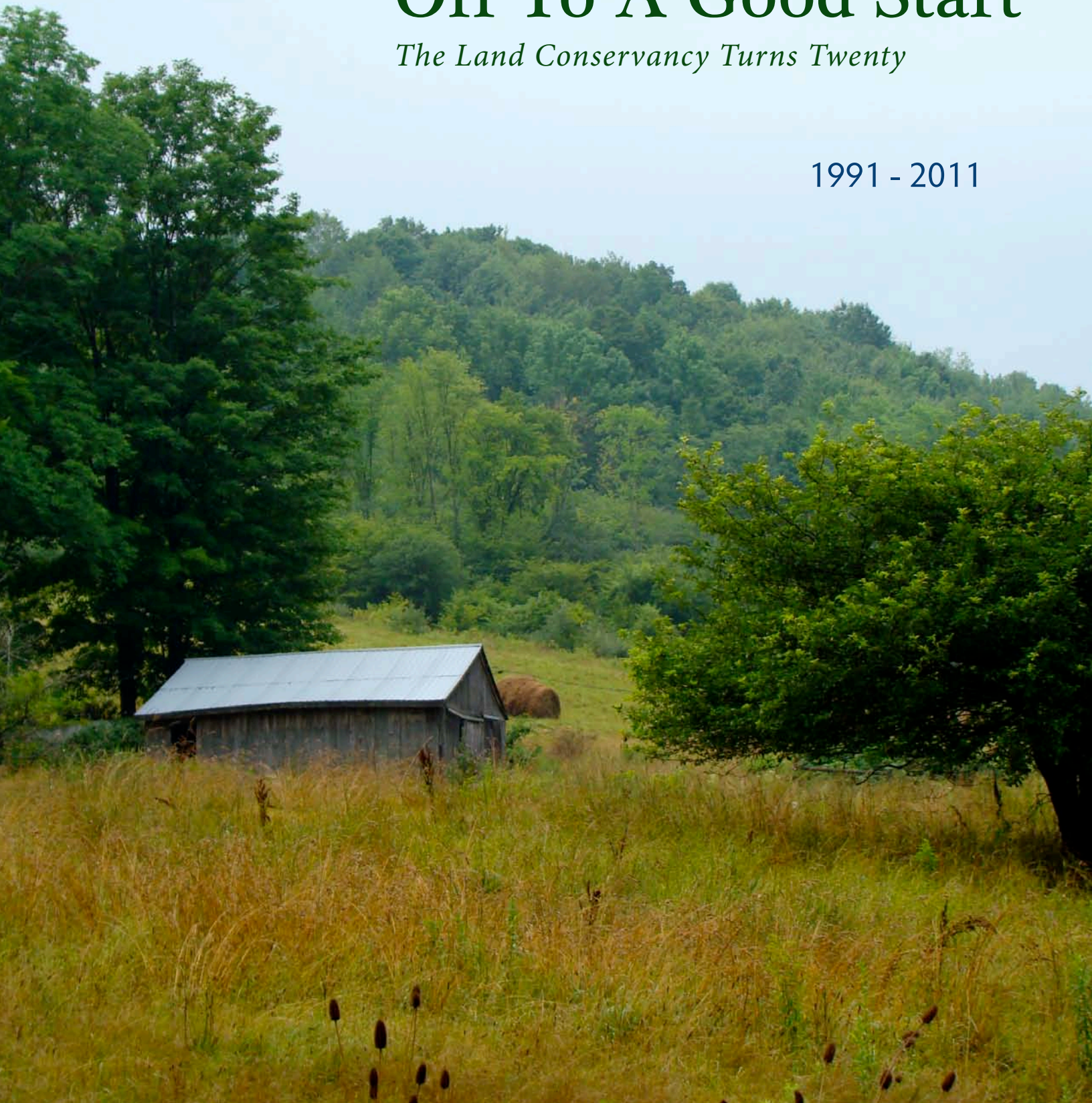




Off To A Good Start

The Land Conservancy Turns Twenty

1991 - 2011





Time flies when you're doing something you love, especially if that something is fulfilling your mission of "preserving our region's irreplaceable natural environments, farms, forestlands and open space." It's hard to imagine that twenty years have already passed since that day in April of 1991 when we officially became the Western New York Land Conservancy. How things have changed in twenty years.

