

A Gift Beyond Measure

(by Whitney Gleason)



Board Chair Becky Nystrom (left) and Executive Director Whitney Gleason (right) are pictured with Wilson Huhn, who generously donated 50 acres of natural, undisturbed land in the Town of North Harmony to the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy for permanent conservation.

In a world often dominated by headlines of conflict and hardship, there are moments that shine brightly, illuminating the path towards a better tomorrow. The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy was lucky enough to experience such a moment this fall – the donation of 50 acres of beautiful land, rich with life, by Mr. Wilson Huhn.

This generous donation of natural, undisturbed land located in the Town of North Harmony just off Route 394 is a significant addition to our list of protected sites and marks a crucial step towards preserving the area's natural beauty and biodiversity.

The newly conserved land, predominantly forested, boasts a diverse array of trees, including ash, pine, cherry, maple, hemlock, oak, beech, and birch. This rich variety of flora provides essential wildlife habitat, making it a haven for various species. Additionally, the site's close proximity to Chautauqua Lake renders it a vital local migratory and maternity habitat for birds, underscoring its importance in the region's ecosystem.

Of particular ecological significance is the approximately 3/4 mile stretch of Cheney Creek that winds its way through the newly conserved area. As the last substantial forest block that the creek passes through before flowing into Chautauqua Lake, this site plays a vital role in filtering the water that travels through it. By reducing the sediment load entering the water, this preserve contributes significantly to the overall health of Chautauqua Lake.

(article continues on page 4)

Appreciation for Cassadaga Creek Sparks a Wonderful Contribution

(by Tracy Carlson)

In the summer 2023 issue of *The 'Shed Sheet* newsletter, we sent out a call for help to raise additional funds to cover costs associated with a newly acquired property of 22 acres of Cassadaga Creek floodplain and wetlands in the Town of Ellery. Our call was heard and answered by an amazing donor, Barbara Swift Suckow, and her son, Kyle Suckow. In recognition of their generosity, we are happy to officially name this beautiful piece of nature, "Kyle's Landing – at Cassadaga Creek!"

Their desire to help fund this preserve stems from Kyle's passion and appreciation for Cassadaga Creek. Kyle's mom said, "It's like he's obsessed with the creek! He loves to just stare at it and will even try to guess the actual depth and width." The two have even gone out together to attempt to get actual measurements! Kyle's love for the creek prompted his mom to make another donation towards improvements and accessibility along a section of the Marden E. Cobb Waterway Trail which cuts through this preserve.

(article continues on page 4)



Kyle Suckow stands on the Waterman Road bridge in Stockton overlooking his beloved Cassadaga Creek.



CWC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a mission to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams, wetlands and watersheds of the Chautauqua, NY region.

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Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy
71 East Fairmount Avenue / PO Box 45
Lakewood, NY 14750
716-664-2166
info@chautauquawatershed.org



Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As winter hits and a sense of tranquility descends upon us, I find myself reflecting on the incredible journey we have undertaken together this year through major leadership transitions, land acquisitions, brand new restoration projects, and more. I am profoundly thankful for your continued support in our mission to preserve and protect the natural treasures of our community.



Executive Director
Whitney Gleason

Throughout the past year, the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy has achieved remarkable milestones, thanks to the unwavering dedication of our supporters. With your generosity and commitment, we have expanded our conservation efforts, adding 190 new acres to our protected lands and ensuring the preservation of vital habitats for wildlife. Your support has allowed us to create lasting legacies, securing these pristine environments for future generations to cherish.

Whether you have volunteered your time, made a donation, or simply shared our mission with others, your contributions have made a tangible impact on the landscapes we protect and the communities we serve. As the year comes to a close, I invite you to consider renewing your commitment to conservation, perhaps by becoming a sustaining member or including the Conservancy in your year-end giving.

As we embrace the winter months, I encourage you to get outside and find solace and inspiration in the great outdoors. In the spirit of the holiday season, let us come together to celebrate the warmth of community and the boundless possibilities that the future holds. On behalf of the entire Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy team, I extend our deepest gratitude for your support and wish you and your loved ones a peaceful and joyous holiday season.

