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Conservation Matters

Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance

Vol. 8, No. 1

Spring 2004

HLTA Celebrates Preservation of More Than 1000 Acres!

The Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance achieved an exciting milestone in 2003, having helped preserve more than 1000 acres of Hunterdon County open space and farmland since the group's founding in 1996. As importantly, more than 300 acres of this land was preserved in 2003 alone, which highlights the momentum that is growing behind HLTA's land preservation efforts. Projects in Delaware Township, Bethlehem Township, West Amwell and Kingwood Townships all came to fruition this past year.



*Risi Acres
l. to r. Hal Shute, West Amwell Open Space
Committee, Bill Kastning, N.J. Green Acres
Program, Margaret Waldock, HLTA
photo by Stephanie Smith*

"This is a fantastic achievement, and it underscores the tremendous progress HLTA has made since the group was established," said Roger Harris, vice president of the HLTA Board of Trustees, and founding president of the group. "All of the trustees, volunteers, donors and landowners should be extremely proud of this milestone. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to everyone that who has helped make this happen.

"We're on a roll," Harris added. "Now, let's go for 5,000 acres."

Several recent projects helped bring HLTA to the 1000-acre mark, including the preservation of properties totaling 295 acres of woodlands in the Sourland Mountains region in West Amwell Township, and the protection of a 22-acre plot in Kingwood Township.

While these projects are clearly significant in terms of acreage saved, they also highlight the success of HLTA's efforts to help establish large, contiguous areas of protected land by preserving multiple plots in a particular region of the county. Two of these "project areas," one along the Alexauken Creek in the Sourland Mountain region, and another along the Lockatong Creek in Kingwood and Delaware Townships, also offer excellent examples of how various open space preservation groups can combine their efforts and pool their resources to increase their impact.

Preserving the Alexauken Creek for Future Generations

A region that has been of increasing focus of HLTA's efforts is the heavily wooded area adjacent to the Alexauken Creek, in the southern tier of the county. The acquired lands (known as Risi Acres and Goodshepard) are part of the Sourland Mountain region, which contains the largest unbroken contiguous forest in central New Jersey.

"As development increases in Hunterdon County, we risk the degradation of our high-quality streams, of which the Alexauken Creek is a prime example," said Margaret Waldock, executive director of HLTA. "Preservation of these wooded properties maintains a critical buffer for the creek." The creek drains into the Delaware and Raritan Canal, making it an important part of the region's watershed.

Nearly 170 acres of woodlands will be added to the Alexauken Creek Wildlife Management Area, and the remaining 125 acres will be privately owned, but preserved with a conservation easement that prohibits future development.

These projects were collaborations between HLTA, the State of New Jersey Green Acres Program and West Amwell Township. HLTA served as a funding partner for these projects.

Of course – as is the case with all preservation initiatives – the most

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President's Message

2003 was a busy year for HLTA, full of many changes. We reached an important milestone in 2003, having helped preserve more than 1000 acres of farmland and open space in Hunterdon County. To build on this success, HLTA hired its first executive director, Margaret Waldock, and new administrator, Stephanie Smith.

With this expanded professional staff, HLTA is poised for our next 1000 acres. From the Alexauken Creek in the south, to the Highlands region in the north, HLTA is intent on preserving the natural resources and rural characteristics that make Hunterdon County so special.

As we move past our grassroots beginnings, support from individuals like you and me becomes even more important. If your company has a matching gift program, you can make your tax-deductible contribution to HLTA go twice as far. Ask your employer for the appropriate forms and guidelines. You can also help spread the word about HLTA to like-minded friends and family and encourage them to become members. Many of us appreciate Hunterdon County for the same reasons – the scenic views, agricultural landscapes, quiet woods and stream corridors. Becoming a member allows you to directly participate in preserving the qualities that we all value.

The HLTA door is always open and we're only a phone call or email away – don't forget our website at www.HLTA.org. We encourage and invite your participation.

