



**DUTCHESS LAND
CONSERVANCY**

GAINING GROUND

Fall 2023



PRESIDENT'S LETTER



It's a beautiful, albeit soggy, fall season as I sit down to write this letter. The leaves changing colors heralds a coming winter; a reminder for us all to enjoy the outdoors before the shorter, colder days beckon us to the warmth of our homes. It's also the time of year that we hold our annual Fall Country Luncheon, for which just a few weeks ago, we were knee-deep in preparation. Co-chaired by steadfast Board Members, generous supporters and community members Tom and Deban Flexner and Eric Roberts and Robbianne Mackin, this year's luncheon at the Jesse & Gayle Bontecou Wildlife Conservation Preserve was a magical day!

We are thrilled to preserve two historic gateways to villages in Dutchess County, both of which we have featured in this issue. First, we worked with Scenic Hudson and the Town of Red Hook to protect the gateway between the town and village with the



Cookingham easement. This farmland has not only been worked for centuries, but also provides a breathtaking view admired by visitors and treasured by residents. Particularly notable is the 12 acres set aside for affordable housing which will serve as a model for future projects within the Hudson Valley. Second, the gateway to the Village of Millbrook was preserved with an easement placed on the future Bennett Park, a partnership with Millbrook Community Partnership and Dutchess County. In our story you will read about the unique transformation of this property from an exclusive

hotel - founded in 1893, to Bennett College and now as a park, planned for public enjoyment.



Our education programs were very active this summer helping people to learn about our environment, the creatures that inhabit it and the value in preserving it. Among our many events, our first ever Moth Night was such a success we had to schedule a second evening. Our ever-popular fauna and flora columns are of course on offer this issue, with delightful insights into our most important natural resources and their invaluable inhabitants. Education Director Julie Hart reveals the surprising and exciting life to be found in fallen trees while our Grace Year Intern Kara-Lyn Moran leaves us with a final interview with Maeve the Monarch Butterfly before one departs for

graduate studies at Yale and the other migrates to Mexico.

Our "Program Notes" department highlights our continuing support of our local 4-H youth with a Scholarship Program that provides financial support for the expenses incurred at the Dutchess County Fair each summer. Their application essays are a beacon of hope for the future of our county. Finally, our "Inside the DLC" department features a touching letter from our MillbrookEngage summer intern Juliet Drury and a heartfelt tribute to long-time DLC Advisory Council member David Clapp. We hope you enjoy a look back at our busy summer and welcome the beginnings of a spectacular fall season.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Becky".

Becky Thornton



OUT & ABOUT: GREAT GOINGS ON

A look back at this summer's education events that helped people learn about the natural world and the vital role that land preservation and stewardship play in protecting resources

Those Summer Moth Nights

On two magical evenings this summer, spectators witnessed the stunning and surreal beauty of our local moths. Led by volunteer lepidopterist Matthew Rymkiewicz, guests gathered in the twilight and helped apply moth bait to the trees on two separate evenings, first at the Whitlock Preserve in Stanfordville in late July and then at the Thompson Pond Preserve in Pine Plains in early August. As the sunlight disappeared on these splendid summer nights the moths appeared, attracted to the bait and Matthew's black light rigging. Wings fluttering as they flew between flashlight and headlamp beams, the insects alit on the observation stations where their intricacies could be observed. Attendees marveled at the broad diversity of moths and, at the end of the night, left with a new and greater appreciation for the discoveries to be found when the sun goes down.



Walks in the Woods and Gardens

The DLC once again offered summer walks across one of the most spectacular landscapes in Dutchess County this summer. Teaming up with Wethersfield Estate & Garden's Alaina Mancini, the DLC's Julie Hart led guests through the botanical and sculptural wonders of the grounds and then guided them along the woodland trails. From buzzing pollinators in the gardens to majestic views of fertile fields and verdant forests, visitors had an outstanding experience learning about the history and ecology of these remarkable lands. These educational walks are among the most beloved that the DLC offers each summer and this year proved to be no exception as guests were treated to the splendor of Wethersfield, one of the finest gardens in the northeastern United States on land forever protected by the DLC.

