

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 2023

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



Rick Dubiel
Co-President, ALT

Looking Back, and Looking Ahead

Fifty years ago, a group of people from many walks of life joined together to form the Avon Land Trust. In a letter to the town, they noted that *“we are all becoming increasingly aware that decisions made now will have a profound effect in the quality of life available to our children and grandchildren.”*

We stand on the shoulders of these Avon giants – Alsop, Enders, Thompson, etc. We work very hard to maximize the value of their past acquisitions for today’s Avon residents. This past year, we’ve built out new trails at our Wellner Family Conservation Area, as well as our parcels along Avon Mountain and Huckleberry Hill. We’ve added new infrastructure — benches, tables and chairs, raised walkways, wildlife cams, and signage. We give thanks for all our new partnership projects with the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Town Library, Parks and Rec Department, and our cadre of dedicated volunteers who enable us to leverage our very limited resources.

We’ve come a long way. Our membership, our revenue, our programming, our trails, and our wildlife habitat improvements are all on an up-trend. However, we are still painfully aware of how far we still have to go. As we see large cluster developments cropping up all around us here in the valley, there is an even greater need to balance these with the acquisition of more open space.

Please support our efforts by becoming a new or continued member, so we can continue to expand our work for another 50 years, and provide even more open space for our children and grandchildren! ■

Bob Breckinridge & Rick Dubiel, Co-Presidents



Bob Breckinridge
Co-President, ALT

thank you!

The land trust received many generous grants and charitable donations in 2023. This money allows us to do more and better work towards our mission of preserving and maintaining open space for YOU.

Please join us in thanking these generous **Grant Donors**:

- The Richard Garmany Fund
- Avon Greater Together Fund
- Whole Foods
- CT Water Company
- American Eagle Financial Credit Union

save the date calendar 2023

FALL FOILAGE HIKE

10.21.23*

Fall Hike to The Tower.
Meet at Nod Way Trailhead
@10:00 AM
*raindate 10.22.23

FALL FILM EVENT

10.24.23

Free screening of the film
Chasing Childhood.
TBS Auditorium @7:00 PM

P R E S E R V I N G
open space
for  **years**
and counting

The Avon Land Trust was formed in 1973 to preserve open space, protect wildlife habitats, promote stewardship of the environment, and create spaces for public enjoyment.

At the time, Congress had founded the EPA, and momentum was building across the country for nature conservancy. In response to the loss of farmland and to address environmental threats, the Town of Avon created the Natural Resources Commission and adopted an open space conservation provision that required developers to set aside a portion of the land they were building on for conservation. Often, those parcels were donated to the land trust. Prime examples include 127 acres along the west slope of Talcott Mountain when the Hunters Run and the Woodford Hills developments were built in the 1980's.

Land acquisitions have not come only from developers, however. Many parcels have been donated to the land trust by individuals and families. Notable examples include 25 acres along the base of the Talcott Mountain Ridge, acquired in 1978; a 23-acre lot on Scoville Road behind Valley Community Baptist Church, donated in 1979; and a 15-acre parcel behind Petco, known as the Wellner Family Conservation Area, donated in 1995.

To open more of its land to recreation and hiking, the land trust created the trail system behind Hunters Run, that includes the Garvin, Maher, and Spring trails. With recent additions, the trust now maintains 6.5 miles of trails including the mountain trails accessible from Hazen Road and Nod Way, the Oakes Preserve on Chidsey Way, and the Wellner Family Conservation Area.

Throughout its history, the land trust has advocated for the protection of open space by reviewing development proposals to ensure adequate consideration is given to preserving natural habitat. The trust has engaged with and educated the public through informative events focused on nature and the environment. These include exclusive film screenings and live presentations by expert naturalists, co-sponsored with organizations like the Public Library, the Public Schools, and our family-centered outdoor initiative, The Unplugged Learning Project, founded in 2009. Recently, a live webcam was installed at the Oakes Preserve, enabling the public to view – online – wood ducks, great blue herons, and other animals in

real-time. For 32 years, the land trust has awarded the Hugh Blanchard Scholarship to up to three graduating Avon High School students each year. The scholarship fund was created by Hugh's wife, Dottie, also a long time ALT board member. (You can read about the 2023 recipients here in this issue.)