In friendship,

Deborah Woodard ●

Preservation

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critical parties are the landowners. "We are grateful to the owners of these properties for choosing to preserve their land," said Hal Shute of West Amwell's Open Space Committee. "This brings us one step closer to creating the Sourlands Greenway envisioned in the Township's Open Space Plan."

One Step Closer to a Keeping the Lockatong Corridor Development Free

The Lockatong Creek, another key project area for HLTA, is one step closer to being relatively free of development. In late 2003, a 22-acre tract along the creek in Kingwood Township known as "Top Holding," which incorporates several feeder streams, a waterfall and valuable amphibian habitat, was preserved under the state's Green Acres program.

The Top Holding project makes four preserved properties for HLTA in the Lockatong Creek project area. The project also highlights one of the many distinct roles that HLTA plays in preservation projects. In this particular case, HLTA identified the project, arranged and paid for an

appraisal, and brought the project to the state's Green Acres program to complete. The State then made the purchase from the landowner. The property will be managed by the NJ State Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Often the preliminary steps in a project, such as the appraisal, are the keys to getting the project off the ground. HLTA has the ability to jump start many projects this way, by investing staff time and money in the preliminary stages, then passing the project to a partner interested in acquiring the property for preservation and managing it in the long term, in this case the state of New Jersey. The Top Holding project yielded 22 preserved acres. "This is exactly the kind of project HLTA should be involved in," said Jim Amon, HLTA board member. "These kind of projects get you quite a bang for the buck."

This project highlights perfectly how effectively HLTA works in partnership with the state. By working together towards common priorities within our project areas, HLTA is able to leverage more funding and preserve more land. ●

A Tribute to Mimi Upmeyer

The board of trustees and members of the Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance share the grief of family and friends of Mimi Upmeyer, who died in 2003. Mimi played an essential role in the growth of HLTA as a committed volunteer and later as the group's administrator. For many years Mimi – more than anyone else – represented HLTA to the broader community, and what a great representative she was. Her deep affection for the natural world, her knowledge of how to get things done, and her gentle and loving presence made everyone glad to know her and proud to work with her.

In a wholly inadequate symbol of our appreciation, the HLTA plans to develop a trail along the Lockatong Creek that will be named the Mimi Upmeyer Trail. We hope it brings pleasure to its users, and helps to promote a better understanding of the value of preserving beautiful places.

Interview with Margaret Waldock, HLTA's New Executive Director

Margaret Waldock joined HLTA as its first executive director in September, 2003, bringing nearly a decade of open space preservation expertise and experience to the task of helping secure a rural future for Hunterdon County. A graduate of Vermont Law School and dedicated land preservation advocate, Margaret has helped manage preservation initiatives for the American Farmland Trust, the State of New Jersey's Green Acres Program, and the Trust for Public Land.



Margaret Waldock

Now several months into the job, we asked Margaret to discuss her reasons for coming to HLTA, and her priorities for the coming year.

Q: What led you to take this position with HLTA? It seems like a big step to move from large, well-established organizations to a small, relatively young not-for-profit.

A: Yes, it is a big step but the simple and corny answer is that I love Hunterdon County. I moved here just over four years ago when I began working for the state's Green Acres Program. I have been lucky to live in a variety of locations – rural New York, the Green Mountains of Vermont, and Washington, D.C. Hunterdon County is truly a special place and I have found a community here unlike any other. I feel like the luckiest person on the planet to have a job that allows me to work right where I live.

What's even better, the members of the Board of Trustees of HLTA all share a love of, and commitment to this place. While it's daunting to build a grassroots organization and try and bring it to the next level, there is a genuine commitment from everyone involved to pitch in to help achieve the goals of the organization.

Q: What do you see as the primary challenge facing HLTA today?

