

# BIC THROUGH THE YEAR

## Remembering Justin Abrams

By Susan Gibbons

BIC gratefully acknowledges and remembers Justin Abrams for his lifelong commitment to nature and conservation on Block Island and in RI. Justin had a lifelong love for nature and animals, and used his professional and personal time to advance the health and welfare of both. Justin studied agriculture at the University of Rhode Island, and by the early 1950s was instrumental in conservation efforts in RI while caring for chickens and donkeys on his own farm. After moving to Block Island, he acted on his love of farm and exotic animal species by starting the Abrams' Animal Farm and his incredible vegetable garden. The farm provides protection and an enriched, healthy environment for species as typical as donkeys and sheep and as exotic as zeedonks, African cranes, emus, lemurs, camels and kangaroos. Lucky visitors to the farm often were able to meet and chat with Justin as he interacted with and cared for his beloved charges. Educational signage at the farm helps both adults and children learn to appreciate and admire these creatures, and may be a step towards their own future in caring for their world.



New BIC Board Member, Seth Draper, with his grandfather, Justin Abrams

Justin worked with the US Fish and Wildlife Department in RI, and was a past BIC director and then Advisory Board member. His daughter Rita Draper followed in his path as a BIC director, and we are now lucky to have a third generation director in Justin's grandson, Seth Draper. A very generous outpouring of memorial donations were made to BIC after Justin's passing in March 2016. It is clear that Justin Abrams' commitment to family, nature and conservation will be one of his great legacies, and BIC is both proud of and thankful for his guidance, leadership, and support.



## Further A Field Trip 2016



By Susan Gibbons

Thanks to grant funding from The Nature Conservancy and a generous contribution from BIC and many other community organizations, students from the 10th grade class at the Block Island School were able to travel with Susan Gibbons, their science teacher, and Dwayne Brown from TNC, to St. Croix, USVI. While there, students worked directly with Chris Littlefield and other dedicated TNC staff on plant identification, habitat restoration, coral nurseries and beach clean up activities. Highlights of the trip included:

- Successfully getting out of the Northeast by plane in the middle of a blizzard.
- Working together to shop for, create and clean up meals at the guesthouse.
- Touring a historic sugar mill and learning the names of a myriad of local plants.

- Hiking into remote areas to plant trees and agave cactus at Jack and Isaac's bay.
- Investigating turtle nesting sites and rescuing one baby sea-turtle from a hatching site.
- Learning about the coral restoration program and then snorkeling directly over the coral nursery.
- Night-time kayaking in the bioluminescent bay.
- Trying new foods from a local farmer's market and at local restaurants.

This trip is aptly named "Further-a-Field" because it gives Block Island students a chance to travel and work outside of their local ecosystem and personal comfort zones. A second group will travel to St. Croix in March 2017, and we plan to make this service learning trip an annual activity.

## BIC On The Beach



By Robert Greenlee

On August 14th, BIC participated in the 2016 Conserfest Music and Arts Festival. Conserfest has been collaborating with BIC since its inception in 2007. The proceeds from

Conserfest have been used to raise awareness and promote conservation on Block Island. It has operated as an extension of BIC until 2015 when it received its own 501c3 status. This year it established a scholarship fund to support Block Island School students in their lifelong learning experience through conservation and environmental science. The 2016 scholarship is dedicated to past BIC president, Stephen Record.

The all-ages event was held at the Fred Benson Town Beach pavilion. The BIC presence consisted of an information booth set up next to the main stage. This year's festival was the best attended ever.

## NEW SIGN INSTALLATION



## Solviken Nature Preserve

## BIC and CGSP Celebration



By Michael Chapman

On August 13th BIC set up an activities area at the Solviken Nature Preserve to take part in the first annual island-wide Celebration of the Great Salt Pond. The purpose was to raise awareness of the importance of the Great Salt Pond to the health of the island and to raise funds for the on-going work of the Committee in the protection of the Pond.

The activities booth was visited by about eighty people. Many visited to take part in the BIC Scavenger Hunt where you earn a BIC badge upon the completion of a series of questions that challenge your knowledge of Block Island. Others picked up t-shirts and hats, and learned the history of the Solviken Nature Preserve and how it is ecologically connected to the Great Salt Pond.

## Reducing waste

By Michael Chapman

When thinking about the many ways we are raising conservation awareness on Block Island, sometimes it's little gestures that create the spark of awareness. Every summer we witness many thousands of visitors walking away from the ferry docks with plastic bottle containers in hand. And with the summer sun brightly shining upon the ferry decks, who can blame them. The vast amounts of plastic waste pouring onto Block Island presented an opportunity for the BIC Education Center to address the issue of waste while attracting more people to our Education Center on Weldons Way.



