



BLOCK ISLAND CONSERVANCY

Block Island Conservancy Inc. Newsletter

November 2008

Adopt-a-Wall



Is it any wonder that Block Island is a favorite destination place? We have truly unbelievable topography. Knolls rise out of nowhere, ravines appear without warning. Rodman's Hollow rolls and dips to a sea bordered by dunes and weathered clay cliffs. These natural wonders are enhanced by 350 miles of our treasured stone walls that border and define the old farm and grazing lands. Block Island would not be the same place without these monuments to man's labor and ingenuity.

In the fall and winter seasons, our faithful Road Department clears and trims the stone walls that border our many streets. The work starts in fall, and continues through the winter depending on the severity of the weather. Then comes the spring. Before long, the walls have "disappeared" under a tangle of weeds, shrubs, and smothering vines. There are some exceptions, such as the walls in front of Mitchell Farm on Corn Neck Road, which are trimmed by non-town employees all summer. In summer the Road Department mows the heavy roadside growth, but that alone is a Herculean effort. There is no time to trim.

So here's where Adopt-a-Wall comes in. Mike Shea, head of the Road

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Conserfest rocks BI - C



Conserfest organizers present \$2700 in donations and 85 new member names to BIC President Doug Hoyt in July. Back row: Cameron Greenlee, Danielle Duffy, Hoyt, Justin Lewis, and John Breunig. Kneeling: Scott Michel and Laura Michel Breunig.

Block Island was rocking on July 9th at Conserfest. Conserfest was organized by Cameron Greenlee, Justin Lewis, and their friends to celebrate land conservation and to build awareness of Block Island Conservancy among the young people by reaching out to them through music.

Conserfest featured performances by regional musicians at two venues designed to attract a broad cross-section of participation. The conservation festival kicked off at the Town Beach pavilion at 3:30 pm with Travis Greenlee of Homeslice and then Zox's Eli Miller playing acoustic sets until 5:00 p.m. The beachside setting was a perfect wrap up to a spectacular beach day for the pre-teen to senior audience. Conserfest then reconvened for the main event at 9:30 p.m. at Yellow Kittens for the over 21 to senior crowd. The Kittens was packed until closing, enjoying sets by Eli Miller and Dan Edinburg of Zox, Chachi (Providence's conscious voice of hip-hop) and The Trenton Street Rockers, and Homeslice with all new material.

There was no cover charge at either venue. At Town Beach Conserfest teamed with and warmed-up for that evening's Blues on the Beach concert while Dan Cahill and Ed McGovern graciously donated the Yellow Kittens for the festival's main event following Blues on the Beach. Local artists generously donated artwork for a silent auction. Conserfest tee shirts were for sale and bumper stickers were free in exchange for signup for membership and future mailings.

The inspiration for Conserfest developed from a 2007 conversation that Cameron and Justin had with Justin's father, David Lewis. Justin's grandfather, Rob Lewis, was a founding director of Block Island Conservancy and Cameron's grandmother, Dorothy Greenlee, was on the BIC board of directors in the late 1980s. The three were discussing the island's decades-long commitment to conservation and Block Island Conservancy's role as the local grass-roots organization. Across 36 years and two generations,

Conserfest continued on page 4

Department and member of the BIC board of directors, is excited about this project. Choose your favorite stretch of wall and agree to trim it for the summer. It can be near your house or farther away on an island road. It can be 50 or 100 feet long or a mile. You can do it alone or with friends or family. All volunteers will be recognized in future BIC newsletters and the *Block Island Times*. To do a good job, it's best to start in April or early May and do a weekly trimming until growth begins to slow down. A grass trimmer can accomplish more in less time, but you don't have to have one. Just select a shorter length of wall.

If you'd like to volunteer, call Peter Greenman, Stewardship Chairman, at 401-466-2950. He'll send information on how to begin. He can also make suggestions if you don't know which wall to pick. BIC thinks this is a positive step to preserve the beauty of Block Island—at no expense! Plus it can be fun!

Conservation Easement

Here is a wonderful win-win situation to consider. If you own real estate property, you can give or sell at a bargain price a conservation easement to a conservancy like Block Island Conservancy. You would continue to be the owner of the property, and it can always be sold or passed on to heirs. You may wish, however, that the property never be developed or changed. This is what the conservation easement is all about, and it can significantly help you tax-wise. You can take as a tax deduction the value of the easement if donated, or the difference between the fair value and the agreed upon sale price. You can take as a deduction up to 50% of your earned income instead of the usual 30%. You can continue to take the deduction until used for 15 years instead of the usual 5 years. You the taxpayer get to conserve your property forever, your way. You get some unusual benefits, and BIC acquires the easement and will insure that its provisions are maintained.

Under current law, this tax benefit expires on December 31, 2009, though efforts are well underway to make the benefit permanent. Already many easements are in place forever all over Block Island. The Mitchell Farm purchase of 22 acres in 2007 is a conservation easement. For more information call us at 401 466 3111 and ask for the brochure *Using the Conservation Tax Incentive*. We will send it to you promptly. The brochure explains exactly how this works and would be helpful to your attorney assisting you with the conservation easement.



