

## Hugh Blanchard Memorial Avon Land Trust Scholarship 2021 scholarship recipient



Despite his passion for technology and status as one of Northeastern University's newest Computer Science majors, this year's Avon Land Trust Hugh Blanchard Memorial Scholarship recipient, **Dhananjai "Jai" Senthilkumar**, is an "unplugged" kid at heart.

Born in Southeast India, with many relatives still there, Jai moved to Farmington in 2006, as a toddler, and then to Avon in 2013 where he has attended school since 5th grade. Much of his Farmington Valley childhood was spent hiking, climbing trees, playing soccer, making Origami creations, and riding around on his bike – in fact, he met one of his closest friends in front of Avon High School where their bikes occupied an otherwise empty bike rack.

Jai's parents, mom Ushrani, a homemaker, and dad Senthil, an engineer, are deeply proud of their son – so is younger brother, Vishnu – and there is no shortage of reasons to be proud of a young man like Jai. A gifted student, Jai is quadlingual; he speaks English, French, and two unique Indian languages. He also speaks the language of computer code, and was part of the successful student effort to revive the AHS Uberbots robotics program that had been discontinued before his freshman year. Jai soon became lead programmer for the team, a role he held all four years.

Although his Uberbots role was time consuming, Jai made room for athletics (two years of soccer, two years of Cross-Country), National Honor Society, and French Honor Society, while at Avon High. He split his free time between adventures, outdoors, and developing applications and writing code on his computer, indoors.

One app Jai is most proud of was inspired by his strong ties to family in India, which he visits bi-annually. During the Covid-19 pandemic, his family trip was cancelled and Jai wanted to bridge the geographic divide, particularly

for his aging grandparents. So, he designed and developed an app, he calls Roots, for his extended family – straddling two hemispheres – to locate, connect, and easily video chat with each other.

Ever curious, and not content to rest on his laurels, Jai took full advantage of the school internship program, while at AHS. Last year, he completed a fascinating internship in a University of Connecticut lab studying the gut microbiome: its effects on overall health, how different cultures have unique biomes related to diet and culture, and how biases in healthcare affect outcomes. The experiment on which he worked simulated different regional gut biomes to test the efficacy of various probiotic treatment combinations. "Indian culture deeply values holistic healing practices like protecting the digestive system with probiotics – and so do I," explains Jai. "Covid has really hit India, and the UConn internship experience showed me how I might bring my technology skills to the field of medicine."

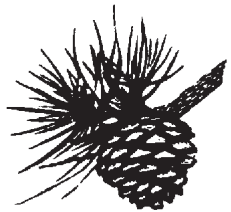
Jai wrapped up his impressive four years at Avon, as all seniors do, with a multi-disciplinary Capstone project; his centered on Clean Energy. Influenced by studies of wind currents on Long Island Sound, and modeled, in part, on a Block Island wind project, Jai created a long-term, cost-effective, conceptual plan for the state of Connecticut to replace natural gas with renewable (wind, solar) and nuclear energy. (He's no small thinker!)

Fall term can't come soon enough for an eager Jai. He looks forward to digging deep in his classes at Northeastern to improve his programming and development skills, explore new subject matter like Artificial Intelligence and Data Science, and see how they can be applied, eventually, to either Medicine or Environmental Science. Of course, he plans to make time to explore campus and the city of Boston from the vantage point of his bike or a tree, too. "I do love technology, and I plan to make my living with it," he says, "but I try to live my life as unplugged as possible." ■



### LOOK FAMILIAR?

As part of our effort to increase community financial support of the land trust, we're trying to make it easier to donate. Now, when you're out enjoying a hike on one of our trails and think "Gee, this is a really great trail, we should donate to the land trust," you don't have to risk forgetting about it by the time you get back to your car and wallet. New signs featuring easy QR codes and posted on our most popular trails, make it easy to give immediately - at the moment you're inspired. Please give today! ■



