

# THE WREN



SUDBURY  
VALLEY  
TRUSTEES

November 2014

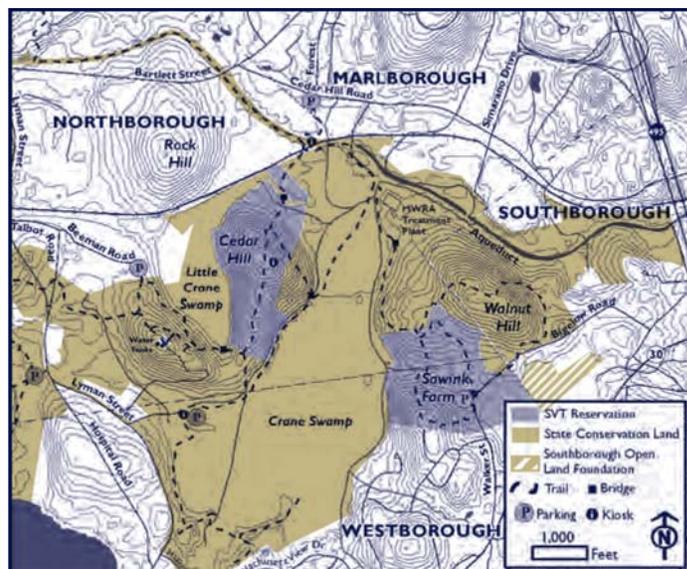
## *Enjoy a Hike on Our 'Borough Trails*



SVT

Crane Swamp Regional Trails, which sit at the intersection of our four 'borough towns, offer a great diversity of habitats and topography for the adventurous hiker. From the parking lot in Marlborough, the climb up the north side of Cedar Hill is quite steep, but you will be rewarded for your effort with an expansive southern view. Here, you can also observe habitat restoration in action. SVT is restoring shrubland habitat for bird species whose populations have been declining. While we still have a lot of work to do to control invasive plants at the site, we have seen a positive response from the birds: We have observed Eastern towhee, blue-winged warbler, prairie warbler, and indigo bunting during the breeding season.

Walk south along the trail past the shrublands and you enter a beautiful, mature forest owned by MassWildlife (the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife). You can then walk around the connector trail, passing red maple swamp and the MWRA water treatment plant before entering young forest on the eastern side of the swamp. You will enter the hilly forests of Sawink Farm a couple of miles from your starting point. You could also opt to take the new Walnut Hill connecting trail over to Southborough.



*Volunteers improved the Walnut Hill Trail in Southborough during a recent work day.*

*You can access the Cedar Hill portion of the Crane Swamp Regional Trails from a parking lot at 360 Cedar Hill Street in Marlborough.*

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Sherrill Cline**, Sudbury, *President*  
**Deirdre Menoyo**, Sudbury, *Vice President*  
**Bruce Osterling**, Sudbury, *Treasurer*  
**Peter Martin**, Northborough, *Clerk*  
Colin Anderson, Sudbury  
Brian Clew, Framingham  
Marylynn Gentry, Wayland  
Chris Jenny, Wayland  
Robert Kamen, Sudbury  
Andrew Magee, Acton  
Arthur Milliken, Concord  
Karin Paquin, Marlborough  
Richard Perkins, Snow  
Iryna Priester, Wayland  
Lisa Valone, Wayland  
Stephen Winthrop, Wayland

## STAFF

**Lisa Vernegaard**  
*Executive Director*  
**Alicia Coleman**  
*AmeriCorps Member*  
**Christa Hawryluk Collins**  
*Director of Land Protection*  
**Ashley Davies**  
*Land Protection Specialist*  
**Jesse Koyen**  
*AmeriCorps Member*  
**Laura Mattei**  
*Director of Stewardship*  
**Debbie Pullen**  
*Development Assistant*  
**Michael Sanders**  
*Director of Membership*  
**Deborah Sargent**  
*Office Manager*  
**Dan Stimson**  
*Assistant Director of Stewardship*  
**Kate Tyrrell**  
*Business Manager*  
**Chris Wilson**  
*Caretaker*  
*The Wren*  
**Deborah Sargent**, *Editor*  
**Jason Fairchild**, *Truesdale Group, Designer*

