

In March 2015, we hired Lisa Stepiok, who came with wonderful credentials and had served for several years as Editor of The Block Island Summer Times. However, shortly after she came on board, she told me of a much too good to refuse offer she had received from the University of Connecticut to serve as Editor of its Alumni Magazine. Notwithstanding that, Lisa jumped in and began helping us organize, as well as getting a number of projects underway, before leaving the Island at the end of this past June. Several months earlier, after Lisa was hired but before she started working for BIC, we received an intriguing resume from Michael Chapman. We put the resume aside, informing him that if our situation changed, we would get back to him. Of course our situation did change and we did get back to him, resulting in his hiring as our executive director effective July 1, 2015.

So two talented executive directors, one leaving the Island and one arriving. It is still hard for me to believe that Michael has been with us five months—already he has solid accomplishments to show.

## MEET MICHAEL CHAPMAN

Michael Chapman quickly fell in love with Block Island during his initial visit in 2014. It was Block Island's natural beauty and wonder that was the catalyst in his decision to move there, and working with an organization tasked with maximizing the preservation of Block Island was exactly what he knew he wanted to do.

After graduating from RIT with a BFA in Graphic Design Michael worked for several years in business development and marketing for a medium-sized firm in Washington DC. Ultimately corporate life and marketing work in DC were satisfying but he was looking for more and moved to Ithaca, New York—which he identified as a hub of forward thinking conservation practices that resonated with his own developing internal principles.



In Ithaca, he helped develop and market a top-honored fair-trade, sustainably produced, boutique coffee company called "Gimme! Coffee." He was originally drawn to work with Gimme because of the commitment to fair-trade practices and production with minimal negative environmental impact.

Throughout Michael's life he's consistently held a deep commitment and concern for preserving and protecting the natural world. He continues to learn, practice, and appreciate sustainability and preservation in the form of permaculture, and in creating a lifestyle which doesn't deplete nature's gifts and bounty, but rather gives back in a manner in which our natural environment can thrive.

## SOLVIKEN UPDATE

Solviken is the one acre site on Corn Neck Road adjacent to the Beachhead Restaurant which BIC purchased jointly with Block Island Land Trust following our very successful fund raising drive in 2013. We spent much of 2014 in preparing plans and obtaining approvals from various Town boards and several months early in 2015 in preparing working drawings. However, the bids we received following a public solicitation were shockingly high leading BIC and BILT to decide not to move forward on our plans but instead proceed on a much slower, much less intensive approach to the site. In the next few weeks, we expect to have a contractor extend the stone wall that currently exists along Corn Neck road just to the north of the site along part of Solviken. The parking lot has been filled and graded and the first of the monuments, Harbor Pond Monument (which has been mostly buried in the sand dunes across the street), has been relocated.

Solviken remains an important site for the enjoyment of current and future generations of Block Islanders and Block Island visitors.

## TREASURER'S REPORT

By Debbi-Jo Horton

Block Island Conservancy general donations for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015 were \$158,817 versus \$152,394 for the previous year. Interest income on CD's and money market accounts continues to be weak due to low interest rates. Operating income including return from investments totaled \$3,350. Operating expenses totaled \$118,293 for a net gain of \$40,586.

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. In all, income to stewardship in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015 was \$3,805, against expenses of \$41,539 for a net loss to stewardship of \$34,445. Much of this loss was due to expenditures in preparing the Solviken site and money was spent from the cash set aside for this purpose.

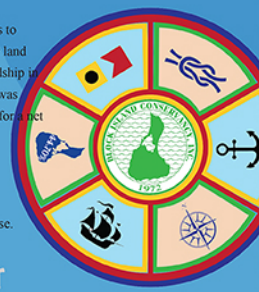
## SCAVENGER HUNT

We have developed and have ready for distribution in brochure format a Block Island Scavenger Hunt.

While the main audience may be children, completing the hunt or parts of it is likely to be more of a family undertaking.

The hunt starts and ends at BIC's Education Center and requires the participants to visit a number of Island locations and seek out facts or fictions. It is designed to be fun and should leave participants with a greater understanding of Block Island and its natural environment.

Take a look and see how many of the questions you can answer. Return your completed answers to the Education Center and receive our new and beautifully designed BIC Badge!



## ONLINE STORE

Within our revised website you will find our new online store! Our new apparel is just a few clicks away from being shipped to you or your loved ones for the holidays. You will also find our new BIC reusable stainless steel drinking bottle, our BIS Student-designed coloring book, and more.

We would like to thank Lyle Anderson for the wonderful work he did on designing our new website.