We began as a grass roots organization that counted among its modest assets a Rolodex of possible interested folks, a book of stamps, an office that doubled as a farmhouse kitchen and a 32-cup coffeemaker. Twenty years later we can point with satisfaction to the almost 4400 acres we've helped permanently protect across Western New York, 133 of them encompassing our headquarters at Kenneglenn Scenic and Nature Preserve in the Town of Wales. While we have been blessed with five dedicated staff members since 1997, there have been hundreds of volunteers doing lots of the heavy lifting, some coming on board for a short time, many of them for all twenty of our years. Some pitch in with their hands and hearts, maintaining trails or doing office work; some bring expertise from a variety of fields and donate professional services. A land trust is the ultimate multi-disciplinary effort requiring scientists, farmers, engineers, naturalists, surveyors, lawyers, politicians, real estate agents, accountants, leaders and foot soldiers—and we've had them all. Regardless of their contribution they all have something in common, a passion for the land and the conviction that any discussion of the ultimate fate of our agricultural, scenic and ecologically significant open spaces must include those of us who understand its real value.



Celebrating 20 Years

We have had our share of challenges in our first two decades, building a membership and raising the funds to do our work, but they've been offset by quite a few successes. All of them are prideworthy, even the smallest at less than five acres, for the contribution they make to the landscape and environmental well-being of Western New York. A few stand out, though: Nature View Park in Amherst; the Clarence Greenprint; significant farmland protection in Chautauqua, Erie and Niagara counties; and the establishment of our headquarters at the 133-acre Kenneglenn.

There is still so much to do. As our current staff—Executive Director Pat Szarpa, Stewardship Manager Nancy Smith, and Development Coordinator Megan Mills Hoffman—will attest, we are busier than ever with several important projects ongoing and new relationships being forged with those who share our vision. The phones ring off the hook and the email inbox is constantly full of inquiries and suggestions for future projects. So while we take a minute to look back, we can honestly say, "We're off to a pretty good start," and gear up for the next twenty years and beyond.

Here then, is a look, however brief and incomplete, at those first years.



While the Land Conservancy was formally registered in April of 1991, our beginnings go back further into the 1980s. And in those early days five names stood out: John Whitney from the USDA Soil Conservation Service, now the Natural Resources Conservation Service; Ken Koehler, farmer, agronomist and soil scientist; environmentalist John Daleo; Clarence farmer and early farmland protection advocate Henry Kreher and Emily “Lee” Oprea.

Lee, the Land Conservancy’s founding mother, spiritual caretaker, original board member and its first acting director, remembers it like this:

I moved to Sardinia, NY, from Greens Farms, CT, in 1984 to manage the family farm called Olmsted Camp and update the 1840s vintage farmhouse. I staged my first living room concert in 1985 in the farmhouse, inviting friends and musicians in for some fun while we were under “renovation.” After that I staged about four open-air “Concerts In The Country” every summer, down at the camp and built a mailing list from the attendees and their friends. These were high-spirited affairs with friends and families enjoying the creek and the woods and providing potluck dinners. All manner of musicians showed up to play, and the dancing was legendary.

Early on, John Whitney, a multi-talented musician as well as a steward of the land, began coming to the concerts with his family, wife Laura and sons Brian and Bradley.

After one of the concerts in 1990, John and I talked about land conservancies, because back in Connecticut there were already over 100 land trusts and those were where my kids and I had always hiked or cross-country skied. The land bordering my home in Greens Farms was a land trust, and my mom even conducted nature tours at one.

At that time I thought it might be a good idea to get some sort of land trust in place, just in case one day there might be no Olmsted who wanted to keep Olmsted Camp going, and maybe the family would agree to preserve it in some other way.

