

P.O. Box 425 New Canaan, CT 06840

# **Land Trust Leadership**

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Executive Director: John Winter Events & Outreach Coordinator: Elle Smith Land Steward: Brian Cucchiara



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# You're Invited...

To Last Saturday on the trail event series.

Visit our website at www.newcanaanlandtrust.org for news and scheduling of our monthly outings.



The Land Trust accreditation seal is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.

# **Stay Connected Year-Round**

Subscribe to the Land Trust's E-News for monthly updates, invitations to events, and more. Visit our website at www.newcanaanlandtrust.org to sign up.









# 2023 Annual **Impact Report**



To donate scan the QR code.







# A Decade of Transformation



# **President's Letter**

write this President's letter with mixed emotions. Mostly gratitude. Gratitude for the support that you, our members, have given to help us pursue our mission. That gratitude emanates from the recent fiscal year, reviewed in this Annual Impact Report, and over the past decade. Ten years ago, the New Canaan Land Trust experienced an organizational transformation. Many of you have witnessed that transformation.

From its founding in 1967 until 2012, the Land Trust was a quiet entity with a minimal budget and scant awareness. (It nevertheless protected over 300 acres in its first 45 years). Inspired by the new leadership of then-President Chris Schipper, an outward-facing philosophy took over. While still focused on land conservation, the Land Trust began emphasizing connecting the community to its natural resources and sustainably stewarding the protected land. For the first time, the Land Trust opened preserves to the public for recreational access. As a result, the Land Trust has grown dramatically in membership, programming, stewardship, your support, and impact in these ten years. Thank you!

We are close to finalizing a critical milestone for our organization: establishing a permanent home. We will acquire the historic Grupes Homestead on Valley Road this fall and reunite the property with our contiguous 10.3-acre Browne Preserve. A stated goal of our Strategic Conservation Plan, a headquarters will serve as a springboard to ensure the Land Trust's sustainability and long-term growth.

That brings me to a bittersweet emotion. I have been fortunate to be a part of the team over the past ten years that, with your support, has reshaped our organization. Serving as president, side by side with a fantastic group of board members for the past five years, has been a tremendous honor. Chris Schipper, to whom we are indebted, Art Berry, who has guided the organization with his leadership and financial acumen, and I are transitioning from our current roles on the board. Chris and Art will become charter members of the newly formed Advisory Council. To facilitate the transition, I will continue to serve on the board for one more year before joining The Advisory

The exciting news is that Rob Fryer is the new board president. Rob brings a depth of knowledge about the NCLT, non-profits, New Canaan, and finances to the role. The board leadership is in capable hands with a "new generation" actively working to expand the organization's impact.

Last, I want to thank you for being part of an organization that is helping make New Canaan the special place it is.

- Tom Cronin, President of the Board



# A Message from the Executive Director

T begin with a heartfelt thank you to all the members, donors, and volunteers who have tirelessly given their time, enthusiasm, and dollars to support land conservation in New Canaan. All we do is because of you.

This fiscal year started with our wildly popular Sculpture Trail event In June, over one hundred guests joined the artists at the Carriage Barn in opening the exhibition and celebrating the connection between

art and nature. Over the following five months, thousands of people visited the ten outdoor sculptures installed at our preserves.

Summer is also the time for stewarding our protected land – close to 400 acres. Most of our stewardship is done by our summer stewards. For nearly a decade, we've hosted ten high school students from New Canaan who mow, rake, clear, and build walkways, bridges, and kiosks to help you enjoy your preserves better. We have expanded the program to include seven young people from Stamford through our new collaboration with the Future 5 organization. Funding for

the expansion came from generous donations made during the Sculpture Trail Opening Event paddle-raise and a wonderful grant from the Harlan and Lois Anderson Family Foundation.

Speaking of expansion, we added new staff this year. In November, we welcomed Elle Smith to manage our communications and events and help with fundraising. She's been a great addition to the team and has freed time for me to explore conservation opportunities with landowners and to work on the exciting NCLT headquarters initiative (you may have read about it in the local news).