A: Well, the obvious answer to that is the challenge of getting ahead of the intense development pressures on this region. The county's rural character is changing rapidly, and the irony is that the very qualities that attract more people here are those qualities that are under the biggest threat. We are deluding ourselves if we think we can stop the development – people and businesses will continue to come, just as many of us did not too long ago. But we can be smarter, and plan better for the inevitable growth that will occur. Land preservation plays a critical role.

Q: What do you see as the top three or four priorities for the HLTA in the coming year?

A: Continuing our successful land preservation program, letting people know who we are and what we accomplish, and building our support base. I often characterize HLTA as the best-kept secret in Hunterdon County. County residents overwhelmingly support open space and farmland preservation efforts, and yet our membership base is a fairly small (although committed) group. We have to get the word out, let people know what's been accomplished and our plans for the future.

Q: Can you tell us what you think of the current state of land preservation efforts in Hunterdon County? How can HLTA make a greater contribution to these efforts?

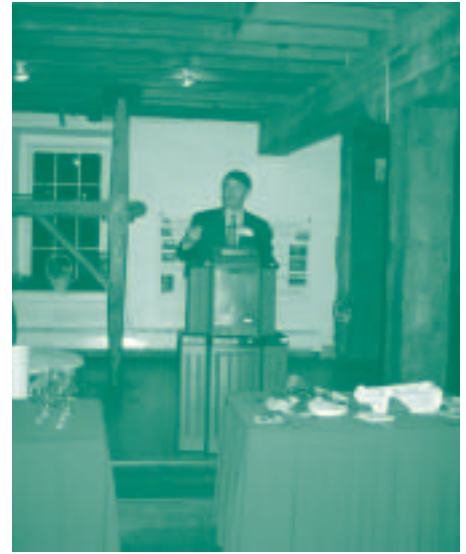
A: I am happy to say that land preservation efforts in Hunterdon County are fairly sophisticated and successful. There has been a tremendous learning process over the past five years as permanent preservation funding became available to non-profits, municipalities, and counties through the Garden State Preservation Trust Fund. Several municipalities and the county itself have created a dedicated tax for open space and farmland preservation – most overwhelmingly supported by taxpayers. And the money is being spent – Hunterdon is a leader in the state for farmland acreage preserved.

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HLTA's Fall Fundraising Event

HLTA's Fall Event held at the Prallsville Mill on Sunday, November 16, 2003 proved to be one of the most successful annual get-togethers held to date. More than 100 HLTA supporters enjoyed the informal cocktail party atmosphere that encouraged mingling with old friends and new. Phillip's Fine Wines in Stockton once again stepped in to help organize the wine tasting, with seven vendors pouring some excellent vintages. A copious offering of hors d'oeuvres was passed, and there were also several fixed food stations for grazing. Ota Ya of Lambertville donated a generous selection of assorted sushi.

Area artists contributed a wonderful collection of paintings and other works of art, which were auctioned over the course of the evening. With the walls of the Mill replete with beautiful art, the soft light dramatizing the Mill's unique architecture, and a crowd of great people all dedicated to a great cause – and making significant financial contributions to HLTA to boot – the evening could only be described as a smashing success. We look forward to seeing all of you at next year's party! ●



*Art Auction Master of Ceremonies,
HLTA Trustee John Mathieu*



New HLTA Trustee Risa Sackman (center) prepares to bid against husband Jeff Tareila and friend Annie Waldock.



The crowd gathers...



HLTA Trustees John Mathieu and Roger Harris share conversation and a glass of wine with Friederike Harris.



Ellen and Sargent Russell (left and center) of Frenchtown with Judy Allen of Delaware Township.

Thanks to our members, donors and volunteers who contributed to HLTA between January 1, 2003 and February 20, 2004

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Todd Hans Rothpletz

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Make checks payable to:
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Frenchtown, NJ 08825

Please check this box if you would like to learn about volunteer opportunities with HLTA. Whether you are a beginner, an expert, or somewhere in between, HLTA could use your help.

