

Outside the Box:
**GET THE DIRT ON
 MICRO-GREENWAYS**

by Rick Dubiel

There's a familiar saying in the environmental movement that advises us to "Think globally, act locally." We are asked to think in terms of the larger goal of saving the planet, but to accomplish that by taking action on a smaller, more manageable scale in our own state and town. Taking this idea one step further, there are steps we can take in our very own backyard, where we have the most control. This can entail thinking "outside the box" – beyond just birdhouses.

There are many ways in which both homeowners, and owners of undeveloped land, can improve wildlife habitat on their small piece of property. Let's start from the ground up. The soil is often over-looked as a natural resource, but it is one of the most critical components for plant life, which in turn supports animal life. The soil is a intricate matrix of moisture, organic and inorganic matter, and micro-organisms. Residents can improve their soil by composting their organic waste, such as grass clippings and leaves, instead disposing of it at the landfill. If composting doesn't appeal to you, then at least use a mulching blade on your lawn mower, and let your grass clippings help build up the topsoil. We should also strive to reduce or eliminate pesticide use. Residents should consider using biological controls, such as milky spore, for grub and Japanese beetle control, instead of pesticides which kill beneficial organisms such as earthworms. Avon-ites can further protect soil-life and ground water by disposing of their hazardous waste properly. Save your used oil, unwanted paints, solvents, batteries and pesticides for the annual hazardous waste day, instead of taking them to the landfill, where they might be incinerated and pollute the atmosphere.

Another way to improve the wildlife habitat is to set aside your own personal land trust, on a micro scale. Leave a corner of your yard in a natural state. The wildlife will appreciate it, and you will appreciate spending slightly less time behind the lawnmower each week. You can also create your own micro-greenways between house lots with buffer areas of woods. This not only provide greater privacy between you and your neighbors, but also provides food and shelter for wildlife, and allows larger animals to travel from tract to tract without feeling so exposed. Avon is very lucky to have a progressive Public Works Dept., which sponsors many programs to help improve the wildlife habitat in our yards. Among these programs are the annual sale of plantings that provide food and shelter for wild life. Take advantage of them.



**THE *Avon* LAND TRUST
 membership form**

please check one:

- \$100 Life Membership
- \$15 Family Membership
- \$10 Individual Membership
- \$ Additional donation

Name

Address

Date

Please make checks payable to The Avon Land Trust.

All contributions and memberships are tax deductible.

Yes, I can help with:

- Mailings
- Program Planning
- Land Maintenance

Please mail to:

THE AVON LAND TRUST, P.O. Box 267, Avon, CT 06001

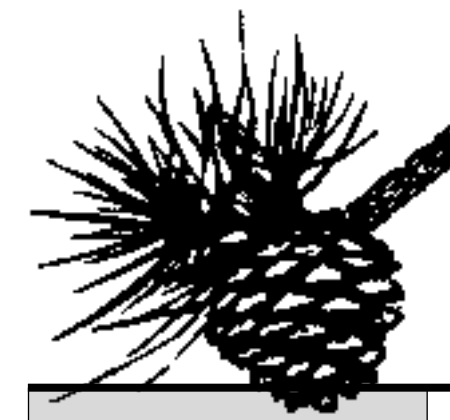


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THE *Avon* LAND TRUST

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November 1997

WELCOME TO THE AVON LAND TRUST

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- Dean Applefield
- Richard Dubiel
- Alan Aldag

ANNUAL MEETING

> > > > > > > > > > > >

Wednesday, December 3 at 7:30
 PM, at the Avon Senior Center
 on West Avon Road.

Please read inside for details about
 our guest speaker.



President's Message

In September of this year the newspaper *USA Today* printed an article on the increased popularity of land trusts in America. The article ranked each state according to the number of organizations located within the state that are dedicated to land preservation. I was very surprised to find that Connecticut was placed third on this list. With 113 trusts statewide (nearly one for every city and town), Connecticut was surpassed only by Massachusetts and California. Considering the tiny size of our state, this figure is quite amazing. It's possible that the combination of high property taxes and population density add up to a climate favorable to land donation, but I prefer to think that people care more now about what is precious. Especially here in Avon, what is most precious is disappearing fast.