On the financial front, this year, we added a new way for people passionate about land conservation to support the Land Trust. The Evergreen Society recognizes individuals who make a legacy gift to the Land Trust through a bequest or other estate planning means.

Finally, our new Last Saturday on the Trail outings program has brought hundreds of people to our preserves to have fun outdoors and learn more about the natural world in New Canaan. From children's programs to adult education, there was something for everyone. Check our website for the rest of the 2023 outings. We hope to see you there!

- John Winter, Executive Director

# **Advancing the Mission**

The New Canaan Land Trust aims to cultivate a meaningful relationship between the people of New Canaan and the natural assets ▲ surrounding them by responsibly conserving and managing our lands. Every action we take at the Land Trust aligns with this overarching goal. The following pages detail some of the significant achievements and intriguing facts made possible through your support.

# **Creating a Lasting Impact**





New Canaan High School lacrosse players spread wood chips at the Firefly Sanctuary as part of their community service goal



jars of honey bottled this



guests attended 12 sold-out Peak Season Firefly viewings



year from our bee hives



of new raised walkways placed at the Irwin Park to Nature Center GreenLink Trail from COVID-19 recovery funds provided by the Town of New Canaan







# **Protect Your Land With Us**

Do you own undeveloped land in New Canaan? Would you like to see it remain as open space and habitat for plants and animals? Whether by donation, sale, bargain sale, or conservation easement you can leave a lasting legacy by conserving your land in perpetuity. To learn more about how the Land Trust can help you achieve your conservation vision, please call us at 203-972-1270 or write to info@ newcanaanlandtrust.org. We will gladly review the land conservation tools available to you and describe the financial benefits of land conservation.

# **Buzzing with Excitement**

ray of hope has emerged in New Canaan in a world bombarded with constant news about the decline of pollinators. What started as a small idea with the New Canaan Land Trust from a local resident evolved into a community-wide project, buzzing with life and the promise of sustainable change. Track the timeline of the buzz-worthy activities below.

Ultimately, this project was about much more than bees or honey - it was about community collaboration toward a common goal of supporting plant pollinators. Together with our beekeeper, Jack Winalski, local children, and several nonprofit organizations, we united in common cause to think globally and act locally for the betterment of all.

# January: A Buzzworthy Introduction

A volunteer beekeeper approached the New Canaan Land Trust with a generous offer to donate his tools, time, and passion for beekeeping to install beehives on Land Trust nature preserves. We eagerly accepted his offer.

# April: The "Honey, We Need a Logo!" Contest

The Land Trust partnered with the New Canaan Library in creating the "Honey, We Need a Logo!" contest. Elle Smith, NCLT's Events & Outreach Coordinator, and Marie Aspinwall, the Children's Librarian, generated 56 artistic entries from participants aged four to sixty.

April also saw the first installations of beehives at Colhoun Preserve and Still Pond, quickly followed by Hannan Field and Hicks Meadow.

# **June: The Artists Are Crowned**

June was an exciting month for young artists. The logo contest winners were announced (from left to right), with Olive Goldenberg (12) earning the honor of having her art displayed on the honey jar labels. Emilia Humphreys (10), Julia Ikeda (8), Lila Rose Nealon (8 1/2), and Carolina Chimera (13) had their artworks chosen to decorate the hives.











# February: A Helping Hand from an Eagle Scout

Jack Winalski, who had experience with beekeeping with his family, sought out the Land Trust for an Eagle Scout project. He was thrilled to learn about our beekeeping initiative and an Eagle Scout project was born. Jack built and painted the hive boxes and the stands for them. His skills were invaluable in laying the groundwork for the project.

# **May: Crafting Public Awareness**

The New Canaan CARES Craft Club contributed to the initiative by designing informative signs for the beehive sites. The signs educate visitors about the bees and gently remind them to give them their space.





"I really enjoyed doing my beehives as part of my Eagle Scout project on the New Canaan Land Trust properties. Not only was I

# **August: The Sweet Harvest**

Our volunteer beekeeper harvested a bountiful 300 pounds of honey which was subsequently bottled by the summer stewardship interns, resulting in a jawdropping 888 bottles of fresh, local honey.





