



# BLOCK ISLAND CONSERVANCY

Block Island Conservancy Inc. Newsletter

December 2009

## Annual Meeting Report

The annual Block Island Conservancy meeting was held on October 18, 2009, with approximately 50 people in attendance.

Unfortunately, Senator Jack Reed, the scheduled guest speaker, was unable to make the trip to the island due to inclement weather. Senator Reed phoned to express his regrets and promised to try again to come next year in either the Spring or the Fall.

Stephen Record's President's report contained some interesting news. This summer for the first time ever, an Advisory Group met to discuss topics of interest to the BIC Board. The Board will be focusing on how to become accredited from the Land Trust Alliance. A legal defense fund was created in order to support the CGSP in the fight against Champlin's expansion; so far we have received almost \$40,000.00 in contributions! Steve was also happy to report that thanks to Board member Laura Michel Breunig, the web site has been updated and expanded. Conserfest was once again a success, bringing in 120 memberships and \$5400.00 in donations.

BIC's finances remain sound. Most of our stewardship endowment funds are invested with the Rhode Island Foundation, pledges are still expected from Mitchell Farm, and some funds

*Continued on next page*

## Conserfest adds up in 2009

Conserfest has again brought us a different and fun way to help protect the environment and the natural beauty of Block Island. The concept of Conserfest, a grassroots project originating on Block Island, RI, in the fall of 2007, came from a conversation between Conserfest founders Cameron Greenlee and Justin Lewis, and Lewis' father David. "My father said to us, 'if you are friends, and your friends care about this place, it's time to take some ownership,'" recalled Lewis.

The efforts of Block Island Conservancy have proven inspirational to the group, who recognize the importance of raising awareness for land conservation among the younger generations. "We realized that many of our peers were unaware of the personal effort and financial sacrifice required to keep Block Island as open as it is today. It's time for us to step forward as the next generation of conservation leaders," Lewis said. With more than 40% of Block Island preserved as open space in perpetuity, it's a legacy that will be passed to future generations.

Stepping forward! The 2009 Conserfest events proved to be more successful than the

previous year. Events were numerous and brought together many generations of people under the unified idea of land conservation and environmental awareness. Through the celebration of music and art at a variety of locations, including Fredrick Benson Town Beach, McGovern's Yellow Kittens, Lewis Farm, and Smuggler's Cove, Conserfest provided atmospheres fun for all ages. There were musical performances by several local musicians, as well as musicians from Boston, Providence, Washington D.C., San Francisco and New York City. While enjoying the music, people were able to receive more information about BIC and Conserfest, become members, make donations, and purchase merchandise. With donors ranging from the age of 8 years old to over 80, Conserfest raised \$5,400.00 for Block Island Conservancy. Along with donations, Conserfest also signed up 120 new or renewed memberships for BIC. The group is energized about the success of the summer and has already begun plans for 2010! For more information about Conserfest, and to stay updated on events visit [www.conserfest.org](http://www.conserfest.org) or "friend" them on Facebook!

## Block Island Students' Photo Project Returns

BIC Director and Secretary Shannon Cotter, who is also a teacher at the Block Island School, is planning on reintroducing the photo project from four years ago to a new group of 5th, 6th, and 7th graders. The students will again be asked about what they love about Block Island and what they still

want to see here in twenty years. The project will start in January 2010 and continue until May 2010 in order to cover different seasons. Former director Gail Ballard Hall will assist with the project as well. Look forward to seeing the results at next year's annual meeting.



*Meeting continued from page 1*

came in from the trail map. Further details may be found in the complete Treasurer's Report elsewhere in this newsletter. Besides two donations, there were no new acquisitions this year.

Peter Greenman presented the Stewardship report. Peter reminded everyone that if an individual gives or sells land at a bargain rate to conservancy groups, he or she would get a tax deduction, which can reduce adjusted gross income by 50 percent. Peter noted that the property we own is in top shape because of Gene Hall. He discussed two gifts: one from Frank and Nancy Ruddle who deeded property to BIC and the other from Louise Halloran who gave an easement to BIC. Peter encouraged suggestions and feedback from BIC members for the Stewardship.

