

# Vistas

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Spring 2005

## Albany County Land Conservancy Annual Report

2004 was a year for introspection, strengthening and growth for the Albany County Land Conservancy.

The Board began the year by revising the Strategic and Action Plans and creating a Fund Development Plan.

The **New Strategic Plan** sets the following goals:

1. The Conservancy "will maintain its primary focus on land preservation, achieving its goals through a combination of land acquisition activities and community outreach."
2. To accomplish this, the Conservancy will "develop partnerships at multiple levels to assist proactive efforts with local government, community groups, individual landowners and land developers to preserve open space."
3. The Conservancy will "operate in a broad target area that extends beyond the boundaries of Albany County."
4. The Conservancy will "be supported by a strong organizational structure that includes an expanded membership base, paid staff and designated office space."

**The Normanskill Preserve.** The Conservancy acquired one new preserve this year, a very important one on the Normanskill, directly across from the City of Albany's Stevens Farm. This property was a gift from Albany County, which has become an important partner in preserving significant parcels. This is the third gift of "tax delinquent" land; previous gifts were the entrance to Onesquethaw Cave, and a ten-acre addition to our Winn Preserve.

To let people see the new Normanskill Preserve (which is not yet open to the public) we held a joint outing with the Friends of Normanskill Farm. Their trail along the Albany side of the Normanskill allows you to see the full extent of our new Preserve. We will continue to work with Friends of Normanskill Farm and the City of Albany on joint projects, such as linking our trail systems.



Outing across from our Normanskill Preserve

**Rail/Trail.** Albany County is also working to acquire the abandoned former D&H railway. They plan to convert the railway to a hiking/biking trail. In applying for a grant to build the trail, the County asked the Conservancy for a statement of commitment of fund raising and in-kind contribution, and a letter of support for the proposal. The Conservancy agreed and provided a letter of support and a commitment to raise \$50,000 over three years once the County acquires the railway.

**In the Mohawk Valley.** The Conservancy already owns one preserve in Montgomery County, our Schoharie Creek Preserve, and we have been working on acquiring several easements in Wolf Hollow in Schenectady County. We have also been approached by a landowner in Amsterdam with the offer of a gift of land, and a landowner in Cranes Hollow has offered an easement.

The Board decided to create a Mohawk Valley Committee to pursue these opportunities. The Committee has already formed a Neighbors Committee for the Schoharie Creek Preserve; it is working on the Wolf Hollow easements; and it is completing work on the proposed Amsterdam acquisition with the help of a group of interested neighbors.

An important partner in the Mohawk Valley is the Environmental Clearinghouse of Schenectady (ECOS). ECOS is the organization that publishes *Natural Areas of Albany County*, which describes about 60 natural areas in the County. The Conservancy provided a no-interest loan of \$5000.00 to support ECOS's publication of a new edition of the book. The new edition has maps of most ACLC preserves, and includes a tear-out ACLC membership form.

**Tri-Village Greenway.** With the addition of the Normanskill Preserve, the Conservancy now has three preserves in the Delmar area. Examining the path of the D&H railway, it became clear that it would be possible to link our preserves with the Town of Bethlehem's parks and the State of New York's Five-Rivers Environmental Education Center, creating a greenway around the Tri-Village area of Slingerlands, Elsmere and Delmar.

We met with Bethlehem Supervisor Terry Egan to introduce her to the ACLC, our preserves in the Town of Bethlehem, and the concept of a Tri-Village Greenway. As a result, the concept has been incorporated into the Town's draft Comprehensive Plan. We announced the idea of the Greenway to the community through a series of articles and letters in local newspapers.

The Conservancy also created our new Tri-Village Greenway Committee; the Committee will steward our preserves in the area, work on the rail/trail conversion after acquisition of the D&H trackbed by the County, and develop the Greenway. The Committee has already created a trail system in our Phillipinkill Preserve; that Preserve is now open to the public (with signage provided by the Mansions at Delmar). A tour of the Phillipinkill Preserve was a feature of the 2004 Bird Fest and Wetland Fest held at Five-Rivers on September 18.