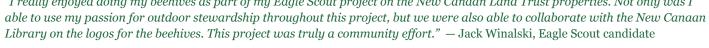
# **September: Labeling the Honey Jars**

About 40 volunteers, including many of the label design contest winners and their families, gathered to put the labels on 8-ounce and 3-ounce honey jars. All the participants went home with a jar of honey in appreciation of their work for us. The Land Trust will give away the honey to members, donors, and volunteers. You might even find some Land Trust honey for sale in local stores.































# Our Summer Stewardship Interns

# **New for 2023 - A Collaboration with Future 5 in Stamford**

The New Canaan Land Trust has been a vibrant meeting ground for high school students passionate about the environment for nearly a decade. Since its inception in 2014, our summer internship program has become more than just an educational experience; it's grown into a community-building endeavor to shape the next generation of conservationists.

Each summer unfolds as a series of three-week sessions, immersing young minds in land conservation and property stewardship. Here, the interns don't just learn; they act, leaving their mark on the New Canaan community and its lush 400-acre network of open space. The interns are the heart and hands of stewardship from Mondays to Thursdays. On Fridays, they go on field trips to environmental education sites in Fairfield County, expanding their horizons on conservation as a collective effort. The interns receive a weekly stipend for their work.

One of the standout moments of this year was our partnership with Future 5, a nonprofit organization committed to aiding under-resourced students in Stamford. This collaboration allowed us to welcome six interns from Stamford, thus diversifying our community impact and extending the program's reach.

In total, we hosted fifteen interns from New Canaan and Stamford. 2023 projects included the construction of a new information kiosk at Watson-Symington Preserve; new wooden gates at the lower meadow and water diversion bars to control flow and reduce erosion at Livingston-Higley Preserve; installation of a new trail sign at the Oenoke Lane GreenlLink Trail, repainting the roadside trail signs at all of the preserves, and removing invasive plants from several preserves.

None of this would have been possible without Theo Baltierra, the Intern Program Coordinator. His excellent leadership and oversight ensured that the program was a resounding success.

## **Looking Ahead**

As we look ahead to 2024 we are exploring adding Stamford worksites to the list of places where the interns perform their property stewardship. We may also introduce several fall, winter, or spring projects. We are very excited to see the Summer Steward Internship Program evolve into a broader collaboration between the Land Trust and Future 5. Together we are making an investment in our shared futures — both for our young interns and the New Canaan (and now Stamford) communities they call home.

# **Future 5 Partnership**

Six kids participated in the Summer Steward Internship and had the summer of their lives, connecting with nature and making new friendships with New Canaan teens. The NCLT staff made every minute of their educational Internship an outdoor adventure, filled with delicious lunches from NC eateries, awesome experiences at Soundwaters and Fairgate Farm, and serious power tool training, ensuring that our students understood the principles of conservation and the impact of their efforts on the NC community!

— Polly Perkins Johnson, Founding Partner & Future 5 Advisor

































# **Engaging Our Youth**

In 2023, we embarked on a journey to reach all corners of our community. From classrooms to congregations and service leagues, a diverse range of young people joined hands to make an indelible impact on our lands.

# **New Canaan Library**

This summer also saw a collaboration with the New Canaan Library in a program called "Bugged About Books," blending the joys of reading with the thrill of nature exploration for school-aged children. The interns helped locate and then show the children insects and other wildlife depicted in the books.

# St. Luke's and Congregational Church

Our partnerships began at St. Luke's School, where 5th and 6th graders put their youthful energy to work by removing invasive garlic mustard plants at Browne Preserve and the Irwin Park to Nature Center GreenLink, respectively. The Congregational Church Middle School Youth Group undertook a similar task at Watson-Symington Preserve. These young stewards didn't just enhance the health of these lands; they set an example that small actions can make a big difference.

### **SLOBs**

In addition to these hands-on initiatives, the SLOBs (Service League of Boys) widened the scope of our community activities. Besides embarking on a day of invasive vine removal at Hicks Meadow they also became our eyes at outings throughout the year, capturing the essence of our projects and public engagements through photography during our "Last Saturday on the Trail" events.