New Trails

This year we have cut two new trails for everyone to use, and we hope you take advantage of them in every season.

Beach Avenue Trail (4+ acres)—to get there go up (North) Corn Neck Road and turn left onto Beach Avenue. On your right, after the first house, is our Beach Avenue Trail sign. This trail was used extensively this summer because of its proximity to the public beach. Here you will discover a new view of Trim's Pond. You can walk right to its shore. Across the pond is a beautiful view of Indian Head Neck. To westward rises the love-

ly white Narragansett Inn, while to the east the dunes roll seaward to Crescent Beach. In the warm months expect to see shore birds—great egrets in particular. We maintain the cleared trails in this season, but in mid fall we mow the entire salt meadow. You can walk the trails in all months of the year and never tire of the beauty of this area. In spring and summer, new and different flowers bloom every few weeks. The tall grasses waving in the wind are a sight not to be missed. In early fall when the golden rod is in full bloom, thousands of monarchs hover over the blossoms, their brilliant orange giving the effect of another layer of flowers in the air. Walking is extremely easy. You can walk the perimeter trail in 20 minutes for exercise, or explore at leisure, bring a picnic, and stay for 2 hours.

Martin Trails (10+ acres)—to get there enter Old Mill Road from West Side

Road. On the left is our trailhead sign "Martin Trails." In mid fall we mow these lots and trim all the walls. There is no better example of what agricultural Block Island looked like when the entire island was devoted to farming. So, until grass grows in the spring, enjoy the magnificent open views. During daffodil season, a knoll close to the road displays hundreds of daffodils. It's worth a stop to gaze at their beauty or pick some. To encourage walkers to use and enjoy the property more, we cut a perimeter trail through the grasses this year. It is hilly in some places—this adds to the beauty. Sturdy shoes and long pants are suggested. This is a perfect walk or run in any season. Bring your dog if you'd like to.

If you have any questions, comments, or ideas about new trails, please call Peter Greenman, Stewardship Chairman, at 401-466-2950.



Membership Idea

Why not help us expand our membership base? Your annual contribution to us makes you a member of BIC. If you have friends who are also conservation minded, please consider sending us another contribution in their names. We will print the names of all new members in our next newsletter. Your friends will receive the newsletter and be invited to the annual meeting in October. While you're thinking about friends, remember your children and grandchildren. If you contribute for them, send along names and addresses as well.

Leave a Legacy

Have you ever thought of giving something for all time? Consider a gift whose value will go on indefinitely while you receive a tax advantage. You can accomplish this by setting up an endowment with Block Island Conservancy.

We have one such endowment fund, the Eric Spirer Fund. This fund is permanently invested with the Rhode Island Foundation in Providence. We receive a fixed amount of income each year from this fund to insure that our Martin Lots (10+acres) are mowed and their walls trimmed forever. The Martin Lots are at the junction of West Side Road and Old Mill Road. It's impossible not to be stunned by their beauty as you pass by on foot, bike or car.

If you want to consider setting up a legacy, call us at 401-466-3111. The fund can be in memory of a family member or friend. You can begin with the required minimum of \$10,000 and then add

to the fund in the years to come. You receive a tax benefit for your donation. We urge you to discuss this with your attorney and financial planner.



Annual Meeting Report

The annual Block Island Conservancy meeting was held on October 12, 2008 with approximately 75 people in attendance.

The guest speakers were Valerie Talmage of Preserve Rhode Island and Richard Youngken, executive director of the Dunn Foundation. Both speakers discussed historic preservation in general and on Block Island specifically. They have observed that land conservationists and historic building preservationists seldom work together and often

see their missions as mutually exclusive. The speakers urged the Block Island community instead to embrace both missions with the goal of preserving a sense of place on the island through cooperation between historical societies and conservation groups.

Doug Hoyt's President's report contained much good news. The Mitchell Farm campaign has been completed successfully with donations and pledges to fully cover the principle and interest on the loan. If the expected pledges are received in the next two months, the Mitchell fund debt can be paid off early, saving \$60,000 to \$70,000 in interest. Despite the prevailing bad economic and stock market news, BIC's finances remain sound, with the stewardship endowment invested by the RI Foundation showing typical losses but with our operating funds on deposit at Washington Trust Co. in insured accounts.

Peter Greenman presented the Stewardship report. Peter emphasized the important work we perform in the maintenance and care for our properties and trails and the need to build awareness of our properties among the public. To that end, he spearheaded the 2008 trail map. Trailhead signs, made by Rick Mullen, have been placed on various



Above photo from left to right: (back row) Nancy Pike, Betty Lang, Debbie Howarth; (front row) Stephen Record, Peter Greenman. Inset photo: Laura Michel Breunig



properties for public identification. In addition, BIC bumper stickers and magnets are available to increase BIC's visibility in the community. Peter also has been leading site walks for directors and the general public.