Sudbury Valley Trustees  
18 Wolbach Road  
Sudbury, MA 01776  
Tel: 978/443-5588 • Fax: 978/443-2333  
E-mail: svt@svtweb.org  
Website: www.svtweb.org



## NOTES FROM LISA

Not long ago, I was gently awakened from my late-night slumber by a mid-night symphony. First came the violins: katydids chirping, tree frogs trilling. Then, the woodwinds—the alto, tremolo trill of a nearby screech owl. Then, on some cue from an invisible conductor, the tenor duet of a pair of barred owls, no doubt hanging out in the canopy of the more distant dense woodlands. Finally, as if nature’s composer realized something was missing, in came the bassline: the deep sonorous hooting of a great horned owl.

And so, with this private symphony, I marveled at my good fortune in living and working in a region that still provides habitat for such a wonderful orchestra of animals. Sure, as solos, any of the owls sound terrific. But, when combined in a symphony...well, that’s the joyful sound of a healthy, diverse system.

It’s in great part because of your support and volunteerism that our region can be home to this symphony of animals. In this issue of *The Wren*, you’ll read more stories of how our members, volunteers, and partners are enabling SVT to continue to make progress in protecting and caring for natural areas for wildlife and people. At the western edge of our region, the Brissette family of Boylston is making plans to permanently protect more than 50 acres of woodland, adding to a 6,000-acre network of protected open space that provides habitat for animals such as bobcat and includes a varied trail network for hikers and naturalists. At our Sudbury headquarters, two MassLIFT AmeriCorps members are working to expand our volunteer program and increase our capacity for land protection and stewardship. And through our annual Pumpkin Patch Halloween event, we hope we inspired a new generation of conservationists who will continue our efforts into the future.

As we approach this season of thanks, and on behalf of the owls, I want to thank all of you for making these stories possible. If you’d like, please join me on Thanksgiving morning for a “Give Thanks for the Land” hike that will explore the Mt. Pisgah Conservation Area (see page 8 for details). In addition to providing an opportunity to appreciate nature’s bounty, this hike will also be a great way to work up an appetite for an afternoon of feasting!

See you on the trail,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa".

Lisa Vernegaard  
Executive Director



David Griffin

# Desire for energy independence leads to conservation effort

Deborah Sargent, Office Manager

Thanks to the energy crisis of the 1970s, SVT now stands poised to acquire more than 50 acres of land on the western edge of our watershed.

“Our commitment to wood heat was sort of a reaction to the Arab oil embargo,” said Fran Brissette, as we sat in the house he and his wife, Pat, have shared for the past 29 years in Wrack Meadow Woods in Boylston. While the Brissettes have enjoyed the recreational opportunities their property affords, they initially bought the land as a source of wood for heating their home. Recently, the couple agreed to sell what may be as many as 55 acres of their property to SVT (a survey is underway to determine the exact acreage), keeping just over three acres for their home and their own use.

The Brissettes moved to Boylston from Winstead, Connecticut, in the late 1970s, when Fran got a job in Westborough. But it was while living in Connecticut that the couple resolved to rely upon renewable energy sources.

“1973 was a key year,” said Fran. “That was the first Arab oil embargo. We decided that it was just outrageous that we could be blackmailed by our inability to control ourselves and our energy consumption. So we started heating with wood around 1974, and we have been heating with wood ever since.”

When shopping for a home near Westborough, the Brissettes “were looking for a place where we could harvest wood,” explained Fran. They found a house in the main part of Boylston and purchased a woodlot on the outskirts. In 1985, they built a house on the woodlot and moved their young family to this beautiful property.