With a little research, and the help of David Turner and Mark Emmanuelle, we successfully installed a water filling station. The water filling station was fashioned to fit seamlessly into a window on the main floor, taking up no floor space. It uses zero electricity. Visitors are welcome to come inside the Education Center to fill their bottles as they are surrounded by our educational wall display, just another creative and conservation-oriented feature that makes our Educational Center even more attractive.

## LATE BREAKING NEWS

By Bill Comings

Block Island voters approved the Green Economy Bond—Question 6 on the ballot—by the second highest approval percentage in the State of Rhode Island. 84.3% of Block Island voters said "yes" to this measure. I have always known that conservation is highly regarded by Block Islanders and this vote is a vivid demonstration of that. I asked the support of BIC's members at our Annual Meeting. Apparently, no prompting was necessary.

One of the seven programs to be funded by the approved bonds is the Local Open Space Grant Program. This program will be funded at \$4,000,000 and will provide matching funds for land acquisition to protect special places. The funding is made available on a competitive basis but Block Island is usually successful in obtaining much needed funds to allow acquisition of key parcels. State funding is paired with private and local money. Because of the island's extremely high land costs, we generally combine fund raising, funds from The Nature Conservancy, revenues from BI Land Trust, and State funding. This has been an essential part of our land acquisition success over the years.

Passage of the Green Economy Bond is great news for the Island and the State.

## TREASURER'S REPORT

By Debbi-Jo Horton

Block Island Conservancy general donations for the fiscal year ending June 30th, 2016 were \$142,245 versus \$158,817 the previous year. There was a bequest included in the amount of \$25,000. Income included a return on investments totaling \$506. Operating expenses totaled \$122,012 for a net gain of \$20,739.

The Stewardship Endowment Funds at the Rhode Island Foundation have decreased slightly and BIC elected to receive the annual proceeds of these accounts to enable more funds to be available for land acquisition. Proceeds from RI Foundation Stewardship Endowment Fund were \$10,111. In all, including losses representing a decrease in market value in the endowment funds, income to Stewardship in the fiscal year ending June 30th, 2016 was \$22,621 against expenses of \$51,275, and a loss in the RI Foundation accounts of \$5,074, for a net loss to Stewardship of \$33,728. Much of this loss was due to the expenditures in preparing the Solviken site and money was again spent from the cash set aside from specific donations.

The above figures have not gone through the annual review by our outside accountant and are subject to minor changes.

## SOLVIKEN FOUNTAIN

By Bill Comings

Earlier this year, The Rhode Island Foundation announced a program of grants to celebrate the 100th year anniversary of its founding. Their announced intention was to award grants to each of Rhode Island's cities and towns.

BIC submitted a request to RIF for funding to cover the acquisition and installation of a refillable water station and drinking fountain at Solviken. The Town of New Shoreham agreed to provide water by extending the waterline to the site from the water main located in Corn Neck Road. Heidi Tarbox of Block Island Land Trust prepared our grant application.

In April 2016, we were notified that the RIF had awarded Block Island Conservancy a \$10,000 Centennial Community Grant for the Solviken Outdoor Public Fountain and Reusable Water Bottle Filling Station. RIF noted that: "We received over 200 applications, representing all 39 cities and town in Rhode Island, for a total of over \$2.5 million in requests. Your proposal was one of 43 selected for funding."

We selected a high quality non-refrigerated outdoor unit manufactured by Elkay, a leading supplier of durable outdoor equipment used in many parks nationwide. The unit has a dark green powder-coated exterior over a corrosion resistant primary coating to provide protection from the elements. This three level unit provides a water bottle filling station, a water fountain and even a dog bowl.



The Block Island Water Company provided the water line and Bain Transue donated his services to connect the line to the fountain.

We are very hopeful that this fountain will increase usage of refillable water bottles and reduce the usage of ever-present plastic water bottles.

We have had very encouraging feedback from other Island organizations that are thinking of following our lead and installing water bottle filling stations elsewhere.

## INSTAGRAM PHOTO CONTEST

By Michael Chapman



Photo By Hayley Gibbs

This summer BIC hosted our first social media event, an Instagram photo contest. On July 13th, we awarded first prize to Hayley Gibbs for her Instagram-submitted photo of the North Lighthouse. There were a few dozen wonderful Block Island photo submissions and it was a great way to bring together conservation awareness with active participation of many visitors on and off island. Much of the feedback regarding our increased social media presence is that people enjoy staying connected to Block Island long after their visits. They enjoy witnessing our efforts in helping to keep Block Island the magical place they know and love. We welcome you to join our more than 1,100 Instagram followers for fun and easy updates of all things BIC.