There is also increased awareness as to the importance of regions like the Highlands in Hunterdon County, not just to residents but to the many people who benefit from clean water from the region and those who visit to hike, fish, hunt and enjoy the scenic beauty. Because of this, more funding is available at the federal and state level to preserve land in the Highlands.

HLTA plays a critical role in preservation efforts in that we access funding from a variety of sources to preserve more farmland and open space in the county. We work in partnership with municipalities, the county, and the state – partnerships are critical to stretching the funding and preserving more acreage.

Q: Have you run into any major surprises since coming on board?

A: Yes. I've learned that computers are necessary, yet temperamental tools and that a good technical support person is worth his weight in gold. Not that that should come as a surprise to anyone.

Q: What's your favorite part of the job so far?

A: Well, to be completely honest, my favorite part of the job so far is that when it snows, I can cross-country ski to work. I have the best commute in the county.

Q: What would you most like to accomplish in 2004 as HLTA executive director? Also, what would you most like to see the HLTA accomplish this year?

A: I would love to see this organization attract the attention and support that it deserves. It really is an accomplishment for this relatively young organization to have helped preserve over 1000 acres of farmland and open space, particularly given the fact that this was achieved through the work of a small and dedicated group of volunteers. I hope to honor that spirit and keep up the momentum. No small feat for sure, but I am up to the challenge. ●

Welcome!

Early last fall, Stephanie Smith joined HLTA as our administrator. A Hunterdon County resident, born and raised, Stephanie brings years of experience from the private sector to her new position with HLTA. Stephanie's primary responsibilities include managing our office, organizing volunteers, and managing our database and membership program. We are pleased to have Stephanie on board and welcome her to the Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance family. ●



Stephanie Smith

New Trustees

In January, HTLA welcomed three new trustees to join the Board. Tama Matsuoka from Kingwood Township, Risa Sackman of Frenchtown, and Kenneth Hyman from Delaware Township. HLTA's newest Trustees bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the Board, as well as a deep commitment to preserving the rural character of Hunterdon County. ●



Joyce Koch

Golden Pitchfork Award

HLTA recently honored one of its own, HLTA trustee Joyce Koch, with the Golden Pitchfork Award. Awarded to the trustee who "pitches-in" above and beyond the call of duty, Joyce is the fourth recipient of the coveted Golden Pitchfork. "Joyce has been a dedicated trustee from the start," said board president Deborah Woodard. "She has single handedly taken on organizing and monitoring the organization's stewardship responsibilities." As an owner of properties as well as holder of conservation easements, HLTA is responsible for ensuring that its preserved properties remain so. Joyce has spearheaded this effort making sure conservation easements are monitored on an annual basis and properly documented. In addition to her volunteer efforts with HLTA, Joyce has been very active in Bethlehem Township open space and farmland preservation efforts. The pitchfork will be put to good use – Joyce is also a Master Gardener. Congratulations, Joyce! ●

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HLTA Joins Governor in Support of Increased Open Space Funding

On October 3, 2003, HLTA Executive Director Margaret Waldock joined Governor Jim McGreevey, Clinton Mayor Allie McGaheran and other supporters of land preservation to call for passage of a ballot question directed toward expanding funding for open space and farmland protection. At a speaking event held at the Spruce Run Recreation Area in Clinton Township, event participants voiced their support for Ballot Question #1, which called for an additional \$150 million to be added to existing \$1 billion dedicated to preservation through the Garden State Preservation Trust.

HLTA Executive Director Waldock spoke in favor of the ballot initiative, citing the threats to Hunterdon County from unchecked development, and the negative impact further erosion of Hunterdon's rural character will have on all New Jersey residents. The event, which drew reporters, local officials and other observers, helped direct much needed attention to this important measure. In November, Ballot Question #1 passed by an impressive margin. ●



Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance

3037 Route 29
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Website

For more information, check out our website, www.hlta.org.

To Contact HLTA

Web: www.hlta.org

Email: info@hlta.org

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