### 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 the trail maintenance fund

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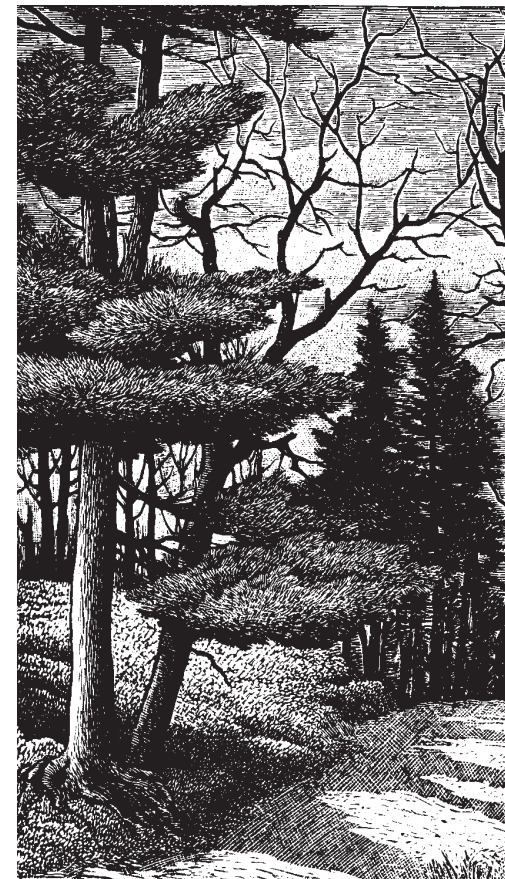
Please make checks payable to The Avon Land Trust, and mail to: The Avon Land Trust, P.O. Box 267, Avon, CT 06001.

... or pay on-line by visiting our website: [www.avonlandtrust.org](http://www.avonlandtrust.org).

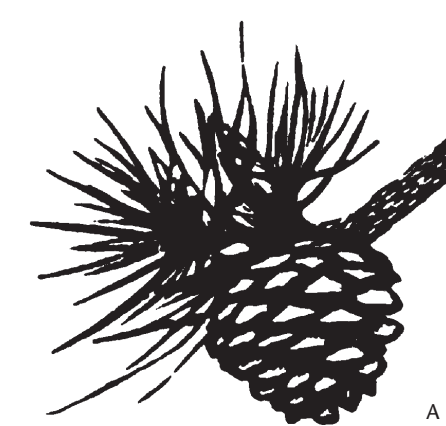
Please let us know if you can help the ALT in any of these other ways:

- 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 2022 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](http://www.avonlandtrust.org) FALL 2021

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



**Rick Dubiel**  
*Co-President,*  
*Avon Land Trust*

**"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times"**  
– Charles Dickens

Year two of Covid-19 brought the worst of times to many of our favorite trails. The emerald ash borer, high winds, and heavy rains, together caused many trees to fall across our trails, and the Nod Way trail bridge to be swept off its footings.

But it was the best of times in that we formed many new partnerships. We partnered with some professional trail maintenance outfits, and with the Avon Free Public Library to offer a highly successful speaker series on various nature topics (which will be ongoing). We joined with several foundations to secure grants for new projects, like our new Oakes Preserve video camera. We collaborated with historian Janet M. Conner and the Town of Avon to launch a new quarterly electronic newsletter – and we have more partnerships under development!

A passage from Mary-Francis Mackie's, *Avon, Connecticut – An Historical Story* comes to mind: "In the best tradition of the town, Avon still has citizens who care...citizens who work with imagination and energy without regard for personal gain, for the good of Avon. As long as they continue this tradition, Avon will be a good place to live".

We grew up in Avon during a time when roaming the woods and observing nature was the common pastime. Today's youth have more organized schedules that don't allow much space for connecting with the outdoors, so we want to help maximize those opportunities for this and future generations.

With your financial help, we can. We invite you to become a dues-paying member and volunteer of the Avon Land Trust, supporting our mission to preserve open spaces for public enjoyment and wildlife habitat, promote environmentalism, and inspire a new generation of woods roamers like us. ■

Bob Breckinridge & Rick Dubiel, Co-Presidents

## land trust ⇨ library connection

The Avon Land Trust, in partnership with the Avon Free Public Library, has been co-hosting a series of nature-related presentations this year. In February,

over 200 people attended a lively virtual presentation on **Bobcats**. A presentation on **Roadside Ecology** followed, in August.

More future events are in the

works, such as State Archeologist Nick Bellantoni's Greatest Hits, on October 5th. You can register at the library or at our website: [www.avonlandtrust.org](http://www.avonlandtrust.org).

# the walking Schoolbus



The Roaring Brook Walking Schoolbus, has stood the test of time. It is well established and has barely missed a Friday, except for weather reasons, in all these years. Says 8 year-old Madison R., an RBS 3rd grader who proudly moved up to the coveted role of Line Leader this year: "I wish I could walk to school every day. It is so much fun, really good exercise, and a great way to start the day!" Her neighbor and friend, 7 year-old Lucas P. concurs: "I never miss a

When the Unplugged Learning Project made its debut in 2009, one of its simplest initiatives (i.e. no funding and only one volunteer needed) was the Walking Schoolbus program in which an adult-leader 'picks' children up at their bus stops and walks them safely to Avon's elementary schools.