But I was totally ignorant about what a land trust was or how they benefit the donor.

John Whitney knew of others who had mentioned starting a conservancy in WNY and that the Erie County Environmental Management Council had formed an ad hoc committee to explore the issue. He knew there were no land trusts in the area, except the neophyte Genesee Valley Conservancy to the east and the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy that was focusing specifically on the lake. And so John called a meeting in his office in the Soil Conservation Service headquarters in the Erie County Cooperative Extension building. Coincidentally, the WNYLC had its first real office in that space years later.

Attending were John Daleo, Henry Kreher, Ken Koehler, John Whitney and I. By the second meeting I called in a good friend and attorney, David Seeger, to help us file as a NYS charitable trust and compose our bylaws. Another of my friends, Jim Pickering, donated \$365 for the filing. Joanne Hameister was the principal drafter of the bylaws and Dave Seeger filed the Articles of Incorporation and other necessary startup papers.

The WNYLC got our “papers” in April of 1991 and could officially announce ourselves to the world. I used my concert mailing list, and the other board members compiled lists of their friends and notables for the first newsletter. We were off and running, using my farmhouse as our official address. Along the way, we picked up more board members. Shortly after the official formation, Paul Rutledge and Kathy Ryan also became involved.

As an early outreach effort (and with a little grant funding through the Land Trust Alliance), we conducted a seminar in each of the eight WNY counties—Erie, Niagara, Wyoming, Orleans, Genesee, Allegany, Chautauqua and Cattaraugus—Co-op Extensions and drove through sleet and snow to carry the word. Sometimes four people attended, sometimes twenty and, once, only John Whitney’s father attended, but at least the announcement got in the Extensions’ newsletters and flyers got on the racks...so we were beginning to get a little recognition. It really took a long time to get out the word that we existed...about six years!

John Whitney, John Daleo and Ken Koehler (and Paul Rutledge after he became involved later) did most of the compiling of lists and contacting of landowners and in general kept tabs on EVERYTHING. John Whitney found a grant for a computer, which he installed in my house and taught me how to use.

What did I do?

- 1. As secretary (and “acting executive director”), I recorded and typed up the minutes and mailed them to every paid member. I think we got about sixty members almost immediately.*
- 2. I organized our “Day in the Country” every summer—except the year my sister died (1992).*
- 3. I typed up and mailed renewal notices and thank you letters.*
- 4. I fielded phone calls (we used my home phone number) and forwarded most of them on to Whitney.*
- 5. I manned our display booth at every festival I could attend—to educate the lumpen. Eventually, I rounded up a few volunteers to help me...Mark Szpara and MJ Graham especially. Some folks couldn’t even pronounce “conservancy”—let alone know what it meant. One local newspaper editor told me it was too complicated for her readership—I KID YOU NOT!*
- 6. I wrote a few of the press releases, but most of them were written by John.*
- 7. I maintained the organizations’ files and records.*



“It really took a long time to get out the word that we existed...about six years!”



John Whitney fills in some of the details: “At the meetings of the Erie County Environmental Management Council, of which I was an at-large member, Henry Kreher was regularly bringing up the idea of land trusts. The council decided to form an ad hoc committee to look into land trusts in Western New York. On this committee were John Daleo, Henry Kreher, Ken Koehler, Lee Oprea and me. By the second meeting in the lower level suite, next to the boiler room in the basement of Cornell’s building on the Roycroft Campus, Lee said, ‘Why are we talking about a land trust? Let’s just do it.’ We went back and advised the council that a land trust was being formed.”

And so the Western New York Land Conservancy joined the over 900 land trusts nationally and became the newest of the then sixty-five land trusts in New York State. At the time only two other land trusts, the Genesee Valley Trust based in Geneseo, and the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy were active in the region and these three managed to form a cordial alliance. After much discussion the board decided that our area of influence would be all of Western New York, differing from many trusts east of us who focused narrowly, sometimes only one or two specific parcels of land.

