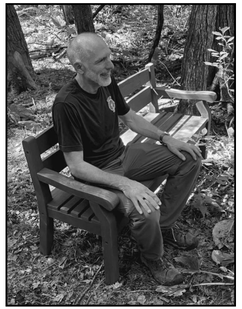
HAPPY TRAILS



Scott Lewis on the Thompson Osborn newly installed bench.

Scott Lewis continues to lead the way in maintaining the land trust's many trails. Recent work has been accomplished to make hiking on Avon Mountain up to the Heublein Tower via the Hazen and Nod Way trails more enjoyable. In addition, a new blue loop trail has been blazed at the Thompson-Osborn Preserve earlier this year - and Rick and Scott installed a bench for weary hikers there.

Thanks to Rick Dubiel's hard work identifying and applying for grants, the Avon Land Trust received nearly $7,000 in donations this year – dollars and in-kind product donations that were immediately invested in making our properties more accessible to and enjoyable for residents. We thank the following:

Donor	Amount
Avon/Canton Rotary	$2387
CT Water	$500
M&T Bank	$1400
Monarch Water	$357
Northwest Bank	$1090
People's Bank	$750
STILH	$299
Whole Foods	$100

unplugged corner

This award-winning animated "short" (2 minutes) brilliantly illustrates the addictive power of phones over kids – and the even *stronger* pull of good old outdoor play.

You can find **"Like and Follow"** by Brent Forrest and Tobias Schlage on YouTube by name or via this URL: **www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioaY1z2trx4**.

Watch to the end with your family – and then head outside!

would you like to **join a like-minded group** to **help preserve and protect them?**

then please **consider joining** the **ALT board!**

As we look around our boardroom table these days, we see a few more wrinkles and grey hairs. Although, like Rick Dubiel, featured in this issue, many of us were young'ns when we joined the board, most of us have stayed on – for decades. This is great for mission continuity but it's not a good succession plan.

We are currently reviewing candidates to join our 2026 board as at-large members. The time commitment is minimal, and the rewards are great.

Please consider raising your hand to join ours in keeping Avon's open spaces beautiful and accessible. Contact Susan at srietano@gmail.com, to learn more.

THE *Avon* LAND TRUST
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avonlandtrust.org

THE *Avon* LAND TRUST
membership form

Yes, I/we would like to make a tax-deductible annual membership donation to the Avon Land Trust, at the following level:

_____ $500 Oak Membership
_____ $250 Maple Membership
_____ $100 Birch Membership
_____ $ 50 Family Membership
_____ $ 30 Individual Membership
_____ $ 25 Senior/Student Membership
_____ Please allocate my donation to the Unplugged Learning fund
_____ Please allocate my donation to the trail maintenance fund

name

address

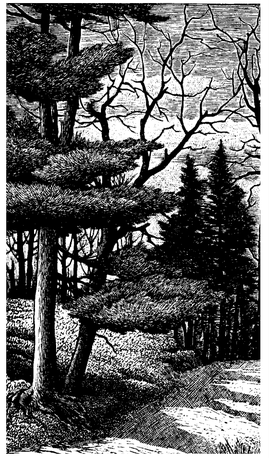
e-mail phone

_____ I/We wish to remain anonymous

Please make checks payable to The Avon Land Trust, and mail to: The Avon Land Trust, P.O. Box 267, Avon , CT 06001.
. . . **or pay on-line by visiting our website: www.avonlandtrust.org.**

Please let us know if you can help the ALT in any of these other ways:
☐ My employer will match my contribution.
☐ I would like information on how to include ALT in my will or estate plan.
☐ I am interested in donating land to the ALT
☐ I would like to help the ALT as a member-volunteer

Thank you for becoming a 2026 member of the Avon Land Trust!



The Avon Land Trust is 501(c)(3) certified, so your donation is tax deductible. If your employer offers a matching gift program, or participates in the United Way, please consider making the Avon Land Trust a beneficiary so your money can go even further.

