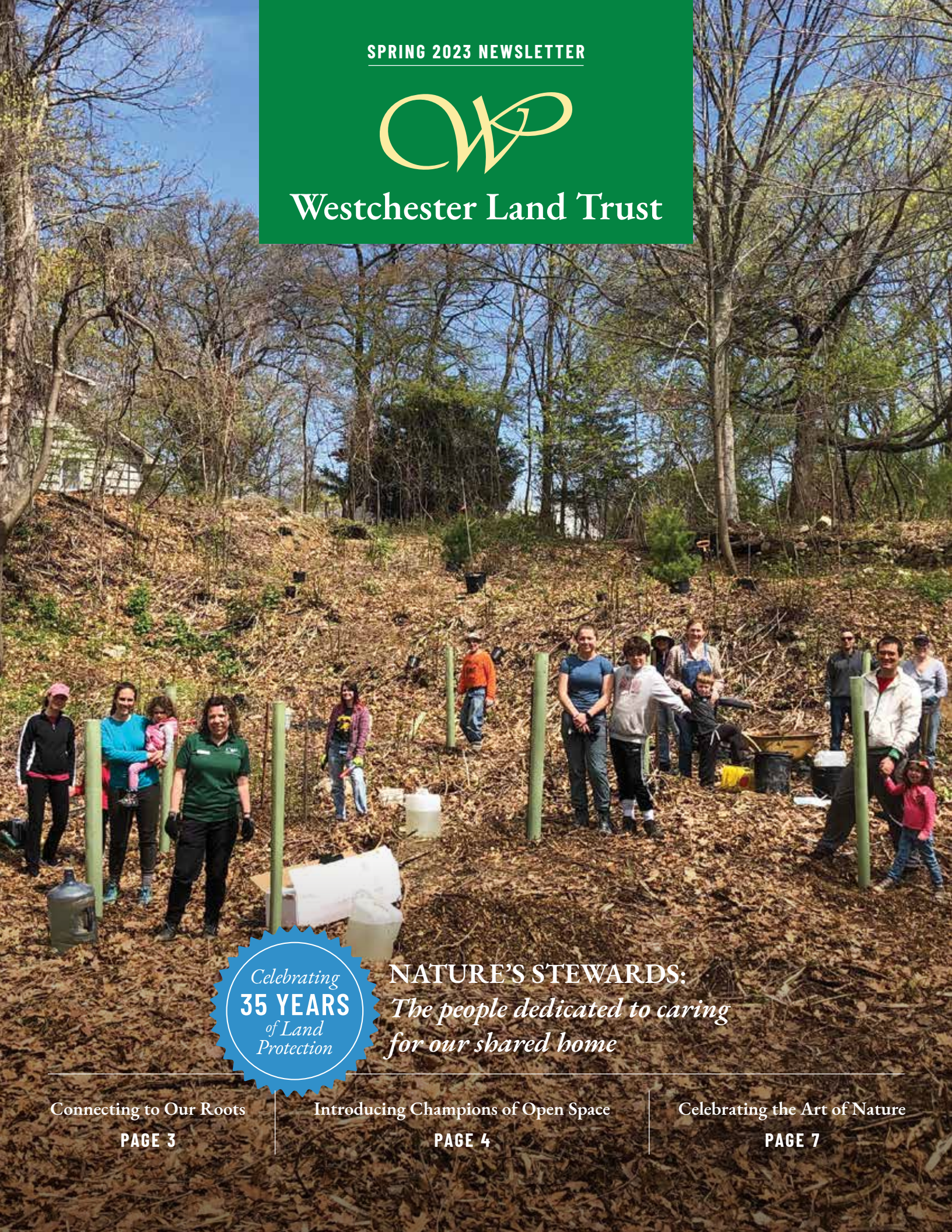


SPRING 2023 NEWSLETTER



Westchester Land Trust



Celebrating  
**35 YEARS**  
of Land  
Protection

**NATURE'S STEWARDS:**  
*The people dedicated to caring  
for our shared home*

Connecting to Our Roots  
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## HELLO FRIENDS,

Last Thursday our office was abuzz with a full schedule of meetings throughout the day. As I passed a colleague in the hallway between engagements, she smiled and said, “on a scale of one to ten, that meeting I just had was an eleven!” What made it so special?