Summer Wildflowers Strut Their Stuff

While they often play second fiddle to their splashy spring cousins, the blooms witnessed by guests at the DLC's Summer Wildflower Walk held a sublime attraction of their own. Leading guests on a trek along the trails of the Buttercup Farm Audubon Sanctuary, Dave Decker of Audubon NY pointed out the many flowers blossoming in late summer, including the bright white Yarrow, vivid purple and pink Showy Tick Trefoils and soothing yellow and brown Black-eyed Susans. Each play their part, along with dozens of other summer flowers, in helping to keep pollinators well-fed and nourished. It was the beauty of the flowers, though, that would stick with attendees the most, as they were treated to an astonishingly gorgeous show of nature at the height of her beauty.



NATURE OF THINGS

Our Grace Year Intern Kara-Lyn Moran conducted one last interview before she departed for her graduate studies and sat down with Maeve the Monarch Butterfly for a final chat.

Q: Hello Maeve! I am so excited to see you again. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. I know it's a crazy time of the year for you.



A: It sure is, Kara. I'm about to make a 3,000-mile trip down to the Sierra Madre Mountains; that's my winter home and I'll be there until next March. We Monarchs have one of the longest migrations of all insects, sometimes traveling up to 100 miles each day. We overwinter in the same 11-12 mountain areas each season. In order to protect these areas, Mexico created the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve in 1986. We are now an endangered species and it is important to protect our future generations.

Q Wait... I did not realize that you were endangered. I saw so many as a kid flying around the fields!

A: Yeah. Monarch populations in the eastern part of the United States have declined 85% in the last two decades. We officially were put on the endangered species list in the summer of 2022.

Q: I am so sad to hear that. I love seeing butterflies around every summer. I helped to raise them in kindergarten and one of my fondest memories was releasing them into the air and watching them fly away. How can I help to make sure we have Monarch butterflies for other people to see in the future?

A: We are special insects and very picky eaters. We only breed on milkweed plants and they are essential to our life cycle. We love the milkweed plants because the toxins from the plant help protect us from predators. Caterpillars will only eat milkweed, but adult Monarchs will feed on the nectar of many flowers. In short, loss of habitat and food are the primary threats we face. We enjoy visiting all types and sizes of gardens that contain native plants and milkweed. By planting "Butterfly Gardens" with milkweed and native flowers we have places to continue so many of the important phases of our life cycle.

Q: I love seeing the small butterfly gardens all around Millbrook and it is even better when butterflies are there. When will you be making your trip down to Mexico?

A: I will be leaving shortly and many of my friends are already on their way! My family will be in Mexico during the winter and then head north again in March. But you won't see me here next year as I'll only make it to around Texas. However, my children or grandchildren will make the trip up here next year.

Q: Aww. I am so sad to say goodbye then. But I look forward to seeing your family next summer! Safe travels!

A: Thank you and goodbye, Kara. And safe travels to you as well as you begin your studies at Yale! 🍀

EXPLORER'S NOTEBOOK

Education Director Julie Hart explores the fascinating world that flourishes when a tree falls in the forest.

A dead tree is the most alive thing in the forest. It sounds counterintuitive, but in fact this is entirely true! Like every living thing, trees have a life expectancy – sometimes decades, sometimes centuries and sometimes millennia, depending on the species – and when a tree reaches the end of its life it becomes home for countless other forms of life. From majestic birds like the pileated woodpecker to microscopic decomposers like bacteria, a dead tree supports an incredible amount of biodiversity!

A standing dead tree is called a “snag” and it is best to leave them because they become multi-use dwellings for lots of wildlife! Snags will be hollowed out by woodpeckers and other animals and the resulting cavity spaces are popular options for many animals and birds looking for a place to shelter and to raise their young.

