

THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF NEW JERSEY

# OUTDOOR ISSUES

SUMMER 2021

## THE GRAY CUP RETURNS!



The Gray Cup, The Land Conservancy of New Jersey's biggest annual fundraiser, returned to the renowned golf course at Hamilton Farm on June 28 after a hiatus last year. It was exciting and satisfying to reunite with old friends and meet new ones, enjoying beautiful (if a little warm) weather and raising money to support our conservation work.

Eighty golfers assembled for a noon shotgun start, heading off in all directions. Some foursomes were seriously competitive, while others took a more casual approach, but everyone had fun out on the course. Riding a golf cart through the rolling hills and blooming flowers over the well manicured greens was a perfect way to spend an afternoon. One golfer came within inches of landing the nearly impossible hole-in-one challenge at the ninth hole. He was a good sport about just barely missing out on the \$40,000 prize.

Staff and golfers alike were relieved to come in from the heat for cooling drinks and a delicious dinner.

Guests mingled and perused the array of silent auction offerings. President David Epstein and Board Chair Andy Dietz said a few words about the critical projects that will be funded by the money raised by the Gray Cup, and trustee Rick Simon handed out awards.

At the end of the day, the event raised \$110,000 to support the Split Rock Mountain project and other land preservation efforts, and guests went home knowing they were supporting a good cause and having fun in the process.





## THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF NEW JERSEY

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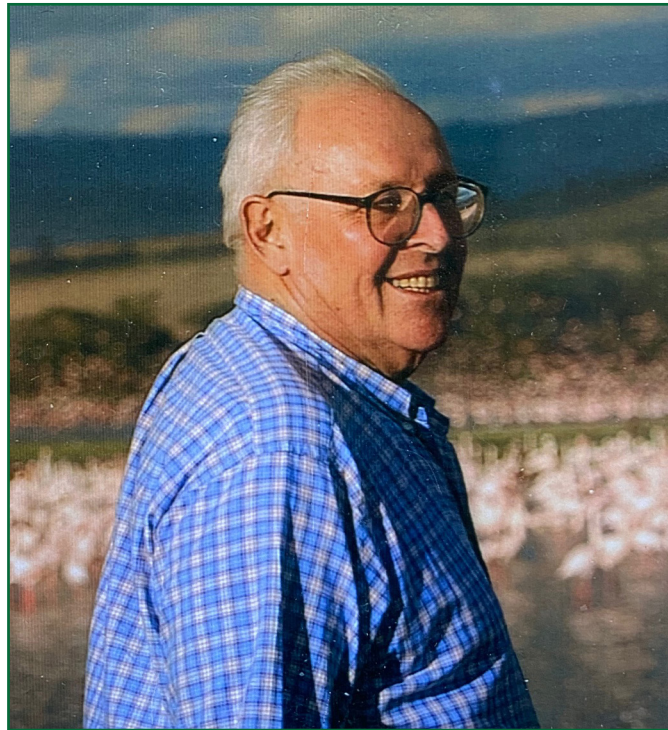
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## Remembering Jack Fritts

One of our biggest champions, Jack Fritts, passed away in May. A member of the Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft law firm in New York City for 60 years, he was also a founding member of the Food Bank for New York City. Jack served on The Land Conservancy's board for 17 years in many capacities, including Board Secretary and Chairman of the Board. He was a member of almost every board committee and an integral part of our 2002 capital campaign, which raised \$3 million for our Land Preservation Fund. His leadership was instrumental in our effort to become the first nationally accredited land trust in New Jersey.

Jack was also kind, self-effacing, and a fierce advocate for open space preservation. His warm personality, powerful intellect, and unparalleled dedication earned him the respect and admiration of every person in every room he entered.

Our president, David, had the good fortune to work closely with Jack Fritts for nearly two decades, and he proved a strong counselor who left an indelible mark on this organization. He will be missed.



# FROM MY PERSPECTIVE



*Gray Rogers*

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey lost one of our most beloved leaders when Gray Rogers passed away recently. I first met Gray at the Nautilus Diner in the late winter of 2000. He had just retired as co-founder and president of W.P. Stewart and was heading to Florida for two months of family, golf, and relaxation. When I asked if he would consider joining our board, Gray responded with a long series of questions and finally left, saying he would think about it.

I called Gray the day he got back and again asked him to join our board. Many years later he would tell me that he had been trying to decide between two different organizations, and he chose The Land Conservancy because we were the first to contact him. Little did we realize that Gray would completely transform this small county-based organization into a statewide land preservation powerhouse.

