



# GAINING GROUND

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WINTER 2025-26





# PRESIDENT'S LETTER



As I sit down to write this letter, we've already had our first snow, and a frost has settled over the county. The last few years we haven't had a White Christmas, and I've really missed it. There is a sort of magic that comes over the land at this time of year, especially when it gets cold and still.

Magic seems to be at the heart of this newsletter as I look through these pages. It's a word that Taylor Pyne uses to describe this area in a spotlight on him and the Legacy Society, and I couldn't agree more. There is just something about Dutchess County that is pure magic and makes me so happy to live and work here, no matter what the season. That same sense of magic comes up again in our feature about a new easement by Sean Johnston. He tells a story of a unicorn to his daughter deep in the woods that fills me with childlike joy. Perhaps it's the holiday

season, or maybe it's the deep sense of wonder I feel when I'm in nature, but something is making me misty-eyed and wistful as I sit here today.

I am always so grateful this time of year as I reflect on the months past: grateful for my children and my family, grateful for the amazing work that fills me with such purpose every day, grateful for those at the DLC and my community, and grateful for you and the support you give the DLC each and every day, year after year. From our Board of



Directors to our Trustees of the Land, from our staff to our sponsors, from our volunteers to our interns from each and every one of you, I am always flabbergasted by the amazing support we receive from every person I encounter for this organization; that kind of support, I think, is its own type of magic.

You'll see many of our supporters in the party pictures from our annual fall luncheon, this year hosted by John and Terry Regan and co-chaired by Georgiana Bland, Lara Glaister Ferrarone, Jodie Fink, Elizabeth Mayhew and Connie Newberry. Or maybe you'll see a quote from your favorite 4-H'er describing their adventure at the Dutchess County Fair with help from our scholarship program. But there is always a certain sense of vibrancy and energy in our community that never stills; maybe that is part of the magic too.



I saw my first Junco this year, the day after our first snow, bouncing around at the feeder. While these snowbirds are certainly an indicator of colder climates they're also a reminder that our world is never truly still; even as the first frost comes, nature is alive with the joy of the season. And on that note, I'd like to close by offering you and your loved ones that very same joy, and of course, some of this wonderful local magic!

Warmly,

Becky Thornton

## LEGACY SOCIETY SPOTLIGHT:

### TAYLOR PYNE

*Taylor Pyne joined the DLC's Legacy Society in 2018. Like so many other residents of Dutchess County, Pyne is dedicated to preserving the area and placed his land under easement. But he also went a step further when he added the Dutchess Land Conservancy to his estate planning. With this forward thinking, Pyne is helping to keep what makes this area, as he describes, so magical.*

**Q: How did you first come to Dutchess County? What drew you to the area?**

**A:** I grew up in a magical place called Far Hills, New Jersey. When the Mashomack Preserve Club moved from Shelter Island to Pine Plains in 1979, I moved with it and discovered the magic of Dutchess County. Given Far Hill's proximity to New York City, the pressures of development proved too great to preserve all its magic; that is not the case with Dutchess County.

**Q: Why did you put your land under easement?**

**A:** Working on the premise that one does not really own land, but merely borrows it for a while, before passing it on to somebody else to borrow, it would make sense to try to leave it a little better, and certainly no worse, for one's stewardship. Putting my 55 acres of woodlands, hills, streams and fields in the Dutchess Land Conservancy seems the best way to ensure that no matter what happens around them, they will stay just the way they are forever. There will never be another lighted house on the hill, no winding driveway cutting through grouse, deer, fox and turkey habitat. All the creatures on these acres will have a home in which to live forever as well. And if the next borrower wants to enjoy the view from the top of the hill like the current borrower has, he can take a little walk on the old logging trails and do so. Hopefully, it will do as much good for him as it has for me.

**Q: What appealed to you about joining the Legacy Society?**

**A:** It takes work for preservation wins like this. Work and money and dedication. It takes people like Becky Thornton. The Dutchess Land Conservancy checks all the right boxes. Putting my little 55 acres in the DLC easement program was and is important to me, but the work to maintain and extend these acres, to keep the "magical" part of our world still magical takes people, organization, dedication and money. And more money. Lots more money. After I am gone, I can think of no other organization I would rather provide some of the resources needed to keep this place we call home magical forever.

**Q: Is there any advice you would offer others when managing their legacy plans?**

**A:** You can't take it with you, and I know some who have tried. Why not help a truly great organization keep things just as magical here in Dutchess County as where you are hoping to go next? 🍃





# Magic Forest



There is a glow that shines from the eyes of Sean Johnston as he talks about the land upon which he lives; land he knows and loves so deeply. He understands the shape of the land, the steep rocky slopes of West Mountain, the streams that flow down those slopes and the vast living forest that grows there. He knows how time affects the land, the flow of the seasons that tell him which berries are ready to be harvested or where new bushes should be planted. He studies the history and stories of the people who occupied his property in bygone years, too.

