Meadowood Nature Preserve Update

The Meadowood Nature Preserve is an environmental initiative of Meadowood and the Worcester community to promote awareness, appreciation and improvement of our local natural resources. Meadowood is well on its way to achieve its goal of planting 500 trees in 5 years. In 2012, 103 large caliper native trees were planted in the riparian corridor on Meadowood’s property that buffers the wetland from the adjacent agricultural field. This was funded through a 2012 TreeVitalize grant that was awarded to Meadowood and the Worcester Elementary School (WES), contributions from two Meadowood residents and proceeds from a quilt raffle held by the Environmental Club. Meadowood and WES were recently notified that they received another TreeVitalize grant to plant 100 trees in 2013.

The WES Environmental Club established a native tree nursery by working with Meadowood residents to build four large wood frame boxes. Meadowood residents took WES Environmental Club students on a trail walk to collect native tree seeds and acorns. These collected seeds and acorns were planted in the native tree nursery by students and Meadowood residents. The plan is to eventually plant the native trees in the riparian corridor area.

Meadowood also received a $58,000 grant in 2012 to retrofit an existing storm basin and install a series of demonstration rain gardens to reduce the volume and velocity of storm water entering the wetland area. This project has been funded in part by Exelon Corporation through the Schuylkill River Restoration Fund and the Delaware River Basin Commission. Both projects are in the final design stage and are planned to be completed in 2013.

Access to the Nature Preserve is important, so that everyone can enjoy the beautiful surroundings. Meadowood worked with an architect to prepare a conceptual design for an accessible trail and tree house structure. An accessible walkway will allow anyone with wheelchairs and walkers to access the Nature Preserve. The walkway will lead to a tree house that will overlook the entire Nature Preserve. Besides giving a view of nature and providing a serene environment, the tree house will also function as an outdoor classroom, providing intergenerational learning opportunities.

Meadowood and the WES Environmental Club recently hosted an educational program, “Close Encounters with Birds of Prey,” presented by the Delaware Valley Raptor Center.

To learn more about the Meadowood Nature Preserve, please contact Jody LaVerdure at jlaverdure@mwood.org or 484-991-1025.

Fiscal Cliff Deal Includes Good News for Local Land Preservation Efforts

Media, PA - Congress’ “fiscal cliff” deal renewed a tax incentive for private landowners—especially working family farmers & ranchers—who preserve their land with a voluntary conservation agreement. The incentive, which had expired at the end of 2011, was a boon to private conservation efforts while it was in effect between 2006 and 2011.

"Nationwide, the incentive is credited with a 30% increase in the number of acres preserved each year," noted Molly Morrison, president of the non-profit Natural Lands Trust, a land conservation group serving eastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey. "At a time when public investments in open space have been reduced drastically, the incentive is a cost-effective way to encourage landowners, regardless of their means, to consider conservation as an option."

Conservation-minded landowners now have until December 31, 2013, to take advantage of a significant tax deduction for donating a voluntary conservation agreement to permanently protect important natural or historic resources on their land. When landowners donate a conservation easement to Natural Lands Trust, its affiliate Montgomery County Lands Trust, or another qualified organization, they maintain ownership and management of their land and can sell or pass the land on to their heirs, while foregoing future development rights.

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Enhanced Tax Benefits continued from page 1

The enhanced incentive applies to a landowner's federal income tax. It does the following:

- Raises the deduction a donor can take for donating a voluntary conservation agreement from 30% of their income in any year to 50%;
- Allows farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income; and
- Increases the number of years over which a donor can take the deduction from 6 to 16 years.

"Private conservation donations are in our DNA in this region," Morrison said. "Some of our most treasured open spaces exist today because of the generosity of the landowner. This incentive makes the tax benefits of such donations available to a wider array of landowners."

Congressman Jim Gerlach (R-6th District) serves Chester, Montgomery, Berks, and Lebanon Counties and has been a champion of the incentive from the beginning, sponsoring legislation during the last session of Congress that would make the incentive permanent.

"This critical conservation tool has been extremely effective because it benefits landowners who want to protect their property as well as communities interested in working together to preserve exceptional natural resources," Gerlach said. "Renewing the incentive is a great first step, but it will not be the last."

"Legislation that would make this incentive permanent received overwhelming bipartisan support of about three-quarters of the U.S. House of Representatives during the last session of Congress," Gerlach added. "I will be reintroducing legislation to make the incentive a permanent option and look forward to working with my House colleagues, Natural Lands Trust, Montgomery County Lands Trust, and other partners to provide property owners with greater certainty about the availability of this option."

If you are interested in preserving your land or have questions about how the tax incentive works, visit www.natlands.org/landowner or email info@natlands.org. Reprinted with permission from MCLT/NLT.

