

Wallkill Valley Land Trust

ESOPUS, GARDINER, LLOYD, MARLBOROUGH, NEW PALTZ, PLATTEKILL, ROSENDALE, & SHAWANGUNK

Spring 2012 Newsletter

PROFILE: KHOSLA EASEMENT (HUGUENOT STREET FARM)



A torch is passed on Huguenot Street Farm

When Ron and Kate Khosla purchased Huguenot Street Farm in 1999 and embarked on the remarkable adventure that led to the creation of their ground-breaking CSA, the land had been in active cultivation since the late 1600s (initially by the Hasbrouck family and then the VanAlsts). With the herculean efforts of the two recent Cornell graduates, the 77.5 acre parcel, nestled along the rich alluvial plain of the Wallkill River in the Huguenot Street Historic District, became a thriving beyond-organic farm and a hotbed for agricultural innovation. But it also remained a prime candidate for development. Then, in 2005, the Wallkill Valley Land Trust, partnering with the Open Space Institute, spearheaded a drive to protect the endangered farmland and acquired a conservation easement on it. This ensured that the Khoslas' Huguenot Street Farm would remain as open space, and that these historically rich fields would "never produce a crop of houses." Last year Ron and Kate passed the farm on to new set of dedicated hands, committed to the tradition they began, so that this valued land can continue to serve the New Paltz community sustainably grown produce.

The "Two Farms Campaign" that saved HSF (along with the neighboring Jewett Farm), was the culmination of a communal vision for protecting open space and farmland in the Town and Village of New Paltz. Working together, the two not-for-profit organizations mobilized the community to help raise the funds needed to purchase the development rights of both tracts, confirming the recognition that working farms are part of the national treasure of the Hudson River Valley, and truly define what makes this area so special.

The initial transformation of cornfields into a showplace of sustainability did not happen overnight. For five years, Ron and Kate camped on the property with no running water while they began building, on their own, a super-insulated house, heated with light bulbs and a few space heaters and powered in part by solar energy. Defying conventional wisdom (they were told demand for CSA was low in the area) they forged ahead anyhow, starting with twelve families. They wound up supplying 225+ shares, harvesting and distributing more than two tons of food each week with minimal hired labor. During this time, Ron also founded and became director of Certified Naturally Grown (CNG), an alternative certification program only open to small organic farmers who sell locally and directly.

At the same time, Ron was inspired by his tech background to develop models that could improve the operations of other small-scale farmers. His accomplishments here are legion. They include the development of the solar charged tractor (more efficient than diesel or gas), as well as an under-bed heating system for green houses that runs off a standard hot water heater. Then came the CoolBot. When they started the farm, the Khoslas could not afford a walk-in cooler so Ron found a better way: rigging a wall AC with a light bulb on its thermostat to fool the unit into thinking it is 80 degrees when it is really only 40. Thousands of CoolBots are now sold around the US every year.

Eventually it became too much to run the farm and build CoolBots as well. Though torn, Ron and Kate decided to seek a buyer for the farm, hoping to find someone who shared their vision. After a couple of false starts, they met Jeremy Mindich and his wife Amy Smith; according to both families it was the right match as they all share a love of the future and a desire to keep the farm active, organic, and trying new things.

(Continued on next page)

Letter from Executive Director

Henry Ford once said; *“Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is a progress. Working together is success.”*

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Wallkill Valley Land Trust. It has been a very busy and fruitful quarter century! Looking back over the past 25 years, it is important to remember where we have come from and everything we have accomplished, while also looking forward to what the future holds. As this newsletter illustrates, there is a lot going on at WVLT, and we are delighted to be involved in a number of exciting and meaningful projects. We are also celebrating the protection of over 1600 acres in Southern Ulster County. Our 28 conservation easements are the core of what we do, and as each year passes, we not only add more easements, but we are also seeing more properties conveyed to new landowners, each of whom who join our land preservation community.