The newest land conservancy responded to a growing chorus of voices that were concerned about sprawl, the gradual creeping of development into greenspace, and the loss of farmland through development and through assessment of farmland, not as agricultural but as potentially available for residential and commercial buildings, the resultant taxes driving landowners to sell.



The early days were organizational, getting the word out, letting Western New Yorkers know that they had a land trust working on their behalf. The second issue of *The Resource* listed a score of activities that board members and volunteers had engaged in such as speaking engagements and grant proposals, and setting up at fairs and festivals to engage the public. It was a combination of grass roots connection with our constituency and lots of learning about the ins and outs of land trusts.

It wasn’t until 1995 that the Land Conservancy could call itself a landowner. The headline from the Winter 1995 *Resource* told the story, “We Did It: Thrice!!!” The article goes on to outline the first three parcels, all of which were referred to the Land Conservancy by the Nature Conservancy: the thirty acres in Elma between Buffalo and Little Buffalo Creek donated by Robert and Marie Janusz, the twelve acres of wetland along Spring Brook in the Town of Concord donated by Robert and Patricia Andrews, and the four-acre wooded parcel near Franklin Gulf in Eden donated by Maurice Spectoroff. Each of these small gems of the local landscape would now be forever protected. We were off and running.

Six months later *The Resource* would herald the Land Conservancy’s signing of our first conservation easement, Gun Creek Woods on Grand Island.

Instrumental in bringing these four parcels into the fold was Paul Rutledge, a professional ecological consultant, and in 1995, a member of the Board of Directors. It was Paul who leant his expertise to the Site Evaluation Committee, developing the baseline data reports that determine which pieces of land are appropriate for Land Conservancy interest. Fifteen years later Stewardship Manager Nancy Smith says that the guidelines Paul developed for land evaluation are still the standard for the Land Conservancy.

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By 1997 the Land Conservancy had 300 members and an official logo, drawn by Buffalo State College student Kristin Fundalinski. John Whitney received the Friend of the Land Award from the Nature Conservancy for his, “vigilant and untiring efforts to promote the wise use and understanding of the natural world.” As well, the Amherst Farmland Protection Project was under way with the Land Conservancy in place to hold conservation easements jointly with the town. With a one-year grant in hand Wayne Awald, of Awald Blueberry Farms fame, came on as the first paid staff member with the title of Wetlands and Conservation Outreach Coordinator. Wayne left after his year, and another grant, a major grant of \$41,000 from the EPA, allowed us to bring on Amy Holt.

For Holt, signing on with the Land Conservancy was a homecoming of sorts. After undergraduate college in Pennsylvania, graduate school in New Hampshire and a stint with the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy, she spent two years in Honduras with the Peace Corps working on conservation projects, making as she said, “the rainforest more valuable standing than felled.” She returned to work with the Land Conservancy first as a project coordinator and later as Executive Director. Eventually installed in the headquarters at the Farm and Home Center (the old Roycroft Book Bindery), we now had a constant presence, a place where the public could drop in and begin to understand what we were all about.

As the 20th century came to a close, we were preparing to roll right into the new millennium. Lee Oprea continued to host her popular “Day in the Country” music and art fest and potluck fundraisers at the Olmsted Camp in Sardinia. These featured “wet art,” where local artists such as nationally syndicated cartoonist Tom Toles, painted during the day, then had their work framed by Grace Meibohm of Meibohm Fine Arts to be auctioned after dinner just before a night of dancing. Part of the outreach program was a wonderful variety of hikes—geology, wildflowers, birds, owls—and workshops like invasive species and the ins and outs of conservation easements that continue to this day.