THE *Avon* LAND TRUST
Future generations may not remember our names, but they will certainly be glad that we were here.

A NON–PROFIT ORGANIZATION www.avonlandtrust.org FALL 2025

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Bob Breckinridge
President, ALT

Recently, my brother-in-law visited from California. As we drove down Lovely Street and up Country Club Road, he exclaimed "look at all the trees!" His observation pointed out something that many town residents take for granted: Avon has beautiful landscapes, the heavily forested Avon Mountain, the pristine fields of Fisher Meadows, the slowly winding Farmington River, and the westside Foundlands, to name a few. For such a small town, the natural wonders abound.

The Avon Land Trust has spent over 50 years preserving these beautiful open spaces, and providing safe, easy access to them. Our 350+ acres of land offer miles trails of trails to meander, breathtaking ridge-top views, and home for abundant native wildlife. This year, as in the years past, your land trust has worked tirelessly to maintain and expand these local gems. Here are some of the 2025 highlights, some of which you can read more about inside this newsletter:

- A Chimney Swift tower was installed on our Enders property to provide sanctuary for this declining species. We are happy to report that several swifts have already taken up occupancy in their upscale digs!
- In partnership with the Avon Parks and Recreation department, we have held monthly hikes on Land Trust and Town of Avon properties. Usually held on Saturday mornings, these hikes are a wonderful introduction to the natural wonders of Avon.
- Trail maintenance is a constant undertaking on our many miles of trails, and board member and trail leader Scott Lewis has done a fantastic job all year. He also has added several new trails to some of our existing properties for you to check out.
- Kiosks and trail maps have been installed on newer trails.
- We sponsored several lecture programs on natural wildlife at the Avon Free Public Library.
- We led manpower to several invasive species cleanup days in town.
- A We applied for and won several grants, significantly boosting our financials.
- Our membership has grown considerably over the last year.

We have several new projects lined up for 2026, and our land acquisition subcommittee is busy investigating potential investments. As always, we welcome your help! Please consider lending a hand on one of our trail projects or volunteering on our board of directors – and just as important, please continue to support us financially through your membership and donations. Avon's open space depends on you! ■

save the date calendar 2025

FALL/WINTER HIKES ALL LEAVE @10 AM

10.18.25	Tower Toot [11AM], Meet at Hazen Rd. [Rain date: 10/19]
11.1.25	Foundland Trail, from parking lot on Northington Road
12.6.25	Huckleberry Hill area from Countryside park
1.3.26	Thompson-Osborne Preserve from Avon Senior Center
2.7.26	Buckingham Countryside Loop from Ball Field parking lot

Editor: Susan Rietano Davey; Design & Production: Diana Cesaro

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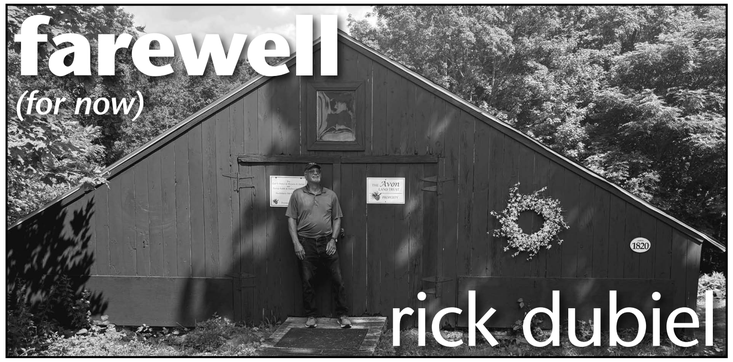

Avon native, Rick Dubiel, embodies the idea that those who know and love the land in childhood, preserve and steward it into adulthood. From his earliest days wandering open spaces and building forts in the Moravia Woods neighborhood on the north side of town, to catching black racer snakes atop Avon Mountain, to marveling in wonder at the land trust's deep forests right in the center of town, few people know the flora and fauna of Avon as well as Rick.

