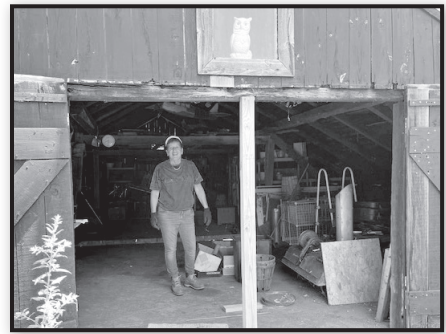


workin' the land

We proudly do the bulk of land and trail maintenance of ALT properties ourselves, allowing us to reserve your donor dollars and grant awards for special programs and projects. For example, we recently cleaned out the barn at our latest land acquisition on Huckleberry Hill Road, which produced multiple truckloads of junk and debris (that were easily transported to the landfill right up the road.) In the photo above, ALT board member, Heidi Zacchera poses in the newly cleared space. Just west, we got a little help from demolition contractor Kapura, Inc., to remove a fallen cabin on our Sepous Rd. property along the Farmington River. Funding for this project was provided by the Lower Farmington Wild and Scenic Association which, in turn, got the funds from the National Park Service. (A great example of your federal tax dollars trickling into your 'backyard.')



Heidi Zacchera in newly acquired barn on Huckleberry Hill Road



Collapsed cabin on Sepous Road property



Fireplace remaining on Sepous Road property



Hikers who enjoy trekking to the Heublein Tower from the Nod Way trailhead will have an easier time navigating the twists and turns of that route thanks to our newly installed kiosk!

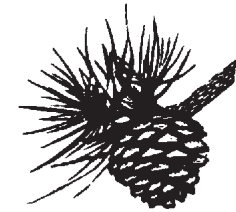
2022 scholarships Hugh Blanchard Memorial Avon Land Trust Scholarships

This year's worthy winners of a \$1,500 scholarship are 2022 Avon High School graduates **Madison Ellsworth** and **Yilan Tang**. Congratulations to them both! The Avon Land Trust Hugh Blanchard Memorial Scholarship is named after one of our founding members and is awarded to an Avon High School senior who has demonstrated a commitment to the environment and who will be continuing this commitment through their college studies and activities. If you are (or know) an Avon High School senior who fits this profile and would like to be considered, applications are available in the AHS guidance department.



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

Post Office Box 267
Avon, Connecticut 06001

PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 283
ECRWSS

Local
Postal Customer



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 2022

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's been a very productive year for the Avon Land Trust. We inherited two beautiful properties, which you can read about in this issue, and our trails continue to see increased use as COVID subsides. To improve your hiking experience, we've erected three raised walkways on our trails at Nod Way and Oakes Preserve. New trail markers have also been ordered and installed. In addition, we co-hosted (with the town) a hike to Heublein Tower on the Hazen trail, and successfully lobbied to have a new kiosk installed there. Improvements to other properties have also taken place and they are detailed in this issue.

For your reading and viewing pleasure, we partnered on a series of nature-related presentations with the library, published three quarterly e-newsletters, and continue to maintain our wildlife camera at Oakes Preserve where we launched a new turtle raft.

It's never too early to give thanks. Accordingly, we'd like to thank the organizations that have provided major financial support for our special aspirational projects, such as **Northwest Community Bank Foundation**, the **Lower Farmington River Wild and Scenic Association**, and the **Avon Greater Together Community Fund**. We'd also like to thank the great folks at the Avon Free Public Library for partnering with us on environmental presentations; Attorney **Paul Potanka** for donating legal services; our dedicated cadre of volunteers, like **Gerry LaChance** who maintains our trails, **Calvin Bensch**, who maintains our wildlife cam; and historian **Janet M. Conner** who writes our informative e-newsletters distributed by the town.

We also thank the generous land donors and stewards who are featured in this issue. And lastly, we offer big thanks to the members of our board of directors, who give so generously of their time and talents - and to our members whose financial support provides our baseline operating funds, and whose moral support inspires us to work hard maintaining spaces and trails for public enjoyment, environmental education, land acquisition, and improved wildlife habitat.

Please renew your membership, or join us anew, and reach out to us if you would like to donate land, or leave a bequest. Thank you!

Bob Breckinridge & Rick Dubiel, Co-Presidents



Bob Breckinridge
Co-President,
Avon Land Trust



OFFICERS

Bob Breckinridge
Co-President
Rick Dubiel
Co-President
Susan Rietano Davey
Vice President
Olga Timofeyeva-Vogt
Secretary
Brian McDermott
Treasurer

DIRECTORS

Christine Graesser
Scott Lewis
Leonard Oremland
Paul Schned
Bill Shea
David Thomas
David Whitney
Ruth Woodford
Heidi Zacchera

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 2023 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.

save the date
calendar
2022

FALL FOLIAGE HIKE
10.15.22

Saturday @ 1:00 PM
Annual Fall Hike to the Tower.
Meet at trail head on Nod Way,
off of Nod Road.