Little by little pieces of property were coming under Land Conservancy protection, and over 500 acres were secure, either by conservation easement held solely by the Land Conservancy or jointly with a municipality or by outright ownership. They represented all corners of the region. The Wildhaven property in Allegany County, a 130-acre wonderland, was acquired from Carole Ellenson shortly before her untimely death; the Brompton Woods Preserve, a small but strategic woodland in the middle of intense development in Amherst was saved through a compromise brokered by the Land Conservancy; conservation easements were put on 215 acres of Spoth brothers farmland in Amherst; an easement on a part of the Eighteenmile Creek Watershed was donated; Blake and Marilyn Reeves donated a conservation easement on the ecologically diverse Bryant Hill property in Ellicottville. In Amherst there was a campaign brewing to create Nature View Park. All these contributed to the Land Conservancy’s growing reputation, a reputation that was further enhanced by a glowing article in Buffalo Magazine’s September 1999 issue.



GREAT OUTDOORS

There is nothing quite as satisfying as picking up a first time visitor to Western New York at the airport and showing him around. Especially if he is a reluctant visitor - a business associate from Charlotte or that smug relative from California here to visit great Uncle Oscar at the retirement home - who is regarding a trip to Buffalo more as a punishment than a reward. The look on his face as you load his luggage into the van (resisting the temptation to suggest that the down parka and mukluks weren't really necessary for a September visit) is smirky and self-righteous as if he's telling you, "I know all about Buffalo; I've heard the jokes." Then you drive. It doesn't matter which direction - to the Waterfront and along the lake, up into the orchards of Niagara County, south to ski country or east to the rolling farmlands. Pretty soon your visitor will say something like, "Hey. It's really pretty here." And then you know you've got him. Another convert we've let in on our little secret: Western New York is beautiful.

I've lived here nearly a half a century and I'm still amazed by the variety and beauty of my surroundings. But I've also lived here long enough to have seen the changes that have altered my landscape. The hill I used to sled down, careening full speed onto frozen Cazenovia Creek, is now terraced with raised ranch houses. The bike trails through the woods leading to the summit we knew affectionately as "Old Baldy" are paved roads in the middle of a hatch of vinyl sided condos. The gorgeous green farm country lining the back lanes I drove, in order to avoid the main roads, is now asphalt black and covered with strip malls, big box retail outlets and housing cut-de-sacs.

Of course even though I'm a walking remnant of the first Earth Day in 1970, I can still understand that a certain amount of growth and development is inevitable, proper and even necessary to fuel the economic engines of the area. But more and more of us across Western New York and the country are beginning to realize the value of our open spaces, wetlands, watersheds, agricultural lands and forests. We know that once destroyed that land can rarely be reclaimed. We are becoming so informed that the buzzwords sprawl, smart growth, green space and brownfield are creeping into our vocabulary. More and more we want a say in what lands will remain unthreatened by development and sprawl, and we're not willing to leave the task just to local or state government.

Enter an old concept with a new public profile - the land trust or conservancy as they are sometimes called. A land trust is a private, non-profit organization which protects lands directly, usually by accepting donations of land or by buying land outright and agreeing to keep that land undeveloped or by the use of conservation easements. Under the terms of a conservation easement a land owner donates (or sells in some cases) the development rights to his land to a land trust and receives a tax write-off. While he remains the rightful owner of the property, he must follow strict guidelines which limit or forbid altogether commercial activity or the construction of residential buildings. Of course there is a lot of legal mumbo-jumbo that goes into saving a piece of land, and the income, property and estate tax ramifications of a conservation easement keep accountants up nights, but I won't try to explain all that. Your local land trust will be happy to do that for you. What I will do is to demonstrate how land trusts

In Land
WE TRUST
By: W. Richard Ohler
September/October 31



"The new headquarters is spacious yet cozy, simple but with the amenities we need, and has that rustic, rural feel that says home, sweet home."

The dawn of the 21st century brought with it optimism: a growing membership of over 400, a greater visibility in the community of Western New York and some important projects on the horizon, projects that would, as much as any others, define the Land Conservancy.