This past fall, Sean made the commitment to forever protect his 73 mostly forested acres. “I’ve been blessed to live on this land and establish a way of life here that I hope to pass on to others,” he begins. “It’s a special place, filled with history and I wanted to see it preserved and unchanged.” Working with Erin Hoagland, the DLC’s Senior Director of Conservation and Stewardship, to preserve his property, he continues, “Erin was an absolute professional and a lovely, lovely person. She genuinely cared about my intentions for the land. Assuring its protection through the DLC is a huge comfort to me.”

Located in the Town of Beekman, abutting the Appalachian Trail corridor near Nuclear Lake and in close proximity to West Mountain State Forest, the conservation of Johnston’s land and its expansive forest was crucial not just for the DLC, but for a number of ecological

organizations as well. The Forest Conservation Easements for Land Trust Program which is administered by the Land Trust Alliance in partnership with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s Wild East Action Fund and Scenic Hudson’s Climate and Environmental Justice Fund came together to provide funding for the project. “The protection of this property adds to a critical mass of 2,300 acres of protected forest between the Appalachian Trail corridor to the south and West Mountain State Forest at the north, providing important connectivity for passage of animals across the landscape and securing thriving habitat,” Hoagland explains. “Sean’s love for his land and commitment to its preservation is an amazing example of the power of private land conservation and its ability to ensure the future of sensitive ecosystems and enhance local communities,” added DLC President Becky Thornton.

Johnston has a profound attachment to this land and the people who lived here. “Helen Watkins was a wonderful artist and an amazing person,” he notes of the prior owner he inherited the property from. “She designed gorgeously elaborate window displays for the large department stores in Manhattan – Saks Fifth Avenue, Bergdorf Goodman, Tiffany and more.” Some of her designs are displayed in his home, as well as a portrait of Charles Lindbergh, signed by the famed aviator who sat for Helen at the height of his fame.

Johnston’s knowledge of the people and history of this land runs even deeper still. “A road ran through the property at one point that was used by troops







in the Revolutionary War to move men and material from Connecticut to the supply depot in Fishkill. My brother has found cut pennies and two-cent pieces here that date from that period,” he recalls. “It was part of the Beekman Patent and was eventually purchased by the Haxton family. After some time, it ended up in the hands of Helen’s aunt and uncle, Clarinda and George Richards. George was the best friend of Eddie Rickenbacker, the famous World War I fighter pilot.” Johnston explains that the oldest building on the property was once a schoolhouse. “It burned down at one point, unfortunately, and they rebuilt it using the scorched timbers since wood in these parts was so scarce at the time. Most of the trees had been cut down to feed the Beekman Furnace down on Furnace Road.”

Tending to the land and restoring its historical aspects are among Johnston’s most treasured tasks. Nowhere can this be better seen than in his loving attention to the small cemetery found on the property and accompanying artifacts and ruins. He has cleared much of the plant growth that hid the gravestones for years and has tended to them as if they belonged to members of his own family. “There are 31 souls buried here, many of them children who didn’t get the chance to grow up.”

Another of Johnston’s pastimes is the fruit crops he grows in the few acres of cleared fields. “We had a fantastic batch of raspberries this year. They were fruiting right up until the first

frost.” He plans to add additional rows of blueberry and raspberry plants in the spring. “It’s very important to me that we grow food on the property organically.”

More than anything, though, it is the deep forest here on the slopes of West Mountain that has captured Johnston’s imagination. He hopes to have a trail built on a corner of the property that will connect the Appalachian Trail with other public trails in West Mountain Forest, allowing people to experience the woods he knows so well.

He deeply treasures the trees here and has fond memories of time spent among them with his children. “Once, I was sitting in the meadow on the edge of the grove of larches back in the woods with my daughter, and I told her, ‘If you’re quiet, you can hear a unicorn in the trees there.’ The wind blew, and she gasped with delight.”

It is these personal connections – family, friends and previous residents – that tie him so greatly to this land. “You know,” Sean says with a characteristic twinkle in his eye, “We’re only given so many chances in this life and not all of us take the chances we’re given. I get great comfort from knowing that I took the chance to preserve this land.” 🍀





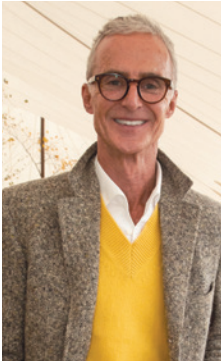


## *Fall Classic*

On October 12, more than 400 attendees drove up the winding dirt road to Half Moon House in Millbrook to partake in the Dutchess Land Conservancy's Annual Fall Luncheon. Held on a portion of the land of the DLC's first easement and hosted by long-time and stalwart DLC supporters Terry and John Regan at their Half Moon House, the 40th Anniversary event was co-chaired by Georgiana Bland, Lara Glaister Ferrarone, Jodie Fink, Elizabeth Mayhew and Connie Newberry. Lunch was prepared by Spice Catering with music by Josh Driver with DLC Chairman Tim Mayhew emceeding the occasion. By the end of a classic fall afternoon in Dutchess County, the lunch raised more than \$365,000 in funds for the DLC. 🍃













## PROGRAM NOTES

The Dutchess Land Conservancy awarded the first annual Dave Tetor Award to Meadow Facchin and Riley Mahaffey at this year's Dutchess County Fair's "Barn Bash" on August 23rd. Tetor, a long-serving DLC Board Member and lifelong voice for Dutchess County's agricultural community, was also a dedicated volunteer at the county fair and created the highly successful 4-H milkshake booth. Nine-year-old Meadow wrote an impassioned plea for protecting vernal pools, while 16-year-old Riley's essay did a phenomenal job tying together environmental stewardship with her experiences in 4-H.

