

The UNDERSTORY

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOUTHEAST LAND TRUST OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

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Conservation Cultivates Community







The Southeast Land Trust (SELT) saves, shares, and stewards land for the benefit of people and nature in southeast New Hampshire. SELT serves 52 towns and cities of greater Rockingham and Strafford counties and has conserved more than 25,000 acres since 1980, including nature preserves, hiking trails, farmland, and scenic vistas.

SELT relies on its annual contributing members, committed Board of Directors, talented staff, and dedicated volunteers to keep advancing critical conservation initiatives in our region.

Our Mission

To protect and sustain the significant lands in our communities for clean water, outdoor recreation, fresh food, wildlife, and healthy forests.

Our Vision

Conserved lands in every community, sustaining people and nature.

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Enjoying Nature Together

This spring, SELT moved into the brand-new Nan and George Mathey Center for People and Nature at Burley Farms. This represented the culmination of nearly a decade of passionate and precise work from our donors, Board of Directors, volunteers, staff, and our great partners at Sheldon Pennoyer Architects and Chapman Construction/Design.

It was truly a massive – and exciting! – undertaking, as creativity and expertise mixed with a conservation ethic to produce a unique building. The Mathey Center was designed to be net-zero, as it produces its electricity through roof-mounted solar panels and the nearby solar tracker arrays. It was constructed to be as airtight as possible, girded by thick walls and windows to minimize the unwanted energy gain or loss. With a modern design and engineering for an energy-conscious approach, The Mathey Center is absolutely a standard-bearer for efficiency and environmental sustainability.

And as exciting and innovative as that all is, what thrills me the most about this special new place is not what it is, but what it will be. As we talked about the vision of The Mathey Center and Burley Farms to our friends and neighbors, we described a place “where community and conservation meet.” Yes, the alliteration is handy, but from the get-go, the dream for the Burley Farms campus was always grounded in a desire to connect as many people as possible to the wonders of nature.

Whether it’s exploring the property’s trails, attending a workshop in the Pratt Family Community Room in The Mathey Center, enjoying a SELT event set against the backdrop of the rolling fields, or touring the working farm (which is coming soon!), the opportunities to experience the great outdoors on a deeper level with the community are boundless.

Because community is key to conservation—community cultivates conservation! The more we can come together to appreciate all that nature has to offer us, the more value we will find in protecting these special places in New Hampshire.

Within the stories that follow in these pages, you will find examples of creative and collaborative relationships, of surprising connections forged in the bond of conservation and enriched by a shared love of ensuring the lands that make New Hampshire so special are there for the community to enjoy for generations.



Brian Hart
Executive Director, SELT

A close-up photograph of a field of green plants, likely borage, with small blue and purple flowers. In the foreground, there are several bright yellow flowers, possibly marigolds, which are out of focus. A person's hand is visible on the right side, gently touching one of the blue flowers. The background is a dense field of similar green plants, also slightly out of focus.

the little miracle



It was mid-September and the late morning breeze carried with it a touch of autumn chill. Cars began to pull into the parking lot of Bruton & Berube law offices in Dover. Their occupants made their way into the office conference rooms. Their tasks: signing mountains of paperwork. And as mundane as that may sound, for Stephen and Rhoda Capron and Brian Fluharty and Linh Aven, two married couples separated by four decades of life, these were going to be some of the most emotion-inducing signatures they would ever put to paper.

You can sense the importance of the moment by the tells in the room; the Caprons were energized from the get-go, impressive considering they had made landfall the night before, following a cross-country flight from Seattle (their new home and, more importantly, home to their grandchildren). Across the table, Brian and Linh largely kept an even keel – amiable, of course, but if you listened hard enough you could hear the butterflies fluttering in their stomachs.

Something big was coming. And as Stephen and Rhoda took the pens in their hands and began scrawling on the papers in front of them, Brian and Linh traded the faintest of glances, a wordless exchange that will always remain between them and them alone, though the general substance of which was intimated when Brian gently took Linh’s hand in his: “Our lives are about to change forever.”

In 1979, Stephen and Rhoda purchased their 31-acre plot of land in Nottingham. At that time, they were leasing a farm in Litchfield, fine-tuning their gardening game, and envisioning a working farm on their newly purchased acreage. After they purchased the land, Stephen split his time between work and building their house. When they eventually moved in, their farming dream took a back-seat to raising a family, and as the years passed, their agricultural designs faded.

Fast forward to 2022: their children have long since grown up, moved away, and

had kids of their own. Stephen and Rhoda eventually realized that Nottingham was not going to be the preferred destination for future Capron generations, with their own families in Washington state. But, perhaps, it could be home to a new generation. So, they decided to conserve their property and they contacted SELT. Jeremy Lougee, SELT’s Senior Conservation Project Manager and Farmland Coordinator, floated an idea to connect with young farmers to carry on in their stead.