The land trust has enjoyed outstanding leadership over the years starting with Ruby Lornell and Peter Conrad in the 1970's, Hugh Blanchard in the 1980's, and Tom Morganti and Harry Spring from the early 1990's until 2004. Bob Breckinridge served as president from 2004 to 2010, followed by Chris Graesser from 2010 to 2020, and now, co-presidents and Avon natives, Rick Dubiel and (again) Bob Breckinridge.

We appreciate the pioneers who formed the Avon Land Trust in 1973 as well as the many members, residents, and town officials who have supported its bold mission since. From land preservation and stewardship, to community education and environmental advocacy, your local land trust makes living in Avon more pleasant, enjoyable, and healthy. *Please consider supporting us today!* ■

moving mountains

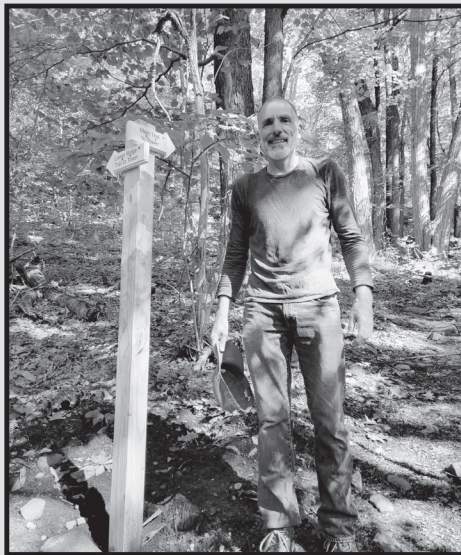
The Avon Land Trust board is small and mighty. We all work hard in our various roles – but we ALL agree that one of us does more than his share of heavy lifting (and we mean that literally and figuratively). Every time you walk on one of our trails and think, “wow, that hike was much easier today than last time;” or when you’re thrilled to see a footbridge over what, last month, was mud; or when, breathless, you near the top of a steep incline only to see a newly installed bench waiting for you; you can thank ALT board member and Trail Master, **Scott Lewis**.

Most recently, Scott wrote to us all about the Lower Ridge trail to the Heublein Tower. Although it was ready for hikers in mid-July – and those of us who’d hiked it found it in great shape – Scott wasn’t happy with the first the first 100 yards of the trail that bypass the vast sea of mud (what he calls the “VSOM”) or with the state of his much-appreciated switchbacks which significantly reduce the pain of steep hiking.

Remember how hot and humid it was in July? Well, the newly retired Scott was going to work most every day that month on that ridge trail, removing

“skip and trip” rocks to allow for surer footing, laying down strategically placed large flat rocks to ease crossing the boulder field, widening sections of his switchbacks, stabilizing the trail bed in some places, adding stone “staircases” where the gradient is extra steep, and “raking the upslope” to mitigate the problem of loose trap rock pieces continually falling onto the trail surface.

Talking about it afterwards, Scott said “It felt like I moved a mountain!” Actually, he did. And we are so grateful.



Scott Lewis at the new lower ridge junction sign he installed.

We invite you all to witness Scott’s handiwork and enjoy the new and improved trail as soon as you can. If you’d like a guided tour, consider joining us for our Fall Hike on **October 21**, when we’ll hike to the top and enjoy the Tower Toot Festival.

Alternatively, if you’d like to explore a trail you probably haven’t hiked before, check out our **Wellner Property Trail**. Unassumingly located behind Petco and Staples, the trail had been neglected and hard to find or follow. But Scott fixed that in no time - and now it is a little slice of paradise beyond



Trail master Scott Lewis, with son Geoff, after finishing a day’s work on the trail.

the pavement. With short and shorter loops through and around a beautiful wood, it’s our top pick for an easily accessible midday pick-me-up.

For more information and trail maps, visit out our new and improved website at www.avonlandtrust.org.

Happy Trails! ■



Picnic table and garden installed on the Huckleberry Hill Barn property by girl Scout, Makena Logan.