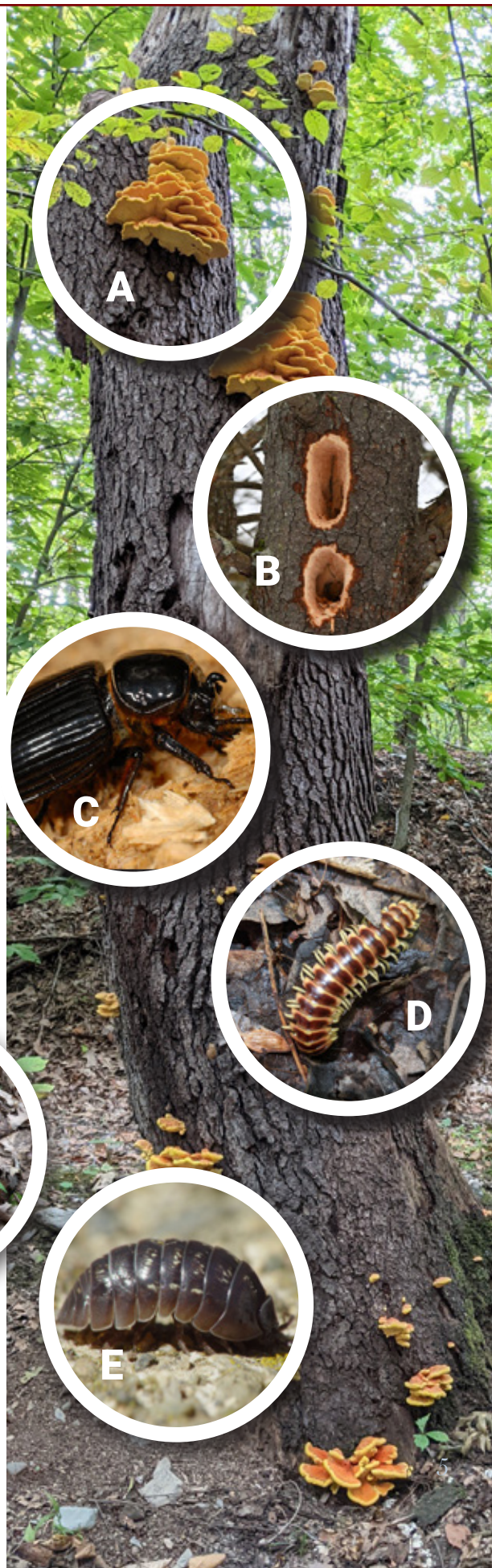
While all of that is going on, a multitude of life – some microscopic, some visible to the naked eye – is working to gradually break down the wood through the process of decomposition. If you have a compost pile you're familiar with decomposition, but since wood has a different structure than fruits and vegetables it takes longer to break down. And who does the breaking down? Well, there's an immense cast of characters who all do their part!

Microscopic organisms like bacteria and fungi, and invertebrates like worms, beetles, pill bugs and millipedes all play a part in breaking down the wood, as do mosses and lichens. Once a dead tree has fallen to the ground, it becomes much easier for us to see them up close. Don't be shy – bring a magnifying glass and take a closer look the next time you encounter one. You'll find all manner of critters living there and working to break down the wood, as well as mushrooms, their networks of hyphae and countless other forms of life.

And while you're at it, take some time to appreciate nature's clean-up crew! A tree that falls in the forest is still part of the forest and leaving it to decompose in place allows the nutrients that make up the tree to return to the soil and nourish the next generations of trees, as well as forest dwelling plants and animals. 🌿

Pictured at Right:

- A | Trunk with Fungus**
- B | Pileated Woodpecker Holes**
- C | Horned Passalus Beetle**
- D | Millipede**
- E | Pill Bug**
- F | Ferns on Log**
- G | Mushrooms**



Halcyon Days

By Doug Ohlandt

A future public park in Millbrook will stand on the lands of the former Bennett College, forever preserved by the Dutchess Land Conservancy.