“The Caprons are long-time supporters of SELT and have enjoyed hiking on our properties,” Jeremy says. “When they made the difficult decision to sell the property and move to Seattle to be with family, they first wanted to protect the land with a conservation easement. Over their 40+ years of ownership, they cared greatly for this land and didn’t want to see their conservation ethic and good stewardship erased by the quick money of a housing development.”

As SELT’s point person for farmland conservation projects, Jeremy has morphed into a valuable resource for landowners looking to conserve and young farmers looking to own, the matchmaker of the local agriculture scene. Tapping into his connections, he was able to introduce the Caprons to potential young farmers. Linh and Brian showed the most interest and took the necessary steps to get the property under agreement.

And so, Stephen and Rhoda met Linh and Brian and the wheels of farmers’ fate began to turn.

Farming and food production were so far away from Linh’s collegiate orbit that a career in competitive spelunking would have been just as likely. Born and raised in southern California, Linh found her fast lane on the academic track, and all signs pointed to a long and lucrative career filled with post-grad papers and peer review.

After her undergraduate degree in Biology at Whitworth University in Spokane, WA, she attended the Boston University School of



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Medicine for graduate school and eventually received her Ph.D. in Molecular Medicine. There she met her husband Brian, who was simultaneously earning his own Ph.D. in Biochemistry. That's enough collected brainpower to solve any number of the world's most intellectually impenetrable problems, up to and including yesterday's Wordle.

But Linh came to the realization that the world of biotech was not for her, and, after eight years of living the life of a scientist, she abruptly shifted directions at the age of 27 and pulled a hairpin turn on her career.

"I love animals too much and I was in a mouse lab!" she says. "I realized that I have always loved food. So, I ended up working at a French bakery. It was a total switch, because of how much time I had invested in my education. But I just jumped in."

Specifically, she jumped directly into baker's hours, working shifts starting at 4:00 am for two years. Slings pastries was fun, but it didn't completely fan her foodie flame, so Linh began working as a chef at a national restaurant chain, where she learned all about the world of corporate recipes for a 60+ restaurant chain.

Creating these precise dishes that would be replicated by others at scale still didn't square with what she wanted to do with food, so the next phase beckoned. That meant starting her own farm, although she and Brian were still living in a studio apartment in Boston.

"I dove into permaculture and biodynamics and natural farming practices," she says. "And when COVID hit, I literally spent a year on my couch researching farming and figuring out exactly how I wanted to farm."



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The isolated “reset” of time the pandemic allowed Linh to unleash the academic side of her brain and identify what she wanted to do as a farmer – and, more specifically, as a farmer farming on her own land.

“I was in my zone,” she says, laughing. “And when I felt like I had researched enough and knew what I wanted to do on paper, we just couldn’t find land, couldn’t find a home. We looked everywhere.”

Linh and Brian came up empty and with the housing market burning white-hot during 2020, they had to be creative about next steps. This led them to a farming co-op in the New Hampshire seacoast where they spent a year working with other farmers on the same property. The silver lining: “It was a nice little bubble so I could explore the process of actually being a farmer,” she says.

And the added bonus: “I had friends there who introduced me to SELT,” she says, “and so I got in touch with Jeremy, and I remember he said, ‘We might have this property but it’s probably going to take a long time.’”

That property was, of course, the Caprons’, and Linh and Brian were put on a prospect list. Over the course of 10 months that list grew shorter, and in 2021, following several meetings with the Caprons, it was clear that Linh and Brian took this opportunity seriously and showed they had a plan and were willing to follow through. Stephen and Rhoda had found their successors.

“I can’t think of a better couple to take over the land,” Stephen says. “They were everything we were hoping for.”



“It gave us such peace of mind,” Rhoda adds. “What made our move easier was knowing that the property was being conserved and owned by people who shared our same values.”

In April 2022, Linh and Brian moved to Nottingham and began leasing, with a goal of purchasing the land once SELT had completed the conservation easement on the property. SELT partnered with Nottingham’s Conservation Commission, who agreed to cover the project expenses related to the conservation easement (it must be said, and applauded, that the Caprons sold the easement at a bargain sale price that was far, far below its market value).

“The Nottingham Conservation Commission and its Board of Selectmen were supportive of this project from the start,” Jeremy says. “I cannot stress enough the importance of community engagement in the conservation process. SELT simply could not do this work without funding from our municipal partners.”

Bringing along the next generation of farmers is critical to the New Hampshire agricultural scene. Today, five times as many farmers in the Granite State are over 65 years old than those under 35. And from 2001–2016, 11,600 acres of agricultural land in New Hampshire was developed or compromised.