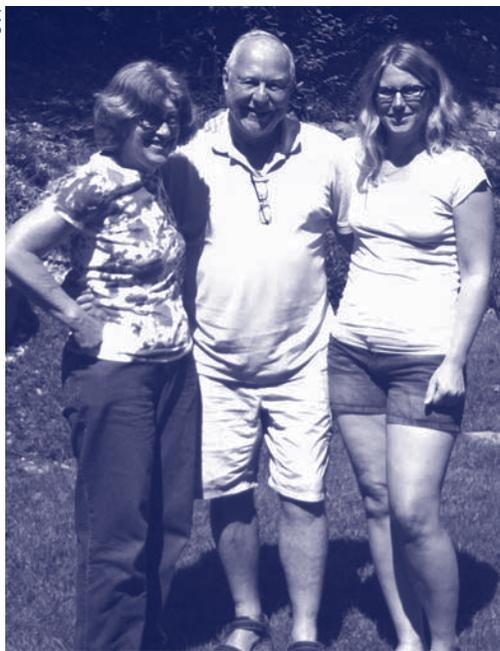
## Enjoying the Land

Of course, the Brissettes value the land for more than its energy potential. “We just have always been involved with outdoor recreation,” said Pat.

The Brissettes’ daughter, Aria, who was visiting from her home in Vermont, sat down to join our conversation and chimed in. “We always hiked out to the marshy areas, where it’s like a meadow in the middle of nowhere. In the winter it would be frozen and we would slide around out there.” She added, “Back before electronics, we spent a lot of time in the woods.”

The family mentioned wild animals they have seen on their land: deer, snapping turtles, and fisher. A neighbor has reported seeing a bear, and about 7 years ago, a bobcat walked through.

The surrounding area, like much of MetroWest, has undergone a tremendous amount of development since the 1980s. Aria explained



Pat (left) and Fran Brissette and their daughter, Aria, have used their property in Wrack Meadow Woods in Boylston as a source of fuel and as a recreation area. SVT is working to acquire more than 50 acres of the land as part of the Tri-Town Landscape Partnership project.

that when the family built their house, the surrounding land was sparsely populated, and nearby Smith Road was a dirt road that dead-ended not far away. Now, it is a paved road lined with houses and extends into Berlin.

Aria, who inherited her parents’ love of nature, played a role in their decision to conserve their land. She works in environmental education in northern Vermont, but during a previous job at the National Seashore on Cape Cod she had a colleague who was creating open-space plans. “So I encouraged these guys [her parents] to look into deeding their property in perpetuity.”

About the decision to conserve their property, Pat said, “We have always forested and we put it in Chapter 61 initially to keep it natural.” She continued, “We had 5- and 10-year plans. But a lot of it couldn’t be forested because it’s swamp.”

“We always wanted to keep the land, anyway. It wasn’t like it was an economic revenue generator,” said Fran. “But the idea was it was nice to be able to create

oxygen and help animals. We were able to enjoy the benefits of that, and I think as we’ve gotten older, we thought it would be nice if we could figure out a way not to have to redo the management plan every five years.”

## Working with SVT

The Brissettes first encountered SVT in 2012 during a reception for the abutting Eager Woods property in Berlin, where the couple struck up a conversation with Christa Collins, SVT’s Director of Land Protection. SVT now has the Brissette property under option and is doing the necessary due diligence, hoping to close the sale by the late winter of 2015.

Because the Brissettes have agreed to sell the property for less-than-fair market value, the land becomes more affordable for SVT, and the family will benefit from the state’s conservation land tax credit. Pat pointed out that with the addition of trails, the Brissette land will be a valuable resource for recreation.

The Brissette acquisition is part of a much larger land protection effort, the Tri-Town Landscape Partnership project in Berlin, Boylston, and Northborough, through which SVT is working to conserve more than 500 contiguous acres in the Mt. Pisgah area ([www.svtweb.org/tri-town](http://www.svtweb.org/tri-town)). Once the purchase is final, SVT will need to grant a Conservation Restriction (CR) to another conservation entity to satisfy state grant requirements. And with a CR that permits forest management, the land will continue to provide a renewable energy source, just as the Brissettes intended all along.

# LONG-PLANNED SANCTUARY OPENS IN BOYLSTON

Dan Stimson, Assistant Director of Stewardship

Several years ago, Shalin Liu had a vision for creating a community wildlife sanctuary and set out to find the ideal site for the project. SVT began working with Shalin and helped her purchase a wooded piece of land off Linden Street in Boylston in our Mt. Pisgah priority area.