## Block Island Conservancy Board of Directors

Bill Comings <i>President</i>	Lyle Anderson	Jessica Willis	Published by
Sue Gibbons <i>Vice President</i>	Leonard Perfito	Derek van Lent	Block Island Conservancy, Inc.
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This newsletter was prepared by Bill Comings, Sue Gibbons, Debbi-Jo Horton, and Michael Chapman. Newsletter designed by Michael Chapman.



## BLOCK ISLAND CONSERVANCY

## ANNUAL MEETING RECAP

Because the stormy weather the weekend of BIC's Annual Meeting severely cut back attendance and because the subject matter is likely to find broad interest in the membership, we are providing coverage in much greater detail than normal in our Newsletter.

The program at the meeting was billed as a "Celebration of Block Island Conservancy's Education Partnerships." At the business meeting which preceded the program, the attending membership approved a change in BIC's By-Laws to allow BIC Directors to attend monthly Board Meetings either in person or by telephone/internet conference call. Quorum requirements were eased to allow Directors attending from remote locations to be counted with the proviso that at least five Directors personally be in attendance.

Our new office is equipped with a high quality speaker phone and together with a conference tie line we are able to have greater participation by non-resident Directors or resident Directors who may be traveling.

Treasurer D. J. Horton, and Advisory Coordinator Leonard Perfito were reelected to three year terms on the Board. Jessica Willis, who had been appointed to fill the unexpired term of Steven Record, was also elected to a three year term.

Dr. Robert Greenlee was elected to a three year term succeeding Laura Michel Breunig.



Bob would be new to the board but has deep roots on Block Island and with conservation. He and his wife Susan just moved to the Island as full time residents following his retirement in June 2015. He practiced Obstetrics/Gynecology in Westchester County from 1980 to 2008 and was with Westerly Hospital until his retirement. He has served on the BIHS Advisory board for many years.

Bob's Block Island experience started in 1952 when he sailed here with his parents, Ralph and Dorothy, who after visiting multiple summers, bought land here in 1971 and moved here full time in 1981.

Bob and Susie's three children Travis, Cameron and Hannah grew up spending most summers herring have strong island attachments. Bob notes that the whole family has been involved with Conserfest since its inception in 2007.

BIC took a giant step forward in hiring our first executive directors in 2015. This step was the subject of serious discussions by the Board but, in fact, had been recommended a few years ago by our Advisors. At the time they made this recommendation to us, we were not ready to act but after Accreditation and seeing BIC's programs expand, we felt that this step was not only desirable but necessary for organizational stability. We had asked the tough questions: were we ready? Could we afford it? And was this the right time? We were able to answer all of these in the affirmative.

As an aside, I need to tell you that at last year's Land Trust Alliance Rally in Providence, people from other land trusts were incredulous that BIC has achieved so much without permanent staff. BIC's current board and its predecessors deserve much credit for that. Today's BIC simply has too many aspects to its operations—acquisitions, stewardship, education, and organizational management to continue without professional staff. We decided upon recruiting a 20-25 hour per week year around executive director reporting to the president but working closely with Board members heading up specific areas of our operations.

## BIC HIRES EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

By Bill Comings



## BIC'S EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

A continuation from the Annual Meeting

The subject of the presentation at the Annual Meeting was "A Celebration of BIC's Educational Partnerships." BIC chose this topic to highlight its longstanding commitment to environmental education and particularly its partnership with The Nature Conservancy and the Block Island School. This is an important part of BIC's program and we hope you will enjoy reading the comments made at our meeting.

It was to have been a panel discussion led by Scott Comings of The Nature Conservancy, BIC Vice President and B. I. School High School

Science Teacher Dr. Susan Gibbons was a panelist as were current 12th Graders Jameson Brown-Padien and Wade Ortel. Several panelists were stuck on the mainland due to weather and Chris Littlefield of TNC not only moderated the discussion but read the missing panelists responses. Here is a summary of their remarks:

Scott Comings  
Scott is Associate State Director of The Nature Conservancy's Rhode Island Chapter.

"I was tasked with starting and building the education program almost 19 years ago. I have led over 3,500 programs for the Block Island School and mentored over 100 interns. I am so happy that some of them are now a part of the effort. Roberta, who I taught in school, is our Education Coordinator (my original position) and Clair, who I mentored as an intern is our Philanthropy Specialist—they are the next generation and will ensure our important work continues.

Quite simply the education program has changed my life. It gives me hope for the future and I believe it is the most important thing I have achieved in my professional career.

My favorite thing about the program is seeing students' reaction to seeing something for the first time—it is truly magical. Also teaching students over their whole school career and seeing the amount of learning and

## Some brief comments by Scott Comings before questions for the panel

appreciation towards the Island.

One thing that may not be generally known by the audience is how amazing the support from the community has been for this program. Without this, we wouldn't be here talking to you about it today. I just want to thank Block Island Conservancy for their support and all the other folks who have either donated funds or their time. What an amazing journey of discovery for our students."