“We’re very fortunate in our region to have such an active local food scene,” Jeremy says, “but keeping our farmland productive and viable over the long term requires a significant investment on behalf of farmers, consumers, and their communities alike.”

Linh and Brian represent that investment. And they are acutely aware of the rarity and significance of this.

“The more time we spend here, the more perfect it is,” Linh says. “It’s kind of like a Miracle on 34th Street situation. This is not just any home. We were meant to be here in so many ways. It is exactly what I dreamed of.”

And Dandelion Forest Farm was born.

Later in the day, after all the paperwork had been signed at the lawyer’s office and the easement was officially recorded, the Nottingham property officially passed to its new owners, and Stephen and Rhoda took a drive to Dandelion Forest Farm.

Stephen notes he had been nervous about coming back, fearing he’d be very emotional, considering his family’s home of four decades was no longer in the family. But the theme of the day is fate, and the synchronicity of the events that brought these four people together, fulfilled a kind of destiny – and fulfilled destiny brings peace. And that’s what the Caprons felt, stepping out of their car, guests now instead of owners. Peace. Ease. And a healthy dose of amazement.

“What you have done here is incredible,” Rhoda said to Linh as the group toured Dandelion Forest Farm.

Truly, what Linh and Brian were able to pull off in six months is staggering. Corn growing nine feet high, along with beans and squash (the Three Sisters approach, an indigenous growing technique that Linh was eager to adopt) sit adjacent to another garden that is densely packed with all manner of edible plants – kale, spinach, elderberry, chestnuts, and many perennials researched and seeded to introduce a whole new palate of tastes and sensations to the region. Bees buzz around the garden, a Shangri-la for pollinators. The nearby hoophouse contains other delicacies and curiosities, many of the international variety, which is important for Linh, who is half Vietnamese.

“We’re an agroforestry farm, so we farm with trees along with annual crops,” Linh says. “Our main focus is on edible perennial plants. Now that we own our own land, I can grow long-lived trees with peace of mind. I can grow perennial fruits and perennial berries.



Immediately following the closing, left to right: Jeremy Lougee, Brian Fluharty and Linh Aven, Stephen and Rhoda Capron, and Sam Demeritt, chair of the Nottingham Conservation Commission.

There are so many edible crops growing wild around us already, and we want to put the spotlight on them.”

Community members get the chance to experience these new tastes at Dandelion Forest Farm’s semi-regular “farm-to-table” meals, events that provide revenue and awareness for what Linh is growing and researching: the blending of centuries-tested indigenous practices with the latest advances in modern permaculture, mixed with a generous helping of international agro-knowledge. These gatherings are often sold out.

“Ultimately, what we want is for people to grow their own food and to show them that it’s really easy,” she says. “You can take your lawn, put down a piece of cardboard and turn that into a growing space. When a seed planted in the soil grows into a plant, it’s a little miracle!”

As the tour concludes, the Caprons once again compliment Linh and Brian for all they have accomplished and wish them luck in the future. Stephen and Rhoda climb into their car, wave out the windows, and drive away.

Linh waves back, and picks up a pine cone that dropped from a towering pine tree at the mouth of the property; it’s a tree that Stephen had planted himself when he and Rhoda first moved in forty years ago. Linh shows it off with enthusiasm and tells how she will take this bounty from the land managed by her predecessors, soak it in a brown sugar blend, where it will ferment and, after time, release new and wonderful flavors. ■

**MISSION:
ADDRESS**



THE LOCATION: *The Hive volunteer meeting room in The Mathey Center for People and Nature.*

THE PERSONNEL: *Three SELT staff members, three SELT volunteers, and one instructor.*

THE ASSIGNMENT: *To train on the cutting-edge HETAP machine, a technological marvel that was recently purchased by SELT to aid in data collection, measurement, and, ultimately, the presentation of our trail conditions to the public.*

THE OBJECTIVE: *Give trail users – especially those with mobility challenges – a clear picture of what awaits them on SELT’s trails.*

It all started with a polite phone call. One day, at the height of the pandemic, the phone rang. Deborah Goard, SELT’s Stewardship and Land Engagement Director answered. On the other end of the line was Amanda Kelly, an Exeter resident and mother to young daughter with a disability.

As everyone was during those days of social distancing and quarantining, Amanda was eager to get outside, breathe fresh air, and enjoy a view other than a computer screen.

She and her daughter – who uses a wheelchair – made their way to Mast Road Natural Area, one of SELT’s properties with wider trails, more accessible than others for wheelchairs.

Unfortunately, the gate wasn’t quite wide enough for her daughter’s particular wheelchair, so Amanda gave Deborah a call and two talked at length about the needs for accessibility on local trail systems.

And that’s how Mission: Access began.

