

# 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](http://www.avonlandtrust.org)

FALL 2019

## P R E S I D E N T ' S M E S S A G E



**Christine Graesser**  
*President, Avon Land Trust*

Avon has a wonderful open space that happens to be officially wild and scenic – the Farmington River.

My husband and I realized this year that it was already August and we hadn't been on the river, so we loaded up our kayaks and headed to Nod Brook, which is our favorite hassle-free launching location in Avon. We often put in there, paddle up to the Route 44 bridge and then drift back on the current to our starting point. Alsop Meadows, past the furniture store off Rte 10, is another launching spot. A new launch will be constructed as part of the new Avon Old Farms bridge project.

You don't have to own a canoe or kayak; you can rent one from a number of companies in the Farmington Valley. The companies will also drop you off and pick you up if you choose to paddle point to point. If you have two cars and extra time, you can do your own trip from Farmington through Avon and up to Simsbury.

I like to paddle in the early evening, when the sun is behind the trees and

the light is angled to glowing effect on the insects rising from the water. The essence of paddling on the river is to take your time and look around. You will probably see at least one great blue heron, who will keep flying down the river ahead of you. A cackling kingfisher or two will crisscross from one tree to another. Look at every log that is stranded along the bank; you may see a turtle or a family of ducks taking a nap in the sun. I always look for bright red cardinal flowers growing along the banks.

The river goes by a number of golf ranges, so my husband and son like to retrieve balls that ended up in the water. We have seen beaver, muskrat and river otters plying the waters. On our latest trip, a beaver emphatically slapped the water with its paddle tail as a warning not to get too close.

We didn't. Instead, we simply relaxed, savored the clouds overhead, the water shuffling by and the call of birds in the air - cell phones off; senses on. Try it yourself the next time you're looking for something fun to do in town! ■

save the date  
**calendar**  
2019

**10.19.19**

### **FALL FOLIAGE HIKE**

Saturday @ 1:00 PM  
Meet at trail head on Nod Way,  
off of Nod Road.  
(Raindate: Sunday, 10/20)

**11.21.19**

### **ANNUAL MEETING**

Thursday @ 7:00 PM  
Community Room,  
Avon Free Public Library

# happy trails to avon's favorite outdoor educator, larry sparks

— Susan Rietano Davey

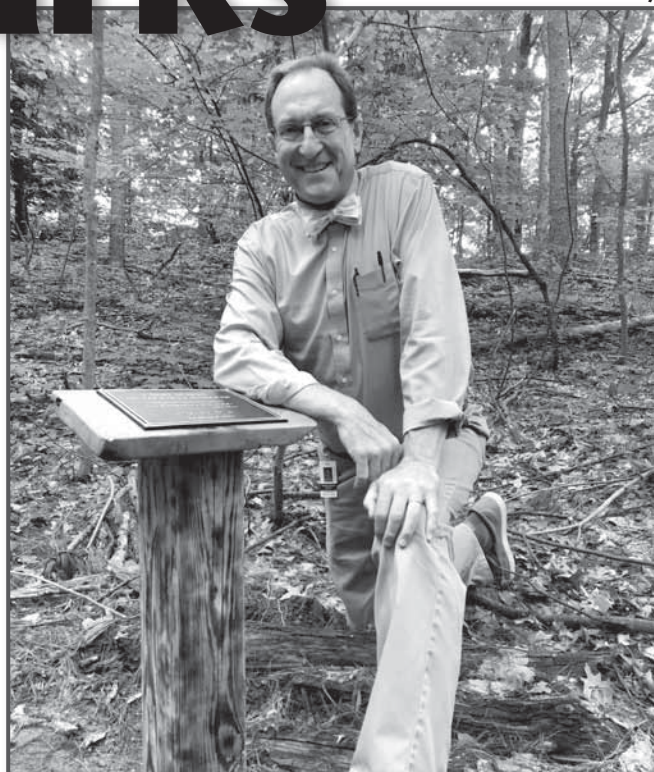
Eleven years ago, I met Larry Sparks beside an empty bike rack in front of Roaring Brook School, where he was vice principal. It was a cloudless, sparkling, Indian Summer day – *perfect for biking or walking to school* – yet, as a long line of cars made its way, snail-like, to the drop-off area, we saw no walkers and just one lonely bike on the rack: my son Luke's.