*The event is free to the public, but tickets are required.



unplugged learning update

When we maintain our trails, or create new ones, it's always with a mind on the future: *What young child will be inspired, in these woods, to care for them when we're gone?*

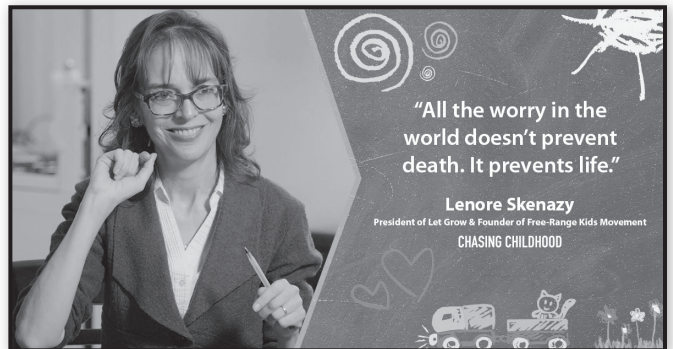
With the explosion of digital entertainment, reaching more children at younger ages with better entertainment than *anything* we saw when we founded The Unplugged Learning Project, it's increasingly difficult for nature to compete for kids' attention.

It's on us – *parents, grown-ups, educators, community leaders* - to bridge the gap between kids' interest in the natural world and the urgent need for them to become future stewards of it. Sound like an easy task? Of course not, but not only is the health of our land and habitat at risk here - our kids' health is, too.

The Avon Land Trust is excited to partner with **Thompson Brook School** to bring residents a free screening (followed by moderated discussion) of the award-winning film *Chasing Childhood* to the community on Tuesday, October 24th at 7:00 PM.* This feature-length documentary explores how free play and independence have all but vanished from kids' lives, supplanted by digital social lives and relentless perfectionism leading to record rates of anxiety and depression – a situation compounded by the recent pandemic. Free play, ideally outdoors and unsupervised by adults, is critical for children to

develop essential life skills like grit, independence, and resourcefulness.

Featuring mental health and education experts, and offering intimate peeks into the lives of "typical" teens and pre-teens from suburban Connecticut and New York, the film is sure to resonate and, more importantly, educate and inspire.



For more information and tickets*, please visit: www.avonlandtrust.org/events. ■



We've been hard at work dusting off and sprucing up the Dubiel barn and property donated to us last year.

huckleberry hill barn

In addition to structural repairs and general landscaping, a trail connector from the property to the Huckleberry Hill red trail loop has been added, courtesy of **Makena Logan**, featured in this issue, who did the work as part of her Girl Scout Gold Award designation. The property, with its picturesque barn and field, is ideal for a mid-hike rest-stop or picnic. Check it out soon! ■



2023 scholarship recipients

AVON LAND TRUST : HUGH BLANCHARD MEMORIAL



Ian Anderson has bold goals for his future. A graduate of Avon High School class of 2023, he seeks to “create a career that is high pay, high impact,

highly necessary, and focused on sustainability.” After meeting and talking with him, it sounds entirely plausible.

A proud Eagle Scout, Ian’s love for the outdoors was nurtured through scouting events and camping trips, and summer work as a camp counselor at Winding Trails. The middle child of Stephen and Lisa - bookended by Austin, 20, and Lily, 15 - Ian was a four-year member of the AHS Crew team; he wrestled for two years, and is part of the National Honor Society. But he is most proud of the AHS Coding Club he and his friend founded three years ago to help students of all abilities and experience levels learn popular coding languages like Javascript and Python.

“For a while, I thought I wanted a career in Computer Science,” he explains. “I’m good at it. My favorite classes are Engineering and Computer Science. But I’ve realized that it’s not the work I want to do because it’s too isolating and there’s no outdoor time.” This shift in perspective motivated Ian to pursue a Capstone Project comparing organic vs. conventional plant fertilization farming practices, for which he won a school award.

Ian will attend Virginia Tech this fall, with plans to major in Agribusiness; he will apply his ALT scholarship money towards tuition. He looks forward to combining his facility with computer languages, his talent for building things, and his interests in land stewardship and sustainability through his studies. “I like to go above and beyond;” he says. “So, I’m pretty sure entrepreneurship is in my future, too.” ■



Ian’s classmate, **Timothy Yang Dong**, is also a fan of nature and of animals; his pet turtle, Bartholomew, accompanied him to our interview

at a local park. While navigating the challenges of high school as a transgender transfer student, Tim found solace in the outdoors. “There’s a path in my neighborhood that leads into the quiet wood,” he explains. “Being connected to the wildlife around me has been healing.”