In the next few years we can look forward to an explosion of "millennial fever"—a rare event (it's only happened once before) where every person with an apocalyptic vision will surface, intent on convincing the rest of us of his/her master plan. I used to wonder if a great spiritual awakening might not occur at this time as well. Perhaps it will, but manifested as a growing appreciation of our planet, and the re-uniting of the human race with the natural world.

Here's one last thing—and something for us to aspire to. The state of New Hampshire contains within its borders more than 25% of all the land trust property in the US. Totalling over one million acres of wilderness, this land has been preserved for the public appreciation and for the use of future generations, forever.

Tom Morganti
President ALT

Tunxis Plantation

On the west border of Avon, off of New Road, and on the banks of the Farmington River, is an isolated, wooded area, known locally as Tunxis Plantation. This area was heavily flooded in the 1950's, and being in a flood plain, has remained undeveloped. The Avon Land Trust owns several pieces of property on this stretch of the river, and is interested in acquiring other parcels to create a contiguous area. If you own land in this area, and are interested in donating it, please contact us.

Avon Land Lovers

by Ruth Maher

Oliver Thompson

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Oliver Thompson is a name and personality familiar to most Avon residents. Sunrise Farm, on West Avon Road, offers exquisite evidence that he has loved and preserved the land where he has spent his life.

One of Oliver's ancestors was a member of Thomas Hooker's small group of hardy settlers who trudged along Indian trails from Cambridge to Hartford. Years later Oliver's grandfather bought the West Avon farm from a Deming family. Eventually he owned 600 acres.

J.C. Thompson, Oliver's father, once told his son, "Farming is a good life, but you'd better have another business to help out during the lean years." J.C. owned sawmills in Sandisfield, Massachusetts, and in several Connecticut towns. He bought standing timber, converted it to lumber and

conducted a thriving business in lumber sales. During a busy period his teams often delivered two wagonloads of lumber one day, and one load the next day, to building sites beyond West Hartford. Sometimes on the return trip a load of bricks was dropped off in Unionville.



Oliver Thompson

At the same time Oliver, J.C., family members and hired hands performed the endless work required for the daily care of the horses, cows, pigs, sheep and chickens. Eggs were delivered to Children's Village in Hartford. On a regular route milk was delivered in 40-quart cans from which J.C. ladled out whatever quantity the customer ordered.

Gardens had to be plowed, planted, cultivated and harvested. Oliver's wife, Betty, kept annual records of canning

many different fruits, vegetables, pickles and preserves, 20 or 30 jars of each.

Hay had to be cut, dried, raked, gathered and stored. All the buildings required periodic inspection, maintenance and repair. In winter ice was cut from the pond and packed in sawdust in the ice house. Oliver donated time and effort to help



First cutting, June 1997. Left to right: Oliver Thompson (on tractor), Douglas Thompson, Ed and Tommy Reller.

cut and stack the winter supply of wood for the West Avon Congregational Church. There was never a shortage of work to be done.

During the 1930s, when two teachers needed boarding accommodations, Betty volunteered

the extra rooms in their house. Volunteering has always been a natural part of the lives of Oliver, Betty, their son Douglas, and their daughter Jean. In the 1960s they participated in the International Farm Youth Exchange Program and one year hosted three students from England and one from Ireland. Oliver was active in the Connecticut Farm Bureau and served as a 4-H Club leader. He was Avon's First Selectman for six years, represented the Board of Education on the first Building Committee for the new Towpath School, organized the West Avon Volunteer Fire Department and served as its first Chief. He was a founder and the first President of the Avon Land Trust, and in 1975 he was one of sixty people honored as outstanding citizens of the town. For many years he has enjoyed honorary membership in the Prince Thomas of Savoy Society. In 1977 he was named chairman of a committee formed to publish a history of Avon. That task was accomplished with the 1988 publication of the wonderful book *Avon, Connecticut* by Mary-Frances L. MacKie.