### **The support of people coming together to make a difference.**

Westchester Land Trust’s headquarters is alive with excitement these days. As volunteers, staff, and directors bounce in and out, ideas are being shared, plans are being made and goals are being set. Thanks to you, the momentum from 2022 (which saw the completion of some of the most complex land protection projects WLT has done to date) is carrying us swiftly and strongly into 2023. Guided by an updated strategic plan that prioritizes climate resiliency and the protection of natural resources for communities in all corners of this region, we are committed to embracing new approaches to advancing our work. Additionally, we have welcomed several talented staff to our organization, allowing us to broaden our impact and reach. *Did you know that 8 out of our 12 current staffers were WLT volunteers before joining us as employees?*

In this newsletter you will learn about the passionate people who connect with WLT to protect the places they care about most. I’ll always remember the first meeting we had with Kay Barthelmes of Peekskill in April 2015, when we learned about the .83-acre historic “Teacher’s Park” and how critical that land is to those who live near it. It would have been difficult for WLT to identify that land as a priority for preservation without the input and urging of Kay. Alongside Kay, Peekskill officials, and neighbors, we worked for seven years to protect that land, which boasts a viewshed of the City of Peekskill, the Hudson River, and the Hudson Highlands beyond.

**Your involvement in this work gives us our lift and reminds us why open space is important where you live.** It shapes our projects and plans and makes what we do possible. Some of you have been with us since our founding 35 years ago, while others we met for the first time late last year. Each of you are critical to our continued growth and success.

**We welcome you to join us this year in whatever way is most meaningful for you.**

Thank you,

Kara Hartigan Whelan



#### ABOUT THE COVER

Volunteers and WLT staff plant trees at forest restoration site along Glenwood Lake on Earth Day 2022.

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Westchester Land Trust (WLT) is a member of **EarthShare**, a nationwide network of America’s most respected environmental and conservation charities. To find out how you and your employer can support WLT through an EarthShare workplace giving campaign visit [earthshare.org](http://earthshare.org) or contact Susan Leighton at [susan@westchesterlandtrust.org](mailto:susan@westchesterlandtrust.org) or 914-234-6992 ext. 23

Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) Number: 77308

## CONNECTING TO OUR ROOTS: *A Renewed Dedication to Urban Land*

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*“I send words and songs of gratitude to all those who are on the frontlines of bringing Justice and Equity into this world; creating spaces that welcome the diversity of being, where all are included in the bounty of creation.”* –Ruby Olisemeka, Director of Urban Engagement

In early 2020, Westchester Land Trust began reflecting on how we could increase our engagement in urban areas to better serve a greater diversity of communities in Westchester County. This examination began with a privately funded 18-month urban conservation feasibility study and a commitment to persistent learning, educating, and training about race, bias, and systemic racism. And while we acknowledge that we still have much to learn, we are pleased to report that we’ve taken our first few steps forward along this path.

As one of the first steps, we held a retreat focused on urban impact for our Board, Advisory Board, and staff in spring 2022. After an inspiring day of talking and learning along the Hudson River in Yonkers, we committed to increasing resources for proactive land protection and stewardship in urban areas. Since then, we’ve secured multi-year financial support to fund this initiative and added a new position on our staff, director of urban engagement, to guide this work and help us weave it into all facets of our organization.

While it may feel new and fresh, this urban focus is a re-commitment to WLT’s founding principles. When thinking about the purpose of the newly formed Westchester Land Trust 35 years ago, our founder and first president, Louis McCagg, stated, **“The first step in carrying out this objective is to form a Westchester**

**Land Trust which will seek to accomplish two goals: First, to educate or raise the consciousness of all categories of landowners...”**

That foundational goal has taken on renewed meaning at our organization over the past few years as we’ve examined how to better engage all people (not just landowners) and all types of land in all manner of spaces.