This year, we wanted to do something special to connect this community. We are engaging the original and current owners of conservation easement properties by hosting a gathering at the home of one of our long-time easement holders. We want to provide an opportunity for these like-minded individuals to meet and share their experiences with each other and with us. We are also inviting some landowners interested in putting a conservation easement on their property so they too can interact with those who have already done so. Hearing from some of our earliest conservation easement grantors about why they placed a land protection agreement on their property is not only inspiring, but a reminder of how important our work has been, and continues to be. We hope to host more gatherings like this throughout the area in order to further the dialogue of land protection in Southern Ulster County while we look forward to remaining a sustainable and essential organization in the next quarter century.

Sincerely,

Christine DeBoer

Christine DeBoer

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Mission Statement:

The mission of the Wallkill Valley Land Trust is to promote the voluntary preservation of farmland, significant habitat, water quality and scenic views in Southern Ulster County for the benefit of present and future generations. The Land Trust's goal is to fully serve the land conservation needs of the eight towns in its service area: New Paltz, Gardiner, Shawangunk, Lloyd, Plattekill, Marlboro, Rosendale, and Esopus. WVLT works to strengthen public sensitivity to environmental issues, to conserve our community's environmental heritage, to encourage environmentally sensitive growth and to support the local agricultural economy.

(HSF, continued from front page) Jeremy is committed to the idea of helping small farms thrive sustainably. His experience on the board of Root Capital, a non-profit which lends to agricultural cooperatives in the developing world, led him to explore the notion of investing in agricultural projects here in the Hudson Valley. “His vision is so rare,” Ron enthuses about Jeremy’s commitment to the farm. “He’s so committed to pioneering forward into the most sustainable way of farming. Definitely financially, which is great, but the personal time he puts into figuring out the best, cleanest approach is even more impressive -- and valuable!”

According to Jeremy and Amy, HSF is in transition right now. They see themselves “more as stewards than owners” and intend that the farm will continue to be managed by farmer Gavin Rinkor. They say Gavin, who has been with the farm ten years, starting when he was 16, has experienced what is really a “19th century apprenticeship,” and has developed a reputation as the “Houdini” of the Hudson Valley for his magical ability to sustain production through the last year’s freakish climate events.

Among Jeremy’s goals for HSF are:

- 1) Grow CSA to 200 (membership shrank during the recent period of uncertainty)
- 2) Help develop new networks of distribution for small, local farms
- 3) Find ways to work with surplus foods

Also under development is a prototype zero carbon footprint winter greenhouse which will enable them to extend the growing season.

Jeremy’s hope is that Ron and Kate will stay involved in the future, a hope they share. Ron says the Mindichs “still talk a lot with them” and the Khoslas are eager to see the farm grow in the way they wanted it to. Although they miss it, he believes, from a New Paltz perspective, as well as the bigger picture, “We did the right thing. He is like college for this farm, taking it to the next level.”

Extension of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail

Two and a half years ago, in August 2009, the Wallkill Valley Land Trust, in partnership with the Open Space Institute purchased 11.5 miles of rail bed in the Town of Rosendale and the Town of Ulster, including the iconic railroad trestle in the heart of Rosendale.

We envisioned a public walkway and began with an in-depth engineering analysis that confirmed the structural integrity of the bridge, and developed a specific plan for railings and decking. This winter, the old decking and railings were removed, and the fabrication and installation of the new railings will start this month. Once the railing is installed, we will complete the decking with volunteers, and we hope to have the bridge re-opened by the end of this year.

Of course, all of this doesn't happen for free. The total cost of completing the trestle repair and making it safe for hikers, bikers, and leaf peepers, among others, will be \$1.1 million. Community support for the project is critical. Last summer, we kicked off the fundraising campaign at the Rosendale Theater, held a family event called the Rail Trail Ramble, as well as two online challenge match campaigns. We attended lots of local events and talked to hundreds of



people about the project and solicited support. With OSI, we also applied for and received two significant grants. We are pleased to announce that so far we have raised nearly \$800,000 towards the project.