It is August 2022 when seven individuals gathered to kick off a new era in trails accessibility for SELT. With a laptop open on the conference room table, they peered at numbers and grids and all manner of digital potpourri, while soaking in what they were learning from Todd Ackerman of Beneficial Designs, a rehabilitation/accessibility research and design firm located in Nevada.

Meanwhile, waiting in the hallway just outside around the corner, ready for action, was the object of all that learning: the HETAP device. HETAP stands for High-Efficiency Trail Assessment Process. At first glance the apparatus may not look like something futuristic – think three-wheel jogger stroller crossed with a Playstation 5. Make no mistake: this is a cutting-edge piece of design that will unlock SELT’s trails for more users.

The HETAP captures and inventories objective information about trail conditions, including grade, width, and obstacles and barriers. The data can then be used by SELT’s stewardship crew to enhance trail safety and efficiently maintain properties. Even niftier: accurate, detailed information about trail conditions will then be made available to the public, allowing users to gather as full a picture as possible about the specific trails and how they measure up to their respective capabilities.

The HETAP investment came out of SELT’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, which is made up of SELT staff, community volunteers, and Board members. Connecting more people to the great outdoors is a major component of the group’s work, and the HETAP process offered a perfect opportunity for accessibility improvements.

And when it comes to long-term stewardship goals, there is an added benefit; the process allows SELT’s stewardship staff to address environmental impacts on trails, identify and mitigate potential barriers like roots, rocks, and difficult terrain, and update existing management plans.

While all of that sounds like it would require, give or take, 12 million hours worth of work, well, that’s the beauty of HETAP – particularly those first two letters of the acronym: “High-Efficiency.”

The process is set up to be done by one person, and with the technology shouldering the data-crunching load, a single user can conceivably map out two to three miles of trails in one day.

“As the number of trail systems that we are responsible for has grown, so too has our land management responsibilities,” says Deborah. “Not only will the HETAP provide a highly efficient way to inventory and better understand these trails for our stewardship purposes, it also opens the door for a more diverse population to access and enjoy these properties.”

Deep diving into the tech involved in bringing this vision to life can easily produce an ice-cream headache, but here’s the layperson rundown of how it all works:

To start, the user calibrates the device on a smooth, flat surface, establishing a baseline reading. Then it’s onto the trails, where the user navigates with the specialized pushcart, which is outfitted with measurement sensors that collect data like GPS coordinates, grade, slope, width, obstacles, features, and terrain.

The captured data is then available to be downloaded as a spreadsheet, which SELT’s stewardship team can adapt into consistent information about a trail’s difficulty level, allowing users to select recreational options that fit their abilities.

That’s where the efficiency comes into play. Gone are the analog days of hand-held tools and chicken-scratching on notebooks. The HETAP represents a more streamlined approach to data collection and the result is more trails, done in less time.

“The length of time to capture data on the trail will depend on how feature-heavy it is,” says Todd Ackerman. “By features we mean multiple rocks, roots, trees, really anything that causes an issue for a hiker, that would make the trail a little more challenging.”

So what’s the upshot to all this technology and training? Information.

“In the near-term, we will be able to provide comprehensive details about our trails, equipping users with the knowledge of what awaits, and allowing them to make their own informed decisions about what trails to try out,” says Deborah. “In the future, this

data will help inform us in regards to which sections of trails we can focus on to make more accessible for people who have mobility challenges.”

For Amanda, these efforts mean a great deal, both for her daughter and others who are craving similar outdoor experiences.