That chance meeting in 2008 has had a ripple effect on what I estimate to be 2,000 lucky K-4 children who have passed through RBS in the decade since, each of them benefitting, in ways small and profound, from the *Unplugged Learning Project* that was conceived and initiated at the bike rack that day.

Concerned that children spent more time looking at screens than observing nature, and more time playing adult-organized activities than spontaneous 'pick-up' games, our mission for the *Unplugged Learning Project* was (and still is) to educate and inspire families to unplug and go outside. Believing that we could best reach families if we reached their children, many of our

projects have been school-based. Our first and finest effort was the construction of an outdoor learning space at Roaring Brook School featuring a 50-seat amphitheater built into the slope of the land and surrounded by a canopy of trees, and a meandering instructional walking loop around it called *Blazer's Trail*. The 'foreman' and chief 'trailblazer' for the project, was Larry Sparks.

On Monday, June 17th, Larry – *a gifted and visionary educator, a passionate nature-lover, and a tireless steward of the land* – retired from his post at RBS. A packed gathering of 50 colleagues and fans surprised him with a heartfelt retirement party which was held (where else?) in the outdoor classroom he helped build, and along the trail he blazed and maintained.



**"...our mission for the Unplugged Learning Project was (and still is) to educate and inspire families to unplug and go outside."**



Teachers and staff from Roaring Brook School gather in the “unplugged” outdoor classroom to say goodbye to retiring Assistant Principal, Larry Sparks.

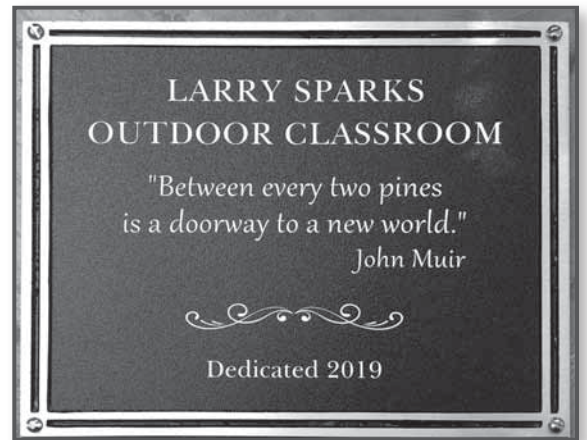
**“...a gifted and visionary educator, a passionate nature-lover, and a tireless steward of the land”**

There were laughs and tears, as teachers and principal Noam Sturm recalled, affectionately,

how Larry could create an outdoor lesson plan for any subject, could find and source a recyclable or compostable version of pretty much anything, and would appear out of nowhere to gently remind you that the paper cup you were throwing away actually belonged in the recycle bin. There was a hike around Blazer’s Trail, a sing-along, and the unveiling of a permanent plaque to honor Larry’s important work in the woods that introduced (and continues to introduce) nature to a generation of kids who are increasingly disconnected from it.

Larry sparks will be sorely missed by the Roaring Brook School educators and children he inspired, and by the fauna and flora of the surrounding woods that he treasured and protected.

He may be leaving the campus, but he leaves a beautiful and lasting legacy of outdoor learning, nature loving, and resource conservation in his wake. Thank you, Larry! ■



A permanent, engraved plaque was installed beside the outdoor amphitheater seating, in Larry’s honor.



Two books of nature poetry were presented at the party: one for Larry, and one for the school library.