For children lucky enough to live beside, behind, or in front of Roaring Brook or Pine Grove School, walking to school is safe and easy. But our roads were not designed for pedestrian travel, so for the vast majority of Avon students, walking to school alone – *something we, their parents, took for granted* – is just plain dangerous.

And so, twelve years later, on any (dry) Friday from September to June, you can see packs of 5-9 year olds hoofing it to school with bright eyes, pink cheeks, and big smiles on their faces. Wendy Mahoney's four children are 'graduates' of the Walking Schoolbus program; her youngest, Colleen, took her last walk in June before moving on to Thompson Brook. "My kids thoroughly enjoyed exploring nature and the surrounding community on their walks to school each Friday," she recalls fondly. "I am so grateful for those days. I know that walking in the fresh air gave them a much brighter outlook on the day."

walking day because I love it! I love the exercise and just starting the day with my friends." Both have been walking since kindergarten, and their three siblings have followed suit.

Pine Grove School's location, on a road with sidewalks, invites a steadier corps of daily walkers. But for those who live further away, we are excited to report that a parent has come forward to rejuvenate the school's Walking Schoolbus this year. If you are interested in learning more, or helping out, please contact Amy Finch at [amyfinch5@gmail.com](mailto:amyfinch5@gmail.com) for details.

We hope to see more backpack-wearing little people out on the road, soon! ■



## new group hiking program for adults

### grant news

In July, we were notified that the *Avon Greater Together Community Fund*, in collaboration with the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, awarded us a grant for **\$6,285.00**.

In reviewing our proposal, the awards advisory committee noted that our work "helps meet Avon's recreational, environmental, conservational, and educational needs and illustrates how engaged and passionate neighbors can make improvements that provide

wonderful benefits to our community." We heartily agree! Stay tuned to learn how we will be investing this generous donation.

We also were notified – just days before going to print – that the *Charitable Giving Committee of the Connecticut Water* company awarded us **\$500.00** towards our purchase of grass carp to remedy the duckweed problem at the pond ("Lake Erie") on our beautiful Oakes Preserve property.

In granting our funding request, the committee noted the "continued efforts of the Avon Land Trust to protect our valuable resources," and commended us, specifically, for "providing wood ducks a safe place to nest, and recognizing (the Oakes) as a haven for birdwatchers," as well. ■

If you're angling to spend more time outdoors, then Avon's new adult hiking group is perfect for you! Join hike leaders Tom and Norm for a fun, stress-free group hike every month. Explore/learn about Avon's many parks and hiking trails, advance your hiking skills, and hike in great company.

Tom and Norm will teach hiking basics and lead the hikes at a social pace, 2-3 hours, 3-4 miles, on moderate trails. Participants should wear comfortable clothing; sturdy, well-treaded sneakers or hiking boots; and bring water and hiking poles (if desired). All hiking ability levels are welcome and registration is required.

#### Fall 2021 Hiking Locations:

9/11/21

Fisher Meadows to Sconsett Pond and back

park at Fisher Meadows Boat Launch

10/2/21

Fisher Farm to Farmington

park at Fisher Meadows Boat Launch

11/20/21

Countryside Park & Huckleberry Hill

park at Countryside building parking lot

12/4/21

Avon Land Trust Garvin-Maher Loop Trail

park on Nod Way

Meeting time: 9:00 a.m.

**Parking:** When parking on a public road, please all park on the same side of the street

**Fee:** \$5.00

An e-mail notification will be sent by 7:15 AM the day of the hike if a hike is canceled due to bad weather. A make-up date will also be announced. ■



## discovering the stories behind the properties

Janet M. Conner, ALT Historian Laureate, and Ruth Woodford, ALT board member, have graciously taken on the ambitious task of researching the history of the Land Trust's 35 properties. Each parcel has a unique story to tell about its heritage and biodiversity. For example, some land trust parcels have colonial roads, ice ponds, and tinker's middens in their past lives.

Janet is using historical maps to document a timeline of ownership for each property, potentially going back as far as 1711, when Avon was part of Farmington. It's not easy to correlate early locations with today's street addresses.

Early land records often mention impermanent objects as landmarks, like trees or fence posts. Janet and Ruth have to use a mix of census records, historical maps, probate records, and the "non-population agricultural census" to piece together the mystery of who owned the property at a certain point in time.

Ruth has been tasked with finding the modern-day land records, which begin in 1969, through the online Town records. She will trace the ownership of the properties acquired by the Trust from 1973 to present day. Once the land parcel histories have been compiled, additional information will be added about the flora and fauna living on the properties.

The end result will be a booklet that showcases each property's historical and environmental value – and we can't wait to see it and share it with you. Thanks, Janet and Ruth! ■