During the year, Doug Hoyt and Nancy Pike resigned from the Board, being replaced by Tom Doyle and Steve McQueeny. Gail Ballard Hall, Mike Shea, and Cindy Baute's terms were up; they were replaced by Barry Saxe, Derek van Lent, and Logan Mott Chase. Trees would be planted in honor of outgoing directors, as well as landscaping at the West Side 20 in honor of Doug Hoyt.

Because there was no speaker, Stephen opened the floor to questions and discussions. Some discussion did take place, including a question about whether easements will ever be challenged by the Town for its own use. Peter thought it would be very hard to challenge, and it would have to go to court. It was noted that the Town owns Rodman's Hollow outright and that the Town should consider granting a conservancy group an easement.

At the November Board meeting, the following officers were elected: Stephen Record, President; Betty Lang, Vice President; Shannon Cotter Marsella, Secretary; and Debbie Howarth, Treasurer. Peter Greenman continues as Stewardship Chairman.

## Treasurer's Report, Fall 2009

The Block Island Conservancy continues to benefit from the strong financial support of its members despite the fiscal challenges of the past year. General contributions over the last twelve months have returned to normal levels post-Mitchell Farm fund-raising efforts. These donations supplemented by conservative investments in money market accounts and CDs cover our day-to-day operating expenses. Operating costs include maintaining an office with a part-time paid administrative assistant, keeping our members and the community informed of our endeavors and supporting our conservation partners on the island. Operating funds also cover attorney's fees relative to land acquisition, appraisals and the expense of the annual financial review and tax return preparation by our accountant. Revenues to this fund in excess of expenses are targeted for land acquisition. At this time, we have completed all current land acquisition commitments. We are fortunate, thanks to the generosity of our members, to be able to add to the land acquisition fund while we await the next opportunity to acquire land and/or easements. In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2009, operating funds generated by donations and investments totaled \$85,000. Our operating expenses totaled \$52,000.

We continue to receive Mitchell Farm pledges as expected. In February we were able to pay Adrian in full, saving a considerable amount in the overall cost of interest on that debt. As we move forward, the pledge money will replenish the land acquisition funds used to accelerate payments to Adrian.

The economic downturn did impact our Stewardship Endowment Funds at the Rhode Island Foundation. As a re-

sult, we elected for forgo receipt of our December 2008 interest payment in favor of leaving that money in the account to earn interest and help restore principal when the economy turns around. Happily, the June 30, 2009 statement showed growth in the funds. Though there is a ways to go to recover completely, we are confident that the funds will return to former levels in the near future.

Memorial and honorary donations were down last year. The interest earned on the endowment funds and memorial and honorary donations are what BIC uses to cover the costs of maintaining our properties and trails. Some of the shortfall was covered by the second printing of our trail guide which is sponsored by island businesses. Income to the stewardship account for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2009 totaled \$17,425 against expenses of \$30,900. Once a year the Board evaluates the status of both operating and stewardship accounts and transfers funds between accounts if necessary. In June 2009 the Board elected to use operating funds to cover the stewardship shortfall.

In an effort to determine support for the Committee for Great Salt Pond's legal defense fund, we queried our members and asked those who supported that effort to send donations care of BIC which BIC then forwarded to CGSP. We were extremely pleased by your response. To date we have received and forwarded almost \$45,000, \$5,000 of which was donated by the Block Island Conservancy Board out of its stewardship fund.

We are thankful for the continuing support of our members. This 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 Advisors

Early this year the Board of Directors decided it would be worthwhile to form an advisory panel to provide input to the Board on both long-term strategic directions and more immediate initiatives. To that end a group of 15 men and women, many of whom are former members of the Board, were approached and agreed to serve as BIC Advisors. The members of the advisory group are as follows:

Justin Abrams  
Jerry Anderson  
James Bailey  
Robert Downie  
Rita Draper  
David Lewis  
Keith Lewis  
Donald McCluskey  
Dorothy McCluskey  
Dennis O'Toole  
Trudy O'Toole  
Melissa Schottland  
Steven Schottland  
Lawrence Taft (Audubon Society of Rhode Island)  
Peter Wood

It is our intention that the Advisors will meet once a year on the Island for a free-

ranging discussion among themselves, with current board members in the audience to participate as needed. The Board is then responsible for evaluating the results of the Advisors' discussion and factoring them appropriately into its plans for the future.

