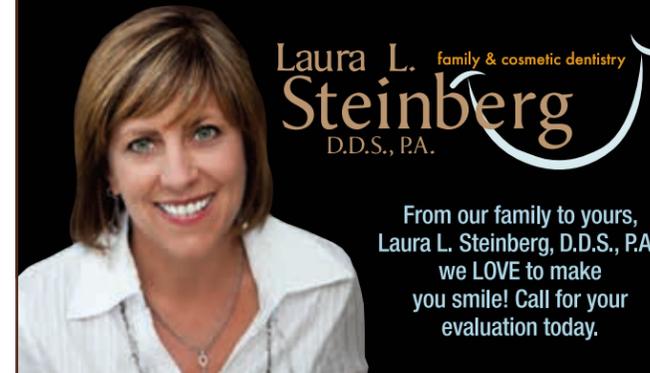
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