### **Scouts**

Scouting provided another avenue for youth engagement. Jack Winalski, an Eagle Scout candidate, teamed up with a volunteer beekeeper to manage bee hives across four Land Trust properties (see "Buzzing with Excitement" on page 4). Chris Wells, another Eagle Scout candidate, built raised walkways at Colhoun Preserve. More scouting projects are in the pipeline, promising ecological improvements and community involvement.

# **NCHS Spring Internship**

We also welcomed Lucas Orwicz, a diligent spring intern from New Canaan High School (NCHS) who installed a safety rope-handrail for visitors to our Watson-Symington Preserve. Fifty of Lucas' classmates at NCHS from the lacrosse team transformed the visitor experience at the Firefly Sanctuary. In a feat of impressive teamwork, the young athletes spread wood chips on the entire meadow ring trail and the seating area at the head of the meadow in less than an hour, improving both the trail and the seating area for our guests.

# **Firefly Sanctuary Hosts**

We also want to acknowledge and thank college students Meghan Kelly and Courtney Ball who served as hosts at the Firefly Sanctuary during the prime two-week evening firefly viewing sessions, showcasing that the torch of environmental responsibility is carried beyond the high school years.

Our various youth initiatives, united under the umbrella of environmental stewardship, have created a cumulative impact that resonates throughout our community. They demonstrate that everyone has a part in shaping a sustainable future. With their boundless energy and enthusiasm, the young people of New Canaan are playing a vital role at the Land Trust and offer hope for a greener, more sustainable tomorrow for all of us.







# **Enjoying Nature Outings: Last Saturday on the Trail**

tting people outdoors to enjoy nature is a key part of our work. We offer hikes, outings, volunteer workdays, and many other fun U events. This year we created the Last Saturday on the Trail program to bring the community to our preserved lands. It aims to deepen connections—both to the environment and each other.

The key feature of Last Saturday on the Trail is its diverse agenda. The program is designed to encourage multiple approaches to community interaction and ecological stewardship. In March, for instance, we held a spring invasive removal event led by Haik Kavookjian, that turned community involvement into a tangible environmental impact. The project enabled participants to contribute to the health and longevity of the Land Trust's precious landscapes, while also learning about the invasive plants that they'll likely see at

However, stewardship is just one pillar of this multifaceted program. Last Saturday on the Trail also serves as an educational platform, offering many opportunities for learning and skill-building. April saw our community gather for a session on nature photography with local photographers Laney Lloyd and Nicole Rivard, teaching the art of capturing the natural world through the lens. The program transformed into a birding expedition in May, led by board member Newell Cotton, elevating the community's understanding and appreciation of our avian neighbors – while providing an opportunity for the newly-minted photographers to snap a few pictures of the

We also recognize the need for casual, laid-back gatherings to allow community members to connect with the open spaces of New Canaan without an agenda. The guided hike in January offered a peaceful communion with nature; we watched beautiful butterflies in July at Livingston-Higley Preserve; and August's National Dog Day with Pet Pantry Warehouse was an unstructured, joyful gathering of pet owners and their furry friends.

There are a few events remaining in 2023 and a fun schedule of outings and events is planned for 2024. Come join us!











Photo Credit: Neil Vigdor, The New York Times

he NCLT Firefly Sanctuary opened to the public in 2015. ■ Due to increasing popularity, the number of visitors is limited on peak viewing evenings in late June and early July of each year. Advance registration is offered on our website at www.newcanaanlandtrust.org. At all other times, the sanctuary is open to the public from dawn to dusk. The entrance is located on Sleepy Hollow Road.

# A Summer Spectacle Where Fireflies Are the Guiding Light

Bill and Mary-Ellen McDonald host firefly viewing parties, hoping to inspire their neighbors to stop using pesticides and consider rewilding their lawns.

> Bill and Mary-Ellen McDonald and NCLT Firefly Sanctuary featured in The New York Times July 29, 2023.

# **Catalysts for Conservation**

### **Job Well Done**

This fall, we recognize three board members who have played a transformative role in making the New Canaan Land Trust the vibrant nonprofit it is today. Chris Schipper, Art Berry, and Emily Nissley are stepping down from the board to become charter members of the New Canaan Advisory Council. The three have made innumerable contributions to the organization's renaissance over the past decade.

