The HMI community is made up of alumni, teachers, apprentices, alumni families, and people who simply believe in our mission. It is a community that believes in coming together, confronting tough stuff, and being authentic; it is a community whose spirit is forged in the rugged Rocky Mountains and in the sandy, ancient canyons of Utah. The privilege of being part of this community is the privilege of knowing what it means to live with intention and integrity.

That is why when we launched our capital campaign in early 2016 we named it “The Campaign for Community.” The objective—to build on-campus housing for our faculty and staff—is in direct service of the community that has made this school so special for the last 20 years. And, without a doubt, it is because of our community that we recently completed this campaign; we hope you’ll enjoy reading more in the following pages. To all who have enabled so many possibilities for HMI: thank you.

THROUGH OUR LENS THIS WINTER & SPRING:

TO FOLLOW MORE OF HMI’S ADVENTURES, FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA
Community and collaboration are so important for our society, especially in this day and age. It is important to build, to connect, to problem solve, and to celebrate what we have as humans on the planet. Any school that promotes and actively lives by these principles is way ahead of the curve. Thanks to HMI for being a leader in the education of these important values.”

— Katharine L. McKenna (Semester 33 Parent)
THE CAMPAIGN FOR COMMUNITY WILL TRANSFORM OUR CAMPUS.

THE PROJECT WILL MEET THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF HMI’S EMPLOYEES AND INCLUDES:

A HEAD OF SCHOOL HOME that has become a landmark for visitors and students alike since its construction in 2016. Designed to accommodate public and private gatherings, this dwelling serves both as an attractive home for Heads of School and their families and as a primary campus space for Family Weekend, employee events, and student functions.

FOUR TOWNHOMES to allow us to offer clean, modern housing options—in contrast to much of the uneven housing stock available in the Leadville area. They will allow our employees to live in homes commensurate with the outstanding work they do each day with our students. These homes will be available for occupancy in the summer of 2019.

THREE SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSES to help us welcome spouses and children to campus. Everyone will enjoy the benefits of an increased adult presence on campus and the infectious energy families bring to a residential community. Construction of these homes will begin in 2019.
If you are a teenager, live with one, or have even ever been one, you probably recognize a fascinating paradox that characterizes adolescence: phases of seemingly intractable apathy, listlessness, and angst contrasted by periods of intense focus, passion, and creativity. Ask any educator, and they’ll tell you it is a wonderful gift to witness this vibrant engagement, one only tempered by the capriciousness in finding a way to catalyze it.

This engagement comes from the feeling of doing something meaningful, something that captures the imagination, something that matters. The challenge is in finding the material, the right fuel to light the fire.

Intuitively, we know that when we feel a sense of purpose—an ability to apply ourselves at the intersection of our passions, skills, and a need in the world—we feel more valuable, capable, and engaged. Recently, we have begun to explore this intersection more specifically within the HMI Gap curriculum. Particularly for young adults who are transitioning into college, living away from home for the first time, and beginning a trajectory toward a career, this quest to articulate purpose is paramount.

Throughout a Gap semester, we ask students to reflect on their identity, values, passions, and beliefs and link these to essential questions such as “How can I shape my life by and through the things that inspire me most?” and “How do my values and choices empower me to live the life I envision for myself and to effect change in the world?” These reflections take shape as students craft a personal mission statement, consider how to integrate purpose into their leadership style, and articulate an action plan through career mapping.

Transference, the idea that what students learn and do here must impact their lives beyond HMI, has been one of our core values since our founding. Our hope is that students leave HMI Gap inspired to connect the what with the why and empowered to pursue their hopes and dreams for the future.
This past year, millions of high school students submitted their college applications. Uploaded along with transcripts, resumes, and teacher recommendations were personal essays.

Of those millions, we can confidently assume that there were several hundred applications which contained tales and lessons from living in a small, intentional community in a town called Leadville, carrying heavy backpacks, living in off-the-grid cabins, and eating cheesy pasta with a spoon.