Cindy & Spence Haines—Cold Spring Farm
A Step Back In Time

As you drive by the Haines property, you can see Cold Spring Farm from North Wales Road. There’s a story that not many people know—this property is now preserved forever.

The Haines family lived not far from Worcester, at Evergreen Farm, which is adjacent to the Mumbower Mill on Swedesford Road in Lower Gwynedd. During the depression, John Benezet Haines and Clara Spence Haines purchased Cold Spring Farm, 136 acres, between North Wales Road and Bethel Road close to Morris Road. Although John’s primary occupation was printing, he enjoyed farming as a hobby. So did Spence Haines, one of his children.

Cindy Welsh met the Haines family in the summer of 1953. She began working as a camp counselor for Violet Haines (Spence’s sister) who ran a riding camp at Evergreen Farm. Cindy reminisces how they would ride their horses north from Township Line Road, a dirt road at the time, to Morris Road to North Wales Road and arrive at Cold Spring Farm. Cindy was interested in farming too. She would help out at Cold Spring Farm in the afternoons after camp. In 1964, Cindy started working with Spence at Cold Spring Farm.

After Spence’s parents passed, the seven Haines children inherited the farm and cherished the land for many years. When they decided to sell in their elder years, Spence opposed the sale. In 1988, the family sold 121 acres to Pat Sparango Builders for the Hillcrest Meadows development. At that time Spence was able to work out an arrangement to purchase the remaining 14 acres of Cold Spring Farm.

The Cold Spring Farm property is tucked between the homes which have now been built on its former acreage. The head-waters of Stony Creek originate beneath the original farmhouse, built in 1718, and feed the farm’s pond. In addition to the farmhouse with its unique features, there is a smoke house from the early 1700s, a barn and several outbuildings. In the 1970’s, Cindy and Spence dismantled an old dairy barn from Evergreen Farm and reassembled it on Cold Spring Farm themselves. A section of the rebuilt dairy barn has been Cindy’s home since 1973. The farmhouse has been rented since the 1920’s to help pay for the maintenance of the property.

Sadly, Spence passed in 2006. Cindy still lives on and works the farm. She mows the fields, raises chickens, and enjoys gardening. She also knits and works full-time for Spence’s grandson, Craig Eberbach, at Cedar Ridge Nursery on Bustard Road. She said with a smile, “I realized years ago that tractors were safer than horses.”

Cindy knew of land preservation, but she wasn’t sure how to actually preserve her property. She was interested in preserving the land and its historic structures.

Did you know?
You can now make your tax-deductible contribution to Friends of Worcester using PayPal. Visit www.friendsofworcester.org and click on the Donate link on the front page. Thank you!
She contacted Kim David, President of Friends of Worcester, who advised her to talk to Susan Caughlan, Worcester Township Open Space Coordinator at the time, a current Supervisor, to see what her options were. They spoke to Dave Froehlich of Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association and Mary Lou McFarland from the Conservancy of Montgomery County.

Cindy decided to donate her conservation easement, a permanent deed restriction, that will ensure there will be no further development on her land, except for a specific two acre area which has been set aside for residential use, if ever needed. Dave became her consultant and guided her through the whole land preservation process.

The conservation easement was completed in November 2007. Cindy still owns her property and is responsible for its maintenance. The specifics of her deed restriction will remain with the property if it is ever sold.

The Conservancy of Montgomery County holds the easement on the property and is responsible for its monitoring. They were a perfect fit due to Cindy’s desire to not only protect the land but the historic structures too. Worcester Township assisted by helping with the expenses of the deed restriction and contributing to an endowment fund, which needed to be set up to oversee the yearly inspections of the farm as part of the conservation easement.

Cindy said deciding to donate the conservation easement was important to preserve the memory of Spence and all his hard work. Fortunately, Spence was able to keep these very picturesque 14 acres when the remaining land was sold for development. Preserving it was a way Cindy was able to leave it as Spence would have wanted it. Cindy is attached to the land too. She works hard to maintain the property but it is a labor of love. Cold Spring Farm is the place where she “gets away from everything.” She didn’t ever want to see the farm’s charm destroyed and chose to protect it by generously donating her easement. It will remain unspoiled and bucolic forever.

Her words to others who may be considering land preservation: “Don’t think about it. Just do it!” We couldn’t agree more! 🎁
With the Planning Commission looking to focus on village planning in Center Point as its next project, we thought we would bring you a historic perspective on the village. Like many crossroad villages, Center Point began as a stopping point along Skippack Pike, one of the main roads to Philadelphia. Wagons hauled produce and other products along these major roads to and from the city. Inns and hotels sprang up at these major crossroads to serve travelers. Other businesses, such as wheelwrights and blacksmiths, soon followed. The blacksmith not only shod horses but made most of the iron tools and fixtures needed in a house and barn. The Center Point General Store, built in 1829, was also the post office.