I'm excited to report that this vision has become a reality. Shalin purchased the necessary land in 2010 and has created the Summer Star Wildlife Sanctuary in the heart of the Tri-Town Land Protection region. A beautiful new nature center opened its doors in September and stands as a welcoming point for visitors to the property, which was once very close to becoming a 32-lot subdivision. This Trailhead House has been designed to celebrate nature and was built in a sustainable way, with the goal of truly fitting into the land that surrounds it. The building sits amid wildlife and rain gardens and is even capped off with a rooftop earth garden. Inside, visitors can find the Linden Street Gallery, featuring up to four exhibits each year that will celebrate humans' connectedness to the natural environment.

In addition to working with SVT, the Sanctuary is also collaborating with Mass Audubon and the Cummings School of



A crew from Student Conservation Association Massachusetts AmeriCorps helped build the trail off Linden Street in Boylston.

trails, one a short wide path with gentle slopes and a flat surface made of engineered wood fiber, and the other, a more winding single-width path reaching out to the perimeter of the sanctuary. There's also a fun little spur that leads to a flat rock overlooking a beautiful section of Wrack Meadow Brook. In all there are 1.5 miles of new trail to explore on the property, with the potential to connect to adjacent open space in the future.

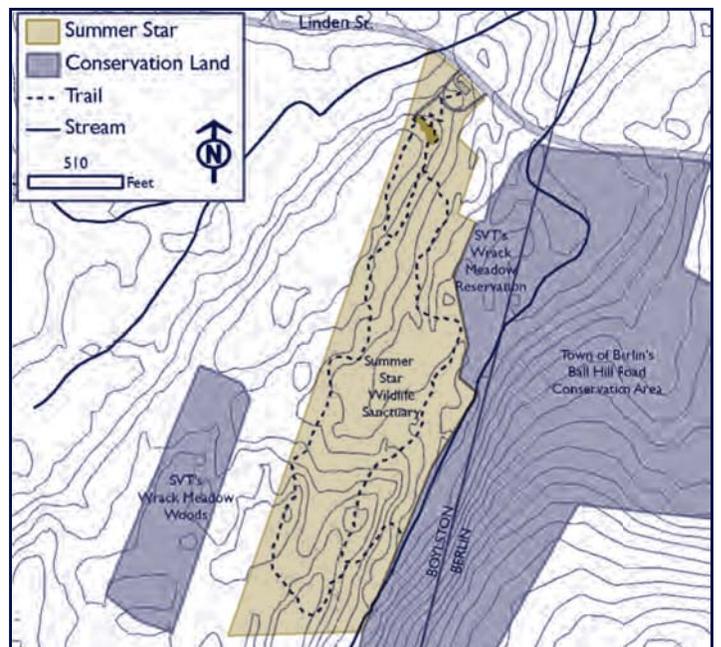
On behalf of Shalin and the Summer Star Wildlife Sanctuary, we'd like to welcome you to explore this new asset to the community. The Trailhead House is open 11:00 am to 3:00 pm, Saturdays through Tuesdays, and the trails are open down to dusk on those days.



The new trail passes along a short section of stone wall in the forest. SVT's Wrack Meadow Reservation lies on the other side of the wall.

Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University to provide programs for visitors. The Sanctuary will feature live video from the Tufts Healing Cage, as well as occasional releases of healed wildlife. The Trailhead House will also be the gathering point for free outdoor tours and talks.

Since the land purchase, SVT's Stewardship department has been working closely with Shalin to create a management plan for Summer Star, guiding land management decision-making for the majority of the property into the future. Shalin also asked SVT to guide the planning and construction of a hiking trail on the parcel. Through this process, I've had the pleasure of walking the land in all seasons, getting to know some of its secrets and finding the best spots to highlight for future visitors. The result is a pair of loop



The Summer Star Wildlife Sanctuary, nestled in the heart of the Tri-Town Land Protection area, offers a hiking trail as well as a nature center with various programs planned for the future. The address is 690 Linden Street in Boylston.

# ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

All photos: Simon Vos



Top left: Lee Steppacher with SVT's Christa Collins. Bottom left: Judy and Will Mack with SVT's Laura Mattei.

Top Center: Fred King and Laura Mattei. Top Right: Steve Tobin and Christa Collins. At Left: Judy Eneguess, David Morgan (son of Allen and Alice Morgan), SVT's Michael Sanders, and Barbara Earley.