Debbie Howarth and Stephen Record were re-elected to the Board. David Lewis resigned from the Board and was replaced by Laura Michel Breunig. Laura's election furthers BIC's outreach to younger Block Island residents. In July, a group of Island youth, including Laura, raised \$2,700 through a concert to increase awareness about the conservancy (see Conserfest article on page 1 for details). Involvement of the young people of Block Island is clearly vital to the continued growth and viability of BIC.

Subsequent to the Annual Meeting, Doug Hoyt resigned from the Board and his position as President. At the November Board meeting, the following officers were elected: Stephen Record, President; Betty Lang, Vice President; Nancy Pike, Secretary; and Debbie Howarth, Treasurer. Peter Greenman continues as Stewardship Chairman.

Doug and David made extraordinary contributions to BIC during their many years of service, and leave a legacy that the current board will work hard to sustain.

more than 2500 people have given tirelessly of their energy and generously of their personal funds to protect this cherished island. It's been hard and costly work! And there is still more to be done. Justin and Cameron came to the understanding not only that they and many of their peers were unaware of the personal effort and financial sacrifice required to keep Block Island as open as it is today, but also that there is still work to be done and that they and their peers need to prepare to step forward as the next generation of conservation leaders.

The financial goal of Conserfest was to provide home lodging, food, and boat fare for the off-island musicians. The musicians donated their talent, and others across the island community donated all other needed services. After expenses, Conserfest presented \$2700 to Block Island Conservancy at their August meeting.

More importantly, the primary goal of Conserfest was to build awareness among and reach out to the next generation of young people to assume responsibility for protecting Block Island's open spaces. And in that regard, 85 new members were added to the roll of Block Island Conservancy supporters.

In addition to Cameron and Justin, the following were the principal Conserfest organizers: Travis Greenlee, Laura Michel Breunig, John Breunig, Scott Michel, Danielle Duffy, Lauren von Bernuth, Robbie Closter, Hanna Greenlee, Alice Ely, Kati Napierkowski, Samantha Price, John Henry Tripler, Dave Flamand, Virginia Dare, Dan Cahill, Ed McGovern, Interstate Navigation, George Dodge, Jessie Edwards, Suzanne Nolter, Leslie Ulrich, the Greenlee Family, the Ely Family, and the musicians of Homeslice, Zox, and Chachi. A hearty thanks to all!

Was this a first annual event? We'll see what 2009 brings.

Treasurer's Report, Fall 2008

The Block Island Conservancy is in excellent financial shape thanks to the generosity of our members and the responsible fiscal policies of the Board of Directors. Member donations are the key to our financial success and enable us to pursue our goals. We supplement donations through conservative investments in money market accounts and short term CDs. In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2008, operating funds generated by donations and investments totaled \$60,275 and offset operating expenses of \$59,584. These expenses included the costs of maintaining an office with a one eighth time administrative assistant, keeping our members and the community informed of our endeavors, continuing our fund raising pursuits and supporting our conservation partners on the island. Operating funds also cover attorneys' fees relative to land acquisition, appraisals, and the expense of the annual financial review and tax preparation by the accountant. In 2007, the BIC reduced the accounting costs by \$3,000 by entering into an agreement with a new accounting firm.

In 1986, Board of Directors of BIC began funding a stewardship endowment fund for the purpose of maintaining our properties. In an effort to sustain the flow of funds to our primary land acquisition objectives, it was decided to divert all me-

morial and celebratory contributions to the stewardship fund. In fiscal year ending June 30, 2008, those donations amounted to \$21,585. Now all of the expenses to mow fields, trim stone walls, cut new trails and obtain legal advice on issues surrounding our land and easements are paid for out of the stewardship fund. In May of this year, we approved the establishment of the Block Island Conservancy, Inc. Stewardship Endowment Fund with The Rhode Island Foundation with an initial contribution of \$250,000. The fund will pay out a portion of its earnings semi-annually and retain the balance of earnings for growth of the fund. Stewardship expenses last fiscal year were \$17,540. Interest earned on stewardship funds was \$8,000.

With regard to land acquisition, we have pledges to-date that will completely cover the cost of purchasing the new easement at Mitchell Farm including interest, legal fees and fund raising expenses. We are, however, excited by opportunities for land acquisition which are on the horizon. Our life's blood is the generosity of our members. Your support enables us to continue our commitment to protect Block Island's natural heritage, rural character and public access to its resources by preserving land as open space through acquisition or via conservation easements.

BIC Photo Project with the Block Island School Students

If you missed your chance to see the Block Island School Students' photographs from last year's annual meeting, or even if you did see them and would like to see them again, they will be hung throughout the Island Free Library for all to enjoy. Block Island Conservancy asked students

in grades 5, 6, and 7 to take photos of what they love about Block Island and what they would still want to see here in twenty years. The students took the task very seriously, and their results prove it. Make sure to visit the library to view the students' heartfelt, thoughtful, and artistic photographs.