



Volunteers... The Land Trust's Minute Men and Women

By Steve Knauth

It's fall and the leaves are descending on Cross Lots. They've drifted up against the stone walls like snow, gathered in heaps around trees and shrubs and scattered themselves hither and yon across the upland parkscape.

From his post as head of the Essex Land Trust's Volunteer Coordination Committee, Brian Willis puts out the call; it's time for the Big Rake. And so it is that, on a rain-sodden Saturday morning, two dozen Land Trust volunteers themselves descend on Cross Lots, armed with rakes, leaf blowers and tarps. In two hours, the leaves are corralled, piled up and ready for removal. A coffee-and-doughnut social follows.

Where would the Land Trust be without its many valued volunteers? Call them the Land Trust's Minute Men & Women. Separate from Stewards, volunteers have no regular bailiwick; you find them everywhere doing just about everything. Many do not even work in the wild, at all. They stuff envelopes, make phone calls and send e-mails; they do the Land Trust paperwork, take pictures, and work on the newsletter. Some simply take on a task that no one else has thought of.

And, while the Land Trust can boast of 17 Stewards, the volunteers far outnumber them. A recent report showed that 97 different volunteers had performed 152 tasks over the last year in such disparate categories as Mailings and Phone Calls, Photography and Trail Maintenance. They

Volunteers at Cross Lot's Annual Leaf Clean-up.



Hard at work reintroducing native grasses.

may work in groups - 40 were on hand at a plant-and-grass sowing - or quietly behind the scenes, such as taking the time to water new trees during a drought. Their energy never fails to impress, says Willis. "It's amazing how many people are willing to turn out to do unusual jobs."

All this volunteer activity is no accident. As the land trust grows, so does the work involved in caring for properties and running the organization. "Last year, the board decided to create a more structured volunteer program," says Willis, himself a volunteer, who moved to Essex from Deep River, where he was involved in that town's land trust. "We developed objectives and described the communications routine for receiving and executing request for helpers." The Volunteer Coordination committee now oversees 163 volunteers, Land Trust members who have offered to help on their membership applications.

Who are these people who give of their time and talent? Why do they do it? Essex Woods and Waters took a random sampling:

Frank Hall, retired from the state Department of Corrections, where he was a drug and alcohol counselor, is a 3-year volunteer. Frank got into it gradually, taking pictures of properties and landscaping at Cross Lots. Then he signed on as assistant to Steward Dana Hill at Canfield/Meadow Woods, where he helps in trail maintenance. A recent project included diverting runoff away from a trail and laying down pea stone. For Hall, such work is a

pleasure. "The preserve is a natural jewel," he says. "When I take a walk, it's like escaping to the past."

Kathy LaBella, a registered dietician, has been a volunteer for five years, taking pictures and working on the web site. She's a regular at Land Trust functions, from kayak trips to trail walks. It's hardly work. "With every event, there is always something new and fascinating," she says. Her volunteer efforts spring from her regard for the outdoors. "I always had a love of nature, the environment and outdoor activity," LaBella says. "Being a volunteer helps me to give a little back to the community."

David Kelsey, a retired journalist, is the former editor of Essex Woods and Waters' predecessor publication, the Member's Bulletin. One of Brian Willis' "regulars," he's worked on Millrace bridges and the stone walls at Cross Lots and helped clear Thatchbed Island. He gave Fern Ledge its name, and laid out boundaries and trails. Volunteering is simply payback. "My wife Judy and I walk [Canfield/Meadow Woods'] many trails all season," he says. "How can you not contribute to the properties when you enjoy them so much?"

While individual volunteers may be different on the outside, they share one thing – a shared mind set. They all want to be where they are and at what they're doing. Being "like-minded" is how volunteer Paul Marden puts it. "The Land Trust has a special spirit, which the organization fosters," he says. "Just witness the numbers turning out at each annual meeting. This is a testimony to the strength in this group of volunteers who pitch in just for the joy of preservation."

To paraphrase David Kelsey: Volunteers make it happen.