This spring and summer, you will see a lot of activity on the trestle as the railings are installed, and we get ready to put on the decking. **But, we still need your help! In order to complete the restoration of the trestle and open it up to pedestrians, we need to raise the remaining \$300,000.** This seems like a large amount, but with 20,000 annual users, if just one quarter of the people who use the trail gave us \$60 each, we'd meet our target. **Please go to the Track the Trestle website www.TracktheTrestle.org and help us by giving what you can.** Significant donors will be recognized on the finished bridge with a naming plaque, so please contact us if you, your family, or your business, would like to make a more substantial gift.

As for the over eleven miles of the extension of the rail trail, a number of developments have occurred in the last year. Volunteers on clean-up days on the rail trail removed trash and downed trees along the trail, and more work days will be set up this year. At the same time, we are working to obtain easements on privately held sections of the trail – including 1.5 miles of trail through the Williams Lake Project, who has continued to express their intention to allow access through their private property. Although we are making great progress, the entire extension of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail is not yet open to the public – if you'd like specific information about the existing rail trail, visit www.gorailtrail.org. For updates on sections of the rail trail extension that are open to the public, visit the Wallkill Valley Land Trust website at www.WallkillValleyLT.org and go to our rail trail page.

A section of the rail trail borders the 118-acre property known as Joppenbergh Mountain. This parcel was acquired in the fall of 2011 by the Open Space Institute and was turned over to the Wallkill Valley Land Trust. OSI donated \$100,000 of the purchase price, and Friends of the Shawangunks are leading the fundraising of the \$85,000 required to complete the transaction (visit www.Shawangunks.com to make a donation).

In January, WVLT kicked off a land use planning process for Joppenbergh Mountain. This will address trail development, which will hopefully include connectivity between the rail trail and the parking lot behind Main Street in downtown Rosendale, as well as other improvements. This process includes meetings with specific interested parties and will incorporate at least one public hearing to ensure all interests are represented. There are monthly meetings of the Joppenbergh Mountain Advisory Group, or JMAG – a volunteer group composed of individuals interested in helping develop the management plan for the property and leading this process. While we conduct the planning process, the mountain is open for passive recreational use at the users' own risk.



In the coming months, there will be numerous opportunities for volunteering to help with the rail trail extension, cleanup on Joppenbergh, and other projects – if you are interested in participating please contact info@wallkillvalleylt.org.

The extension of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail, combined with Joppenbergh Mountain, creates an integrated opportunity to preserve open space, provide recreational activities, and protect important habitats. The Wallkill Valley Land Trust looks forward to your help in seeing these exciting projects through to completion!

WVLT: Twenty-Five Years in the Making

The Wallkill Valley Land Trust (WVLT) was formed in 1987 by a group of Southern Ulster County residents who, with the support and guidance of the Trust for Public Land, came together with the goal of protecting open space in the Wallkill Valley. We serve the towns of Marlborough, Plattekill, Shawangunk, Gardiner, New Paltz, Lloyd, Esopus, and Rosendale and protect over 1600 acres of land through conservation easements. One of our first and defining projects was the acquisition of the rail bed that became the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail.

In 1991, the Wallkill Valley Land Trust completed the purchase the old Wallkill Valley Rail Road right-of-way in New Paltz and Gardiner, and turned it into a rail trail. To accomplish this, WVLT worked closely with the Trust for Public Land. Also in 1991, both the Town and Village of New Paltz purchased from WVLT their sections of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail and donated back to WVLT a conservation easement to ensure the trail would always be a linear park. At the same time, the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail Association was established to maintain, enhance, and promote the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail. In 2007, the Town of Gardiner purchased its section of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail from WVLT and donated a conservation easement. The Land Trust monitors the 12.2 miles of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail annually to ensure the conservation easements are being followed.