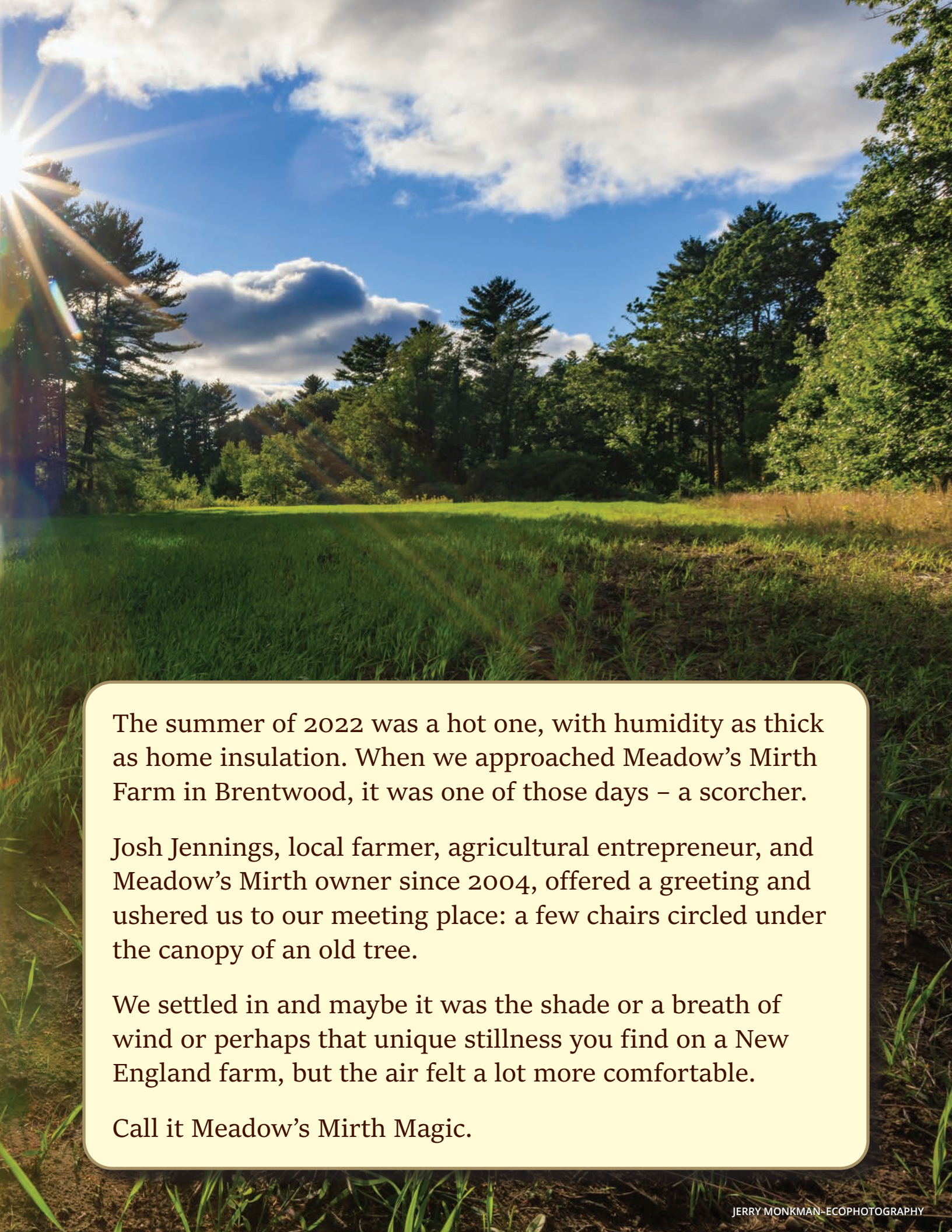
“Everyone should be able to enjoy the benefits of these trails,” she says. “Nature is amazing and something we all need to be exposed to and embedded in. City sidewalks are one experience – and it’s a good one – but we need to be in the forest and on a mountain and experience those spaces.” ■



Pictured: SELT volunteers Emma Tutein and Rob Wofchuck take the HETAP out for a spin at Burley Farms, capturing the data that will eventually be used to paint a comprehensive picture of the trail conditions for users of all abilities.



The **MAGIC** of
Meadow's Mirth



The summer of 2022 was a hot one, with humidity as thick as home insulation. When we approached Meadow's Mirth Farm in Brentwood, it was one of those days – a scorcher.

Josh Jennings, local farmer, agricultural entrepreneur, and Meadow's Mirth owner since 2004, offered a greeting and ushered us to our meeting place: a few chairs circled under the canopy of an old tree.

We settled in and maybe it was the shade or a breath of wind or perhaps that unique stillness you find on a New England farm, but the air felt a lot more comfortable.

Call it Meadow's Mirth Magic.

Farming was never really front and center in Josh Jennings' game plan for life. He was a student first and foremost, earning a History degree, then later, a degree in Philosophy. Academia appeared to be the career track as he considered a Ph.D. program; he applied and was accepted, but at the 11th hour hit the brakes. He loved New England and the thoughts of riding the faculty circuit around the country until finding a tenured position left him cold.

After investing over a decade in his scholarly pursuits, Josh was back to square one. Now what? He turned towards volunteerism at New Roots Farm in Newmarket (along with serving coffee to pay the bills). It was a far cry from academia, but his dalliance with hands-in-the-dirt farming activated something.

"I had never thought about being a farmer at any point prior to that volunteer experience," Josh says. "But I grew up doing hard work and living in the woods. I knew what physical exertion was about. I think it resonated with me, it got under my skin, and I was attracted to the challenge."

He continues: "You know, you get to that point, you're like, I don't know what I want to do with my life.' I promised myself to choose something, anything, and I'm just going to go for it."

That something was farming and that decision opened a new path. But it wasn't going to be an easy path. Not by a long shot.

"It was a tremendous challenge mentally because I knew nothing," he says. "I didn't know how to drive a tractor. I didn't know how to plant a seed. So, I just threw myself 100 percent into it and consumed as much knowledge as I could."