The award is part of a program created four years ago by DLC to assist young 4-H'ers with their expenses from attending the fair. Applicants write an essay, which is reviewed and awarded a scholarship. This year, 19 recipients were awarded scholarships with essays on how to best steward the environment, what people should know about wildlife protection, farmland preservation, water conservation, and more. "I always find research for your essay topics very eye-opening," 14-year-old Vivien Padoleski, one of the recipients, said of her experience. You can read their thoughtful and moving compositions in full on our website at [dutchessland.org](http://dutchessland.org).

Congratulations to all the recipients of the 2025 Dutchess Land Conservancy 4-H Scholarships: Jessa Carpentieri, Kendra Carpentieri, Sienna Carpentieri, Caitlyn Cassidy, Corra DiBlasi, Meadow Facchin, Roger Loughran, Riley Mahaffey, Vivien Padoleski, Lyris Pennock, Tavin Pennock, Cooper Randall, Natalie Shultz, Addison Stapf, Isabella Tropea, Livia Underhill, Taya Underhill, Lily White, and Noah White. 🌿

I think vernal pools are just as important as all other wetlands and bodies of water. Many creatures rely on them. I hope one day vernal pools will be equally protected just like other wetlands.

**– Meadow Facchin, Age 9, writing on the protection of vernal pools.**

No matter how small, every living organism has a crucial place in its ecosystem, and it is the responsibility of humanity to educate themselves about how our actions affect the wildlife around us.

**– Tavin Pennock, Age 13, writing about wildlife conservation.**

Being a good steward means recognizing that the land, water, and wildlife that surround us are not just resources to use, but responsibilities to protect and savor. Stewardship starts with awareness. You can't protect what you don't understand.

**– Riley Mahaffey, Age 16, writing on what it means to be a good steward of the land.**





# NATURE OF THINGS

*A special winter guest sat down with DLC Communications Manager Doug Ohlandt to share a bit about her life and what she likes about Dutchess County winters. Meet Juniper, the Dark-eyed Junco.*



**DOUG:** Welcome, Juniper! Thank you for joining us today. Could you introduce yourself to our readers?

**JUNIPER:** Of course! My name is Juniper, and I'm a female dark-eyed junco—scientific name *Junco hyemalis*. I'm part of the sparrow family, though I like to think of myself as a little flash of winter cheer.

**Q:** What do you look like?

**A:** I'm small but mighty! I measure about 5.1 to 6.9 inches long, with a wingspan of 7.1 to 9.8 inches, and I weigh just 0.63 to 1.06 ounces. My feathers are mostly soft gray and brown, with a pale belly and a pink bill. My tail has bright white outer feathers that I like to flash when I fly—kind of like waving a flag to say, "Here I go!"

**Q:** Where do you spend your winters, especially here in Dutchess County?

**A:** Dutchess County is one of my favorite winter hangouts! You'll find me in woodlands, brushy edges, and even backyards. I love scratching around beneath bird feeders for seeds. My nickname is the "snowbird," but not because I'm heading to a warmer climate like those people who head to Florida. It's because our appearance often coincides with the first snowy weather. We show up in big flocks when the cold weather arrives!

**Q:** And what about the rest of the year?

**A:** In spring and summer, I head north to breed. My species ranges from Alaska and Canada down through the Appalachian Mountains and western U.S. forests. I prefer coniferous and mixed forests for nesting. My nest is usually hidden on the ground, tucked under grasses or shrubs.

**Q:** Tell us about your family life.

**A:** Breeding season is busy! I lay 3–6 eggs, usually bluish-white with speckles. My mate and I take turns feeding the chicks, who grow quickly and leave the nest in about two weeks. We often raise two broods in a season if food is plentiful.

**Q:** Do you face any dangers?

**A:** Oh yes. Predators like hawks, owls, snakes, and even domestic cats keep us on our toes. We rely on camouflage and quick flights to escape. As for threats, habitat loss from logging and development is a big one. Climate change also affects our food supply and migration timing. And sadly, window collisions are a major manmade danger.

**Q:** What makes you special to people here?

**A:** I think it's my cheerful presence in winter. When the world feels gray and cold, flocks of us hopping around in the snow remind people that nature is still lively. Plus, we help clean up spilled seeds and insects, keeping ecosystems balanced.

**Q:** Any final words for our readers?

**A:** Yes! If you want to help me and my flock, keep feeders clean and safe, plant native shrubs, and consider keeping cats indoors. That way, we'll keep bringing our snowy sparkle to Dutchess County winters for years to come. 🍃



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