Warmest regards,

Whitney

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Celebrating Cassadaga Lakes Nature Park's New Improvements!

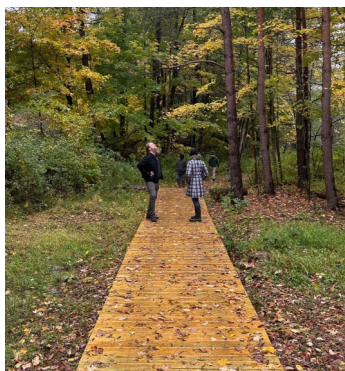
(by Twan Leenders)

Over the past three years, community volunteers and Conservancy staff spent countless hours building bridges, a welcome kiosk at the park's entrance, and a beautiful wildlife viewing blind on the shore of Mud Lake. Trails were improved to ensure that the main trail to Mud Lake is "stroller accessible," and new, reflective trail markers were installed on all trails to improve their visibility on the shorter, darker winter days. Commemorative benches can now be found in scenic spots along the trails, and a small platform at the end of the main trail provides lovely views of Mud Lake. Anyone visiting the park with school-aged children will also enjoy the interpretive signs that are located along the trail, as well as the gorgeous trail map, painted by local artist Emma Cook, which depicts a variety of plants and animals found in the park. Most recently, a native plant garden was installed in the area that was once a parking lot for boat trailers.



You can imagine that, after such a long period of intense effort, the crowd of Conservancy staff and board members, volunteers, and other members of the Cassadaga community who gathered at the park on October 14th was in high spirits to celebrate the completion of this phase of park improvements with a ribbon cutting! All these new additions certainly make the park the most easily accessible and most family-friendly of our preserves. (All of our preserves are open to the public, but not all have maintained trails or other amenities.) It is everyone's hope that many people will visit and enjoy this gem! Its central location in Chautauqua County, about halfway between our two most densely populated urban centers, puts it within easy driving distance for most. And the park has something to offer each season! During the winter months, Mud Lake and the beaver pond are home to dozens of different species of waterfowl that visit if the water is not frozen. Bring binoculars and a camera, and you can get close to the action in the new wildlife viewing blind. Once melting snow and spring rains fill the vernal pools near the park's entrance, the new elevated boardwalk will provide a fascinating top-down view of this sensitive habitat when it fills with frogs, salamanders, and other unique creatures that are closely tied to these unique temporary wetlands. Summer will bring back the migratory birds which you can enjoy from a bench in the woods. About 175 different bird species have thus far been identified in the park, making it one of the top birding spots in the county! And the native flowers in the new pollinator garden will flourish by next spring, becoming only more plentiful as time passes.

We're very proud of this true community effort, which would not have been possible if we did not have many helping hands as well as generous financial support from area donors to supplement a Conservation Partnership Program grant from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. Cassadaga Lakes Nature Park protects 77 acres of beautiful natural habitat, including the critically important wetland areas that, in turn, protect the health and beauty of the Cassadaga Lakes and which form the origin of Cassadaga Creek. This is a community asset that only stands to get better over time. With the completion of this infrastructure improvement project, access to nature has never been more enjoyable. We hope that you will join us in celebrating everything that Cassadaga Lakes Nature Park has to offer!



Huhn continued . . .



Exciting plans are already in motion for the newly protected area. Our conservation team is gearing up to create a native wildflower pollinator meadow, enhancing the site's appeal and supporting local pollinators. A nature trail is also set to be established, complete with a footbridge over the creek, offering visitors a chance to immerse themselves in the natural wonders of the area. To ensure accessibility and convenience, a small parking area, kiosk, and preserve sign will also be installed, inviting nature enthusiasts, hikers, and researchers to explore and appreciate this wonderful landscape. The preserve will be named “The Mary and Tom Huhn Nature Park” in memory of Mr. Huhn’s parents.