In the short time that she’s been in the director of urban engagement role, Ruby Olisemeka has taken a holistic approach to this work. She is exploring opportunities to build relationships with communities and groups in urban areas so we can better understand where and how we can offer support. While protecting land will always be at the heart of what we do, there are other ways we might get involved, ranging from providing resources for community gardens, creating potted plant or grow bag programs, and cleaning up local parks and playgrounds.

Regardless of how we get there, the ultimate goal is to strengthen the resiliency of the land in urban areas and improve access to open space for all. We warmly invite others to participate, to the best of their abilities, as we deepen our connections throughout the vibrant communities across the county and beyond. **To all who have supported WLT’s urban land programs and to all who will join us as we move forward in the future, we offer our sincere gratitude.**

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**“We are thrilled to welcome Ruby to our WLT family. Ruby’s leadership will help us meet WLT’s commitment to partner with urban communities, increasing green spaces, clean water, and health-promoting neighborhoods,”** said Nanette Bourne, chair of the land committee and a member of the urban working group on the WLT Board.



LAND  
PROTECTION  
UPDATE

# Champions of Open Space: *The People at the Heart of Our Work*

As stewards of the natural world, we have a responsibility to protect and care for the open spaces in our communities. Undeveloped land is vital for clean air and water, outdoor recreation, relief from urban pressures, wildlife habitat, and mitigation of the effects of climate change. But protecting land is rarely done by just one organization or just one person. **Over the past 35 years since WLT was formed, we've seen firsthand that people are at the heart of our work.**

The persistence and dedication of the individuals that advocate for nature is what makes our land conservation successes possible. Whether it's a small neighborhood lot or an expansive rural wilderness, the actions of people have a significant impact on the future of our open spaces.

Signage at the Cooke easement explaining that the land is protected forever by WLT

## A Peaceful Patch of Green in Yonkers

Colin and Elizabeth Cooke decided they wanted to protect green space next to their home after they started seeing open lots purchased by developers and hastily turned into houses that didn't fit with their historic neighborhood of Park Hill in Yonkers. They also noticed many old healthy trees being cut down, disturbing the beautiful natural landscapes that neighbors cherished as a respite from the more densely developed parts of the city.

After several unsuccessful attempts to have the neighborhood officially designated as historic, the residents turned to conservation easements to protect what they love about the area. The Cookes contacted us for help, and in late 2022, their two lots were protected forever through an easement with WLT.

**"There is a sense of calm and peace around us with open land," Colin and Elizabeth Cooke said. "Our neighbors appreciate the beauty of our corner lots and there is a broad swath that has no houses. There is a feeling of spaciousness in nature and we always get comments and thanks from people about how much they love our property."**

The Cooke easement is home to a variety of birds, insects, and other small animals, creating a thriving ecosystem that the Cookes say is vital to human health in their community.



*"In a time of climate warming, having undeveloped land surrounding us helps ensure cooler temperatures, healthier air, reduces energy costs, and helps to support the health of the Hudson Valley by not adding to the pollution that would happen if houses were built on those properties," the Cookes said about their easement, pictured above.*



## Saving a Stunning Overlook in Peekskill

Kay Barthelmes first contacted WLT in 2015 about protecting an overgrown property along the side of Crompond Road in Peekskill after struggling for years to find an organization to support her cause. Although the land appeared rather ordinary from the road, Kay, who lives nearby and serves on the Peekskill Conservation Advisory Council, knew that it used to be a privately owned park in the 1940s and 1950s with sweeping views of the surrounding area. Her husband grew up near the parcel, then called Teachers Park, and together, they compiled photos, paintings, and a rendering of the property to advocate for its conservation.

**“The property reveals the city below surrounded by the Hudson Highlands and bordered by the Hudson River, offering one of the finest views in Westchester County,” Barthelmes said. “When it was for sale the seller proposed putting eight houses on a piece of land that was just under an acre, but we thought, why not buy it and turn it back into a park?”**

WLT now holds a conservation easement on the land, which will ensure it remains public open space in perpetuity. The City owns the land and will manage its natural resource and public access plans. Barthelmes believes that once the land is restored to an updated version of its former existence as a park, it will have a positive effect on the community.