FALL FILM EVENT
DATE TBD

Date + Time to come.
Special Fall Film Event for
Parents and Families.

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

the open space in your backyard

— By Chris Graesser

In the fifty years since the Avon Land Trust was formed to preserve open space in the town, a huge amount of open space has been lost. Woodland, meadows and farms are now buildings, private yards and parking lots. Much of this has been in the natural course of rural towns surrounding Hartford evolving into suburbs. But in the process, the habitats of flora (native trees and plants) and fauna (animals, birds and insects) have been destroyed. Some animals and birds have adapted (black bears come to mind). Others, not so much.

We can help restore some of this open space in our own properties.

The ideal of a wide-open patch of well-trimmed, perfectly uniform lawn originated on the estates of the elite in Europe and reached American neighborhoods in the Levittown-style suburbs of the 1950s. The advent of power lawnmowers and chemicals to control weeds and fertilize non-native Kentucky bluegrass cemented the lawn as part of the American dream.

But what's your lawn for, anyway? It can be a good playground for practicing soccer or tossing a frisbee, if you really do that. Otherwise, it can be a source of frustration when weeds invade or an unusually dry summer kills the grass you've worked hard to keep green and lush.

Nature likes diversity, and lawns are no exception. My own lawn is full of "weeds" like clover, plantains, bugleweed, moss, and dandelions. In dry years, this diverse mix of native plants stays green long after the bluegrass has browned.

No Mow May, a movement to put off the first lawn mowing until June, was introduced to give insects a chance to thrive in late spring. According to many organic landscapers, delaying the first mow of the season also helps the grass grow more lush and resilient. In addition, keeping your grass a bit longer can help it thrive, as shorter grass more readily exposes the soil to drying sunshine and winds. It's hard to change your mindset when your yard looks shaggy, but the payoff can be high for you and for nature.

Here are three other suggestions:

Consider converting more of your property to low maintenance native trees, shrubs, and flowers. Natives grow more easily and are natural hosts for birds and insects. Some of the shrubs we have introduced in our yard are viburnum, native witch hazel and winterberry. We have turned over an entire section of lawn to goldenrod and asters, superfoods for birds and animals in late summer. The UConn School of Agriculture Extension Service provides a list of native plants to choose from.

Don't be tricked by retailers who pitch "pollinator gardening" by marketing certain hybrid varieties like coneflower. Sometimes they call these 'nativars'. But hybrids are sterile and don't produce pollen. You need to look for flowers that are actual natives. Your best bet is to shop at garden centers that specialize in native species. You may not find that special scarlet coneflower, but you will know that you are genuinely welcoming and aiding butterflies and bees that rely on pollinating flowers.

Say no to Joe. Mosquito control services, even those who claim they use non-toxic methods, drive away more than our favorite biting pest. Other insects we enjoy, like ladybugs and fireflies, also disappear when these methods are used. The best mosquito repellent I can recommend is a low, rechargeable fan on your deck to blow the buggers away. It really works. So does DEET, if you are on the lawn.

Making your yard more nature friendly won't happen overnight, but it's fairly easy and can ultimately result in a lovely, low maintenance oasis for you and your wild neighbors. And the added benefit? You will have done your part to help restore Avon's lost open space. ■

gabriel dacunha's scout project

While looking for an environmental-themed project to take on for his Eagle Scout designation, **Gabriel DaCunha**, now a 17-year-old Avon High School senior, contacted the Avon Land Trust for ideas. "I have always understood the importance of protecting and maintaining the environment and wildlife around us," he explains. "It's especially important for Scouting since so much of what we do relies on being in the woods." Gabriel met with Avon Land Trust master trailblazer, Scott Lewis, and board co-president, Rick Dubiel, who told him about a section of our popular Garvin-Maher hiking trail off of Nod Way that was often flooded and muddy, making it dangerous for hikers. He was excited by the challenge of fixing it, and eagerly took the project on.

First, he toured the area and determined that the best solution would be to make a land bridge over the section of trail. Since seasonal flooding was so severe, however, there was the risk of a structure sinking or



its wood rotting. Undeterred, Gabriel brainstormed and researched ways to get around these issues, even consulting a civil engineer. His ultimate solution was to use treated lumber and set it on bags of gravel which would spread out the surface area of the bridge preventing it from sinking or coming in contact with the mud.

Once his design was approved, he purchased the materials, transported them to the trail section, and got to

work building the 95-foot long structure with a team of younger troop members he recruited. The project took about 8 months in total, 3 months of which were construction time. It cost approximately \$4,000 in donor-raised funds and took 200-man hours to complete.