The first meeting of the BIC Advisors took place in August of this year. With Peter Voskamp of the Block Island Times serving as moderator, the group spent about two hours discussing issues arising from a set of topical questions prepared by the Board. The topics that were addressed included relatively large issues, such as the challenges posed by stewardship responsibilities for conservation easements, and the importance of developing and sustaining a vision for future conservation. The Advisors encouraged the Board to continue recruiting younger people for membership and for the Board, noting that the transition of leadership to the younger generation is coming soon. There was also some very useful discussion about ways to accomplish specific goals, such as restoring a viewshed, during periods when larger projects are not in progress. Over the winter, the Board will work to identify opportunities to put these and other suggestions into practice.

## [www.BICconservancy.org](http://www.BICconservancy.org)

With BIC's new website you can stay up to date with current BIC news, find out how you can get involved, become a member, make a donation online, check out our walking trails, find the answers



to frequently asked questions, read current articles about the fight to save the Great Salt Pond, and more. Check us out online at [www.BICconservancy.org](http://www.BICconservancy.org) and see for yourself!

## A Note about Al Starr

Al Starr was a founding director of Block Island Conservancy in 1972. He served as our attorney when there were multiple land acquisitions under consideration. BIC was the only conservancy on the Island at that time. The Block Island Land Trust and The Nature

Conservancy's Block Island field office were not established until the 1980s.

Al now lives in Tiverton and was recently discharged from St. Anne's Hospital in Fall River. He would be delighted to hear from his friends. His cell phone is always with him, and the number is 401-474-4996.

## Great Tax Saving Idea

In this current economic decline, we need all the help we can get. The Federal Government has given a break to those who are over 70½ years old and have an IRA. Ordinarily, any distribution from an IRA is taxed as income. This is fair because all deductible contributions and earnings in the IRA have never been taxed.

Congress has now said that through December 31, 2009, a distribution to a non-profit organization such as Block Island Conservancy, referred to as a charitable IRA rollover, will not be taxed. What a deal! Here's what to do:

- Contact your IRA plan provider.
- They will send you an authorization form.
- Determine the amount of your donation and return the form.

That was easy! The gift must go directly to Block Island Conservancy. The total of such contributions this year can not exceed \$100,000.

Here is how you benefit:

- Your taxable income is reduced. This could put you in a lower bracket.
- The charitable IRA rollover contribution does not count towards the contribution limitation if you itemize deductions.
- The charitable IRA rollover provision applies even if you don't itemize.

This is a win-win. Consult your tax advisor for further information, and remember that this opportunity ends on December 31st of this year unless the enabling law is extended. Today is a good time to act.



# STEWARDSHIP CORNER

## Meadow Hill Trail

Here's an easy walk from downtown. Meadow Hill starts at Old Town Road and ends at the intersection of Old Town Road and Connecticut Ave. It encircles the house where Rob Lewis and his wife, Alyce, lived. Rob was a founder of Block Island Conservancy in 1972 and the major moving force in preserving Rodman's Hollow. This trail was given by Rob in 1993.

To get there, follow Old Town Road from Bridgegate Square through the intersection with Connecticut Avenue. In a quarter of a mile is Meadow Hill on your right. Immediately after the cleared field on your right is the trail head sign: "Meadow Hill Trail." Park on the roadside. This trail will provide fine views.

Its other end is at Old Town Road and Connecticut Avenue. To return if walking, Old Town Road is directly in front of you. If driving, take a right on Old Town Road and return to your car.