## Block Island Conservancy Board of Directors

Bill Comings *President*  
Sue Gibbons *Vice President*  
Debbi-Jo Horton *Treasurer*  
Tom Doyle *Secretary*  
Barry Saxe *Stewardship Director*

Lyle Anderson  
Leonard Perfito  
Rosemary Tobin  
Seth Draper  
Jim McCormick  
Bob Greenlee

Michael Chapman *Executive Director*



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## BIC HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

When you shop at our online store you are not only supporting BIC, you are giving to others the gift of sustainability.

Our ethically sourced apparel is just a few clicks away from being shipped to you or your loved ones for the holidays. You will find our new BIC reusable stainless steel drinking bottles, our new BIC caps, shirts and hoodies, all from ethically sourced companies that will make you feel even better about your gift-giving.

Or for the person who has everything consider honoring him or her with a donation to Block Island Conservancy – always a greatly appreciated gift.

[biconservancy.org/store/shop](http://biconservancy.org/store/shop)



## BLOCK ISLAND CONSERVANCY

## OPPENHEIMER SPEAKS AT BIC

By Lars Trosdon

Dr. Michael Oppenheimer wants people to start thinking ahead, far ahead, when it comes to the impact of sea level rise. Block Island should now be thinking about mitigating these impacts even though they may not occur until 50 to 100 years from now. This was the theme of his address to the members of the Block Island Conservancy at their annual meeting on Sunday, Oct. 2 at the Empire Theatre. Oppenheimer is the Albert G. Milbank Professor of Geosciences and International Affairs at Princeton University.

Oppenheimer showed slides that showed even modest rises in sea levels show rising water splitting Block Island in two if certain measures are not taken.

"There are certain problems that can't be put off," Oppenheimer said to the crowd. "This is one of them." He realized that such a discussion can cause a "lot of argument, but if you want to have a future, a say in what the town will look like in 40 or 50 years, then this is one of the key problems to address. Worse yet — make no decision at all."

He also noted that sea level rise is not a uniform phenomenon across the globe; some areas will be hit harder than others. The northeast Atlantic is one such area that will be hit hardest.

The trick over the next century will not be to stop climate change, but perhaps mitigate it. A four-degree Celsius change in temperature by the year 2100 would simply be catastrophic, he said. However, if changes are made and temperature rise is limited to under two degrees Celsius, then the earth may have what Oppenheimer called "a soft landing." Anything over that, he said, there will be a "world that looks nothing like our world."

There are certain measures that can be taken now, Oppenheimer said. He mentioned a federal law that provides flood insurance for homes damaged by coastal flooding that encourages people to "build in places where they shouldn't be in the first place." It's backward to have little or no money for pro-active efforts, but "huge money" that "will pay for the cleanup."



Oppenheimer said that while all of this is an inexact science, there are metrics that point to sea level changes, and there are measures that can be taken. What he said he didn't possess, "was any special wisdom on how to get people together to address the problem."

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## BIC ELECTS DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS

Two new directors were elected by the membership at the October 2, 2016 Annual Meeting. Seth Draper and Jim McCormick were elected to succeed Derek van Lent and Logan Mott Chase. Prior to the vote, BIC President Bill Comings said "It is a particular pleasure to recommend Seth Draper, who is accomplished in his own right but also represents the third generation of Abrams and Drapers to be involved in BIC."

Comings went on to say: "We note with thanks the service of Logan Mott Chase and Derek van Lent. Derek in particular was very involved with our efforts to become Accredited and served as the initial chair of this endeavor."

Comings noted that Jim McCormick has already agreed to head our efforts to obtain Re-accreditation with the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. Our current Accreditation expires in September 2019.

The membership also reelected Bill Comings and Barry Saxe. Barry has been serving as BIC's Stewardship director for several years.

The Board of Directors reelected officers for the coming year—Bill Comings, President; Sue Gibbons, Vice President; Debbi Jo Horton, Treasurer; Tom Doyle, Secretary; and Barry Saxe, Stewardship Director.

## ENHANCED TAX BENEFIT

By Bill Comings

On December 2015, the Congress finally made permanent the enhanced tax treatment for donated easements. This has been an on and off again situation for many years. Now, donors of conservation easements are assured of receiving full tax benefits. First enacted temporarily in 2005, the new permanent incentive raises the deduction a donor can take for a conservation easement to 50% from 30% of annual income and allows the carry forward period to 15 years, from 5 years.

This is great news for conservation nationally. The Land Trust Alliance estimates that "this one new provision of law could result in an additional 300,000 acres of land conserved each year, land that can be used for farming and fishing, pristine watersheds, wildlife habitat, and essential recreation areas for generations of Americans to come." Here on Block Island, easements have always been an important tool for land conservation and the permanent enhanced tax treatment is a real plus.