Mr. Huhn's generous donation reflects a deep commitment to environmental stewardship and community well-being. By conserving this land, he has not only safeguarded a precious natural resource but also provided future generations with the opportunity to connect with and appreciate the wonders of nature. The impact of his contribution will

be felt for years to come, serving as a testament to the positive change that can be achieved through philanthropy and environmental conservation.

Local residents, environmentalists, and nature lovers alike celebrate this momentous occasion, expressing gratitude for Mr. Huhn's dedication to preserving our area’s natural heritage. This act of donating land serves as an inspiring example for others in our community. This donation is not merely a transfer of property. It is a catalyst for change and a testament to the boundless potential of human kindness. The impact of such a gift resonates far beyond the physical boundaries of the land, shaping a brighter, more promising future for all.

As we celebrate this remarkable act of generosity, let us be inspired to embrace the spirit of giving, creating a world where compassion and community thrive, one generous gesture at a time.



“Without love of the land, conservation lacks meaning or purpose, for only in a deep and inherent feeling for the land can there be dedication in preserving it.”

~ Sigurd F. Olson

Kyle’s Landing continued . . .

Barbara felt that, by making this extra contribution to our organization, they could help conserve at least a part of this wonderful waterway which her son so dearly loves. We plan to use the funds from this donation to install interpretive signage along a section of the Marden E. Cobb Waterway Trail and potentially create a viewing area or platform in view of the water that would be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The family appreciates that they will now have a forever “stamp” on a piece of Cassadaga Creek – one that will be protected in perpetuity by Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy. Kyle also appreciates the new bragging rights he has by having a nature preserve named after him, and he hasn’t stopped smiling about it since!



The Order of Nature

(by Carol Markham)



Autumn arrived this year in its usual way. As John Mayer so eloquently writes, “When Autumn comes, it doesn't ask. It just walks in where it left you last. You never know when it starts. Until there's fog inside the glass around your summer heart.” And it always seems like she arrives right on time, just when the calendar says she should! The planet continues to tilt, migratory creatures take their cue from the changing light and leave, and summer slowly gives its way to fall.

As she slowly crisps our air and darkens our sky, wildlife go about their business in all the usual ways...adjusting as they always do to both the changing light and cooler temperatures. Autumn's landscape also changes and slowly presents itself wrapped up in gifts that are often profound and stunningly beautiful.

No matter how cold or how rainy, her brilliant hues of red and orange mixed with the yellows and purples of goldenrod and New England aster are truly captivating. Drunk and sleepy bumblebees slowly creep on late blooming dandelions, waiting for the sun to warm their wings. Last minute butterflies flutter and swoop, hoping to fill up on nectar to carry them on their long journey. One of the amazing things about this time of year is how nature finds her order in disorder. She has no particular arrangement – nothing is organized in a neat, careful, and logical way. And in no way is she “tidy.”

So why do so many people love this time of year? Our society tends to gravitate towards neat and well-kept, yet this time of year we yearn and embrace autumn's vibrant colors and smells of life and earth. She throws the sheets off her bed, leaves crumbs on the floor, and never vacuums! Her glorious artwork very rarely



stays between the lines, and her organized mess of fallen leaves decorates our landscape with life and luminosity. Even when our days seem to be dark and gloomy, her landscape light continues to shine.

Autumn is the best time of year to be quiet, observe what surrounds you, and drink in the knowledge that nature gives to us each day. The beauty of silence is evident only if you slow down enough to listen. Give yourself permission to be a “lazy” gardener. At a time of year when we are accustomed to intensive garden clean-up and “putting our yards to bed,” there's a lot we should really be doing less of in the name of supporting the insects, birds, and other wildlife that we share the world with. Instead of meticulously raking leaves and clearing out dead plant material this fall, slow down, listen to the beauty, and attract more wildlife to your garden by doing less! Listen, observe, and embrace the order of disorder! Enjoy autumn's colorful carpet of leaves, her quirky dead stems, and funky, methodical ways of preparing for winter. You and all the creatures that live and depend on your yard to survive will be glad you did!