# **Chris Schipper Leads the Charge**

Chris Schipper became president of the board in 2012. At that time, the 45-year conservation organization functioned as a land bank with limited public engagement. As a lifelong outdoorsman (including on golf courses) and long-term New Canaan resident, Chris envisioned a different kind of land trust. One that would catalyze conservation by galvanizing the public to be stewards and advocates for our surrounding natural resources.

Chris's environmental salvo started with a letter to the editor of the *New Canaan Advertiser* on February 2, 2012, entitled "Open the doors of Land Trust." In the editorial, Chris asked, "What if NCLT was a vibrant, engaging, and expanding organization highlighting to interested citizens and volunteers the natural beauty of our town." Soon, Chris joined the board, and a transformation began. The first step was initiated: surveying and opening Land Trust properties to be enjoyed by the public.

# Sandy Nissley and Art Berry Join Up

The push for more open space led to the acquisition of 60 acres of New Canaan Audubon Society sanctuaries in 2013. Audubon's past president, Emily Nissley, a.k.a. Sandy, joined NCLT's board. Sandy was already well known to the Land Trust after she and her husband donated significant land and easements in the early 2000s. Sandy had also established a magnificent pollinator garden

full of butterflies, bees, and birds at her home. Sandy was involved in the organization's expansion for the next ten years. She fondly reminisces about her heritage of ensuring the board sticks to proper Roberts Rules of Order, procedure, and grammar.

In 2014, Chris recruited long-time resident Art Berry to join the board. Art's experience as the president of the largest land trust in the Chicago area and lifelong dedication to conservation made him a perfect candidate for the newly invigorated board. Since then, Art has served as president and treasurer of the board and contributed leadership and financial acumen throughout his tenure. Art's frequent poetic descriptions of New England's nature and wildlife have inspired the board and many donors.

# **Vast Accomplishments**

The accomplishments over the past decade are extensive:

- $\bullet\,$  Eight preserves with 6 miles of trails were opened to the public.
- An additional 80 acres of open space have been protected, including a firefly sanctuary.
- An executive director was brought on board in 2016, and a second staff member in 2022.
- Awareness and membership grew dramatically, with over 500 member families in 2022.
- A summer steward internship program was established in 2016.
- Programming, including guided walks, workshops, and the Sculpture Trail, were introduced and expanded exponentially.
- Achieved national accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission in 2018.
- Established a public-private partnership for the stewardship of Bristow Park in 2023.
- A permanent home for the Land Trust has been found!

In closing, we exclaim "Bravo" and heartfelt thanks to the indelible legacy and contributions of Chris, Sandy, and Art.

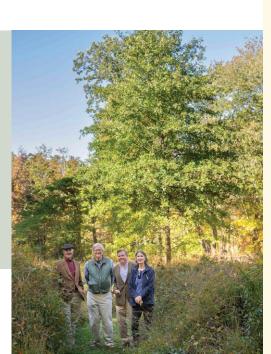
# **What is Your Favorite Land Trust Preserve?**

**Chris: Browne Preserve:** its varied landscapes and landmarks with woodlands, wetlands, scenic reservoir overlooks, stone walls, and a glacial erratic. It's beautiful across all four seasons.

**Art: Colhoun is my pick.** I lived in that neighborhood when my kids were growing up and happily helped plant the Pin Oak in the middle of the meadow and donated a second section of the stone wall.

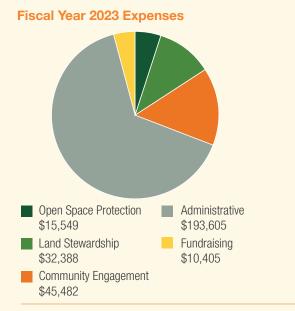
Sandy: I can't claim a favorite, as they are all favorites!

Photo to the right: Chris Schipper, Art Berry, Tom Cronin, and former board member Siw de Gysser in front of the Pin Oak Tree in the center of Colhoun Meadow, which was planted by the four of them in 2014 and highlights its tremendous growth over the past nine years.



