

# ITA NH Overview

**Hopes and Dreams.** In early 2010 In the Arena (ITA) Founder Amory Rowe Salem and husband David Salem will purchase a 133-acre piece of property in Lyme, NH. The property, currently called Acorn Hill Farm (AHF), can accurately be described as rural. It features a blend of open hayfields and wooded areas; the terrain is criss-crossed with walking —or running! —trails; and it's blessed with stunning views of the Connecticut River Valley. It's a special place indeed and, ideally, will serve as home to both ITA and the Salem family. We are buying AHF for multiple reasons, some of which are inner-directed (i.e., its main residence is well-suited to our family's needs, and the community in which it's situated is also just right by our lights) but most of which are outer-directed. More specifically, we're hopeful that the farm will help us advance our shared and long-held aim of giving back, by which we mean doing concrete things for the betterment of both the specific community in which we live and the larger society of which we're part. In this context, specific community means the Upper Valley, and larger society means the US. Happily, we've both found a way to advance such aims in our "day jobs": Amory as head of ITA; and David via his work as founding president and chief investment officer of The Investment Fund for Foundations (TIFF). Turning back to AHF, we'd ideally find in coming years a way to use the property to do two things: (1) quoting the easement on AHF that its current owner granted to the Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT) in the mid-1990s, promote and advance "outdoor recreational enjoyment of the general public," at no cost to such public users; and (2) furnish potentially transformative experiences to a carefully selected pool of young people drawn from the Upper Valley and other parts of the US. (As is true of the young people served by ITA at present, the latter cohort assumedly would comprise primarily young persons from underprivileged households and from under-served geographies.) Such experiences could take at least two forms: brief visits to the farm —ranging from a few hours to several days —during which eligible youngsters would be mentored by Arena Athletes; and episodic use of the property by young folks and their adult chaperones that would enable them to exploit in the best and healthiest sense the recreational opportunities that the farm and its environs offer, e.g., cross-country running in the spring, summer and fall; and cross-country skiing in the winter.

**Stewardship.** We are keen to steward AHF in a manner consistent with both the spirit and letter of the easements alluded to above. The easements granted to the UVLT contemplate the farm's use for "commercial equestrian activities such as competitions, trail rides and horse shows throughout the Property" and permit explicitly the construction of "fencing, structures and other improvements necessary for this use." Very importantly, we do *not* intend to conduct equestrian activities of any kind on the property. Indeed, we've told the current owner as well as his highly competent barn manager that, as a condition of our purchase (i.e., closing) in late January, all horses and horse-related equipment and feedstock should be removed.

**Biped Power.** Looking further down the road, time-wise, we would ideally like to limit —for safety and related (i.e., insurance) cost reasons —the property's recreational use to activities conducted by humans on their own two feet (or skis), at no cost to them. This aspiration raises several questions we hope to explore ASAP with interested parties, with "interested" defined expansively to include not only UVLT but Lyme officials as well as other denizens of Lyme and surrounding communities who might be inclined to oppose —or more hopefully support —conscientious pursuit of the hopes and dreams outlined above. The key question at this stage of our planning is whether the UVLT and the Town of Lyme would view favorably certain improvements that would facilitate the property's use for the human-powered recreational purposes mentioned above. More specifically, we're keen to get a clearer sense than we now possess of what improvements the UVLT and the Town of Lyme might permit us to make for the use and enjoyment of all (human) comers to AHF interested in furthering, at no cost to themselves, their own physical and mental health. It goes without saying that we'd take care to situate and construct such improvements in a manner that would *not* (quoting the easement on AHF) "impair materially the scenic quality of the Property as viewed from public roads or public trails." We also want to ensure that whatever programmatic goals we adopt for AHF are consistent with applicable laws and regulations —and, equally important, with the wants and needs of a majority of Lyme's residents as expressed through recognized democratic channels.

**Sense of the Community.** We concede that it's hard to gauge *ex ante* how a community or its chosen leaders will react to proposed changes in a property's usage, however well-intentioned such changes might be. This is one reason among many why we're keen to elicit the Lyme community's reactions to the hopes and dreams outlined here. To render these aspirations as concrete as possible, and to underscore that we favor candor and clarity in all that we do, we've appended below a rank-ordered list of improvements and programs that we might seek to undertake on AHF —if but only if they pass muster with the "interested parties" mentioned above. Rank-ordered as used here means a sorting metric whereby improvements and programs that seem least different from the status quo appear first and those embodying the biggest changes from AHF's current appearance and usage appear last. In addition to ITA's two wise board members in Colorado (the site of ITA's *next* campus, perhaps?), we have two talented board members in the Upper Valley —Michael Horvath and Jeff Johnson —a boon to this project that we could not possibly have foreseen three years ago. We've also reached out to the Upper Valley and ITA communities at-large and have been met with the oft hoped-for response to the question "Would you consider getting involved with this project?" The answers —more or less —have taken the form of the famous final seven words of *Ulysses*: "Yes I said Yes I will Yes." Among those who have proffered the Joycean "yes" are Georgetown Athletic Hall of Fame member and former Reebok Enclave; Arena Athlete Tim Broe; Alumni Arena Athlete Matt Chisam and his brother Chris Chisam, a LEED-certified landscape architect with expertise in track and field facility construction; and numerous other Arena Athletes and Upper Valley denizens.