It was the end of an era in Millbrook when Halcyon Hall was demolished in 2022. The building, abandoned since Bennett College's closure in 1977, had slowly but inevitably succumbed to the ravages of time. The Hall, located at the gateway to the Village of Millbrook on the corner of Franklin Avenue and Routes 82 and 343, had become a hazardous eyesore, one whose time had long since passed. With the final bricks removed, Millbrook Community Partnership, a local non-profit dedicated to the refurbishment and preservation for public use of local properties, would begin ushering in a new era for the property.

In September, the Partnership finalized a conservation easement with the DLC that will forever protect and preserve the future Bennett Park. The conservation easement was funded by Dutchess County as part of its Partnership for Manageable Growth Program. The 32-acre tract of land will one day be crisscrossed with walking paths and sitting areas. Open areas that emphasize the historical and cultural nature of this property will be open for public enjoyment by residents and visitors of Millbrook, enhancing the area's sense of place.

"As a highly visible gateway to the Village of Millbrook, it was vital that the DLC protect this one-of-a-kind property," DLC President Becky Thornton said. "Millbrook Community Partnership's robust plans for the former Bennett College lands will make Bennett Park an absolutely beautiful and vibrant entrance to Millbrook and a place where the public can enjoy the outdoors. We are extremely grateful to Dutchess County for their instrumental role, and are thrilled to be a part of the protection of a park that will greatly add to the charm and character of Millbrook."

Bennett Park will be but the next stage in the storied history of this land. Halcyon Hall, the largest structure to formerly stand on the property, was constructed in 1893 by New York City publisher H.J. Davison, Jr. and designed by James E. Ware, architect of the Mohonk Mountain House

in New Paltz, the Osborne Apartments in New York City, and numerous private homes in New York and New Jersey. Originally a luxury hotel and exclusive summer

get-away destination, Halcyon Hall was a five-story Queen Anne Tudor style structure with wide terraces, wooden shingles, and a cobblestone foundation. Unfortunately, the hotel didn't gain popularity due in large part to a nationwide economic downturn following the Spanish-American War and the number of guests dwindled. Halcyon Hall went bankrupt in 1901 and lay vacant for a few years.



In 1907, May Bennett, a schoolteacher from Irvington, NY, purchased Halcyon Hall for expansion of her Bennett School for Girls. Ms. Bennett was able to easily adapt the site, using hotel rooms as dormitories and converting the larger public rooms to classrooms and lecture halls. A chapel, stables, and an outdoor theater were added to the campus in short order. That first year, 120 students were enrolled at the Bennett School for Girls and they were taught by a faculty numbering 29 teachers.

Students there studied for six years, four in high school and two more in higher studies. Within a few years, the Bennett School discontinued its high school teaching and became a two-year

junior college, changing its name to Bennett College in the process. Further expansions of the school over the years included Gage Hall, a new library, an additional dormitory - the stucco Alumnae Hall - and, in 1972, the Kettering Science Center. Throughout its history, Bennett





College was attended by generations of young women from prominent American families. At its peak, as many as 300 students studied literature, history, art, interior design, fashion design, child development, and equine studies, among many other majors of study.

Forced to compete with the growing popularity of coeducation colleges and universities in the 1960s and 1970s, the trustees of Bennett College made the decision to expand and convert to a four-year coed college. A great deal of money was spent on upgrading facilities. These expenditures proved to be the financial breaking point. Facing bankruptcy, the trustees attempted to reach a collaborative agreement with Briarcliff College, a junior college in Briarcliff Manor. Unfortunately, Briarcliff College merged with New York Institute of Technology instead, and, in 1977, Bennett College entered bankruptcy. On August 9 of that year, after 70 years as an educational institution, the doors were forever closed.

The library and records of the Bennett School for Girls and Bennett College are housed at the Millbrook Library. Many archival photos are included in the collection, a treasure trove witnessing to the scenes of a bygone era. As for the College itself, it quickly fell into ruin. When the water was turned off in Halcyon Hall pipes burst causing considerable damage throughout the building. Over the years, nature took its course as portions of the roof collapsed and vines covered the outside. Trees could even be seen growing inside. A number of attempts to develop the property were made in the 1980s but all were for naught. And so the decaying property stood for many decades.