The village’s general store, on the corner now occupied by the Exxon gas station, included a barber shop on one corner and the family’s living quarters on the second floor. It was purchased in 1911 by Oswin Allebach, who also succeeded to the job of Worcester Postmaster. Allebach’s Store provided all the services of a modern shopping center, selling personal items, fabric, and home goods as well as groceries. Customers could pay their electric bill at the store, cash their paycheck, and drop off shoes and appliances for repair.

As cars became more common in the township, Mr. Allebach had a gasoline tank installed in the back yard, between the store and the barn. The clerk used a one-gallon container to dip gasoline and fill the car’s gas tank, which was underneath the front seat. Center Point was served by public transport from 1907 through the early 1920s. The Montgomery Transit Company ran an electric-powered trolley service from Norristown through Fairview Village and Center Point to Skippack and eventually to Harleysville.

The advent of electricity and the telephone also began to be felt in Center Point 100 years ago. In 1902, local residents organized the Montgomery Telephone Company, which served most of the farms and homes around the village. The first switchboard was located in the waiting rooms of the Center Point Hotel, on the corner diagonally across from the Exxon station. Telephone service cost $18 a year. The exchange was soon moved to a house across Valley Forge Road and was run by the homeowner. It later moved to the stone house across Skippack Pike from the school. The first electric in Center Point was provided by Lynwood Nyce from a small power plant located behind his large brick house, just west of the elementary school. Electricity may have been generated by burning corn cobs, a common fuel at the time.

Worcester’s first high school started about 100 years ago, in 1908. At that time, the township’s school system consisted of seven one-room schoolhouses. Students could study up through 10th grade, but many dropped out after 8th grade to help on the farm. The school board decided that more students would stay on for the higher grades if there were a separate high school. Until the Worcester School was built in 1912, the newly created high school (9th and 10th grades only) met in Farmers’ Union Hall, now the library of the Worcester Historical Society. The students walked or rode horseback to school.

A few years after the Worcester School opened in 1912, the school board decided to close the one-room schoolhouses and consolidate them into two schools, one in Fairview Village and the other in Center Point. Worcester School housed grades 1 through 10, with several grades taught in each room. Before a gymnasium was added in the 1950s, Worcester students would walk next door to the Farmers’ Union Hall for gym class. School plays and graduations were also held at the Hall. The original Worcester School, with several additions, served the community until the 1980s, when it was closed and then demolished. After graduating from Worcester High School, students who wanted to continue their education went to Norristown or Lansdale for 11th and 12th grades. They waited for the bus in-
side Allebach’s Store and sometimes left their boots in one corner of the store, not wanting to wear heavy boots to school “in town,” where Worcester students were known as the farm kids.

Built in 1898, Farmers’ Union Hall was one of the newest buildings in the village 100 years ago. The Farmers’ Union, a regional organization of farmers, needed a place to meet, as did the Worcester Alumni Association. The two groups pooled their money to purchase the ground and build the Hall, which quickly became the venue for many community events, from plays and musicals to card parties, flower shows, and 4-H meetings. The Worcester Historical Society’s Museum in Farmers’ Union Hall, 2011 Valley Forge Rd, Center Point, is open on Saturday mornings.

Once it’s gone, it’s gone forever!

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Join FOW for a Zacharias Trail Walk

Saturday, May 4th at 10:00 am

Meet us at the Green Hill Road Parking Lot

Light refreshments provided

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The community is invited to enjoy an afternoon of delicious wine & cheese samplings from local vendors along with live music and guided tours of Variety Club’s beautiful 80-acre campus. Admission is free.

Questions? Please call our office at (610) 584-4366 or send an email to marissalozanc@varietyphila.org.

Variety Club is a non-profit organization serving children & youth with special needs. To learn more, please visit varietyphila.org.

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The official registration and financial information of The Friends of Worcester may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.
Friends of Worcester Officers
Kim David - President (610-584-1805)
Rob Hayes - Vice President (610-584-0371)
Wini Hayes - Treasurer (610-584-0371)
Barbara McMonagle - Secretary (215-257-1436)

Join us 2nd Wednesdays, 7:30 pm, September through May
Check friendsofworcester.org for details.

Worcester Township Public Meetings
Community Hall, 1031 Valley Forge Rd, Fairview Village

Board of Supervisors
1st Monday of the month, 9:00 am
3rd Wednesday of the month, 7:30 pm

Planning Commission
2nd & 4th Thursday, 7:30 pm

Zoning Hearing Board
4th Tuesday, 6:30 pm
Check worcestertwp.com for any changes or cancellations.