Josh's philosophical underpinnings would come in handy as he called back on his analytical skills to unravel the mystery of

growing. Seeds, dirt, and sunlight – they were systems and relationships to examine and, eventually, to innovate.

But all the know-how in the world is for naught if there isn't land on which to put it into practice. Prior to finding his way to Brentwood, Josh operated Meadow's Mirth on leased land. "It gave me the time to refine my growing experience without the burden of a mortgage," he says.

However, when the lease ended in 2018, Josh was faced with a predicament: how to carry on the business without a permanent place to stay? He patched together operations on several temporary pieces of land to stay afloat, while searching for a permanent location for the farm.

And then, in 2019, serendipity struck!

THE GAME IS AFOOT

The venue now called Meadow's Mirth was operated as a farm at the turn of the twentieth century, and for decades was owned by the State of New Hampshire as a "game farm," where NH Fish and Game raised pheasants for stocking and research purposes. In October 2019, the State made plans to sell the property, so Josh worked with investors to purchase the land as the new home for Meadow's Mirth.

From the beginning, Josh and his cohort worked with SELT and the Town of Brentwood to place the property into a conservation easement, allowing Josh to eventually assume full ownership of the land once the easement was completed. Brentwood citizens overwhelmingly approved the warrant article at a town meeting, backed by the strong approval of the town's Conservation Commission. Final funding to support the purchase of the conservation easement was awarded by the United States Natural Resources Conservation Service's Agricultural Land Easement Program.



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“Josh’s path is not unique,” says Jeremy Lougee, Senior Conservation Project Manager and Farmland Coordinator for SELT. “The future of local food in our region depends on our younger cadre of farmers succeeding and sticking with the business of farming, despite the lack of security, low pay, and hard work.”

The farm sits on roughly 35 acres, with more than 10 acres of open cropland, packed with rich Windsor loamy sand (a locally important farmland soil). The flat grade of the land and the tillable soils make Meadow’s Mirth

an ideal venue for a diversified vegetable operation, which is Josh’s focus.

Josh cultivates a wide variety of vegetables, flowers, and herbs, sold fresh at the Meadow’s Mirth farm store and distributed directly to local restaurants. A core part of Meadow’s Mirth business is the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. A CSA offers shares to community members, who are then able to regularly enjoy the farm’s bounty; think of it as a weekly subscription service for delicious, organic vegetables,



staples that have passed the foodie test from the grower himself.

“I don’t know how you can do this job if you don’t like to eat,” Josh says with a laugh. “I like to cook so I just want to eat the freshest food I can. When I first ate the food I grew myself, I thought back to all the systems I learned about, all the challenges, and, of course, all the flavors! It just started to come together.”

THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE

What lies ahead for Josh and Meadow’s Mirth Farm? More innovation, more experimentation, more new avenues to grow the business. Within the local farm community, Josh is well-known and has

had his fingerprint on so many initiatives, including local farmers’ markets, food bank support, and Three River Farmers Alliance, a farmer-owned food hub in the Greater Seacoast region that coordinates the delivery of locally sourced food to homes, restaurants, and organizations.

This year, Josh launched his Veggie Box venture, a twist on the CSA “subscription” approach, where customers pick up boxes of fresh vegetables each week at a variety of locations, including the Brentwood farm store.

“My product is community,” Josh says. “It’s all about the relationship to our food, to the land, and to the history of New Hampshire.” ■

Protect. Grow. Prosper.

The Necessity of Affordable, Accessible Farmland

By Jeremy Lougee

In our region, we’re blessed with bucolic fields and historic farmsteads. That scenic, rural landscape of New Hampshire is what drives our tourism-based economy. But did you know the Granite State lost more than 11,000 acres of productive farmland between 2001–2016? This is death by a thousand cuts of urban and suburban development, so small that it sometimes goes unnoticed. And did you know that New Hampshire counts five times as many farmers over the age of 65 as under 35 years old? How can a state that is known for its farms, fairs, and local foods afford to lose such a central feature of its character and one that literally sustains us in times of need?

SELT is working to change this trend. We’ve made farmland protection a priority in our strategic plan, conserving nearly 4,500 acres of farmland across Rockingham and Strafford counties. Beyond conservation, we’re working to make farmland more affordable and accessible to the next generation of farmers.

New farms are popping up in communities like Brentwood, Farmington, and Nottingham, owned and operated by innovative, energetic young farmers on land conserved by SELT. We’re partnering with businesses like Three River Farmers Alliance to bring food system awareness, new customers, and renewed economic activity to the region. We’re reinvigorating our own dormant farmland at Burley Farms. A vibrant local food system requires working farms that are affordable and accessible to the next generation of farmers – and your support of SELT helps make this possible.



