



## Silver Eagles Newsletter

August 2014

### Silver Eagles,

We have one new member this month! Wow, we have news from a couple of you this month – and Ron Battocchi gets double mention! Keep it up, please!

### New Member:

**Sandy Browne** – a highway investigator in the LA office in the 80s and 90s. (see contact list for email address)

### Board News: None

### Member News:

**Ron Battocchi** - At the end of May, I flew to New Mexico to join a college classmate and his wife to help build a Habitat for Humanity home in Taos. This was our 5th such project (Richmond, VA, New Zealand, New Orleans, and Guatemala). The team was comprised of the three of us, a 4-person contingent from Oklahoma and about 20 students from St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. One St. Joe's alum had worked 10 years ago on a house across the street from the one we were building. I was the team elder.

The adobe construction was unique in our experience. The beginning of the week focused on harvesting fir, spruce and pine trees from a National Forest (with a permit). After we stripped the bark and substrata from the trees, a tedious task, these logs are called vigas and became the exposed horizontal structural supports for the ceiling and roof. We also enjoyed a cookout in the forest and met the prospective homeowner, who told a touching and inspirational account of her life and aspirations. Hearing and seeing hummingbirds was an unexpected treat.

For the rest of the week, we did a variety of projects primarily installing and leveling the vigas (because of variations in the girth of the vigas, some had to be elevated to make a flat surface for the ceiling) and cutting boards and nailing them to the vigas to create the ceiling. Since preceding teams made an ample supply of adobe blocks, we did not do so, but we saw a demonstration of how they are composed. Dirt, sand and/or gravel, straw and water are mixed together to make a thick mud compound which is then pressed by hand into molds which are shaken and then removed; the brick is then left to dry in the sun for several days and turned once or twice. [Brick is] an ancient, simple and durable building material.

A friend generously encouraged us to stay in his lovely mountain retreat in a quaint town in the outskirts of Taos... The solitude, panoramic scenery, and therapeutic hot tub were greatly appreciated. We cooked a memorable feast our last night in Taos.

We visited several local attractions including art museums in Santa Fe, and the Rio Grande Gorge and the Pueblo village in Taos, which is the oldest continuously inhabited community in the United States. The trip also provided an opportunity to connect with other classmates and college friends.







Where to next? Perhaps Alaska. (see RonB pics)

**Ted Lopatkiewicz - Ron Battocchi** and his wife, Mary Bell, and Ted Lopatkiewicz and his wife, Drucie Andersen, joined other friends in a rented house in Chautauqua, New York to spend a week of relaxation, exercise and intellectual and spiritual stimulation. Chautauqua was established in 1874 on the shores of Lake Chautauqua in western New York as a religious retreat but over the last 140 years has grown to an internationally renowned center of learning and debate. The tent city evolved into tent houses, which evolved into Victorian houses so that Chautauqua is now a 700 acre campus that is actually a charming small town. The season consists of 9 summer weeks, each of which has an overarching theme -- this particular week was Emerging Democracies -- that feature lectures, master classes, seminars and concerts (there is a full Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra that rivals any in the country -- in fact, many of its musicians are from other symphonies that don't have a summer season). The four of us rented a house with two other couples and not only enjoyed each other's company but almost everyone had a hand in cooking gourmet dinners every night (Ted stayed out of the kitchen). Visitors can be as busy or as un-busy as they wish. Guest speakers included people who have founded Egypt's first political parties, experts on the U.S. Constitution, an author who has recently published a book about the drafting of our Declaration of Independence, prominent members of various religious traditions, and book and movie critics. Although it was originally settled by Methodists, there are now 17 major religions that have cottages on the campus, and as daunting as that might sound, one can spend the whole week there without being exposed to any religiosity, if that is one's choice. Although it has been dubbed either Summer Camp for Adults, or Woodstock for Old People, it is actually very family

friendly and had thousands of people from all ages; there were a lot of organized activities for children. There were many people there who are the 3rd and 4th generation of their family to attend at least one week there every year. We were fortunate to be there the week that the cold front moved through the eastern part of the country and several days felt like October. We found it to be a very relaxing and edifying week, and would easily entertain the notion of going again. (Ted Lopat photo)

**Misc:**

Don't forget the Silver Eagle Website: [www.precisionwrite.com/SilverEagles.html](http://www.precisionwrite.com/SilverEagles.html)

Ted and Ron are regular contributors to the newsletter. How about some newbies? I remember someone talking about building their own house about five years ago. Is it finished? Can we see a picture? Any stamp collectors? Fellow birdwatchers? Oh, we have a Mississippi Kite nesting in our area. It is way out of its natural nesting area!! Happy relatively cool summer this year! We hit the swimming pool a week back at 10 am in 68 degrees! Chilly when we got out!

Jim Henderson