# Fiscal Year 2023 Revenue Donations \$214,996 Grants \$79,450 Sponsorships \$13,325 Board Donations \$47,363 Program and Other Revenue \$50,600 \$50,600 Gifts in Kind \$16,715

**Grand Total \$422,449** 



**Grand Total \$297,429** 

## **Support for Conservation**



Financial statements presented in this report are unaudited and reflect operating revenue and expenses for the fiscal year beginning June 1, 2022, and ending May 31, 2023.

Copies of the Land Trust's most recent audited financial statements and Form 990 are available upon request by contacting the Land Trust at 203-972-1270 or emailing info@newcanaanlandtrust.org

# The Evergreen Society – Leave an Enduring Legacy

Like many conservation organizations nationwide, we wish to encourage and recognize generous donors who make NCLT part of their estate plans. To that end, we have launched The Evergreen Society: a planned giving program that bolsters our ongoing efforts to preserve and protect open space in New Canaan while offering supporters a chance to leave a legacy for future generations.

Planned giving is a powerful way that donors can expand their impact by helping preserve open space, protect wildlife habitat, and safeguard our natural resources for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations. In a world threatened by climate change, current and future donations are vital in improving climate resilience and stemming the harmful effects of climate change.

# Why Establish the Evergreen Society?

National research reveals compelling data that support this initiative:

- Nearly one in three Americans report that they would include a charity in a bequest if asked.
- Almost 80% of planned gift donors never tell the non-profit named in their estate plans.
- 86% of Americans believe protecting open space and natural areas is very important.
- Land trusts play a key role in protecting open space conserving 61 million acres in the U.S., more than all the national parks combined.

# Ways to Join The Evergreen Society

We encourage you to discuss your situation with an estate attorney, financial planner, or professional advisor. There are many ways to include the Land Trust in your estate plans. Whether through a direct bequest in your will, a gift of appreciated stock, land, or a charitable trust, it is easy to become part of our legacy society. You'll find details and steps for make a lasting donation on our website at https://newcanaanlandtrust.org/planned-giving/

### **Benefits**

Any type or size of planned gift qualifies for the Evergreen Society. Evergreen Society members enjoy exclusive events and receive priority access to programming. Better yet, you will benefit from the knowledge of your enduring support of the New Canaan Land Trust's essential mission.

"The protection of New Canaan's natural heritage is essential. I have included the Land Trust in my estate plans and joined the Evergreen Society to help ensure that adequate resources will be available for conserving additional land for our town in the future."

Art Berry - Immediate Past President
 and Treasurer of New Canaan Land Trust



# Thank You for Making a Difference in Our Community

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s a land trust volunteer, your time, enthusiasm, and expertise, are valuable gifts to the community. You'll work side-by-side with other As a land trust volunteer, your time, enthusiasm, and experuse, are valuable gitts to the community. For it work one by the man enthusiasm, and experuse, are valuable gitts to the community. For it work one by the man enthusiasm, and experuse, are valuable gitts to the community. For it work one by the man enthusiasm, and experuse, are valuable gitts to the community. For it work one by the man enthusiasm, and experuse, are valuable gitts to the community. For it work one by the man enthusiasm, and experuse, are valuable gitts to the community. For it work one by the man enthusiasm, and experuse, are valuable gitts to the community. For it work one by the man enthusiasm, and experuse, are valuable gitts to the community. For it work one by the carrier of the man enthusiasm, and experuse gitts to the community while carrier of the man enthusiasm. maintaining walking trails, removing invasive plants, and pitching in at our events, among many others. To learn more or to sign up as a volunteer call us at 203-972-1270. Come join us!

# Join a Land Trust Committee

**T** f you like what the Land Trust does and want to roll up your sleeves and help out we invite you to join one of our Board committees. ▲ These committees are composed of members of the Board of Directors and community members and are supported by land trust staff. Committees meet monthly or quarterly depending on the nature of the work. The list of committees includes Open Space (acquiring land for permanent protection); Land Stewardship (maintaining and improving our protected properties); Events (designing and implementing our hikes, outings, lectures, and educational events); and Development and Outreach (fundraising and community engagement). To learn more or to join a committee call us at 203-972-1270.