



Kiosks show the way

You may have noticed new kiosks popping up around town like mushrooms after an autumn rain.

The kiosks are the result of a generous grant to Rural Lands from the Williamstown Community Chest's Flynt fund in partnership with the Town of Williamstown. The kiosks are located along major roads so residents and visitors can easily recognize them as jumping off points for hiking adventures. They're now stationed at Bloedel Park at Five Corners, near the RRR Brooks Trail below Petersburg Pass, Pine Cobble, Bee Hill Road, and beyond.

The kiosks seem symbolic of 2020.

Feeling lost after a challenging year, the kiosks serve as hopeful guideposts to the route ahead. They represent a place to get our bearings, to chart our journey forward, to go deeper into the woods seeking solitude, and solace, and inspiration.

I'm pleased that Rural Lands was able to keep all of its properties open this year. And, in a stroke of luck, we hired Dan Gura to be our Lands and Trails Coordinator last January. Without a trail crew, Dan singlehandedly kept our trails cleared and maintained this summer. He also built the kiosks and painstakingly reviewed the maps for accuracy. The maps are currently headed to the printer and will be

posted on the kiosks in early 2021.

Since Nathaniel's Owl Prowl last February, we have been unable to gather with you in person. Instead, we connected via Kathy Chesney's Woodchuck Wednesdays Wherever lessons, and hike descriptions from revolving authors on our Trails Committee. Look for similar dispatches this winter, followed by the return of our children's nature programs, lectures, and guided hikes next year.

Until then, orient yourself at a new kiosk, and seek the restorative power found in the woods.

- Executive Director David McGowan

Sheep Hill 20 years later

This November marked twenty years since the Williamstown Rural Lands acquired the Rosenberg family's Sunnybrook Farm after a 7-year effort to preserve the historic and scenic landscape. Twenty years is a blink in the time continuum of perpetual conservation, but during those years the property, now known as Sheep Hill and under WRLF ownership, has become tightly woven into the fabric of our community.

In the almost 2 decades since WRLF moved its headquarters to Sheep Hill, it has become a destination for outdoor recreation, enjoyment of nature in all seasons, the town's best sledding hill, and a place to discuss current critical issues. The restored 200-year old barns give insight into the farm's working past and the unique history of their construction. Hundreds of children from local elementary schools have experienced natural and cultural history during field trips and popular afterschool and summer programs.

From a land conservation perspective, Sheep Hill is also a key property link in a corridor of preserved land extending from Stone Hill to the Taconic Crest. It is possible to park at the farmhouse and hike to Petersburg Pass in New York State entirely on public conservation land.

We are grateful for the many people who contributed



to the initial campaign to purchase the property, and the hundreds of hours of volunteer labor that have made Sheep Hill one of Williamstown's most scenic and special places. There is no doubt that experiences at Sheep Hill continue to delight many.

I recently asked one former Wednesday Woodchuck what her favorite memory of her time at Sheep Hill was. She thought for a moment and answered "the popcorn!" Yes. Well. I am certain that there is a deeper, lasting impact which she will carry with her for the next 20 years. That is what Sheep Hill can offer now, and forever.

- Former Executive Director Leslie Reed-Evans



A fond farewell

Kathy Chesney will be retiring as lead educator for children's programs and Education Programs Coordinator for WRL at the end of 2020. Her positive impact on children's education in our area began in 1977, and in 2010 she joined in WRL's education activities providing weeklong day programs such as her popular summer Jr. Naturalist series. She brought her tremendous enthusiasm to our vacation and after-school programs and provided meaningful field trip experiences for hundreds of

area school children.

Her passion for education is perhaps best described by Elizabeth Smith, co-creator with Kathy of Camp Rootabaga at Caretaker Farm in 1978 under the auspices of the Children's Museum: "It was at Camp Rootabaga that I began to appreciate Kathy's infectious enthusiasm for all things wild and wonderful in the world around her. Her unbridled energy and gift to engage children's curiosity in the natural environment has touched the lives of so many children over the

past 43 years, giving them memories and experiences that will remain with them forever." We couldn't agree more!

One of the many things we will miss about Kathy is her lively, heartfelt laugh that seems to embody her inner joy, a joy that has fueled her commitment to children, to sharing and teaching her keen knowledge of the world. Kathy, we thank you deeply and wish you well.

- Assistant Director Cathy Talarico

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