During our Annual Meeting, held October 2 at our Wolbach Farm headquarters, the SVT staff had the honor of presenting awards to several outstanding volunteers and remarkable conservationists.

The ceremony began with the presentation of the Morgan Volunteer Award to two office volunteers: **Barbara Earley** and **Judy Eneguess**. Established to acknowledge the commitment that Allen and Alice Morgan made to SVT, this award recognizes members who have given unselfishly of their time, talents, and resources.

A retired social worker and teacher, Barbara started volunteering at SVT in 2008. Since then, she has been working in the office every Thursday, where her primary responsibilities include sending membership renewal letters, thank you letters, and invitations to events.

Judy began volunteering at SVT over five years ago, after a career that included stints as a computer programmer and a data manager. Each Wednesday, she uses her technical background to help with a variety of tasks, most notably keeping our member contact information up to date.

Next, **Steve Tobin** was presented with the Lewis Conservation Award, which is named in honor of SVT founder George Lewis and recognizes the efforts of those who toil to protect natural areas in our watershed. In addition to leading interpretive walks and performing hands-on trail work, Steve has shown a tireless dedication to conservation through his leadership of the Carlisle Conservation Foundation, where he played a major role in the conservation of SVT's newest property, the Elliott Concord River Preserve.

**Lee Steppacher**, who recently retired as the National Park Service's Project Coordinator for the Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild and Scenic River System, received the Distinguished Public Service Award, which goes to a public servant who has demonstrated exceptional leadership. For the past 13 years, Lee has been the heart and soul of the River Stewardship Council, which works to protect the 29-mile stretch of the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Rivers that have been designated as "Wild and Scenic."

The 2014 Steward of the Land Award went to **Fred King**. This award honors an SVT member who is a model land steward and who exemplifies respect for open space and dedication to ecological management. Fred has been an important player in land stewardship for the last 40 years. He worked as the conservation agent in the towns of Billerica and Wayland in the 1970s and 1980s, has served on the Maynard Conservation Commission since 1997, and was a founding member of SVT's Stewardship Committee in 1999.

The 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award, which recognizes an individual or couple who has made a significant contribution to our conservation efforts over an extended period of time, was presented to **Judy** and **Will Mack**. The Macks began volunteering as Preserve Stewards at SVT's Gray Reservation in Sudbury over 30 years ago and have continued to serve SVT in countless ways. Judy also worked part-time for SVT from 1984 to 2001, initially as the newsletter editor and then in a stewardship role. Since then, she has written and edited a myriad of documents for SVT, and Will has accepted a variety of roles, including mowing the fields at our Goff and Gray Reservations.

# Two AmeriCorps Members Join SVT's Conservation Efforts

On September 15, SVT welcomed two new AmeriCorps MassLIFT members to serve our land conservation community for the next eleven months. Jesse Koyen, from Washington Island, Wisconsin, is our Land Steward Coordinator, and Alicia Coleman, from Toms River, New Jersey, is serving as our Regional Conservation Coordinator.

Part of the national AmeriCorps program that engages more than 75,000 Americans in service at nonprofit organizations each year, MassLIFT (Massachusetts Land Initiative for Tomorrow) seeks to accelerate the pace of land protection across the Commonwealth. AmeriCorps MassLIFT members are paid a stipend to serve at a regional conservation organization and assist the staff on a range of projects.

Jesse and Alicia will support SVT's land protection and stewardship efforts and also work to improve our volunteer program. Together, they will coordinate the West Suburban Conservation Council—a consortium of local land trusts, conservation commissions, landowners, and students working on land conservation.

Having worked in a variety of family ecotourism businesses on a small island in Lake Michigan, Jesse's experience includes farming, fishing, landscaping, construction, and restaurant management. His love of the outdoors and working with people led him to earn a degree in Wildlife Ecology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He continued at UW-Madison in the geography department as a GIS (Geographic Information Systems) certificate student while also working in the Zuckerberg Climate Change Ecology Lab.

In his service with SVT, Jesse will be leading volunteer workdays and providing training in stewardship practices. He will likely work with our Membership department on a program to reach out to dog walkers on SVT properties.