The course of the Bennett College property was finally changed when it was purchased by Millbrook Community Partnership in 2014. Future plans include working with a landscape architect to design a public park that will provide connection to amenities and open space along Franklin Avenue. Besides significantly improving the attractiveness of the entrance to the Village of Millbrook, historical and cultural aspects of the site will be commemorated through interpretive signage and visitor information. The future Bennett Park will serve as a prime example of the value of preserving land that provides a rich sense of the cultural history of central Dutchess County. It will be enjoyed by future generations and stand as a symbol of the power of cooperative conservation between private partners, municipalities and land conservancies. 🍃



Building Consensus

By Doug Ohlandt

In an exciting partnership, the Dutchess Land Conservancy – together with Scenic Hudson and the Town of Red Hook – preserved the scenic gateway to the Village of Red Hook this summer in a unique project.

As one travels south along Route 9 in northern Dutchess County, a vast expanse of farmland opens up with remarkable views highlighting the agricultural heritage of this portion of the Hudson Valley. This scenic treasure serves as the gateway to the Village of Red Hook, which has been farmed for hundreds of years stretching back to the early 1700s. This property is exactly the type of land that the DLC seeks to protect, and a team of three entities teamed up in a unique project that would not only protect the farmland, but would provide land for affordable housing, municipal parks and a buffer to the town water supply.



In August 2023, the DLC and Scenic Hudson – in partnership with the Town of Red Hook – did just that, as the Cookingham family sold their parcels to the east and west of Route 9 to the Town. The Town and Scenic Hudson purchased conservation easements on the agricultural portions of the property, easements that will be held and maintained in perpetuity by the DLC. In total, nearly 170 acres of prime Hudson Valley farmland is now preserved and will continue in agricultural production.

To address a burgeoning housing affordability crisis in the Town and Village of Red Hook, 12 acres of the eastern Cookingham property has been set aside to address the need for affordable homes for local families. The Town is currently in negotiations with RUPCO, a non-profit organization focused on the development and construction of affordable housing in the Hudson Valley, to achieve the vision of providing a mix of rental apartments and owner-occupied, single-family homes.

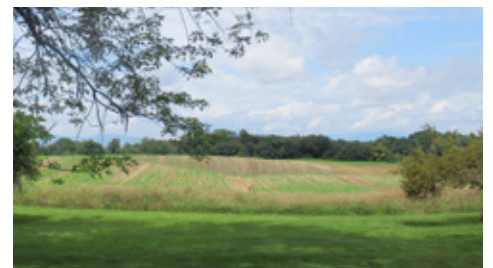
The benefits of preserving the Cookingham farm stretch beyond agriculture and housing. The west side of the

property will buffer crucial wells for the municipal water supply. Additionally, thirty-eight acres of land retained by the Town adjoin two town parks, creating possibilities for a network of trails connecting those two parks, which could offer excellent outdoor opportunities for residents.

It is rare for a piece of land to offer so many intrinsic benefits to a community. Future farming, outdoor recreation, affordable housing, fresh water and scenic views are each worthy components of land conservation and critical to community wellbeing. Taken together, the Cookingham Farm is far greater than the sum of its parts.

“Protecting these lands demonstrates the power of partnerships,” Scenic Hudson Executive Director Seth McKee said. “Scenic Hudson commends the Town of Red Hook for being one of the Hudson Valley’s most proactive municipalities in conserving farmland and open space and now innovating in providing space for affordable housing.”