Restoration Progress: Improvements for our Waterways

(by Twan Leenders)

There is great value in protecting the most ecologically sensitive areas of Chautauqua County, but improving compromised habitats to restore their hydrological and biological functionality is equally rewarding. Consider them “home improvements,” because any such improvements to our environment will represent a small but positive step towards making the County a healthier, more resilient, and more beautiful place – one that has more to offer to its inhabitants (human or other) than before we did this work.

Creek & River Restoration

Buoyed by a long, dry, and relatively warm early fall, we have been very busy trying to wrap up as many ecological restoration projects as possible before winter sets in.

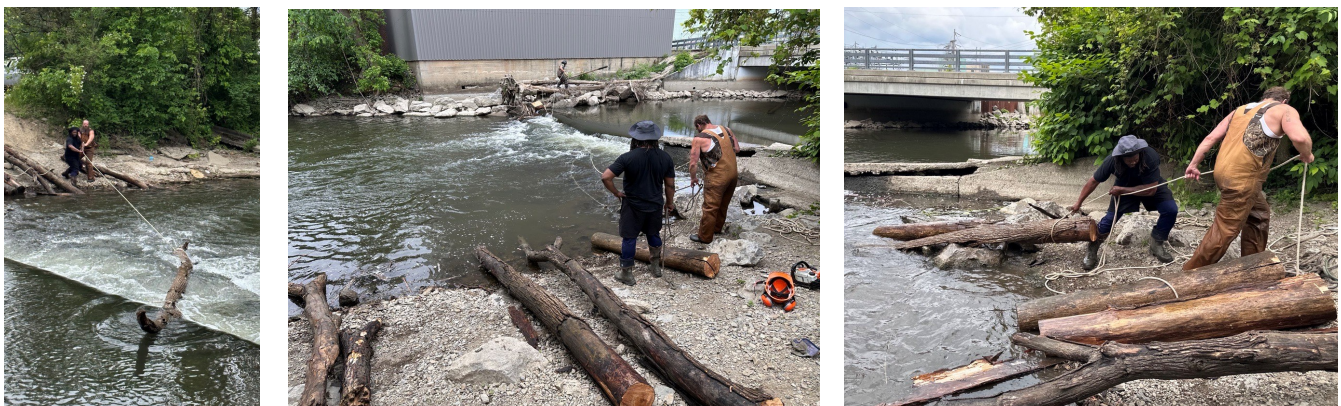
One of the bigger projects focuses on some of the most ecologically sensitive areas in our county (as identified in our Comprehensive Regional Conservation Implementation Strategy) – namely, the Conewango and Cassadaga Creek corridors. Funded through a contract with the County, our Director of Conservation, Twan Leenders, is developing a master plan for the County’s major waterways and mapping the various trouble spots where excessive erosion and flooding are causing water quality impacts.

This effort also considers navigational hazards such as fallen trees and strainers that may cause dangerous situations for people fishing or paddling out there. Under his direction, skilled contractors from Tactical Tree Solutions have been removing such obstacles and improving the natural flow of the creeks to reduce sediment loss while strategically placing woody debris in the floodplain to create wildlife habitat as well as providing added bank protection. Similar work has been taking place recently in the Chadakoin River under a contract with the City of Jamestown, where 143 compromised or dead trees were removed. To date, more than 12 miles of Conewango Creek, about 2.5 miles of Cassadaga Creek, and nearly 6 miles of Chadakoin River have been evaluated and made safer, cleaner, and more beautiful.



Tactical Tree Solutions removed tree stumps and vertical spikes from the Chadakoin River basin for safer navigation.

Our County is blessed with dozens of miles of high-quality waterways, so there is still a lot more to do in future years. However, these restored sections now provide safer recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike and represent a major first step towards improving our region’s critically important water quality and environmental resilience.



Compromised and dead trees were removed from the Chadakoin River to help restore its natural flow and prevent flooding.

Restorations continued . . .