**“It will be good psychologically to have a space to look at that isn’t packed with houses,” she said. “The beautification and enhancement of the view is like a welcome sign to the City.”**



Peekskill Overlook Easement

Each of these projects was driven by the dedication of people who cared about open space in their communities. These examples show the impact that can be made when individuals take action to protect land and prioritize the natural spaces that nourish us all. By working together, we can ensure that access to nature is available today, and for generations to come.



Patterson Preserve

## Rallying Around Rare Habitats in Patterson

Only 50 miles north of New York City lies a 174-acre property that buffers the 6,000-acre Great Swamp, one of the largest freshwater wetlands in the state. The land contains Browns Mountain, a rare floating bog, a 16-acre glacial spring-fed kettle pond, and several species of distinctive plants. It is located within an existing corridor of protected open space. The owner of the property was introduced to WLT through a Woods Forum held by the Hudson to Housatonic (H2H) Regional Conservation Partnership. The owner partnered with WLT to ensure the land would be protected forever and managed to enhance its vibrant wildlife communities. We closed on the sale in 2022.

**“I am grateful that the Westchester Land Trust will oversee the future of this glacial pond, its floating bog, and the surrounding forest and wildlife,” the previous landowner said.**

A public access plan, including trail linkage opportunities, is being assessed for the Patterson preserve with the ultimate goal of allowing the community to appreciate the unique ecological features of the land, while protecting these rare natural resources.



## Donor Spotlight: *Thatcher Drew*

At WLT, we're proud to be powered by the generosity of our supporters and volunteers. One of those individuals is Thatcher Drew, a donor and volunteer since 2020. We asked Thatcher to share why he chooses to support WLT:

**"During the pandemic I hiked most of the preserves in Westchester County and those managed by Westchester Land Trust stood out," Drew said. "Your preserve manager, John Zeiger, runs perhaps the most effective preserve-related volunteer program in the county. The conservation and easement teams frequently expand the managed acreage, and the results are often spectacular. It's a joy to learn, help, engage, and have an impact with this wonderful organization."**

*Learn about the many ways to donate to WLT at [westchesterlandtrust.org](http://westchesterlandtrust.org).*



## Youth Volunteers Improve Preserves for People *and* Wildlife

Meet **Stella and Jack Sanko**, the dynamic volunteer duo who live down the street from our Otter Creek Preserve in Mamaroneck. These siblings have been working with us for the past few years, taking on exciting projects that enhance wildlife habitat and improve visitor experience at our preserves.

As part of her scouting Gold Award Project, Stella designed, built, and installed wood duck boxes to provide a safe haven for these birds at Westchester Wilderness Walk / Zofnass Family Preserve in Pound Ridge. With the help of our preserve manager, John Zeiger, and Advisory Board member, Mike Surdej, Stella brought her vision to life to support the local wood duck population. **"The natural world is going to be the center of everything for my generation," Stella Sanko said. "Whether it's related to global warming, our economy, or even our mental health, I believe we are going to lean into these issues unlike any before us. People are beginning to understand more and more just how important environmental issues are and my generation is going to finally make it a priority."**

To fulfill his Eagle Scout Project, Jack built a mini kiosk at Otter Creek Preserve to help visitors learn more about the natural beauty of the area. He's also worked closely with our stewardship team, assisting with everything from maintaining forest restoration plots to removing invasive vines. **"Nature is a peaceful place where you can go to experience tranquility," Jack Sanko said. "My generation will ultimately have the most work to do out of all of the previous generations because of the dire status the natural world has been placed in due to unnatural man made phenomena interfering with it so disastrously. It will require a lot of time, energy, and organized teamwork in order to effectively combat this."**

With their energy, passion, and generosity, Stella and Jack serve as an inspiring source of hope for the brighter future we can all build together.

Stella and Jack will be honored with Youth Conservationist Awards at our upcoming Annual Benefit, *The Art of Nature*, on June 3, 2023.

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*Interested in becoming a volunteer? Visit our website to learn about opportunities to get involved on our preserves, at our Sugar Hill Farm garden, and in the office.*

### WE'VE GOT A NEW LOOK!

Check out our new website at [westchesterlandtrust.org](http://westchesterlandtrust.org) to explore our land, read the latest news, and learn how you can make an impact.



