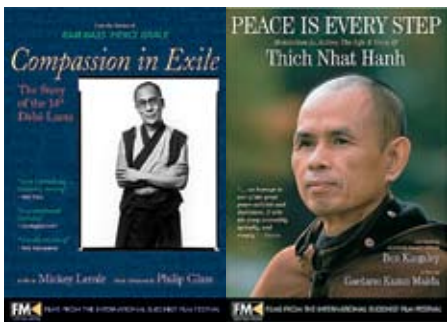




ning Commission approved the design (above) for the three-story Tibetan-style meditation center last June, and in October, Lama Pema Clark and Lama Yeshe Parke, KSC's resident teachers, consecrated the land with a traditional fire puja. KSC has launched a capital campaign to raise the approximate one million dollars needed to complete the project. The goal is to open the doors of the new Kagyu Sukha Chöling Meditation Center in three years. KSC was established by the late Kalu Rinpoche; its current spiritual director is Lama Lodö Rinpoche, resident teacher at San Francisco's Kagyu Drodren Kunchab. ■ **FESTIVAL MEDIA**, launched last fall, is the new video/DVD label of the International Buddhist Film Festival (IBFF), which offers "cinema as a vehicle for wider appreciation and better understanding of Buddhism by general audiences." The new label's first releases are the classic *Compassion in Exile: The Story of the 14th Dalai Lama* by filmmaker Mickey Lemle, and *Peace Is Every Step*, a retrospective of Thich Nhat Hanh by Gaetano Kazuo Maida.



Festival Media markets a select group of IBFF presentations to the educational and home markets. Tana Lehr, associate director of the Oakland-based nonprofit says, "There are always several excellent films in the festivals that don't have distributors and it's our mission to do what we can to get these to as many people as possible." The IBFF's diverse advisory council includes Richard Gere, Alice Walker, Philip Glass, Huston Smith, Pico Iyer, and actress Lucy Liu. ■ Don Goldberg, a member of Thich Nhat Hanh's Deer Park sangha, is launching an **ACTS OF KINDNESS** photography project. Professional and amateur photographers are invited to submit photos that

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## PROFILE: IMS TURNS 30

By David Swick

When Sharon Salzberg joined two other twentysomething meditators to buy a former Catholic seminary for \$150,000, creating the Insight Meditation Society, she learned for the first time what a mortgage was. Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, and Joseph Goldstein were just back from several years of practice and study in South Asia. They knew what they wanted to create, more or less, but they weren't sure they had the skills and experience to make it happen. Could they transmit the teachings? Would people come?

IMS officially opened to the public in 1976, and on July 8 the center will celebrate its thirtieth anniversary with a gala event. IMS has become one of the largest, most influential, and most popular meditation centers in North America. Surrounded by 200 acres of woods on the outskirts of Barre, Massachusetts, it attracts more than 2,000 students a year to more than 25 programs and is supported by an international community of 20,000.



MARK DIAMOND

"In the beginning everybody did everything, because there were just a few of us. And we were, generally speaking, pretty unsophisticated," Salzberg says with a chuckle. "Suddenly we had an institution."

Today, IMS is a nonprofit society with an operating budget in excess of \$2.1 million. Half of its income comes from member donations and the other half from endowment funds. The center is run by a staff of over forty people. Half are long-



Jack Kornfield, Sharon Salzberg, Jacqueline Mandell-Schwartz, and Joseph Goldstein in the early days at IMS.

term paid professionals, and the other half have signed on to serve the center for 18 months for a small stipend.

Despite the growing complexities of administration, IMS has stayed true to its founders' vision: a center rooted in the Theravada tradition, offering training in Vipassana (Insight) meditation, yet open to learning from all lineages. The backbone of the training at IMS is the retreat, held at what is now called the Retreat Center. The schedule begins at five in the morning and ends at ten at night. Silence is maintained except during question and interview periods. The day is devoted entirely to sitting and walking meditation practice, except for a one-hour work period, meals (vegetarian with dairy and eggs), occasional interviews, and an evening talk. Men and women do not share rooms, and there is no camping out, journal writing, mail, or phone calls.

IMS offers a range of retreats, which vary according to the focus (e.g., metta, the practice of virtue), the focus group (teens, families, women, men) and duration (from several days to several weeks). In particular, the rigorous nine-week retreat held every fall has become a well-known point of introduction to the depth of the practice.

Experienced meditators who would like to do a personal retreat have the option of doing it at the Forest Refuge, a nearby retreat center that IMS opened in 2003. It is a secluded facility where practitioners with a proven record of long-term practice can operate with more independence, yet still have the support of a teacher and attend talks. Personal retreats at the Forest Refuge can range from several weeks to a year or more.

"The IMS experience is not about becoming a Buddhist," explains Salzberg. "It's pretty nonsectarian. It's about your own experience, the method, and being supported in deepening your understanding. One thing I got from S.N. Goenka was that the Buddha did not teach Buddhism. He taught a way of life."

Those who are interested in combining more in-depth study of the Buddhist teachings with meditation practice can take part in programs at the affiliated Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. It offers a year-round schedule of courses, workshops, conferences, retreats, and independent programs. Although rooted

in "the classical tradition of the earliest teachings and practices," BCBS also promotes exploration of all schools of Buddhism and dialogue with "other religious and scientific traditions."

IMS is always searching for ways to ensure the dharma reaches as many people as possible in the West. At a strategic planning session in 2004, a decision was made to focus on diversity, and that same year, the center established a retreat for people of color. When IMS offered this retreat last summer, it went an extra step, offering a free bus ride from New York City. Joseph Goldstein, who was one of the teachers at the course, found it inspiring. "It was interesting," he says, "to be in an environment that felt safe enough and inviting enough for people who had no particular connection with Barre or IMS. Usually there is not a great deal of racial diversity in retreats at IMS. In this country, racial issues loom large. Personally, I became a lot more aware of the depth of the issues."

IMS recently added a retreat for 18–32-year-olds, based partly on the success of its family retreat and teen retreat. "Something is happening culturally that is very interesting to me—and wonderful," Goldstein says. "There's a new interest in the dharma among young people. I don't doubt that it's related to the world situation. People are looking for something that's meaningful."

As the original teachers get older—the twentysomethings are becoming sixtysomethings—they realize IMS will need to have new teachers in the future. So the center has placed extra emphasis on teacher training and recently graduated seven students from a full-time, five-year teacher training program. This year, IMS will begin another five-year teacher training program in conjunction with Spirit Rock Meditation Center in California.

Periodically IMS also hosts a Vipassana Teacher Gathering, which focuses on trends and concerns in the wider Vipassana community. This summer, the center is inviting over 30 prominent teachers for a gathering that will take place in the days leading up to its July 8 anniversary event. It's fitting that as IMS celebrates its thirtieth year, the teachers will be sitting down to share their experiences and to talk about where to go from here. **BD**

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