We realized that the availability of Kenneglenn gave us a once in a lifetime opportunity to acquire a unique piece of property. Almost a century ago now the Charles Kennedy family of Buffalo bought 425 acres in the Town of Wales as a summer retreat. Situated on Hunters Creek, adjacent to what would later become Hunters Creek Park, it had everything a country property should have: beautiful old growth woods, a meandering creek, a gorge with breathtaking views, pastures, and a mansion. As the Kennedy family grew and the children, Helen Kennedy Tirrell among them, married and had their own children, Mr. Kennedy built Hillcrest, a four-bedroom cottage on a knoll above the creek. In time the Tirrell children moved away and it was time to sell. Gradually a few pieces of Kenneglenn were sliced off—the mansion and farmhouse were now separated and owned by different families—until only 133 acres and Hillcrest remained in the Tirrell family hands. The Tirrell daughters, Priscilla Bisher and Susan Fagrelus and their dad Stanley Tirrell, wanted to do something special for this land that was so dear to their hearts.

At first the Town of Wales tried to buy it as a park, a campaign spearheaded by Supervisor Mary Weineman, but rejected by town voters as too costly. Undaunted Susan Fagrelus contacted Jack Prinzenhoff of the Friends of Kenneglenn, who in turn brought the Land Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land into the picture. The Land Conservancy decided to make the acquisition of Kenneglenn its priority project and mounted a \$400,000 capital campaign. Individual donors, major foundations and government grants combined to make the campaign a success. By November of 2000 we owned it.



At the same time there was the battle for Nature View Park, 1256 acres in the heart of Amherst, a long battle begun in 1999 that would eventually be won in 2006 through the combined efforts of not only the Land Conservancy, but forward thinking politicians like Bill Kindel, municipal officials like Jason Engel and grass roots activists like Robbyn Drake and Kim Goodman.

In 2000 Marilla launched an ambitious farmland protection program with an ultimate goal of protecting 3,000 acres and allowing the town to preserve its agricultural heritage and rural nature. Under the Marilla Purchase of Conservation Easements (PACE) the town would purchase the easements, which would then be held jointly by the town and the Land Conservancy. Over the next decade the conservation easements were placed on close to 700 acres on nine parcels of land.

The ongoing Amherst farmland protection program continued to preserve agricultural lands in the northern part of the town in partnership with the Land Conservancy.

As all this was happening, Land Conservancy staff and volunteers continued to get the word out with another of Lee Oprea's "Day in the County" events, more Kenneglenn tours, and outreach work at the Erie County Fair, the Wyoming County Fair, Hawk Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, the Buffalo Botanical Gardens, the Elmwood Art Show and more. Michael Cvisca, popular singer, gave a benefit concert at Fanny's and there was a huge Earth Day celebration hosted by the Land Conservancy featuring speakers and displays.





In 2002 the Town of Clarence voters overwhelmingly approved a \$12.5 million bond authorization to fund protection of open space, riparian corridors, scenic vistas and farmland. Mike Powers, of the Erie County Environmental Management Council, and Land Conservancy founding member Ken Koehler were instrumental in promoting this visionary project that required cooperation from the Town of Clarence, New York State, the USDA, SUNY College at Buffalo. In 2003 the Town of Clarence appointed the Land Conservancy as the Town's agent in implementing the plan. Laying the groundwork—assessment, negotiation, implementation and monitoring—has been one of the Land Conservancy's major activities and will continue for years to come.

By 2002 the total acreage protected by the Land Conservancy had grown to 2700 acres in Erie, Niagara, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua and Allegany Counties. Technical advisors and volunteers continued to ably staff our several committees: Outreach (membership, public relations, special events, education), Conservation (acquisitions and monitoring of holdings), Organizational Development (personnel, finance, fundraising) specific committees such as Kenneglenn.

2003 saw the Land Conservancy close on a conservation easement for the first parcel of farmland in Wales, a 27-acre pasture donated by Earl "Skip" Gingerich, Jr. Another "Day in the Country" was a rousing success and Kenneglenn became a center for outdoor activity with the Heartwood Primitive Arts Center and a variety of hikes and workshops.