Brian Willis is the Land Trust's first Volunteer Coordinator. Brian has singlehandedly established a role which is vital to the functioning of the Land Trust. No article on volunteers can ignore the significant contributions he has made through his hard work and strong leadership, always permeated with his characteristic sense of humor. While Brian is retiring from the Board of Directors he will continue to be actively involved in the Land Trust, volunteering when called upon. The Essex Land Trust Board expresses its appreciation to Brian and extends to him and his wife Rosemary its best wishes.

Volunteers Are Always Welcome!

Many organizations state that people are their most important asset. No where is this more valid a statement than in an organization such as the Essex Land Trust. People, specifically volunteers, are the backbone of the organization. Without volunteers the Land Trust would not exist. Nothing would get done. There would not be the quality of open space to which we have become accustomed.

The Land Trust is fortunate to have a ready cadre of outstanding and dedicated volunteers.

But they alone cannot do it all. There is always a need for volunteers whether it is for raking leaves, clearing trails, helping with mailings or distributing posters and pamphlets. There are an innumerable number of tasks that can accommodate to the varying amount of time people can contribute.

If you would like to add your name to the Essex Land Trust volunteer roster, please feel free to contact Thea Putnam at tconv@mac.com or at 860-767-3231.

Johnson Farm Development Rights Acquired

On December 8th the Essex Land Trust completed its purchase of a Conservation Easement to protect 44.9 acres of the Johnson Farm located on Mares Hill Road in Ivoryton. The property is a beautiful family-owned working farm with sheep, chickens, hay meadows, forestland, fruit trees, and gardens.

This easement protects the property, in perpetuity, from any future residential or commercial development. The property owner, Murwin Johnson, will continue to own the property, pay taxes on it, and use it for agricultural purposes, but can not use, transfer, or sell it for any purpose other than agriculture or open space.

Under the agreement with Mr. Johnson, the Essex Land Trust will have the opportunity to purchase the property when he or his heirs decide to sell it, and the Land Trust fully intends to do so.

This is the first of this kind of conservation easement in the Town of Essex designed to permanently protect farmland from being subdivided or converted into residential or commercial development.

The total cost of purchasing this easement was \$550,000, of which \$150,000 was contributed by the Town of Essex and the balance from the acquisition fund of the Essex Land Trust and the generosity of its many contributors.

The Essex Land Trust is a non-profit all-volunteer organization that acquires and maintains open space in Essex. It cooperates with Town and State governments and with adjacent communities, but it relies on the generosity of those who donate land, money, or their time to keep a reasonable balance of open space and development in the Town of Essex.

Johnson Farm on a Fall afternoon.



ELT Board Elects Three New Members

The Essex Land Trust is pleased to announce the election of three new board members. They are as follows: Linda Levene, Peter Prichard and Thea Putnam.

Linda Levene is the former President of the Essex Garden Club who will be taking over the Membership portfolio, replacing Suzy Burke who will remain on the Board. Linda and her husband Dick have lived in Essex since 1999. Both have been actively involved in the community, notably sponsoring 4 annual Essex Blood Drives as they have elsewhere for the past 10 years. Linda's background includes being an 8th grade Math teacher as

Thea Putnam



Linda Levene



Peter Prichard



well as working in programming, sales and marketing for IBM over 30 years.

Peter Prichard and his wife Ann moved to Essex in 2007. After spending more than 30 years as a journalist and Editor of USA TODAY, Peter capped his career being President of the Newseum, a \$450 million dollar facility that opened on Pennsylvania Avenue in 2007. Peter currently serves as Chairman of Guest Services, Inc., a hospitality and produce distribution company based in Fairfax, Va. Peter will be working with Bob Nussbaum in the Development portfolio.

Thea and Phillip Putnam arrived in Essex from New York City in 2004. After many years working for the American Arbitration Association, Thea became a support staff personnel recruiter, ultimately owning and managing her own business. Since moving to Essex, Thea has volunteered at the Middlesex Hospital Shoreline Clinic, the Essex Auxiliary of Child and Family Agency and has served on the Board of the Essex Historical Society. Thea will be taking over the Volunteer Coordinator function.