Now, we hikers have a safe, dry way to hike and Gabriel has a new set of wings – Eagle wings. The young environmentalist received his Eagle Scout Award on August 24th. ■

donated by retired educator, **Janet Conlin**, who generously paid the legal fees for the deed, too.

The .5-acre lot features the Broad Brook running through it, and a buffer of wetland on either side which prevents lawn chemicals from entering the brook, the Farmington River and, eventually, Long Island Sound.

Shortly after receiving this donation, lifelong Avon resident **Marge Dubiel** donated an 8.5-acre lot on the east side of Huckleberry Hill Road, adjacent

to the Huckleberry Hill recreation area. The lot features a red barn dating back to 1820 (with a stuffed owl peering out of its window), and its location makes it a refuge for many forms of wildlife.

Thank you to Janet Conlin and Marge Dubiel for helping us maintain and expand Avon's open spaces!

Please consider donating your land to the Avon Land Trust. To learn more, please email us at trustavonland@gmail.com. ■

recent land acquisitions

This spring, we received two land donations, further expanding our holdings and honoring our commitment to protecting open space in Avon and promoting a healthy eco-system.

The first is a small, wetlands-rich parcel located at 679 West Avon Road,

UNPLUGGED LEARNING UPDATE

upl tribute to david leff

The Unplugged Learning Project's kick-off event in 2009 was a town-wide reading of Richard Louv's seminal book, **Last Child in the Woods**. Hundreds of Avon families and individuals read the book and we met in the Avon High School auditorium to discuss it. Unable to attract the author to deliver a keynote address, we turned to the next-best thing, DEEP official, naturalist, local historian, wildlife advocate, and award-winning poet and essayist, David Leff.

David did not disappoint. He punctuated his talk with interesting local lore, humorous personal anecdotes, and fascinating facts. He was funny; he was informative; and, like always, he was fully present and engaging.

In May, Leff, a resident of Canton, died unexpectedly at a youthful 67 years old. A local newspaper tribute to him is four pages long – the print equivalent of the length of street traffic at his memorial in Collinsville, on May 31st. He was beloved by his community.

Leff was known to always travel with notepads. On them, he'd scribble his thoughts and observations about that tree or rock or creature he passed – things most of us would pass by without a thought. According to his sister, Elizabeth, he called these things "marvels hidden in plain sight." He writes about such marvels in his book, **The Last Undiscovered Place**, which challenges its readers to find the complex richness and beauty of life in their own backyard.

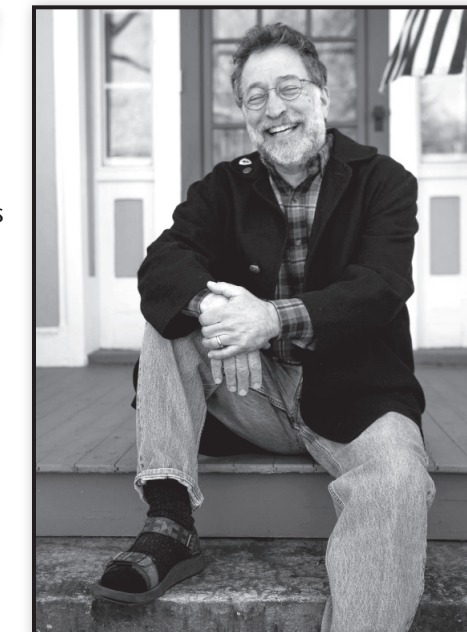


Photo David Leff, courtesy of the Hartford Courant

We are lucky that David Leff lived in our 'backyard' and we're honored to be part of the legacy of naturalists and nature-lovers he inspired with his joy for life outdoors. ■

upl event

The Unplugged Learning Project's first film event was a community-wide screening of the provocative film, **Race To Nowhere**, in January of 2011. The film explored the dark side of America's 'achievement culture' and our showing, the first in Connecticut, was standing room only.

Some changes were made in Avon's schools and homes in response to feedback from the film, but 11+ years later, a new generation of our children – *America's children* – continue, for the most part, to live structured, scheduled, stressed lives. Free time,

free play, and independence remain cultural rarities in childhood.

This, of course, has been compounded by two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In response, we are excited to bring the multi-award-winning film, **Chasing Childhood**, to you and to Connecticut this fall. The 2021 film features

educators, psychologists, parents, and activists who make the case for a "free play" movement to bring back the untold benefits of a less curated childhood. The kind most of us enjoyed.

Admission to the film is **free**, thanks to a generous grant from the Northwest Community Bank Foundation, but tickets will be required. Date and details will be announced shortly. ■

CHASING CHILDHOOD