Since the Greenway will include a link to Five-Rivers, we have also developed a partnership with The State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Open Space Institute and the Friends of Five-Rivers. We are working jointly with those organizations (and the Town) on the section of the Greenway that will link our Phillipinkill Preserve to Five-Rivers and the D&H railway.

**The Fund Development Plan.** At this moment we own twelve preserves and one easement, and we steward a second easement under contract with the Open Space Institute. More than fifty volunteers help with this work. As we expand our influence, we expand our responsibilities. It is critical that the Conservancy become a professionally staffed organization.

The Fund Development Plan, adopted by the Board in November, addresses the need for staff. The Plan anticipates hiring a full time executive director and a part

time administrative assistant in 2005. During the last two years the Conservancy has set money aside in anticipation of hiring staff. In December the Conservancy applied to the Land Trust Alliance for a staffing grant. Our application was successful. The grant is funded by the New York State Conservation Partnership Program. By the time you receive this annual report edition of *Vistas*, the LTA will have held its press conference announcing the award (on May 10). Your Land Conservancy will be a professionally staffed organization within a few months.

The Fund Development Plan recognizes that the Conservancy's annual income must increase substantially over the next several years if we are to have permanent staff. The Plan therefore depends on an increase in our membership, an increase in revenues from the annual gala, a new annual fundraiser and a new campaign for operations.



Arriving at the Wemp Barn for the Gala

**Our 2004 annual Gala** was held in September at Carl and Nancy Touhey's Wemp Barn, on the banks of the Onesquethaw Creek, in the center of the Onesquethaw Valley Historic District. Gala revenues were up by over 10% this year. We will work to continue increasing revenues from the annual Gala. In addition, we plan to develop a new annual spring fundraiser, an event that will permit a larger number of people to participate; this could be a lecture, art/craft show, picnic, outdoor concert, hike-a-thon, or some other event of general interest.

**Membership.** In 2004, membership increased from 213 to 260, an increase of 22%. The Fund Development Plan calls for an increase of 100 members in each of the next five years. To achieve that increase, we have switched to an on-line (internet) development database, eTapestry. The new database is tailored to the needs of not-for-profit organizations and will allow us to provide better service to our members. To improve communications we are replacing the eight-page ACLC newsletter, known as "*Vistas*," with a four-page

newsletter that is being sent out quarterly under the name "ViewPoints." Vistas will be retained as the format for the annual report. The first "annual report" Vistas was handed out at the 2004 Annual Meeting, held at the Olde Shaker Inn, near our Ashford Glen Preserve.

We have also initiated a series of in-home meetings, called Gatherings, to introduce the Conservancy to more people. The purpose of these "friend-raisers" is to interest people in joining the Conservancy and becoming volunteers. Prospective hosts are given a "Gatherings Kit" which provides notes, background and dialog to assist in conducting these events. Each Gathering is attended by at least two Board members, who are given prepared "talking points." Five Gatherings were held in 2004.

Daniel A. Driscoll, President

### Annual Financial Report

Your Conservancy had a total income in 2004 of \$72,096. This includes \$21,655 in land, bequests and restricted income, \$24,204 in dues and member appeals, \$19,125 from the Gala and \$7,112 from grants, interest, program fees and miscellaneous sales. Membership at the end of 2004 was 260. Expenditures for 2004 were \$27,443. This includes \$13,419 for operations, \$381 for stewardship, \$6463 fundraising expense, and \$7180 for consulting, accounting, and other services expenses. This results in a net Income of \$44,653 including gifts of land. Excluding land the net Income was \$21,598.

At the end of 2004, the Conservancy's land holdings were valued at \$1,566,813. The Operating Fund was \$127,431. The Stewardship Fund (pooled endowments for the preserves) was \$86,733; the Stewardship Fund's principal is retained for legal defense while interest may be used for stewardship. The Carol Knox Strategic Acquisitions Fund was \$34,923. Unspent restricted grants (most to be used for land transactions) totaled \$41,150. Copies of the complete Annual Financial Report are available on request.