“As part of the Hudson Valley Affordable Housing and Conservation Strategy, we applaud the Town of Red Hook,” DLC President Becky Thornton said. “This project will serve as a model for other projects within our Hudson Valley community. The DLC is incredibly proud to have partnered with the Town of Red Hook and Scenic Hudson to protect this significant gateway farm,” Thornton noted. “The fact that this land buffers the Village of Red Hook, will remain open for current and future farming and that additional portions that are held outside of the conservation easement are strategically dedicated for other uses that are important to the community truly resonates.” 🌿



PROGRAM NOTES: VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

DLC volunteers donated their time and energy this summer to projects linking people with the land they love. Read on to find out about their inspiring work as they did their part to improve the outdoors in Dutchess County.

The volunteer program at the DLC continues to grow, taking on an expanding workload and garnering the support of an ever-widening pool of participants. Part of that expansive work included further construction of the new trail connecting Thompson Pond with the fire tower atop Stissing Mountain. The effort, in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy and Friends of Stissing Landmarks, involved building stone steps on steep slopes, construction of switchbacks to ease the incline required to hike to the top and raising of the trail bed to make it level and easier on the ankles. A great deal of the work was accomplished by volunteers over the course of mornings in April and June and a number of drop-in trail work afternoons in July and August, as well as countless volunteer hours by Friends of Stissing Landmarks. It's an exciting new trail on an inspiring Dutchess County monument that will be open to the public to enjoy and appreciate the outdoors.

Among the most fulfilling aspects of the DLC's flourishing volunteer program is the partnerships we have expanded upon with other environmentally-minded organizations. One of these is with Housatonic Valley Association (HVA). With their focus on the Housatonic River watershed, a portion of which is in eastern Dutchess County, they're a natural fit for collaborative efforts. The DLC teamed-up with HVA in the spring for a Habitat Improvement Day along the Wells Brook in Dover. In September, we partnered again, this time for a learning session on HVA's "Follow the Forest," an initiative created to protect and connect forests from the Hudson Valley to the Canadian border. DLC volunteers gathered at the DLC office in Millbrook and virtually via Zoom to learn from HVA's Julia Rogers how they can participate in "Follow the Forest" by identifying areas where wildlife is moving between forests and reporting any animal sightings along Dutchess County roadways. Instructive and illuminating, the evening equipped participants with the scientific knowledge to better the environment for the creatures that inhabit it. We hope to take our newly-trained community scientists out to study forest linkages in the spring.



No task is too large or too small for DLC volunteers, and they once again responded by assisting with envelope stuffing, hosting events and delivering our summer newsletter to libraries throughout Dutchess County. We are so grateful for our volunteers and all they do for us. Your hard work and

dedication are heartening and very appreciated.

We're always looking for volunteers of all walks and abilities. For more information on how to volunteer for the DLC please contact our office at 845.677.3002, email us at info@dutchessland.org, or check out our website - dutchessland.org. 🌿



PROGRAM NOTES: 4H SCHOLARSHIPS

The DLC was again pleased to collaborate with Dutchess County 4-H this year. In June, the DLC sponsored “A-Fair to Remember,” a gala held at the Millbrook Winery and Vineyard and land that is forever protected by the DLC. 4-H’ers were able to display their projects and exhibit their skills and share their expertise with guests on topics as diverse as animal care, insect collecting, gardening, archery and shooting sports.

“As with last year, we were so impressed by the 4-H’ers presentations and knowledge of their specific subjects,” DLC President Becky Thornton said. “We were again delighted to offer scholarships to help individual 4-H youth with the costs associated with participating in activities at the Dutchess County Fair.”

As part of the scholarship application process, candidates wrote an essay on one of three topics: how they have had a positive impact on the environment, what makes someone a good farmer or things they have learned or experienced which have helped them care for the natural resources in Dutchess County. Their essays captivated and charmed us with their keen and sincere reflections on the importance of the land around us, how people interact with the land and what the land provides. With these 4-H’ers leading the way, the future of farming and land conservation in Dutchess County will be in good hands.

In their own words:

There are so many ways that not only do we as farmers help the animals and provide for them, they also provide for us as well, and not just as food. To be a good farmer is to keep learning and growing. Knowledge is the key.