Early in the state's program of testing dairy cattle for tuberculosis, there were some positive results among the cows on Sunrise Farm. Doubtful inspectors repeated the tests, but some were still positive. Although it was a devastating loss, J.C. and Oliver disposed of the entire herd rather than risk the possibility that one of the remaining animals might be an undetected carrier. When they bought a new herd, the Canaan owner drove the cows to Winsted, where they rested overnight. The next day Oliver and a helper drove them along the road from Winsted to West Avon.

Farmers constantly witness natural cycles of life and death, but few will tolerate deliberate cruelty to animals. Oliver recalls that as a kid, "I once had murder in my heart" at the sight of a temporary hired hand viciously killing one of the farm cats. At 85, his memory of that incident is still vivid and painful.

The land is the life of the farmer, and the weather is often his boss. Although all crops react to extreme conditions of temperature and water supply, haying in particular demands periods of



dry sunny days. If moist hay is stored in the barn, there is serious danger of spontaneous combustion. It's not surprising, then, that most farmers become pretty accurate weather forecasters. But ability to predict the showers doesn't relieve the frustration of being unable to turn them off during haying season.

When Oliver gave up dairy farming, he had 53 cows. Today the animals are gone, but Sunrise Farm still produces tons of quality hay. Oliver still drives the tractor while Douglas oversees the operation of the various other implements that cut, rake and bale the hay. When they're working in the fields, the air is filled with the sweet fragrance of new-mown hay. It's an unforgettable scent, a reminder of childhood hours spent jumping in the hayloft until it was no longer possible to tolerate the awful itch of dry hay clinging to sweaty skin.

Oliver Thompson is indeed one of Avon's land lovers. He also has a genuine love for family, friends, animals and the Town of Avon. "Sunrise Farm" is a beautiful name for some of Avon's most beautiful land. Oliver's life history reveals character that fits the same description... beautiful! 🐾

Call to the Annual Meeting

by Tom Morganti

The Annual business meeting of the Avon Land Trust will be held on Wednesday, December 3 at 7:30 PM, at the Avon Senior Center on West Avon Road. The featured speaker this year will be Dr. Kenneth Feder, Professor of Anthropology at Central Connecticut State University. Dr. Feder will be speaking on the topic of "Archeology of the McLean Game Refuge".

The general public is invited to attend, and refreshments will be served. 🐾

What Used to be There? (Before Old Avon Village)

Opposite Mountain View Avenue in 1940, a narrow driveway led uphill between trees and bushes on the left and coarse grasses on the right. At the present site of Building 45 (Moosavi Persian Rugs) stood John Eddy's former brooder house, which he had converted to three very comfortable apartments. Just beyond the apartments were three garages in what had been a barn/chicken coop.

Building 33 (Ribbons & Roses, Village Goldsmith) was the home of John and Grace Eddy, their children Muriel and David, and their Airedale, Sandy. Wherever John walked, Sandy followed two steps behind.

Present locations of Buildings 41 and 37 (Crystal Dolphin Travel, David Kelly Salon, Donna Crump, Avon Shoe Repair), along with sections of their parking areas, were set aside for gardens. That's where tenants of the apartments planted tomatoes, corn, green beans and other common vegetables.

Buildings 29 and 31 (Kids & Co., August and Kulick) were brand new homes built by John Eddy, a skilled carpenter. They were for sale for about \$6200. Buildings 35, 37, 39 and 41 did not exist.

There must have been some magic in the second-floor apartment of that old brooder house. Its first occupants, Betty and Roy Noble, became the parents of twins. Eve and

Bill Diefenderfer, its second tenants, also had twins. The next to live there were Luci and Dan Benson, and guess what... they had twins! 🐾

Spring '97 A Wet Success

by Tom Morganti

On May 18, friends of the Avon Land Trust took part in a hike at the recently acquired Wellner Conservation Area (WCA) off West Avon Road. Some weeks before, the Trail Committee had done a fine job of laying out an interesting and well-marked path. In the light drizzle, the old logging roads appeared green and mysterious, as they snaked through stands of pine and hemlock. The group surveyed



the damage done by the April Fool's Day storm, and was treated to the sight of several beautiful pink lady slipper flowers, as they left the beautiful 14 acre forest.

Maps of the WCA may be obtained by writing to the Land Trust at PO Box 267, Avon, CT 06001. 🐾