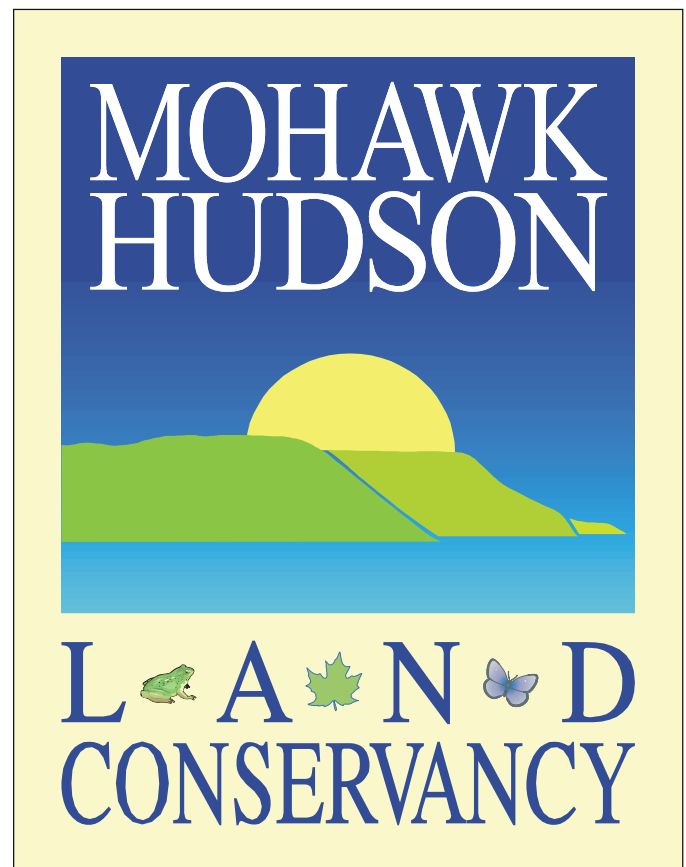
### We're Changing Our Name

The next time *ViewPoints* arrives in your mail you'll see that we have become the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy. What's in this new name? Quite a bit. It now will refer to our growing efforts in the Mohawk Valley and our roots in the Capital District at the confluence of the rivers.

As we reported last month, the Conservancy has been involved beyond the boundaries of Albany County for some time. The Schoharie Creek Preserve in

Montgomery County was acquired in 1998. MHLC's new Mohawk Valley Committee is working now with a number of landowners to acquire other properties in Schenectady and Montgomery counties, including a preserve in Amsterdam and easements in Cranes Hollow and Wolf Hollow.

Looking west we see scenic vistas, farmland, and wildlife habitat, a rich variety of land in the Mohawk watershed. While other land trusts operate in the Catskills and Adirondacks, many natural resources in the Mohawk Valley, resources critical to protecting water quality, remain unprotected. The MHLC Board thought it wise to move quickly.



**Our New Logo.** We want the name change to be as easy as possible. For that reason, the new logo, above, looks very much like the old one – to capitalize on the familiarity of the old logo. The mountain range in the new logo now represents, not only the Helderberg Escarpment, which is visible from both the Mohawk and Hudson, but the landforms along those rivers. The new web site address will be [www.mohawkhudson.org](http://www.mohawkhudson.org), but if you forget to change your bookmark the old one will work for a while.

The change will become official by May 31, 2005. Our mission – protecting the natural and cultural resources in the Mohawk Hudson region – is ongoing.



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**Won't you please join us?**

*Your Support is crucial to our efforts to preserve the Capital Region's natural & scenic resources: scenic vistas, farmland, open space, and wildlife.*

- Friend ..... \$1,000
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- Please send me more information about land conservation options available.
- I would like to host a Friend-raiser Gathering.
- I would like to be a Conservancy volunteer.
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*All contributions to the ACLC, Inc. are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law.*