For over 35 years, Rick has served on the Avon Land Trust board of directors – five years as co-president. Throughout that time, the land trust has been the fortunate beneficiary of Rick's love of our town and commitment to serving it. And so, it is with deep gratitude and sadness that we announce his retirement.

In August, Rick and I escaped the high summer heat in the shade of Marge's Barn to reflect back on his years with the land trust, his favorite moments and accomplishments, and his hopes for the future of open space in the town he's called home for nearly 70 years.

Rick's service to the Avon Land Trust began as many of ours has – with an unexpected invitation. "I attended a land trust presentation on wild turkeys, hosted by (naturalist and former ALT president) Tom Morganti," he recalls. "As I left the venue, Tom pulled me aside and, before I knew it, I was the board's newest member." Rick's imprint on the land trust is sweeping; there's not an area of our mission that he hasn't touched upon and improved.

When he took on a leadership role, the land trust didn't have a deep bench of people (or deep pockets) so Rick led the way in partnering with other organizations, like the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, the Avon Free Public Library, Avon Parks and Recreation Department, and others for manpower and to co-host events. A naturalist, handyman, and semi-professional gardener, Rick enjoyed helping scouts and young adults from FAVARH learn basic carpentry and groundskeeping skills. "Seeing chimney swifts nesting in the tower we built for them," he recalls, "was an especially meaningful moment."

Rick helped significantly improve the trust's financial position by teaching himself grant-writing and putting his newly acquired skills to work. He secured annual grant support from local banks, area businesses, and the *Avon Greater Together* foundation, in addition to our largest-ever grant from the *Garmany* Fund, which was used to make major improvements to Marge's Barn. With greater financial resources, we were able to focus on core activities like expanding our schedule of informational events with naturalists and other experts, and building out trail infrastructure with new kiosks, bridges, puncheons, maps, benches, picnic tables and signage. Likewise, we've expanded wildlife habitat with nest boxes, turtle rafts, chimney swift towers, bat houses, and pollinator gardens. Programs and enhancements like these improve life for hikers, outdoor lovers, our furry and feathered friends, and our gardens.

A graduate of Avon High School (1973) and Trinity College (1977) Rick inherited his commitment to service from his parents who were involved in Avon Little League, Boy Scouts, and their church. In addition to his many years of service to the land trust, Rick has served our town as an Avon Cub Scout board member and Webelos den leader, board member of the Avon Booster Club and Avon Dollars For Scholars, co-founder of Avon's summer volleyball camp, and member of the Avon Parks and Recreation Commission. He continues to donate his time to the American Red Cross, the Avon Food Pantry, Dogstar, and the Orphan Grain Train, in Terryville, which collects and distributes used medical equipment.

Rick earned a master's degree in Public Health from the University of Connecticut and enjoyed a 28-year career at Aetna. He retired as a Lead Director, leading high-impact business initiatives in genetic testing, women's health, and cardiology. It was a perfect job that enabled him to exercise his unique analytic, writing, and clinical skills, and work alongside physicians on a range of interesting projects.

Rick has been married to his wife Barbara since 1984. Together, they raised their two children, Alaina and Brian, in the Deepwood Drive home he built on 4 acres of land handed down by his grandparents, both Polish immigrants. Rick inherited a green thumb from his ancestors. He maintains a large diverse garden and, in the past, he sold his tomatoes to LaSalle Market and Gertrude and Alice's Restaurant in Collinsville.

Asked to name some of his most memorable land trust moments, Rick smiles and recalls "checking on a wood duck nest box and finding a warm clutch of eggs inside …and checking another nest box in winter, and being surprised to find a screech owl sound asleep inside." Rick has also enjoyed seeing such natural wonders as a family of river otters making their way across the pond at Oakes Preserve.