WILD PLAY RULES!

Kids need community. They need to be around each other and play together and soak up the verbal and nonverbal cues that help forge the interpersonal dynamics and social soft skills that springboard them to adulthood. And you're not going to find a better playground than nature.

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One of the most pernicious lessons the pandemic showed all of us is that children kept separate, isolated, and digital have borne a heavy emotional burden.

“Since the pandemic – and even prior to it – I have seen increased anxiety with young people,” says Nick DeGruttola, a guidance counselor for the Epping school district. “Students have had to deal with so many changes and inconsistencies over the past several years.”

As the world has gradually regained normalcy and children have returned to in-person recreation and education, the artifacts of a separate, Zoom-centric life have lingered.

But there is a salve, and even in the darkest days of virus mitigation, nature presented an antidote, an opportunity to socially distance amidst trees and ponds and wildlife.

Heather Campbell, Executive Director of White Pine Programs, has witnessed the healing and restorative properties of the great outdoors first-hand.

“Their senses are heightened and their anxiety is reduced,” Heather says. “They sometimes find a part of themselves that doesn’t have a place indoors. They remember how fun it is to just be outside with others and run barefoot in the grass.”



SELT has formed a key partnership with White Pine Programs to create our All-Terrain Learning Adventures (ATLAS) program, a new initiative that blends nature-based education with “wild play” to produce active, enticing, and group-based experiences set in the backdrop of the natural world.

The 2021–2022 school year saw the launch of SELT’s ATLAS program in Epping Elementary School, with White Pine providing nature-based learning experiences to grades K, 2, and 4 that supplemented the classes’ science curriculum. In addition, every Epping Elementary School student had the opportunity to experience a weekly “wild play” recess activity, facilitated by White Pine.

“These outdoor experiences show our students the value of being mindful of what’s all around them,” says Mandy Murphy, Co-Principal of Epping Elementary. “Being outside gives something to everyone, no matter where they’re coming from or what their story is. There’s no pressure to it. It’s fun. It’s play.”

SELT’s ATLAS programming is fully funded through Epping’s 2023–2024 academic year, with White Pine Programs doing what they do best: presenting the wonder of nature to children of all ages and backgrounds.

“As new neighbors and Epping community members, we are honored to share nature and local lands with Epping’s young residents through our ATLAS program,” said Beverly Shadley, SELT’s Deputy Director. “We hope we can play some small role in helping Epping Elementary School kids discover their own love of the great outdoors and all of the magic it holds.”

“Bringing these types of transformational experiences directly to where students are helps to eliminate numerous barriers to accessing nature,” Heather says. “Together with SELT, our programs deepen local students’ sense of pride of place, building pro-environmental attitudes and a connection to all the living things in the region that will last a lifetime.” ■



In the Footsteps of History

For Phil Primack, it all started with a babysitter who shooed him into the woods. As a young child growing up in Haverhill, Massachusetts, Phil would sometimes be looked after by a retired teacher named Jennie Anderson, whose go-to babysitting maneuver included sending him outside to scavenge for tadpoles.

Little did Jennie know those impromptu adventures into the muck would mold Phil into a lover of the great outdoors – and, ultimately, a committed and generous conservationist.

“At a young age I had developed a fondness for the woods,” he says. “As a short, chubby kid it was great. No one would pick me for the softball team, but I was a mean man with a butterfly net.”

After a jaunt in Kentucky working for a newspaper and living adjacent to people who shared a love of the outdoors and treasured their connection to the land, Phil methodically felt the pull toward land ownership himself. He returned to Massachusetts in his early 30s and put feelers out to track down his dream milieu.

He says: “I wanted what everybody wants: a small house on a creek on about ten acres of land, to which several real estate agents laughed.”

One agent found him real estate in Epping, though it was a *smidgen* off from his checklist: a ten-room dilapidated farmhouse

sitting on 65 acres and located on a busy highway. Thankfully, Phil and another buyer worked out a way to purchase the land and subdivide it, so Phil was ultimately able to build a small house on ten acres, located on a creek. His dream, fulfilled.

Over the course of his time in Epping, Phil acquired additional land, bringing his ownership to over 100 acres. He would later donate an easement on his property to the Rockingham Land Trust (the predecessor to SELT). This represented the first step to what would become the sprawling Pawtuckaway River Reservation.

Phil is a SELTie extraordinaire, a partner in stewardship and land management activities and a member of the SELTie Conservation Circle, the group of SELT’s highest-impact donors. Beyond this engagement, Phil has taken planned giving to a new level, establishing two separate bequests to benefit SELT. The first is a life estate gift, where his house and property will be donated to SELT; the second is an annuity, the proceeds of which will support SELT’s stewardship activities.