Aquatic Invasive Species Surveys & Removal

One of the other larger improvements that we are working on deals with new aquatic invasive species (AIS) threats in Chautauqua Lake. All summer, Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy staff offered “early detection paddles” – on-water workshops that aim to train volunteer citizen scientists to recognize and report new non-native species while also surveying for such potential new challenges. Sadly, we noticed a significant increase in growth of the macro-algae Starry Stonewort in the two known areas where it had already reached nuisance levels, and we also detected it in a few new locations.

Similarly, another invasive, Brittle Naiad, seemed to have recently greatly increased in density in a few localities in and near the outlet. The good news though is that we were able to again manually remove all the Water Chestnut that has been growing in the outlet for several years now, and we seem to have that species under control so far.

Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy also took the lead on an experimental pilot removal effort in Ashville Bay using Mobitracs and skimmers to remove volumes of Starry Stonewort from the lake. This effort was supported by the NYSDEC and carried out in collaboration with our partners the Chautauqua Lake Association, the Chautauqua Lake & Watershed Management Alliance, and the towns of North Harmony and Chautauqua. This new method of harvesting Starry Stonewort has never been attempted previously, and we are still carefully monitoring its effectiveness over the longer term. However, our initial assessment of this collaborative effort was very positive.



Our Seasonal Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator Sandra Emke inspects Starry Stonewort during an AIS survey at Prendergast Creek.

A Look at LakeScapes 2023



Saving More Special Places

(by Bethany O'Hagan)



In 2023, we added five more properties to our list of conserved lands – increasing the number of our nature preserves to 35 and the total acreage of lands under our protection in Chautauqua County to more than 1,250 acres! We've been hard at work this year ensuring that corner posts and boundary signs are properly installed on all of these newly acquired properties.

We've continued work to update and manage our many trails as well, including installing new and additional trail markers at preserves that have trails. We've also mapped all our preserve trails and are excited to say that we offer Western New York residents and visitors almost 10 miles of trails around the County! We hope you will get out and explore them for yourself!



Thank You Preserve Stewards!

(by Bethany O'Hagan and Jill Eklund)

To be in compliance with Land Trust Standards and Practices, and as part of our application to become a nationally accredited land trust with the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, we have a responsibility to annually monitor the lands that we have conserved. With 35 nature preserves to monitor and manage (and more lined up!), our 30 volunteer preserve stewards and one trail adopter play a crucial role in helping us meet that standard. And we couldn't be more thankful for them!

To show our appreciation for our preserve stewards, we gather twice a year to celebrate these fine folks! For our fall gathering this year, we celebrated at the Bemus Point Golf Club and Tap House (Yep, that's some of them in the photo above!) We extend a "thank you" to the Tap House as well for hosting us this past November!



We are always looking for stewards to help monitor our ever-growing lands, and we currently have several preserves in need of a preserve steward. If you are interested in joining our amazing group of volunteer stewards, contact Land Specialist Bethany O'Hagan at bethany@chautauquawatershed.org.



What does a preserve steward do, you ask? Well, as a preserve steward with Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy, you are assigned to a designated preserve where you periodically walk the full boundary of the preserve, as well as the interior, to conduct a physical inspection of any changes made or damage done – natural or man-made – to that preserve. (This would be done at a minimum of once per year.) You will then document the visit and report what you have found to our land specialist. You'll also potentially oversee trail adopters, and best of all, get to spend time outside helping protect the integrity of our beautiful nature preserves!

Remembering Community, Lake and Conservancy Hero Tom Small (1940-2023)

(by John Jablonski III and Cáitlín O'Reilly)

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy, Chautauqua Lake and the community lost a hero last June. Tom Small truly loved Chautauqua Lake, and he was passionate about preserving it.