*Bluebird House, installed at property on Bishop Lane.*



*Wood duck House, installed at property along Secret Lake.*

## new homes

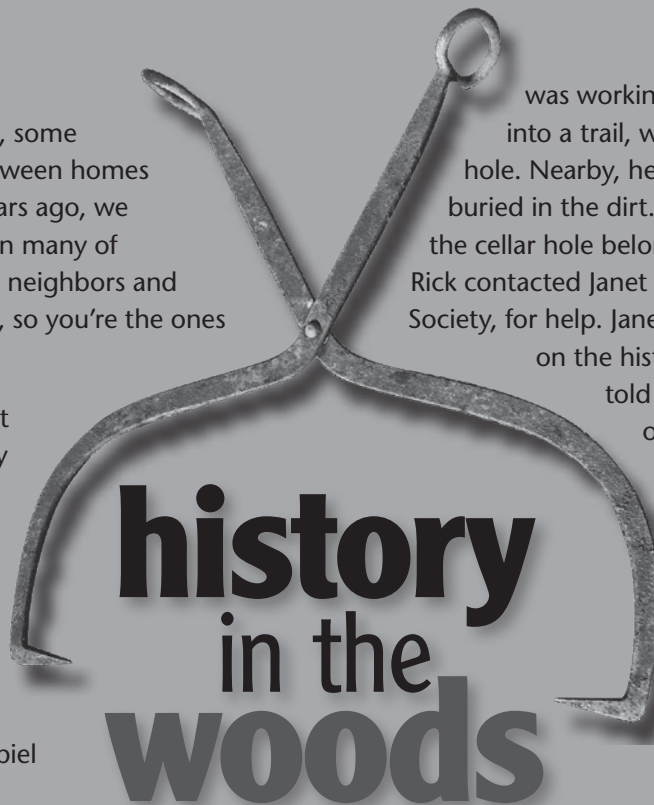
One reason residents frequent land trust properties is to see nature, alive and thriving. We like to do our part to ensure this experience, so we sometimes work to help things along. Case in point: In addition to continued and extensive trail work this year, land trust board members and volunteers put up homes for some of our site "visitors". ■

The Land Trust owns many properties throughout town, some small or obscure, tucked between homes or commercial sites. Four years ago, we printed and installed signs on many of these properties, prompting neighbors and passersby to comment: "Oh, so you're the ones who own this property!"

One sign that prompted that response marks our property that extends behind the Company 4 firehouse on Huckleberry Hill Rd., a road well traveled during workday commutes and on Saturday morning trips to the landfill. This spring, ALT director Rick Dubiel

was working to convert an old roadbed into a trail, when he came across an old cellar hole. Nearby, he found a large pair of ice tongs buried in the dirt. This got him wondering: Did the cellar hole belong to an old ice house? Curious, Rick contacted Janet Conner of the Avon Historical Society, for help. Janet has done extensive research on the history of Huckleberry Hill, and she

told Rick that Romanta Woodruff owned a hard cider distillery nearby on Edwards Road back in the 1830s. She would have had use for an icehouse. To help solve the mystery, the land trust has invited State Archeologist Nick Bellantoni to inspect the cellar hole and distillery location sites this fall. Stay tuned! ■



# history in the woods

# 2019 scholarships

**Two bright, young Avon High School stars were the chosen recipients of this year's Avon Land Trust Hugh Blanchard Scholarship. Congratulations to Emma Buth & Peyton Edwards!**



Emma Buth squeezed in an interview with us between interning, volunteering and running in the woods and hills of her west Avon home. "I was so excited to be chosen

for this scholarship because environmental sustainability is a real passion of mine," she says. The daughter of Alissa and Jay, and older sister to Charlotte, Emma developed her passion for the environment over her years as a runner. "Running outdoors is how I relieve stress and focus my thoughts," she explains, "and I want to ensure that others have the opportunity to enjoy being outside the way I have." Unfortunately, the garbage she sees on her different running routes suggests that not everyone around her respects the land. She wants to change that.

Currently Emma is interning at Environment CT, a Hartford non-profit organization that is funded by the Fund for the Public Interest and uses community education and advocacy to advance its goals. Emma recently contributed to their design of a campaign to ban Styrofoam, and is helping with the group's next initiative to ban RoundUp insecticide.

A 2019 graduate of Avon High School, Emma was a four-year varsity runner (and senior captain) for the Cross-Country team and a four-year member of the Track & Field team. She began assessing the environment more consciously and critically her junior year, when she decided that her senior Capstone project would focus on sustainability.

Curious about how we consume clothing - both the impact of clothing manufacturing on the environment, and of clothing marketing on young people's psyche - she began her project by looking inward. "I

looked at the way I consumed 'fast fashion' and challenged myself to a one-month minimalist trial where I only wore 10 pieces of clothing." What surprised Emma most was that no one noticed or cared. And what satisfied her most was knowing that her wanting (and purchasing) less clothing could have global impact. As a side project, Emma collected her old shirts and recycled them into shopping bags!