**Degree of difficulty:** *easy.*

**Time to walk the trail:** *11 minutes, one way.*

## Mazzur Lot

This is a quick trail with a huge payoff. The lot lies directly across from Smilin' Through on Cooneymus Road. This 2.3 acre property was acquired by The Nature Conservancy in 2000 from Sallie Mazzur.

To start, turn off Center Road onto Cooneymus Road. Opposite Smilin' Through there are places to park on the roadside. In two places in the stone wall there are stone steps set in the ground. The lot is entirely encircled by stone walls. The ascent is steep but not difficult. In minutes you can be at the top of the hill. When you turn around, the views can be breathtaking: Smilin' Through,

Fresh Pond, uninterrupted stone walls, and cleared fields will occupy your attention for a long time. But the biggest surprise is your view looking downward

on these wonderful sites. All of the fields you see are preserved so whenever you return you can expect to see the same wonder. To me the views are not to be missed in all seasons, but the very best times are shortly after the fields have been mowed. This can happen in late Fall or late Spring.

Feel free to walk the perimeter of the lot. There is a tucked-away pond to the west which few have ever seen. Indeed, most people have never been to the top of Mazzur.

It is best to not wear shorts. Depending on its last mowing, tall grass and rose briars may be encountered.

**Degree of difficulty:** *moderate.*

**Time to walk the perimeter:** *30 minutes.*

## Stone Walls

Who would deny that Block Island's greatest asset is its topography? John Greenleaf Whittier thought so in the 1860s:

*But in summertime, when pool and pond,  
Held in the laps of valleys fond,  
Are blue as the glimpses of sea beyond....*

In my opinion, our second greatest asset is our stone walls. This tiny island boasts of over 300 miles of beautiful walls. Unhappily, most of them are completely covered by overgrowth that has made them invisible.

Rosemary and Dan Millea decided to

do something about this on their property. They live in an old Dodge house at the top of Amy Dodge Lane. When they first settled there, thick brush completely hid walls and a glorious pond located about 75 yards from the house.

Now this has changed. Dan and Rosemary hired Liviu Galatann, a European university student, to help with their store, *Essentials*. Liviu has worked for them in the summers of 2008 and 2009. When not working at the store, he cleared and trimmed their walls. Now their property is a place to behold. Walls not seen for decades have been revealed. The beautiful pond is easily seen from the house, and grasses and flowers abound where briars and invasives once flourished. Rosemary, Dan and Liviu are justifiably proud of the work they've done.

A similar situation occurred years ago at our Martin Lots at the junction of West Side Road and Old Mill Road. The walls there had been completely smothered by rampant shrubbery. Now the property is mowed and trimmed annually, and is a sight or walk not to be missed.

Do you have walls that need uncovering? The best time for clearing and trimming is November through April. If you need help in doing it yourself or hiring someone, call me at 466-2950. There are a number of islanders who do clearing, and I can tell you whom to call.

Here's to cleared walls!

*Peter Greenman, Stewardship Chairman*

## Block Island Conservancy Board of Directors:

**Stephen Record**, *President*

**Betty Lang**, *Vice President*

**Debbie Howarth**, *Treasurer*

**Shannon Cotter Marsella**, *Secretary*

**Peter Greenman**, *Stewardship Chairman*

**Laura Michel Breunig**

**Logan Mott Chase**

**Tom Doyle**

**Mike McQueeny**

**Steve McQueeny**

**Barry Saxe**

**Derek Van Lent**

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Stephen Record, President

This newsletter was prepared by Shannon Cotter Marsella, Laura Michel Breunig, Peter Greenman, Debbie Howarth, Martha Ball, Stephen Record, and CRI Design.