**Further Thoughts.** As we ponder our options respecting AHF, we're giving careful thought to the pros and cons of gifting to ITA defined portions of AHF. We would do this for one or more of several reasons, including the enhanced "permanence" of hoped-for good works to be served up on such acreage, as described above, plus potential fundraising considerations (i.e., the tax law requirement that gifts to 501(c)(3)s be applied to eleemosynary aims). It's our understanding that the current (soon to be "former") owner met with the Lyme Planning Board some years ago to establish the maximum number of lots that could have been approved for a subdivision of AHF and further that that owner based the appraisal of his easement gift to the UVLT on retaining only four of those lots, two of which were subsequently sold and the remaining two of which we've contracted to purchase: a 22-acre parcel on which sit AHF's stables, hay barn and indoor riding ring; and

an 111-acre parcel on which sits AHF's main residence. We'll be exploring with the UVLT and in due course qualified appraisers whether and to what extent it would be feasible to offer additional easements to the UVLT (e.g., an easement that would prevent commercial equestrian use), mindful that much of the land comprising AHF is already conserved and that the UVLT board will be cautious in accepting greater stewardship oversight unless the perceived public benefits are compelling. To the extent that a portion of AHF moves into a non-profit's hands, we'll also want to explore the pros and cons of payments-in-lieu of taxes to ensure that the town of Lyme is adequately reimbursed for costs incurred in providing essential services to AHF and its users. Finally, we'll want to explore—with the hoped-for help of Lyme town officials and other interested parties—means of ensuring that any incremental vehicular traffic spawned by realization of the aspirations outlined above isn't disruptive to the community in general and abutters in particular. We believe that the activities and improvements contemplated below can be undertaken without boosting discernibly from current levels vehicular traffic to and from AHF, and—more generally—without impairing the quality of life of any Lyme residents who might prefer that AHF continue to function as it does now, i.e., as a combined personal residence and commercial equestrian facility.

**In summary.** We have three “buckets” of interrelated aims for the property, all of which we'll pursue simultaneously and at whatever rate feels appropriate given the community permissions we seek and the funding and personnel commitments we must necessarily secure.

- To run a summertime in-house ITA program for local and under-served youths that will be staffed by current and alumni Arena Athletes as well as other non-ITA Olympic aspirants, and whose guiding principle will be to develop in program participants an appreciation and an understanding of the short- and long-term merits of physical fitness.
- To launch a post-collegiate track club in the style of the OTC that will feature top US track and field talent, who will make use of the AHF facilities as their training venues, who will live on or near the property, and who will—as a condition of their inclusion in the club—coach at the summer program and be involved in Upper Valley community outreach work.
- To create a venue at AHF where Upper Valley community members young and old can congregate and recreate: on the track, on the dirt roads, on the trails, you name it. We hope, ultimately, to be able to hold youth cross-country meets, to stage track and field meets of varying sizes and talent levels, and in general, to be able to generate enthusiasm and appreciation for physical fitness in all its forms.

#### **Potential Improvements (rank ordered as explained above)**

- Conversion of portions of AHF's existing stable and/or hay barn into spaces suitable for (a) short-term housing and feeding of ITA roster athletes if not also their young mentees and/or (b) weightlifting and stretching.
- Implementation of a 200-meter indoor running oval, within the UVLT-approved building envelope, assumedly sheltered in part by existing indoor riding ring superstructure.
- Construction of a 400-meter outdoor running track, within the UVLT-approved building envelope, assumedly with a green or similarly “natural”-colored surface, and *without* accompanying above-surface structures, so as to render this potential improvement as inconspicuous as possible.
- Construction of a two-lane lap pool, within the UVLT-approved building envelope, also “tucked away” and designed in a manner to render it as inconspicuous as possible.

#### **Potential Programs (rank ordered as explained above)**

- Occasional, unscheduled use of AHF's existing roads and trails by residents of Lyme plus surrounding communities.
- Regular, scheduled use of AHF's existing facilities, roads and trails by members of a Lyme-based club modeled along Farm Team/OTC lines with 12-16 athletes max (gender- and race-balanced); seasonal usage depending on facilities ultimately made available per Potential Improvements above.
- Periodic, scheduled use of AHF's existing facilities, roads and trails as well as surrounding roads and trails for cross-country and other meets involving area public schools.
- Periodic, scheduled use of AHF's existing facilities, roads and trails as well as surrounding roads and trails for cross-country and other meets involving other organized running groups (e.g., Dartmouth College clubs and/or teams)