Emma is heading off to Syracuse University this fall where she plans to double major in Environmental Studies and English. She explains: "The English piece will help me become a better writer so I can educate the public on becoming good stewards of the land." Emma will use her land trust scholarship money to buy books (and definitely not clothes!).



Emma's classmate, Peyton Edwards, has an equally busy summer schedule and an equally interesting story. The only child of William and Cheryl, a popular Wellness teacher at Avon

High School, Peyton grew up just north of the land trust's Skyline trail, and she often explored and ran in the woods there. "I have always loved being outside, exploring nature, hiking, and communing with animals," she explains. In high school, she coordinated social hikes with the LEO service club and her lacrosse team. During the summer, she is a camp counselor at The Summer Place, a full-day camp for children that's run on the campus of the University of Hartford. Peyton started out as a camper there, and has been a counselor for two years.

The curriculum at Summer Place is quite broad and, predictably, Peyton's favorite programs are the outdoor ones - "learning

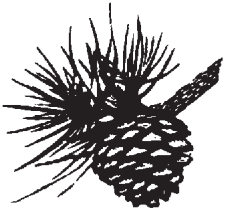
the ropes (course)", "campfire cooking", and "wilderness survival". Her favorite and most memorable camper experiences from her younger days are the community projects they took on cleaning local rivers and planting gardens. Currently, she is instituting a station at each camper hub to recycle the plastic water cups and bottles consumed by hot campers.

Peyton was a four-year member of the AHS soccer team and a four-year member (and senior captain) of the lacrosse team. She belonged to the LEO club and the Animal Welfare Club, and it sounds like she will be just as busy in college, as she rattles off all the ways she plans to be engaged at St. Michael's College in Vermont this fall.

"I'll be pretty busy playing on the lacrosse team, but I'm also interested in joining the Adventure Sports club - and I'm really looking forward to skiing on the bigger hills of Vermont," says the skier who hasn't yet skied up north. In the classroom, Peyton plans to study Environmental Science. "I met with some of the professors and they described the class work - collecting data samples out in the field, studying wildlife and water levels." Not a lover of numbers, she acknowledges that math will be part of the curriculum, but explains: "Even if I don't like the math part, it will be worth the extra work, if I can be outside."

Peyton plans to put the land trust scholarship money towards her tuition. Inspired by Summer Place Saves The World - an academic program at her camp that teaches environmental stewardship to adolescent campers - she's ready to get to work. "My generation is the one that's going to have to save the world."

Emma and Peyton wish to thank the land trust and the Blanchard family for the scholarship funds that will help them pursue their goals - and we thank them, in advance, for their contributions to the planet. ■



# THE *Avon* LAND TRUST

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## 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 a trail maintenance fund

name \_\_\_\_\_

address \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

phone \_\_\_\_\_

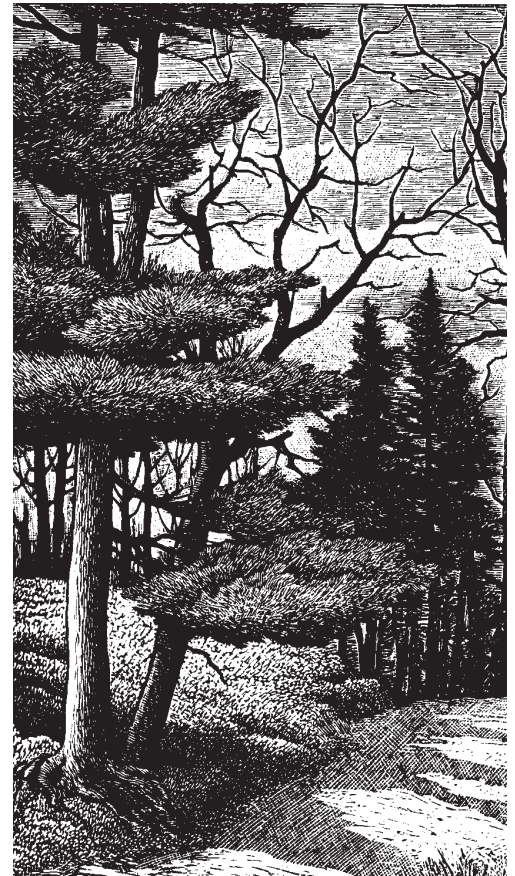
\_\_\_\_\_ I/We wish to remain anonymous

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](http://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 2019 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.