Tim came to Avon from Torrington High, as a mid-year sophomore, having lived in New York and near Shanghai, China, before that. He resides with his parents Huawen and Yongchai, and younger brother Jun-Jun and will be moving in shortly with his older sister, Jessie, a junior at the University of Connecticut. After completing his pre-requisite coursework at community college, Tim plans to follow his sister to UConn to complete his degree. Although he hasn’t declared a major yet, he’s considering a career in Veterinary Medicine - a fitting major for a student who has worked at a doggie daycare.

During high school, Tim was a member of Avon High’s Theater Tech team, building sets for the Drama Department’s Fall and Spring productions. “I love building things,” he beams, “and I learned a lot about sketching and building technique in my Engineering class with Mr. Dadona.” He is an active member of the school’s Gay-Straight Alliance, Craft Club, and was a Math tutor while in Torrington. In his free time, Tim draws, crochets and, like most kids his age, plays video games - balancing his screen time with outdoor time, of course. He will use the ALT scholarship money to help pay his tuition. ■



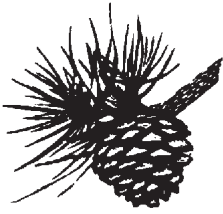
Since childhood, when **Makena Logan** wasn’t doing her schoolwork or enjoying family time, she could be found doing “enrichment” activities with turtles, lizards,

and snakes as a volunteer (and, more recently, a paid employee) at Roaring Brook Nature Center in Canton. “Giving the animals opportunity to move beyond their tanks, and bringing them outside for fresh air, really is *enriching*,” she explains.

Makena’s love of animals and nature was inspired by family hikes, biking and kayaking excursions, and regular trips to the nature center where she has contributed countless hours over the years. The middle child of Janice and Logan, Makena’s sister Jade is a junior at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and her brother Kai is a junior at Avon High.

At AHS, Makena belonged to Sierra Club, the Mock Trial Club, Student Government, the Science Club, and the Girls Who Code Club. For her senior Capstone project, she catalogued trees around campus, researching the various species and studying their impact on biodiversity. (The most popular tree at AHS? The London Plane tree.) A proud Girl Scout, Makena just completed her Gold Award project by connecting our Dubiel Barn property to the adjacent Foundland trails. She left for Colby College in Maine soon after.

“At Colby, I can study biology and government, go on Outing Club trips, and take tech electives before having to choose a path,” Makena explains. Although she’s unsure what that path will be, she’s sure she wants to make a difference – as an Environmental Scientist perhaps, or Conservation Biologist, or lawyer/legislator pushing for policies that promote sustainability and stewardship. Whatever path she chooses, we’re sure Makena will succeed in making our planet a better place. ■



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

_____ name

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_____ I/We wish to remain anonymous

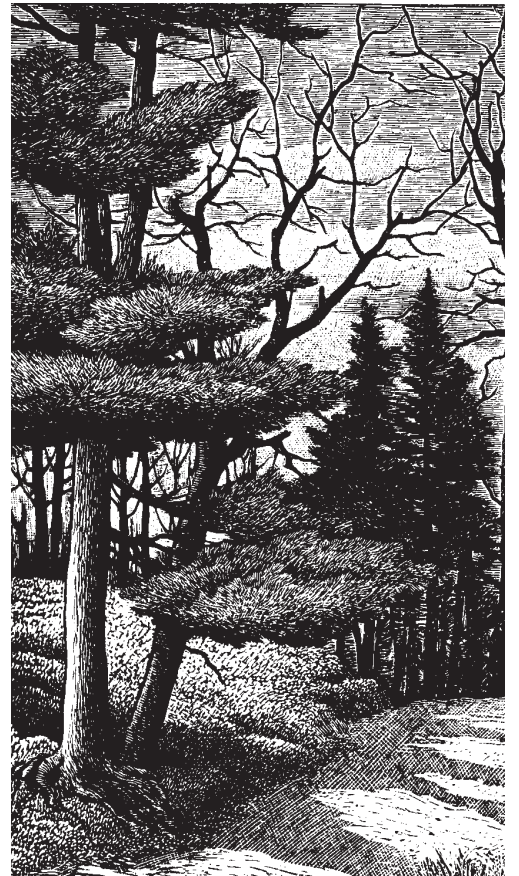
Please make checks payable to The Avon Land Trust, and mail to: The Avon Land Trust, P.O. Box 267, Avon , CT 06001.

... 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 2024 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.