From 2003 to 2012, Tom served as a board director for the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy in positions of co-vice president, capital campaign co-chair, and membership chair. He also led our strategic planning process as an emeritus director in 2016 and 2017. His optimism, can-do attitude, and enthusiasm for putting his love for the lake into action led to success on lake initiatives for Tom and our organization. He successfully spearheaded an effort to get the Chautauqua County Legislature to ban the sale of automatic dishwashing detergents containing phosphorus to protect Chautauqua Lake and other County lakes. It was one of the first of such laws in New York State. This County law helped prompt the NYS Legislature to adopt a similar statewide ban a few years later. Tom also served as co-chair of our *Chautauqua Lake - Forever Beautiful, Forever Bountiful* land campaign, successfully raising funds to conserve the Stow Farm lakeshore and the Lake Chautauqua Lutheran Center forest. He was also an avid fundraiser for our *Score One for the Lake* charity pro-am golf tournament held annually at the Chautauqua Golf Club with proceeds benefiting the Conservancy.

Tom's dedication to protecting water quality also extended to Florida. After establishing his winter residence in Estero, he joined the Architectural Review Committee at Pelican Sound Golf & River Club and obtained his certification in landscape management. He would share examples with Conservancy staff of Florida homeowner lakeshore buffer materials promoting the abilities of pickerel weed and other shoreline plants to absorb nutrients directly from lake waters. Tom was the first to plant a lakeshore buffer at Chautauqua Institution, which adopted this practice in several locations in the following years. Tom was very active in the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle and led various church and disaster relief initiatives in his later years.

Tom lost his battle with Parkinson's disease on June 9, 2023. He was predeceased by his first wife Anne "Penny" Small and is survived by his second wife Cáitlín O'Reilly, son Andrew Small, daughter Carrie Smith, sister Doty (Small) Jackson, three grandsons, and a great grandson. Cáitlín has invited donations to be made in memory of Tom to the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy, the Parkinson's Foundation, the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research, or the Bonita Springs Wonder Gardens. Tom touched hearts wherever he went, and his warmth, kindness, and optimism are missed by all who knew him.



CHAUTAUQUA WATERSHED CONSERVANCY TOOL DRIVE



We're on a mission to protect our precious natural landscapes, but we need your help! Do you have any tools laying around that you no longer use or need? Why not donate them to the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy, where we will put them to use protecting our community's thirty five nature preserves?! We are in need of a 5x8 trailer, extra hammers, nail pullers, allen wrenches, levels, wood saws, hacksaws, drills, wirecutters, and other hand tools of this sort. To make a donation please call 716.664.2166 ext. 1001 or email Tracy@chautauquawatershed.org today!



Swinging “Fore” The Lake & Watershed!

On August 14th, more than 100 professional and amateur golfers hit the links at the Chautauqua Golf Club to help raise money and awareness for our conservation programs and projects! The event raised \$18,000 (net)!

Thank you to all our tournament sponsors, players, and volunteers for making this a successful fundraising event! With special thanks to Snug Harbor Marine as our presenting sponsor and to Chautauqua Golf Club pros Kirk Stauffer and Troy Moss for hosting and organizing this great event with us. This year’s winning team was WNY PGA Pro Greg Kaye and Chautauqua Golf Club members Dale Lyndall, Ron Kilpatrick, and Tim Peters! Congratulations team!



Thank You From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy to our 2023 Pro-Am Charity Golf Tournament Sponsors!

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To sponsor in 2024, contact the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy at 716-664-2166 or info@chautauquawatershed.org.



3rd Annual Chautauqua Lake Sailing Rallye Was a Day for Watershed Comradery!

We had another successful Sailing Rallye on July 15th, raising more than \$13,000 (net) for our conservation efforts - and we want to give a special thanks to the over 50 registrants who participated this year and “hit the water” in comradery and support of our mission!

*(photo on left submitted by Jen Swan-Leuze,
photo on right by Tracy Carlson)*



Thank you to the following sponsors, contributors, and everyone else who made this year a success!

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If you're interested in sponsoring next year's Chautauqua Lake Sailing Rallye, contact Tracy Carlson, tracy@chautauquawatershed.org, or 716-664-2166 Ext. 1001





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learn more at chautauquawatershed.org/support-us

The 'Shed Sheet newsletter is compiled and edited by Jill Eklund, Director of Communications.