New Board members will be presented for membership voting at the April 6th, 2010 annual meeting, to be held at the Incarnation Center.

Mystery Land Trust Photo

This house once dominated the grounds of what is today one of the Land Trust's most popular properties. Do you know which one? Here's a clue...

You can see the tip of one of the Essex churches on Prospect Street in the background. The answer is below the photo.

Essex Woods & Waters plans to regularly feature a mystery photo. These will be drawn from our photo archives but we also welcome any contributions.



Answer: The property is Cross Lots, and that's the house of donor Harriet Cheney Downing. It was torn down at her request in the early 1980s.

Essex Land Trust
Caring for Our World
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A Canfield Essay

The Essex Land Trust website hosts photo slide shows from recent events and programs as well as numerous pictures from our properties. They are there both for members to enjoy and to encourage participation in the Land Trust's activities. All properties and events are open to the public and are free of charge.

We encourage you to visit, explore and enjoy the Essex Land Trust website at...

www.essexlandtrust.org



On the Trail

Osage Trails: "Like a Sunday in the park"

The first impression of Osage Trails, as you're walking in from the parking lot, is that you're encroaching on somebody's back yard. And such a back yard; with a wide green lawn before you, sweeping gradually down to the waters of historic Falls River Cove, and a grove of beeches, maple, oak and birch to the left, home to a myriad of song birds.

And it is, in fact, the backyard of Elizabeth ("Diz") Barnes Callender, who donated the property to the Land Trust in 1998 and still lives on the land her family bought as an unimproved lot in 1947.

Stuart Warner, who came to Essex in 1996 after a career spent in Canada working as a researcher for General Nickel, has been the Osage steward for about three years. We take in the view on a cloudy Wednesday afternoon in December and then walk down the hill towards the water. The clipped grass gives way to a field of moss, wonderfully soft underfoot, with the feel of fur to the touch. "It borders a wetland dubbed the 'Swamp,' lush and verdant in season, home to a fern bed and other wetland foliage in spring and summer," says Warner.

In fact, there's an abundance of wildlife in the pocket-sized park. The "swamp" helps support a host of small birds, from woodpeckers and chickadees to red-wing blackbirds and bluebirds, says Warner. The cove is home to a variety of river and marsh birds, including geese and ducks, egrets, osprey and a kingfisher. "Osage Trails has so much to offer in just a few acres," says the soft-spoken Warner. "It's on

Osage's tranquility in Summer is unsurpassed.



Diz Callender is always watching over Osage Trails.

the water, it has this big green stretch of lawn, the paths are easy and there's a lot to see."

The loop trail system totals about a half-mile. The beginning, at the foot of the big lawn, is right out of "Wind in the Willows," Kenneth Graham's timeless tale. You almost expect to see Mole skipping down the well-trod path to meet Rat among the reeds at the edge of Falls River Cove for a boat ride.



Stuart Warner, Osage Trails' Steward.

Beyond, the well-marked, well-maintained "coastal" path leads on into the trees along the river bank. Showing bare limbs in the fall, the woods are leafy and cool in the summer, says Warner. The trail ends at a kayak landing. There, you can see the stone bulkhead extending into the cove and a fieldstone building foundation, remnants of the cove's busy 19th-century shipbuilding industry. So important was maritime Essex that the British invaded the harbor during the War of 1812 and burned more than two dozen vessels, including several in the cove.

The kayak landing is one of Warner's projects, and it includes a picnic area by the water. "It's a nice spot," says Warner. "You just have to be careful of the tide. The cove gets very shallow [at low tide]."

The "upland" portion of the trail continues through the woods from the landing. Here, tall, mature maples mix in with oaks, including an old "Wolf" tree. The trail closes the loop at the Carolyn Greenleaf memorial tree, planted to honor a Land Trust pioneer.

With all these attributes, Osage Trails remains under-used among the Land Trust's other properties. Says Warner: "I don't think a lot of people know this is here. When they do come upon it, they're amazed. In the summer, it's cool with the lawn and the big trees and the water. It's like a Sunday in the park."

Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



Thursday, January 28th 7:30pm at *Essex Library*

Return To The River

Parker Lord, who grew up in Essex and who now resides in Lyme, will recount his 410 mile canoe journey down the Connecticut River. Along with fellow re-enactor Jim Poole, Parker paddled the entire river from the source to the sound, part of the way in a birch bark canoe. Refreshments served.

Saturday, February 6th 2pm

Winter Walk In Canfield-Meadow Woods

Preserve stewards Dana Hill and Frank Hall along with Head Steward Al Macgregor will lead a family hike in beautiful Canfield-Meadow Woods. Everyone out of the house to enjoy the beauty of Essex in winter!! Park at the Book Hill Woods Road cul-de-sac.

Sunday, February 21st 3pm at *Essex Library*

Singing Leaves, The Stories & Songs Of The Crickets And Katydid

Timed for the end of February vacation, this program will be fun for all ages. Come listen to John Himmelman tell us where to find crickets and katydids and why/how they sing. Himmelman will bring some of his many books to view and purchase. Refreshments served.

Monday, March 1st Part I at 1:45pm at *Town Hall*,
Part II at 3:15 at *Cross Lots*

Stone By Stone: The Magnificent History Of New England's Stone Walls

Robert Thorson, UCONN professor and stone wall expert, will talk at 1:45pm about his award-winning book. After refreshments he will lead a walk through Cross Lots to discuss and view the many stone walls in that preserve. Co-sponsored by the Essex Garden Club, the public is invited to all or part of this program. Park at Town Hall.

Monday, March 29th 7:30pm at *Essex Library*

Essex In The Days Of Native Americans

Join Erik Becker, director of Bushy Hill Nature Center, to learn about the ancestral skills and customs of Native Americans who lived here before the arrival of European settlers. Refreshments served.

Tuesday, April 6th 5:30pm at *The Incarnation Center*

Essex Land Trust Annual Meeting

Members and nonmembers of the Essex Land Trust are invited to attend the annual meeting. There is a charge for the buffet (5:30pm-7pm) but you may attend the business meeting at 7pm at no charge.

Members automatically receive an invitation. Non-members who wish to attend should contact Peggy Tuttle 860-767-7916.

Thursday, April 22nd 7:30pm at *Essex Library*

A Sense Of Wonder

On Earth Day, join us for the movie "A Sense of Wonder" about the life of Rachel Carson, renowned advocate for the natural world and author of the 1962 best seller "Silent Spring" which launched the modern environmental movement. Refreshments served.

Saturday, April 24th 9am-12pm

ELT Property-Wide Earth Day Spruce-Up

Help Essex Land Trust volunteers and other local organizations restore our preserves after a long winter by picking-up brush and clearing trails and streams. Some raking and planting are planned. All ages are welcome; make it a family outing. Meet at the Town Hall parking lot at 9am. Rain or shine. Refreshments served.

Thursday, May 6th 7:30 pm at *Town Hall*

This Fine Piece Of Water.

Learn about the importance of the Connecticut River to the Long Island Sound watershed. Hear Tom Andersen, author of "This Fine Piece of Water," trace the history of the sound, its geological origins, early residents, colonization, beautiful natural resources and more. Refreshments served. Co-sponsored with Potapaug Audubon Society.

Sunday, May 16th 2pm

Nature Photography Workshop

David LaBella, author and photographer, will lead a special walk at Canfield-Meadow Woods. David will instruct photographers of all levels on how best to take terrific photos of our natural world. Bring your camera. Meet at the Book Hill Woods Rd cul-de-sac.

Saturday, May 22nd 7:30pm

Family Night Walk At Falls River Preserve

Join Phil Miller for an educational night walk that culminates in a bonfire and marshmallow roast. Children must be accompanied by adults. Park at the end of Falls River Drive, Ivoryton.

For further information on the Land Trust's programs and events, please contact Peggy Tuttle at abhftc@aol.com or 767-7916

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