2004 was a pivotal year for us. A \$40,000 grant from the Land Trust Alliance allowed us hire an additional staff member to handle an ever-increasing workload. Amy Holt became the first executive director and East Auroran Nancy Smith took over the position of Community Outreach Director. How we had gotten along without her for so many years we don't really know, as she has become the face of the Land Conservancy through the area. With 3300 acres preserved and needing monitoring, and with several projects on the docket, the work load had long justified at least one more person. Also in 2004, founding member John Whitney stepped down from the board after thirteen years of service without which the Land Conservancy might never have gotten off the ground.



In 2005 Rob Besanceney came on the board. Rob, an attorney, had been actively involved with the Land Conservancy since 1997, providing legal expertise for conservation acquisitions including Kenneglenn and the Klydel Wetlands in North Tonawanda. Amy Holt moved on in 2005, leaving a legacy of good works in her wake. One of her last projects to come to fruition was the placement of conservation easements on the Deakin farm, a family-owned vineyard in Chautauqua County that had been threatened by construction companies intent upon mining the deep gravel reserves below their soil. Amy, with the generous help of Niagara County lawyer and former Land Conservancy president Bill Broderick and board member Betty Cheteney, set the groundwork for the ambitious Niagara Escarpment Legacy Project that seeks to preserve a ribbon of land that runs through the county and into Ontario. Still a supporter of land preservation through her work as a real estate appraiser, Amy continues to be involved with the Land Conservancy.

Our website, www.wnylc.org, began to take on a more sophisticated look and now holds all the Resources from 2006 on in PDF format, as well as information about our holdings and a listing of events.

Our current executive director, Pat Szarpa, arrived in April of 2006, bringing with her a wealth of professional experience. Soon thereafter Pat began working with William and Celeste Lytle of Lockport who dreamed of creating a nature park on their 75-acre parcel of woods, pasture and wetlands situated near the Erie Canal. This turned into a most bittersweet project, because Mrs. Lytle passed away as things were getting under way. But the Pat and the Land Conservancy continued to see it through with Mr. Lytle and in 2008 Niagara County had a wonderful new park.

Nature View Park became a reality in 2006, and we got busy recruiting and training volunteer land stewards to monitor protected land to insure that conditions of easements were being adhered to. Several grants came in from HSBC and the First Niagara Bank for the Niagara Escarpment, from the Land Trust Alliance to enhance open space and from the American Farmland Trust to accelerate the pace of farmland protection. In November the Land Conservancy, in conjunction with the American Farmland Trust, and with support from the Margaret Wendt Foundation and the New York State Conservation Partnership Program, presented a one-day conference entitled "Planning a Future for Farms" that included strategies for farmers and landowners.

In 2007 we were blessed to have the leadership of President Lyle Toohy as we faced some legal challenges. We also lost two good friends, founding member Henry Kreher and passionate environmental activist and champion of old growth forests Bruce Kershner. Both of them were integral parts of our organization and helped create the spirit that continues to guide us.



In Aurora in 2007 Nancy Smith and the Town's Open Space Committee readied the Aurora Greenprint for the November 2008 ballot. Similar to the Clarence and Pittsford Greenprints, the Aurora plan would identify and evaluate significant properties in Aurora that might qualify for protection. Funds approved by voters would then be earmarked to purchase conservation easements and keep the lands forever open. While the measure did not meet with voters' approval, the Open Space Committee remained active and now has two other major projects, the Cazenovia Sanctuary and the Mill Road Overlook, well under way.

All in all five more properties went into the "protected" column in the area's registry: forty-four acres in Boston, two additions to the North Tonawanda Nature Preserve, 130 more acres of Spoth land and Crystal Spring Farm owned by the Foss family of Marilla.

The last two years have been a whirlwind, a carousel with ever more riders. In the summer of 2009 the rock group Phish honored the Land Conservancy by choosing them as the beneficiary of Water Wheel Foundation sales at their Darien Lake Show. A team from the Land Conservancy led by Pat Szarpa worked merchandise stands during the concert and raised over \$4000. In the fall of 2009 we moved into Hillcrest at Kenneglenn. The new headquarters is spacious yet cozy, simple but with the amenities we need, and has that rustic, rural feel that says home, sweet home. We couldn't begin to total up the hours of volunteers who gathered for painting and fixing and landscaping and more. We now have the room to accommodate volunteers, interns and staff with space left over for meetings and visitors, and even special events such as the two-day writers' workshop hosted by Rick Ohler.