Roberta Closter  
Roberta is Education Coordinator for TNC's Block Island Office.

"I have been employed by TNC for one full year as the Education Coordinator. I was an intern during the summer months during college and also did an independent study with Scott to finish my undergraduate degree. Upon obtaining my masters and teaching certifications, I was very lucky to take on the Education Coordinator role at TNC. I teach 18 month olds to high school seniors. I did 300 programs last year! I look forward to another great year continuing to build the program and making more connections.

The education program has had a huge impact on me and my family. I have learned so much about birding and migration (I'm nowhere near Scott but am striving to get there), ranging from raptors and birds of prey to song birds, aquatic birds to habitats. Also seals and bats

Nature education began formally on Block Island in 1914 with Miss Dickens. Her students played a leading role in starting BIC and later the Block Island Land Trust.

The newly formed BIC brought TNC to Block Island in 1972. The Nature Conservancy started doing education in 1991 when the Block Island Office opened.

In 1996 BIC started the educational partnership with TNC with a grant of \$6,000 in funds. In 1997 Scott Comings became the education coordinator with support from Josie Merck and the education program was expanded and formalized. Over the 19 year partnership BIC has granted \$179,000 in funds for the education program. The total cost of the program has been just under \$1,000,000 on average \$50,000 a year. The main parts of the education program include: a summer walk series, Block Island School Program, School and other Organizations Custom Walks, and Volunteer Program known as Adrian's Army. Here are the results since 1996 - Summer Walks: 2,280 walks reaching over 30,000 people

Block Island School: 3,831 and counting. This year will be the 4th full generation from 3yr preschool to 12th grade to

Volunteer Program: 20,900 hours from over 1,000 individuals working on trails and restoration efforts.

and showing them the conservation work we're all doing on Block Island. This program truly shaped my life. I feel so lucky to have been a recipient of the program Scott and others built. I love that I get to come full circle and now can give back to this amazing program.

My favorite thing about the program is that it engages people of all backgrounds and ages in nature. Roberta is getting toddlers outside and mucking around in puddles and we have 90 year olds who come to our nature walks. It's an incredible thing to see how this program inspires people and opens them up to nature.

I think people should know how important this program is to all our conservation work on Block Island-- I don't think people protect what they don't know and love."

Scott's Concluding Remarks  
"This program is so important because it gives visitors, residents and students alike an understanding of why Block Island is important and needs to be conserved and stewarded for future generations. This education program would not be possible without your support. On behalf of the panel, I cannot thank you enough."



Jameson's coloring book: "Birds of Block Island"



Wade's brochure: "Invasive Species"

Meet the students...



## BLOCK ISLAND SCHOOL PROJECTS

By BIC Vice President and BIS Science Teacher, Dr. Susan Gibbons

Students at the Block Island School have a long history of involvement in nature and conservation education, and the addition of honors projects and new field trips in certain classes has extended this opportunity further.

During the school year 2014-2015, Jameson Brown-Padien and Wade Ortel, both now high school seniors, took on extra work in order to earn honors credit in their Field Biology class. Jameson developed a coloring book entitled "Birds of Block Island", which provides information about 12 common birds found on the island, and invites young and older readers to learn and color. This book is now for sale at both the BIC education center and Island Bound bookstore. Wade Ortel focused on the problem of invasive plant species on Block Island, and produced a color brochure that offers homeowners help with both the identification and control/eradication of these invasives. This brochure is available at the education center, free of charge. Jameson and Wade both spoke eloquently at BIC's annual meeting about the impact that many years of nature education has had on their ability to appreciate and provide informed stewardship for the fragile Block Island ecosystem.

This new school year brings further challenges and activities related to conservation education. Two 9th grade students are also completing an honors project, supported by the Block Island Maritime Institute, related to the complex set-up and maintenance of a saltwater aquarium containing local species. This project will demonstrate the fragility of salt water environments in powerful ways that occur and can be manipulated directly in the classroom. Other students in the same class are considering projects related to recycling, reducing plastic bag waste, and climate change mitigation. The 10th grade class will undertake a trip to St. Croix, in the US Virgin Islands, sponsored by The Nature Conservancy and partially supported by BIC, where they will explore the local environments and work with conservation leaders on habitat restoration and other service learning activities. They will also complete an extensive project that compares the history, ecology, tourism and challenges of St. Croix and Block Island.

Tourism, ocean pollution, resource/energy challenges and climate change are major issues that impact all of us at local and worldwide levels. BIC continues to work with multiple organizations and the Block Island School to ensure that the next generation of Block Islanders has the knowledge and passion necessary to appreciate and care for our island and the wider world.

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