Without question, Rick's favorite property is Marge's Barn on Huckleberry Hill. Named after the woman who donated it, Rick has lovingly led its clean-up and restoration, partnering with other board members, residents, and Girl Scout, Makena Logan and her family, to clear three trailer loads of barberry to restore the old cow trail and furnish it with a wooden walkway over wet, overgrown areas that had become impassable.

Rick's imprint on the land trust can also be seen in our balance sheet. Under his leadership, the trust went from running slightly in the red six years ago, to banking modest surpluses each year since. Always open to new ideas, Rick led the charge in making ALT the first Connecticut land trust to enroll in a carbon sequestration program – and we've been receiving checks regularly ever since. Similarly, he spearheaded the opening of an Endowment fund, making us better able to address operational expenses not covered by grant money – like insurance.

"I was lucky during my tenure to stand on the shoulders of giants like our current trail master Scott Lewis, and our hike leader and social media maestro Jeff Grindrod." Rick reflects. "Together, we have grown our membership and made our open spaces more welcoming and accessible to the community."

In his retirement, Rick is excited to spend more time with his four grandchildren, and enjoy more travel. He recently enjoyed an extended trip to Poland, and other trips will surely follow. Rick Dubiel may be a retired grandpa, but in his heart, he's still that little boy exploring the wonder of the Avon woods, foraging for wild mushrooms – and there's still a lot more to discover. ■ SRD

rest in peace, Dottie Blanchard

Earlier this year, our beloved Secretary Emeritus, **Dottie Blanchard**, passed away at 97 years old. Dottie and her husband Hugh – *for whom the ALT Hugh Blanchard Scholarship was named* – were founding members of the Avon Land Trust over 50 years ago. When Hugh passed, Dottie remained on the board as Secretary for decades, hosting board meetings in her cozy home on Woodhaven Drive. Meetings at Dottie's began promptly at 7:21 pm, a time so specific she thought we'd remember it better. All warmth and smiles, Dottie made board members old and new feel welcome and appreciated. The land trust she helped start now holds over 350 acres of land. She was proud of our accomplishments, and we are deeply grateful for her years of service and friendship. ■

building community | making new friends

Members of FAVARH rest proudly in front of the barn they helped preserve.

Members of Avon's Daisy (girl scout) troop rest after a land trust led hike in the Huckleberry Hill woods.

Acquiring and maintaining open spaces is only part of the Avon Land Trust mission. Trails, fields, and meadows are meant to be not only preserved but experienced with our eyes, our hands and feet. To that end, we partner regularly with schools, scouting groups, other naturalist organizations like Friends of the Heublein Tower, and town organizations like the Avon Parks and Recreation Department. Some of these partners have been featured in past newsletters.

This year, we forged a new partnership with FAVARH/The Arc of the Farmington Valley which serves young adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities ensuring they have the supports they need to live a healthy, active, and independent lifestyle.

ALT board member, **Jeff Grinrod**, initiated our partnership with FAVARH by inviting members to participate in property maintenance and light construction and groundskeeping projects at some of our properties. With help from Jeff and Rick Dubiel, participating young adults learned to use basic tools, to see a project from start to finish, and they felt the satisfaction of contributing to something important.

If your organization is interested in partnering with the land trust to work on trails or property maintenance, co-host an event on one of our properties, or participate in educational events, please reach out!
Contact: srietano@gmail.com ■

workin' the land:

We received a generous donation of about 200 native plants from seed company and retailer, American Meadows, this year. We've had several successful planting days, expanding gardens at Marge's Barn, Oaks Preserve, and on the Nod Way Trail. In addition, we donated about 25 dahlia bulbs to the Avon Garden Club.

These native plants will provide much needed sources of food for our pollinators as well as habitat for other treasured wildlife. Moving forward, we are collecting seeds from these plants this fall to use them for growing new plants next spring! ■

Work crew: ALT board members Bob Breckinridge, Tom Kassan, and Heidi Zacchera.

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