CELEBRATE

# THE Art OF Nature

## WESTCHESTER LAND TRUST'S ANNUAL BENEFIT

**Saturday, June 3, 2023 at PepsiCo Headquarters in Purchase, NY**

Join us as we gather for *The Art of Nature*, a dazzling evening of gourmet food, signature cocktails, dancing, and a silent art auction overlooking the stunning Donald M. Kendall Sculpture Gardens.

### GET READY TO CELEBRATE THE ART OF NATURE!

Together with new and longtime supporters, we'll raise a glass to all the amazing things we've accomplished together. With your support, we've protected land, preserved habitats, and created spaces for people to connect with nature.



**TICKETS ARE ON SALE NOW AT [westchesterlandtrust.org](https://www.westchesterlandtrust.org)**

**All funds raised support our land conservation mission, including land protection and open space enhancement.**

### 2023 HONOREES

#### Lori Ensinger | LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Lori Ensinger will receive the Lifetime Achievement Award for her dedicated work as president of WLT from 2013–2022, where she led the protection of nearly 2,000 acres of land. Prior to her tenure as president, Ensinger served on our Board of Directors from 2004–2013 and chaired the investment committee and governance and nominating committee. Ensinger and her late husband, Bill Kuebler, donated a 17-acre conservation easement to WLT in 2005. Today, as senior advisor, she works with our staff to implement WLT's strategic conservation plan, lending her expertise to real estate negotiations and conservation finance.

#### Jen Schwartz and The Louis and Anne Abrons Foundation | PRESERVATION AWARD

Jen Schwartz and the Louis and Anne Abrons Foundation will receive the Preservation Award for their generous support of our land protection projects and their unwavering commitment to supporting WLT's community conservation programs. Schwartz has served on WLT's Board of Directors since 2014 and is a frequent volunteer across the organization, lending a hand at our Sugar Hill Farm garden, and offering her expertise on our Annual Benefit planning committee.

#### Stella and Jack Sanko | YOUTH CONSERVATIONIST AWARD

See page 6 to learn more about the inspiring work of Stella and Jack.



**COMING SOON...**

## Bluegrass in the Barn

**Thursday, September 14, 2023  
at Maple Grove Farm in Bedford**

Our fun and festive fall event, Bluegrass in the Barn, is back Thursday, September 14, 2023 at Maple Grove Farm in Bedford, NY.

**Keep an eye out for tickets to go on sale in August!**

## Westchester Land Trust

403 Harris Road  
Bedford Hills, New York 10507  
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## Westchester Land Trust

### BECOME A SUSTAINING STEWARD

Join our Sustaining Stewards Club by making a recurring monthly donation. Every little bit helps us protect and care for the land we all love.

### VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

Roll up your sleeves and get hands-on with the land. Volunteer at our Sugar Hill Farm food pantry garden or join our stewardship team to improve the trails.

### EXPLORE AND SHARE

Get outside and bring a friend to explore a WLT preserve near you. Visit our website to find a place to hike and connect with nature.

### MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Your support is critical! Make your annual gift to WLT today to help protect land, keep trails open and safe, and provide fresh produce for those in need. No gift is too small.



## Get involved with the land you love

I would love to contribute  \$25  \$50  \$100  \$150  \$200  Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Recurring:  Monthly  Bi-Monthly

**For the price of one lunch a month, you can contribute \$100+ in 2023 and preserve the land that will sustain future generations.**

**My gift is in honor/memory of** \_\_\_\_\_

**I would like my gift to remain anonymous.**

**I would like to learn more about leaving a legacy gift in my will to WLT.**

**I will submit matching gift from my employer:** \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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\*The email provided above will be added to our enews list to keep you up to date on Westchester Land Trust's successes, news, and events. You can unsubscribe at any time. We never share your private information.

Checks made out to Westchester Land Trust can be mailed to 403 Harris Road, Bedford Hills, NY 10507. Donate online by visiting [westchesterlandtrust.org](http://westchesterlandtrust.org) and clicking the 'Donate' button.

WLT is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, your contribution is tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.