

## HOW DID WE GET HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE AND WHERE ARE WE GOING FROM HERE?

These questions kept resurfacing in my mind as the Health Services Committee planned the fall sexual concerns seminar. Legal and mental health experts were lined up as presenters.

How have we, the Whale Foundation, gotten here? The stories begin in 1995 with Bob Grusy wanting to honor the memory of his friend, Whale (Curtis Hansen), who everyone had turned to, respected, and played with. Bob also didn't want to lose any other friends to depression, chemical dependency, and hopelessness. Bob and Bill Karls recruited Robby Pitagora and Sarah Hatch to come up with ideas of how to support the guiding community. The Whale Foundation was formed.

The first project was to develop a helpline where guides and other members of the river community could call with problems. Now we assist, refer, direct, and generally help with the many challenges that the river community faces. We provide access to mental and physical health professionals on an ability-to-pay basis and still maintain that helpline: 1-866-773-0773.

Nancy Nelson was recruited to draft incorporation papers. Lora Colton came on board to develop the liaison program; you probably know a few liaisons. They are guides who have taken a leadership role and are available to other guides in a variety of ways. They help access needed services and generally are a great resource. These liaisons will continue to provide leadership and we are eager for more persons to join their ranks.

Tim Whitney, current Board chair, spearheaded the Whale Foundation's website, which provides relevant articles, updates, and information to the community. Check us out! [www.whalefoundation.org](http://www.whalefoundation.org).

Steve Bledsoe allowed us to use his great drawing of Whale; this has become probably the best-known image of him. Johnny Janssen came next with an idea of starting a scholarship program to help transitioning guides finish their education or create a safety net with a backup career. This became the Kenton Grua Memorial Scholarship fund which has provided 19 grants for guides to study such diverse subjects as nursing, photography, history, and Chinese medicine.

Walt Taylor invented the WingDing! This February event is a celebration of the river culture and the primary source of funds for our programs. He, Annette Avery and a cast of hundreds have made this rendezvous a vital point in the river year. Commemorating our unique river history is Joyce Killebrew who creates an original sculpture each year for the live auction.

The annual Whale Foundation GTS Health Fair provides screenings for guides in response to the need we see for routine medical checkups. Tom Myers and Walt Taylor have put together a vastly competent healthcare team that serves at the spring GTS. 108 individuals have been screened in the last three years.

Nancy Helin's exhaustive research provided us with our much-needed bylaws and policies. We couldn't function as well as we do without them. So many persons have given selflessly of their time, their love, and experience. Who are these people? Mostly they are river guides who love the canyon, value their friendships, and who want to protect living their dream. An example is Matt Dunn saying, "You need to talk to this bloke I met on a trip." That was our introduction to Norm Hanson, MD who provides psychiatric services for us. Behind the scenes tirelessly doing whatever needs to be done are: Fran Joseph, our Director, Roberta Motter, Dick McCallum, Pam Quist, Brad Dimock, and a plentitude of others who pitch in to make our community better.

This really isn't meant to be a roll call—just a glimpse of how we've evolved. Each event or presentation has been in response to you expressing a need.

And this brings us to the sexual issues that the community has asked us to address. The question, "Where do we go from here?" has been answered by our November 3<sup>rd</sup> training. Your participation has given us a blueprint for further involvement. Thirty people from the river community gave their time and attendance.

The afternoon seminar opened with three challenging questions. The first two were to be discussed openly and the third not necessarily shared out loud.

1. How have your boundaries been violated on the river?
2. Have you seen the boundaries of others violated on the river?
3. How have you violated the boundaries of others on the river?

Responses to these questions were varied; however, a number of themes were repeated throughout the day.

- a. The first was that female staff may be subjected to sexual language which is demeaning to women. Men and women may both be called negative names if they turn down sexual overtures. Some passengers and river guides can – and do – intimidate crew; there are often no guidelines for trip leaders or other guides to intervene.
- b. The next theme was the recognition that there needs to be a uniform code of ethics for both outfitters and river staff. Currently, there is no code in place other than the Federal regulations (EEOC).
- c. The third topic, which was most often revealed in the evaluations, concerned the guides confusion and fear that their employers would not recognize, support, or stand by staff that intervened in negative behaviors.
- d. The fourth area of concern was the increasingly common violations by passengers toward guides; the guides feel ill-equipped to deal with these situations.
- e. The fifth theme regarded the power differential/imbalance between companies and guides, guides and TLs, and guides and passengers. There seemed to be a consensus that this is an area which does cause real difficulties.

These concerns really boiled down to the questions river personnel face.

Should I do something to intervene?

If so, what should I do?

How should I do it?

And, the participants were asking themselves another question: "Will my peers and the company that I represent back me?"

The final discussion stressed the need to develop a code by blending organizational standards with individual, internal values. Compatibility between the two creates the most unified and strongest message.

My favorite part of the presentation was when the participants were asked to relate the strengths of being an effective guide. Some of the strengths that were listed include: compassion; recognition of an injustice or wrong; powers of observation; awareness of the environment including watching patterns developing between people; desire to connect rather than be right; and the courage to act. The wisdom of age and experience were also noted as strengths. I'd add to this list: the commitment to being the very best for themselves, their peers, and their outfitter. This is exemplified by the willingness to attend and participate in these discussions.

So, what is the answer to where are we going? **Join us for a Leadership Skills and Toolbox Workshop on April 28<sup>th</sup>**; the exact time and place will be announced.

Check our website for details ([www.whalefoundation.org](http://www.whalefoundation.org).) In addition, the Whale Foundation is offering a second article in this issue. *Sexual Harassment Prevention* is a summary of the presentations on November 3rd by the NAU staff devoted to legal standards relating to safe working environments.

Many people who cherish the river experience are redefining what that means. Guides are assessing how they can take responsibility for their part and are, in fact, taking that respect for the river and for their peers to a more substantive level. These are the initiators, the leaders, and the new pioneers.

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