# Memorials

*Kate Roll*

Steve & Rita Draper  
Polly Davis  
Mary Erlanger  
Barnard Guerlain  
Fred & Debbie Howarth  
Barbara Earle  
Joyce Wyman

*Suzanne Weinberger*

Hildred Lasser

*Eve Grindley*

Nigel Grindley & Cathy Joyce

*Joan Abrams*

Steve & Rita Draper

*Jane Boone Foster*

Fred & Debbie Howarth

*Ruth Kaufmann*

Barbara Earle

*Charles & Edith Martin*

Maureen Hoyt

*Pat Korten*

Sean & Leslie Hartnett

*Bob & Gloria Hull*

Rev William & Gail Martin

*Capt Rob & Alyce Lewis*

Robert & Mary Cushing

*Bill Transue*

Erroll Transue

*Helen Cullinan*

Don & Nonie White

*Bob Dunne*

Jessica Pozen Bulman

*Kathryn Champlin*

Dan & Rosemary Millea

*Peter Blane*

Dan & Rosemary Millea

*Margaret Brain*

Dan & Rosemary Millea

*Skip McAloon*

Dan & Rosemary Millea

*Lou Ritzinger*

Dan & Rosemary Millea

*Ellen Ball*

Dan & Rosemary Millea

*Jim Mitchell*

Dan & Rosemary Millea

*John Urbain*

Rally & Fran Migliaccio  
Richard & Casey Clark  
Marilyn Bogdanffy  
The Family of Chandra Smith  
Ethel DeMuis  
Kevin & Jayne Swanson  
Celia Bauer  
Knudsen Family  
John & Diane Sheehan  
Albert & Eleanor Doyle  
William & Barbara Lyons

*Paul Rivers*

Regional Water Authority  
Robert & Joyce Mailhouse  
Bailey, Moore, Glazer Schaeffer  
& Proto  
Winfield & Valarie Redman  
Wallingford District Probate  
Court  
Ct Assoc of Probate Clerks  
Lynn Shaw  
Dr. Edmund & Frances Sullivan  
Erica Russo  
Richard & Dolores Tedford  
Robert Conroy  
William & Pamela Peterson  
Nobert & Margaret Church  
Marc & Melissa Harold  
Peter & Mary Jo Tamaro  
Patty Tedford  
Burke & Barbara Schlott

*Jim O'Leary*

Dr. Mitchell & Shelly Driesman

*Eric Jess Spirer*

Kevin & Carolyn Hogan  
David & Alexa Tartaglia

*Marc Benedict*

Rally & Fran Migliaccio

*Frank Joseph*

The Office Staff of South County  
Ob/Gyn

*William Arnold*

Scott & Debra Ziegler

*Bill Chmeil*

Elizabeth Theve

*Laura Rawls*

Dave & Peg Lewis  
The Lang Family: Neil & Maja;  
Leslie; Keith & Kathy;  
Duncan & Donna

*Michael Murphy*

The Murphy Family  
Frank & Antonia Buono  
Joe & Rita Buono  
Dept of Teacher Education,  
Lauder University

# Honors, Celebrations

*Chris Sitbon's Birthday*

Doug & Joanna Wright

*Keith & Kay and Dave & Peg Lewis*

Ray & Barbara Ripper

*Eliot Nerenberg & Amy Jaffee*

Ron & Lisa Arnold

*Peter Wood*

Heather Grillo

*Keith, Kathy & Gillian Lang*

Marilyn Dodge

*Wedding Thanksgiving*

Eric & Sarah Thomas

*Joan Corwin*

Theresa Cipriani

*Jonathan Duncklee's Birthday*

Jeffrey & Jane-Ann Campbell  
Tricia Cunningham  
Emily Kukulka  
Peterjob Inc.  
Joshua Scalora  
William Turner  
A. Gardner Young, Jr.

*Michael Oppenheimer*

& Leonie Haimson  
Geoffrey Lawrence

*Barbara MacDougall*

Mary Ann Gregory

*Sim Attwood & Susie Weisman*

Mary Meeker

*On behalf of Sheffield Farm Assoc*

Geoff & Colleen Ernst

*Jane Anderson & Peter Vercelli*

Sharon Armstrong

*Dr. Alvin Goodman's Birthday*

Richard & Judith Schultz  
Hector Levin & Francia DeBeer

*Ray Torrey's Birthday*

Gail Ballard Hall  
Ed McGovern  
Patricia & Sylvan Vaicatis

*Jim & Charlotte McGee*

Frank & Marjorie Solomon