Gray's enthusiasm, dedication, and gracious manner were irrepressible; it was nearly impossible for people

to say no to him. He started out by putting up bluebird boxes at our office and cleaning them out each spring to prepare for new arrivals. When bears knocked down one for a quick meal, he put up two more in higher locations. When I came to the board with an idea to raise \$100,000 in capital funds to renovate a building for our new office, it was Gray who suggested a capital campaign instead to raise funds to purchase more land. This ballooned into our "Preserve Now–Protect Forever" campaign which raised an astonishing \$3.3 million and helped The Land Conservancy preserve 27,000 acres. And it was his challenge gift that allowed The Conservancy to double the scholarships we award to future environmental leaders in New Jersey each year.

Gray challenged each of us to follow his lead and do more to help save the New Jersey landscape he loved. He was a mentor to me and others, a good friend to all, and a great man. When Gray retired from The Land Conservancy's board after a decade of service, we began an annual event in his honor that combines golf and conservation, two of his favorite things. During this year's Gray Cup, a beautiful red-tailed hawk flew over the course all afternoon, and I couldn't help but think that Gray was watching out for us.

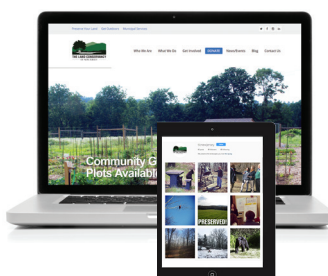
Though we are deeply saddened by his passing, Gray's memory will live on through the Gray Cup, the scholarships we present each year to bright young leaders, and the many people whose lives he touched. Gray Rogers was one of New Jersey's land conservation champions, and I was honored to know and work with him for nearly two decades. He left our state a far better place.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read "Carol Epstein".

## GET MORE FROM THE LAND CONSERVANCY

If you enjoy this newsletter, follow us on social media and sign up for our mailing list. You'll receive occasional dispatches from the field and learn about conservation issues, our preserves and programs, the people and organizations we partner with, and what we're working on in your area. You can also visit [tlc-nj.org](http://tlc-nj.org) to read our blog.



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# Saving Split Rock, Helping the Ramapough Lenape

As you reach the peak of Split Rock Mountain, a massive boulder comes into view, stopping you in your tracks. In the near distance the mountain's namesake, cast in sunlight, stands tall in a grassy clearing in the forest. A gift from the last ice age brought to the mountain by a glacier thousands of years ago, Split Rock is a little-known geological treasure, as well as a site of cultural significance for the Ramapough Lenape Nation.

The Land Conservancy aims to protect the mountain's many extraordinary geological features from encroaching development. We are collaborating in this effort with the Ramapough Lenape Indian Nation, whose members still live near the mountain and consider it sacred. Purchasing this land will also allow the completion of a 12-mile trail that begins with the historic Cannonball Trail in New Jersey and runs through the heavily forested mountains on the way to Harriman State Park in New York.

The Land Conservancy has been working with state and county governments, community organizations like MEVO (Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organization), the Ramapough themselves, and other groups to preserve Split Rock Mountain and set up a land trust to preserve this site forever. Recently, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation has given us their vote of confidence with a grant of \$100,000, along with a challenge to raise the rest.

A prejudice towards the Lenape has endured for more than a century and still adversely impacts their lives today, and we are doing our part to repair the damage. For decades Split Rock was used as an illegal dump—



in spite of the fact that it is the tribe's ancestral hunting grounds. We are organizing a series of cleanups in partnership with MEVO, rallying volunteers to remedy this problem. In addition, this fall we are hosting an event to help educate the community about the history of the Ramapough there, encouraging neighbors to meet and learn from each other.

There remains a lot of work to be done, but one way we can move forward together is by making this land available to the descendants of its first inhabitants—as we do for so many others.



# Meet Our 2021 Scholarship Winners

For 37 years, The Land Conservancy of New Jersey has been awarding scholarships to New Jersey residents pursuing degrees in environmental science, natural resource management, park administration, conservation, and related fields. This program rewards environmental scholars who plan to pursue careers protecting the natural resources of their home state.

Thanks to a generous gift from the Rochkind-Wagner Foundation, we will be able to double the number of scholarships awarded for the next three years. This means four winners were selected to receive scholarships of \$7,500 each this year. Let's meet the cream of the crop!



**DANIELLE DYSON**  
*Rogers Family Scholarship*

Danielle is a senior at Stockton University finishing up a double major in marine science and environmental science. She is interested in conserving ecosystems and natural

resources, and she has her eye on a master's degree in conservation biology.

Danielle says, "This scholarship means the world to me. Not only does it lift some financial burden from myself and my family, but also it ensures that I will be able to graduate this year and continue down the path to achieving my dreams."



**ANDREIA RESENDE**  
*Rochkind-Wagner Scholarship*

Andreia is currently in her final semester at Montclair State, where she is training to become a biology teacher while interning at the School of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics in Paterson.

She was born in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and grew up in Newark, NJ. Andreia aspires to be a teacher because she believes that every student deserves to be encouraged and become excited and eager to learn. Just as her biology teacher planted a seed of hope and confidence in her, so will she strive to instill those foundations.