“It’s one thing to donate land, but it’s another to make sure it is managed and protected,” he says. “For potential planned giving donors, there are three benefits you should think about. First, it is good for nature, obviously. Second, there are financial benefits you can realize, because in many cases there are tax breaks. And third, there’s an enormous sense of closure. I can walk around that land now



and say this is taken care of, this is done. And it was done right.”

These days, Phil is riding the literary circuit, sharing about his latest writing project, *Put it Down on Paper: The Words and Life of Mary Folsom Blair—A Fifty-Year Search* (Loom Press). Copies of Phil’s book are available at Water Street Books in Exeter and at The Mathey Center. Mary Folsom Blair was a lifelong teacher, Quaker, early advocate for outdoor education, and the former owner of

Phil’s land. Through comprehensive research, Phil revealed the story of this noteworthy New Hampshire native, and put it together in his book, released on August 15. He has since worked with Neal Folsom, Mary’s great nephew, to donate Mary’s collected papers to the Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Study.

“As you get into older age, you want to find safe and appropriate homes for what matters to you,” Phil says. “That applies to objects. And it applies to land.” ■



Phil Primack takes a moment at one of the original locations Mary Folsom Blair brought her class for a session of outdoor education, as seen in the above original photo.



ADVENTURES IN THE **REEL WORLD**



Now, more than ever,
hit the trails!

Joe Wofchuck's passion for conservation flows from a lifetime of globetrotting, a strong faith, and a desire to share the lessons for success he's learned over the years. Also, he *loves* fishing.

Joe Wofchuck is often asked by young people about the secret to success. This is not surprising. He's been retired for years and has achieved much professionally, though he is reluctant to dwell on that. But his reputation precedes him, and he is often looked to for wisdom. There are two life lessons he is eager to transmit, both of which were passed down to him by his own mentors. The first:

"There are three things that can keep you from success," he says. "Greed, ego, and the frivolities of life. If you're only after the nicest cars or brand name clothes and feel jealous of what your friend or neighbor has, well, that will derail you."

Joe is a world traveller who has been drawn to every corner of the globe thanks to his love of fishing. His adventures have taken him to Alaska, Guatemala, Mexico, Patagonia, and countless other locales, some of which are only accessible by aircraft. A quick tour through his many photos on his phone reveals shot after shot of Joe proudly holding a variety of freshwater and saltwater fish from exotic venues (and a couple of surprise pics of him standing with Warren Sapp and Wade Boggs, who happened to be on the same fishing trip).

He has seen much of what the planet has to offer, and the lasting lesson he takes away from his excursions is this: "What you see is what could be – and isn't," he says.

Joe has seen what could be; he has fished undisturbed waters, has sat at arms-length from silverback gorillas, has reeled in colossal rainbow trout that can only be found in the great recesses of the natural world.

And he has seen the destruction of the environment that has led to the disappearance of fishing stocks through overfishing, over-development, and pollution.

His passion for the outdoors connected him to SELT, where he found evidence of the values he holds close. His generous support of SELT's Promise for People and Nature Campaign, which included constructing The Mathey Center for People and Nature, resulted in The Wofchuck Wing, which encompasses the community-facing section of the building, containing the Pratt Family Community Room and The Hive volunteer room.

While he is not a man to dwell on the particulars of the square footage he helped fund, there is a sight embedded within the Wofchuck Wing he finds hypnotic: the scenic views of the Burley Farms fields that spread out before him.

"I love the planting of trees and flowers and seeing things grow," he says, gazing through the window. "When I see fields like these, with the bales of hay, it's like I am looking at a Van Gogh painting."

Joe finds great peace from vistas like Burley Farms, where a sense of time and space that intersects with another passion of his life: his Jewish faith.

"Judaism preaches to us to take care of the land, take care of animals, treat them right and civilly," he says. "We're in a G_dly world and we need to protect what we have. And not just for us, but for our children and their children and the generations to come."

Which brings us to Joe's second piece of advice, and the single most important credo that has illuminated his professional, personal, and philanthropic life.

"There is no substitute for knowledge," he says. "Understand what life is about and what the world is about and see what you can do to make it better." ■



SELT

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Save

SELT conserves the special places in our communities for clean water, outdoor recreation, fresh food, wildlife, and healthy forests. We do this through ownership and working with landowners to place conservation easements on their properties.

Share

What do these lands have in common? They are for all to enjoy! Whether it is the miles of trails, or the local farms producing fresh food, or the pure water flowing from your taps, SELT's properties are protected for the benefit of everyone in our communities.

Steward

Conservation is forever! SELT's team of stewardship staff and committed volunteers thoughtfully manage and monitor our properties – all to ensure these wonderful lands are cared for so that they can be treasured for generations.