–Mia Henry, Age 9

A good farmer is someone who has a purpose for what they do and works toward an end goal without compromising their values. Overall, a good farmer doesn’t care just about profits, but about the wellbeing of their livestock, their environment and others.

–Mackenzie Phillips, Age 15

It is not enough to assume that everything is trash. The challenge to myself is how I can minimize costs in order to best support the environment by recycling and reusing.

–Josh Pultz, Age 19

Congratulations to the recipients of the 2023 Dutchess Land Conservancy Scholarships:

Frankie Carpentieri, Jessa Carpentieri, Kendra Carpentieri, Sienna Carpentieri, Caitlyn Cassidy, Corra DiBlasi, Mia Henry, Margot LaPorte, Tessa Mashburn, Lauryn Menz, Mackenzie Phillips, Josh Pultz, Julia Raskopf, Kieran Read, Natalie Shultz, Isabella Tropea, Livia Underhill and Macey Veeder-Shave. 🌿



INSIDE THE DLC

The DLC was thrilled to accept Juliet Drury as our Summer Intern this summer. Juliet came to the DLC through the MillbrookEngage program. Offered to students of the Millbrook School, MillbrookEngage is a unique program that encourages students to give back to their local communities at not-for-profit organizations during the summer prior to their senior year. Juliet impressed us with her hard work, energy, enthusiasm and dedication. In her own words, here are Juliet's thoughts on her experience interning with the DLC:

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work as an intern at the Dutchess Land Conservancy this summer. In doing so, I learned to appreciate the beautiful land around us and on which I have been privileged to grow up, as well as the hard work that happens to conserve and preserve it.

My internship was hands-on and I was involved in numerous educational events, such as Moth Night, the Wethersfield Walk and the Pawling Farmers Market table. Beyond learning about what it takes to plan and execute these events, I was inspired by the curiosity and enthusiasm that our community displayed at them. Working with different departments at the Dutchess Land Conservancy also expanded my knowledge of its mission and important work. Some of the efforts I assisted with included monitoring preserved land, scouting out trails for future events, creating environmental fact sheets, visiting the recently acquired Bontecou Wildlife Preserve and curating ideas for social media. In doing this work, I had the opportunity to interact with the Dutchess Land Conservancy staff, all of whom were extremely welcoming, passionate about their work and devoted to creating a more sustainable world.

I am truly grateful for the opportunity to join the Dutchess Land Conservancy this summer. It was amazing to witness the work that goes on behind the scenes in order to protect our land. From conserving 46,000 acres of land to leading a variety of educational events that help individuals appreciate and connect with the environment, the Dutchess Land Conservancy continues to make a difference in our community. I learned about myself and reflected on how my future goals align with my passion for land conservation. I encourage others to find out more about the Dutchess Land Conservancy and support its incredible mission! 🌿



IN MEMORIAM: *David Clapp*



In July, the Dutchess Land Conservancy lost friend and staunch environmental advocate, David Clapp. In addition to serving on the DLC Advisory Council, David was well known for his many philanthropic interests and served as President of the Board of Trustees of the Museum of the City of New York and Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the New York Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation. Additionally, he served on the boards of Kent School, University of Miami, Bard College, Buckley Country Day School, Hazelton Foundation and Scenic Hudson. David was elected chairman of the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board (MSRB) in 1994 where he was instrumental in establishing restrictions on the “pay-to-play” issuance of municipal securities. Long-time owner of Coole Park Farm in Millbrook, which is conserved by the DLC, Coole Park hosted many of the Millbrook Hunt's meets, as well as the site for the Millbrook Horse Trials. David's quick wit, fantastic storytelling and larger-than-life personality will be greatly missed by the Dutchess Land Conservancy. 🌿

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Founded in 1985, the Dutchess Land Conservancy (DLC) is a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to preserving the rural character, important resources and open lands of Dutchess County, New York. We encourage sound, well-planned growth, balanced with the conservation of our important natural resources and working landscapes to ensure healthy and vibrant communities for the benefit of all generations.

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