In a recent survey of Semester 37 and 38 alumni, more than 85% of those whom responded said that they chose to write about their HMI experience in their college essays. With a quick scan of some of this past year’s Common Application essay prompts, it’s easy to see why:

• The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failures. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
• Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
• Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

Any alum can attest that time at HMI is filled with obstacles, challenges, setbacks, failure, accomplishments, personal growth, new understandings, and new ideas. They happen every day, in fact. Whether celebrating a climb to the top of a 14,000-foot peak, resolving a frustrating cabin social dynamic, or writing and sharing a Family Weekend poem, potential answers to these questions abound in an HMI experience.

Knowing this data, as well as seeing students respond creatively and reflect sincerely on their adventures in everything from cabin meetings to Full Circle, Summer Term staff began to explore an idea: What if we could intentionally take these experiences and focus our academic inquiry on crafting an essay worth sharing, sharpening leadership and writing skills along the way?

New this year, Summer Term will provide writing instruction for students to take observations, feelings, and triumphs from their backpacking trips onto the page. During the five-week program, students spend three of those weeks on expedition. Writing and journaling occurs in the field, with fine-tuning happening in writing workshops and feedback sessions on campus.

The essayist Anais Nin said, “We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospect.” We are thrilled that our students will get to double-down on their HMI experience this summer, and get to carry it with them as they move forward to next adventures.

— From an HMI Semester student’s college essay
1. STAY HUMBLE.

HMI is not the same place that first welcomed students over twenty years ago. We have grown in students and facilities; we better compensate our employees, offer more financial aid to welcome all forms of diversity, and engage more sustainably with the natural world. We have more resources now than we did then. Our community understands the need for HMI to evolve, but does not encourage us to grow for the sake of growth. They want us to be sure our decisions—and their investments—are helping us better deliver on HMI’s promise that extraordinary things happen when nature and minds meet.

Supporters of HMI believe that glamour and complexity distract from the core of our mission. The ethos of “simple in means, rich in ends” is as resonant today as it has always been.

2. COMMUNITY IS PARAMOUNT.

Stewards of HMI truly love our school. They are passionate about our mission and what they believe are the uniquely powerful outcomes we offer. I often hear praise for our teachers and the academic quality of the experience, along with reverence for the wilderness areas that we visit. What excites our supporters most, however, is the growth students experience through the powerful community that develops through these endeavors. “She left home on par with her peers, and returned from HMI on a vastly elevated plain,” is a version of a common refrain. The community we develop at HMI lifts up students, helps them take risks, affirms their instincts for compassion and empathy, and provides them pathways to explore who they are and what they want to become. In the end, initiatives that strengthen these outcomes excite our community and inspire people to invest in our school.

3. FOCUS ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION.

Our community sees HMI as a defining experience for students, and a springboard for all that comes next. They feel the experience is too important to allow the ability to pay full tuition determine whether someone attends HMI. In fact, they believe diversity exponentially increases our relevance. A school of students who look the same, think the same, and come from the same backgrounds would diminish the power of HMI in the eyes of many supporters. This belief has propelled the growth of the HMI Fund during our capital campaign and allowed HMI to undertake important initiatives; for example, we have expanded the comprehensiveness of our aid awards to include things such as hiking boots or flights for a family member to attend our Family Weekend when the need is present. Rather than slowing our ability to fund capital projects, asking contributors to support the goals of diversity and inclusion helps us maximize philanthropic support for HMI.

LESSONS FROM THE ROAD:

REFLECTIONS ON THE CAMPAIGN FOR COMMUNITY

By Danny O’Brien, Head of School

As you will read elsewhere in these pages, HMI hit a milestone last November: we surpassed our $4.5 million dollar Campaign for Community goal. On-campus housing for faculty and staff, something that has been part of plans for HMI since its inception, will become a reality. Four townhomes are slated to be ready for occupancy this July.

We should not gloss past this milestone. The Campaign for Community was as worthy as it was audacious. Over this three-year long effort, HMI raised more than twice the amount we had in our largest previous campaign. We also did this while more than tripling goals for the HMI Fund, our annual campaign that helps us increase financial aid and staff compensation. At no time in this campaign did we have to make a choice between buildings and people: our community stood tall and invested in both.

The Campaign for Community was as worthy as it was audacious. Over this three-year long effort, HMI raised more than twice the amount we had in our largest previous campaign.