**KENNETH HAMEL**  
*Russell Myers Scholarship*

Ken is a graduate student in the marine biology program at Montclair State. He is interested in marine and freshwater ecosystems, human impacts, and environmental policy and protection. He has

done research with the New Jersey Center for Water Science and Technology studying water quality. The focus of his graduate research is how purple sea urchins respond to increased algal turf encroachment in kelp forests as a response to extreme warming events, which could help predict shifts in these ecosystems.



**JULIA GALAYDA**  
*Rochkind-Wagner Scholarship*

Julia's work doing site remediation for the NJDEP, as well as her childhood spent at the beach, sparked an interest in environmental management and policy, and now Julia is pursuing a master's degree at American Military University. She wants to remain at the

DEP but shift to policy making and implementation, ensuring that her home state is preserved for future generations. She wants her own children to be able to enjoy the experiences she did, so she set out to make a difference.

# Restoring Connections with Community Events

## PLANTING FOR POLLINATORS

In May we planted 1,000 seedlings in the pollinator meadow at South Branch Preserve with the help of some terrific volunteers. This work is important because native pollinator populations such as bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies are rapidly dwindling across the country due to disappearing habitats and a decline in vital food sources. It wasn't easy work, but the sun was shining, and there was good company, and we got to be outside with our hands in the dirt. The seedlings are growing strong and healthy so far.



## HIKING THE WEST BROOK

In June we explored the West Brook with our resident wetlands scientist Linda Glosinski, who led a great group of folks to discover creatures and plants in our Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve. We also got to check on the progress of the major stream restoration we finished last year. We followed the newly blazed trails and talked about how much the landscape has changed for the better. Coffee and doughnuts were served, and there was a trout-themed craft for kids to take home. A great time was had by all!

## REVIVING THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT

In July we learned about the importance of the American chestnut tree to wildlife, humans, and the ecosystem in our region. Our partners at Antinanco have a deep knowledge of chestnut trees and are spearheading an effort to re-establish them in the wild. They shared their experience and tips for growing, we checked on the young chestnut forest, and every participant took home a chestnut seedling. Plus everyone enjoyed homemade chestnut cookies!







# BACK TO THE LAND

Every day The Land Conservancy is working quietly and diligently to fulfill our core mission: preserving land for the public good. In the last few months we've finalized the purchase of a number of properties. These three are the most notable.

Two important farms have been preserved in Warren County's agricultural Frelinghuysen Township. The first, Murlan Farm, was on track to become a residential subdivision, but we fought alongside our partners for years to keep it undeveloped—and finally succeeded. In 2003 Frelinghuysen's mayor convinced local landowner Rick Murphy to buy Murlan Farm, and he held on to the 224 acres to prevent it from being developed. But that wasn't a permanent solution, and now we have finally put the pieces in place to formally preserve Murlan Farm, with the help of the SADC and Warren County.

We were also able to secure Hidden Woods Farm. These 100 acres of rolling hills used to operate as Camp Wasigan, a beloved summer camp that was shuttered in the 1950s. In 2014, Danny and Siobhan Rogers bought the property and transformed it into Hidden Woods Farm, where they now sell organically raised heritage beef, pork, chicken, and lamb out of a shop in their own barn on Silver Lake Road. It's been the Rogers' lifelong dream to own a farm, and Danny's enthusiasm is obvious.

The Land Conservancy has preserved 7,330 acres of farmland over the last 24 years, and each new farm is still satisfying, especially as western New Jersey continues to lose productive farms.

Our preserves continue to grow as well. We recently purchased 43 acres in West Milford to add to our Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve, bringing the total to 241 acres. This new property contains a pond and waterways that feed the West Brook, which in turn flows into the Wanaque Reservoir. The newly acquired land has been seriously impacted by man-made changes to the landscape over the years, and it will require significant remediation. These efforts will build on the work we've done so far in this area, improving the ecosystem for resident plants and animals, protecting the wetlands from further degradation, and making them more resilient to flooding and drought. Ultimately, the goal is to improve the quality and lower the temperature of the water, while also establishing a short trail and a wildlife blind for visitors to enjoy.





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## Celebrating 40 Years

Forty years ago, our organization opened its doors as the Morris County Parks and Conservation Foundation. The brainchild of Russell W. Meyers, the first director of the Morris County Park Commission, our original mission was to advocate for land preservation in Morris County. Quickly we built momentum, and the scope of our work broadened. In 2008 we rebranded as The Land Conservancy of New Jersey.

We have grown from a tiny, hyperlocal land trust to one whose works spans the entire state of New Jersey. We work with municipalities and landowners, tribal elders and regional nonprofit networks, community organizations and organic farms. We are committed to bringing diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice to conservation. We're proud of our accomplishments, but we still have a long way to go. So glad you're along for the ride!