Shortly after moving Megan Mills Hoffman came on board as our development coordinator and has been instrumental in getting the word out about the Land Conservancy with high-profile happenings like the Land Conservancy Night at the Burchfield Penney Art Center.

Initiatives in Clarence, Marilla, Amherst, Niagara County and throughout Western New York continue with more and more stewards coming on board to monitor our growing acreage of protected property. And we continue to have a full slate of popular hands-on events like owl prowls, u-pick blueberry fundraising days at Jim and Toni Cudney's farm in Orchard Park, wildflower hikes and geology walks.

It's a busy time, but a fulfilling time as well. Come join us.

As we celebrate our 20th, we might do well to let Lee Oprea, who had the first word, have the last as well: "If we continue to do this right, what will really matter is that significant pieces of the landscape of Western New York are permanently protected from the kinds of changes that destroy community character, degrade environmental quality and would prevent future generations from experiencing and benefiting from the fields, woods, wetlands, lakes and streams that grace this region."



"If we continue to do this right, what will really matter is that significant pieces of the landscape of Western New York are permanently protected."



Western New York Land Conservancy

Celebrating 20 Years



I want to take this opportunity to thank our dedicated board members, volunteers and staff who have given their time, energy and passions to the Western New York Land Conservancy in the last twenty years. I am reminded daily that the organization is not an inanimate object, but a collective, cohesive body of minds and hearts all working to support our mission of land protection.

Each accomplishment is the result of many hands, and it is only by this kind of grassroots effort and the development of relationships with one another that we are able to accomplish our goals in land conservation. We see today through this retrospective what Henry Kreher's burning desire to protect farmland brought about, and what the tireless effort of our founding board members began as they were inspired by Henry's words.

I am also reminded on a daily (and sometimes hourly!) basis that there is no "fast track" to permanent land protection. We must maintain the "Rome wasn't built in a day" kind of attitude as we create open space balance in our region. Our first twenty years are filled with tales of patience and tenacity. Just as the organization lives and breathes and requires nurturing, so too does each land project. Each is a conglomeration of personalities, needs, desires and emotions. I am in awe of my predecessors in what they accomplished with little assistance or support. It's truly amazing.

I hope you enjoyed this beautifully written and designed retrospective by our talented and creative volunteers Rick Ohler and Kateri Ewing. In the last five years it has been a privilege for me to work with so many inspiring individuals and celebrate each small land protection victory along the way. I will "borrow" a phrase that Rick Ohler used when we met to reflect on our twenty-year history for this piece, "Well, it's a good start!"

Good start indeed!

Enjoy our look back and know that we share this with our grateful appreciation of your ongoing support. We look forward to sharing the next twenty year ride with you!

Patricia Szarpa
Executive Director



I remember learning about WNYLC in the mid 1990s when I worked across the hall on the Roycroft campus. We would all keep up-to-date on the activities of this growing organization through their executive director at the time, Amy Holt, and other founders I knew through my GIS contacts, such as John Whitney. Back then I was very impressed by the dedication of those associated with the organization.

I was honored to be asked to serve on the WNYLC Board in 2006, and gladly accepted. I was amazed at that time at how much things had developed, but looking back, I continue to see such growth and am proud to have been a part of it for the past five years. The dedication of the entire organization: the board, staff, volunteers, our members, and all of our associates, continues to be just as impressive, nearly 20 years later. The organization continues to grow: from offices in a small basement room to our signature property at Kenneglenn, from the ever increasing total acreage of protected land, to the ability to hire our wonderful current staff. Thank you for the opportunity, and I look forward to the next 20 years!

Gregory Coniglio
President



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