Over the last three years, I have crisscrossed the country meeting with potential supporters of this initiative. I learned so much about our community’s vision for our school through visiting with alumni and their families. I often left these visits inspired and challenged—affirmed by so much of what I heard and pushed to do even better by the people most loyal to our mission. Celebrating the end of the campaign also means reflecting on these thoughts. Here are some takeaways that are framing my perspective on how to grow while living our mission on a daily basis at HMI.

By Danny O’Brien, Head of School
Of course, even as we celebrate the completion of this stage of our Campaign for Community, our work continues. The next step is to construct a Faculty and Student Center to house additional classrooms and quiet study areas to better serve our students and to teach in learning spaces best designed for this purpose. I am excited to see how this building will enhance our community and expand mentorship possibilities on campus. It will complete the campus master plan we developed in advance of HMI’s 20th anniversary last year. I look forward to seeing this building rise—and to the many exciting and enlightening conversations that come as part of the effort to build it.

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT HMI’S PRIORITIES?
PLEASE CONTACT DANNY O’BRIEN AT DOBRIEN@HMINET.ORG OR 719-486-8200, EXT 101.
About halfway through the hike, the Leader of the Day (LOD) stops to examine the map. “I think we’ve gone too far” she announces. My co-instructor and I exchange a knowing glance. We have not gone too far, and if we simply continue on this well-marked trail, we will arrive at our X within the hour. But we stay silent.

Later during our debrief at Twin Lakes, we break down each decision that led to our slog through the swamp. The students take our feedback to heart, and for the remainder of the trip we watch future LODs foster more collaborative navigation discussions, dead-set on avoiding the errors that led to the swamp fiasco.

I think back to the moment when my co-instructor and I looked at each other, silently agreeing not to intervene. We knew that we were taking the harder path. But we also knew that failure is one of the strongest tools that we, as educators, can offer.

At HMI, we create intentional opportunities for our students to fail. Whenever possible, we let them make their own decisions and mistakes, even when it means trudging into a swamp. After all, a few scratches and some muddy boots will teach a far more powerful lesson than any words of advice we can offer.

We knew that we were taking the harder path. But we also knew that failure is one of the strongest tools that we, as educators, can offer.
Q: WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO START CEDAR SPRINGS FARM?
A: I started Cedar Springs Farm because I love farming and there’s nothing else I would rather be doing. It’s a place where I can plant trees, raise animals, and have a beautiful garden. Our grass-fed cows and pastured hogs are rotationally grazed, and our herd management practices have been shown to sequester carbon from the atmosphere, build topsoil, and harmonize with the native ecosystem. Our goal is to create and sustain a large scale permaculture system, which generates more calories per acre and more income then a commercial farm, and is designed to be self-sufficient and mimic natural ecosystem processes.

Q: HOW HAS THE FARM GROWN SINCE IT BEGAN?
A: In the past two years, we’ve planted over 10,000 trees, created seven ponds, and cut 15,000 feet of swales for the most efficient water management system possible. Over the next few years we will watch this old ranch transform into an abundant food forest. Our cows and pigs create income for the farm, and their manure fertilizes all the young trees, creating a self-sustaining cycle.

Q: HOW DID YOUR EXPERIENCES AT HMI SHAPE WHERE YOU ARE TODAY?
A: I was a student at HMI during Semester 15. I struggled a lot during my semester in Leadville, but enjoyed experiencing the Colorado wilderness. From experiences at HMI, and elsewhere, I learned that the values of the traditional educational system were very different than my own. I wanted to learn, hands on, how to live on this earth in a good and happy way. Instead I was being sorted, graded, judged, and assigned a number. This realization inspired me to leave school and start working on farms and learning skilled trades early on. I’ve enjoyed staying in touch with HMI over the years and appreciate that they buy meat from us!

Check out the Cedar Springs Farm Instagram account @CEDARSPRINGSFARM for more photos and educational updates on sustainable agriculture and daily farm life!
DO YOU KNOW AN EDUCATOR WHO HEARS ABOUT HMI AND THINKS, “HOW FUN WOULD THAT BE...?”

Then tell them to join us this summer on our Educators Expedition!

• Meet and backpack with HMI faculty and other educators in the Colorado mountains
• Discuss the impact of leadership and place-based education, and learn how to take it back to the classroom
• All educators welcome, regardless of position or grade level!

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT WWW.HMINET.ORG/EDUCATORS-EXPEDITION