Some other early and important achievements for WVLT include the acquisition of an easement on the 88-acre Kellar Farm located along the Wallkill River in New Paltz (featured in our Spring 2011 Newsletter), and protecting the Phillis Bridge Farm Project, the first CSA in Southern Ulster County as well as an important education facility. In 2006, WVLT partnered with the Open Space Institute (OSI) to raise funds to purchase the development rights of two adjacent farms in the Town and Village of New Paltz, just 90 miles north of New York City. The Two Farms campaign, which includes the Khosla Easement (Huguenot Street Farm, featured in this newsletter), successfully protected 180-acres, allowing them to remain in private hands and as active farmlands, forever.

The Wallkill Valley Land Trust was, for the most part, a volunteer run organization for many years. Through the Land Trust Alliance granting program, staff positions were created and maintained by the resulting increase in operations which was needed to meet the increasing needs of the communities we serve. We now have a full time executive director and a part-time office manager, as well as a land steward who develops baselines for new conservation easements and monitors our existing easements.

With 2012 marking our 25th anniversary, the Board is dedicated to serving the needs of the communities in southern Ulster County for another twenty-five years.

SAVE THE DATE!

Our annual Conservation Award Ceremony this year will celebrate 25 years of hard work and dedication by the Wallkill Valley Land Trust, preserving land in southern Ulster County. We will especially honor our Board President, Robert E. Taylor for his ten years of tireless efforts in leading us through our successes. Join us Sunday, October 14 for a gala dinner celebration at the Apple Greens Golf Course overlooking the beauty of the valley.

2012 “Houses on the Land” Historic House Tour: Clintondale

Saturday, June 2, 2012 our “Houses on the Land” Historic House Tour will explore historic farmhouses and their environments (both domestic and utilitarian) in the Village of Clintondale in southern Ulster County. The historic village spans the Towns of Lloyd and Plattekill, both heavily farm-centered communities with a rich diversity of apple orchards and farms.

As with our very successful “Houses on the Land” Historic House Tour last year in Kettleborough, the event will include a detailed program documenting the historical importance of the buildings and land use.



Donors to the Walkkill Valley Land Trust

Our thanks to all of our donors. The list below includes donations received September 9, 2011 through March 15, 2012. We make every effort to keep our records accurate. If there are mistakes or omissions, please bring them to our attention so that we may both apologize and correct them.

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Wallkill Valley Land Trust's Walks and Talks

Walk and Talk on the Smith Property: Box Turtle Day in the Town of Gardiner. Saturday, May 12 at 10 am

For the past three years, WVLT has sponsored an Eastern Box Turtle survey at the home of Anne and Ray Smith. The Smiths, with the aid of biologist Joe Bridges, have been monitoring the turtles on their 65 acres since 2005 in an effort to ascertain their range and understand their behavior. Fifty-three individual turtles have been found. You can learn more about this project at www.boxturtlesny.com Please RSVP for this program.



Walk and Talk on Joppenbergh Mountain in the Town of Rosendale. Saturday, June 16, at 9 am - 11 am

Join Lynn Bowdery, WVLT Land Steward, to explore Joppenbergh Mountain, which towers over downtown Rosendale on the north side of Rondout Creek. This walk will travel up the main trail to the top of the mountain, take in the view, and along the way notice the plants, animals, geology, artifacts and archaeology of this unique area.

Walk and Talk on the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail, and learn about ferns. Saturday, August 11, at 9am - 11 am

The rail bed of the former Wallkill Valley Railroad in Rosendale, which will eventually become part of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail, passes through a variety of shaded habitats which support a nice variety of ferns and other plants. Join Lynn Bowdery, WVLT Land Steward, for a leisurely walk along the rail bed exploring at the diversity of ferns and whatever else is interesting.

**PLEASE REGISTER FOR THE WVLT WALKS AND TALKS
BY VISITING OUR WEBSITE OR CALLING (845)255-2761**