"I'm excited to explore the regional ecosystems of the Concord, Assabet, and Sudbury water basin," Jesse said. "I look forward to assisting with the monitoring of SVT's current reservations and helping to educate the public about their importance."

For her part, Alicia Coleman comes to SVT with a Master's Degree from



Jesse Koyen (left) and Alicia Coleman began supporting SVT's programs in September.

the University of Pennsylvania in Environmental Studies. She is particularly interested in sustainable design, ecosystem services, climate adaptation, and the human dimensions of environmental challenges.

Using her skills in conservation planning and GIS, Alicia will identify new prospects for protection and project planning. She will also work with SVT and other land trust and municipal partners to organize community events and provide outreach to landowners. She will seek out opportunities for projects that promise to have a positive impact on the more densely populated areas of our region, such as community gardens, greenways, and pocket parks.

Said Alicia, "I am eager to learn about the multifaceted dynamic of local conservation efforts. I hope to acquire a new knowledge base in community outreach and planning efforts to better serve SVT this year."

## TRANSITIONS

**Nancy Hallen** retired from her position as SVT's Office Manager in June, a position she had held since 2008. In addition to keeping the office running smoothly, Nancy expertly coordinated the myriad details that led to the success of each year's Annual Benefit Gala and Circle of Friends luncheon. She also managed the production of *The Wren* and was an excellent proofreader for all written material. We greatly appreciate all she did for SVT.

Also retiring this summer was **Ellie Johnson**, our Development Assistant since 2010. In addition to processing membership renewals, Ellie produced our popular *Outdoors This Week* e-newsletter and coordinated our Activities Calendar. She also shepherded our successful application for Accredited Land Trust status in 2013, for which we owe her a debt of gratitude.

MassLIFT AmeriCorps member **Nick Olson**, who worked on land protection projects for SVT, completed his year of service in August and is now pursuing a Master's Degree at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

**Deborah Sargent**, who worked as a database manager for SVT last winter, has joined the staff full time as our Office Manager and editor of *The Wren*. The former managing editor of an engineering publication and website, Deborah has been a member of SVT for several years and is excited by this opportunity to take on new challenges in the conservation field.

We recently welcomed **Debbie Pullen** as our new Development Assistant. In addition to putting her own spin on the *Outdoors This Week* newsletter with a new Trail of the Week section, Debbie is also coordinating SVT's activities program, for which her responsibilities include writing press releases and communicating with attendees and event leaders.

# Become a Sustaining Member

**S**VT recently initiated a Sustaining Member program that makes it easier for you to demonstrate your commitment to land conservation and stewardship. Instead of renewing your membership annually in response to a reminder notice, you can use the Sustaining Member program to spread your gift throughout the year and offer continued support to SVT.

By enrolling in the program, you can choose to make a monthly or quarterly recurring gift directly from your checking account or credit card. This will simplify renewal for you and will have a positive impact on local open spaces and wildlife habitat. Of course, you can also use the Sustaining Member program to make an annual gift and ensure your SVT membership doesn't lapse.

*"...it's amazing how small, automatic monthly contributions can add up to a significant gift by year end."*

—Bob Anderson

What's the value of being a Sustaining Member? Bob Anderson, a former member of the Board of Directors for 25 years and now a Life Member offers his opinion: "I like giving this way because I can budget my total charitable contributions for the year, divide that amount by the number of charities, and then have 1/12th paid each month from my credit card, and at year end I've painlessly met my goal. And it's amazing how small,

automatic monthly contributions can add up to a significant gift by year end."

You can become a Sustaining Member at any time by setting up a recurring donation at [www.svtweb.org/donate](http://www.svtweb.org/donate). Alternatively, you can fill out and return the form that accompanies your next renewal notice.

## Pumpkin Patch Halloween Event

On Saturday, October 18, SVT hosted the fourth annual Pumpkin Patch Halloween event at Wolbach Farm in Sudbury. The nearly 300 people who attended enjoyed a festive atmosphere, despite the occasional rain shower. Special thanks go to our lead sponsor, TD Bank, and its representatives who handed out goodie bags to all the kids. We also want to thank Roche Bros./Sudbury Farms for a generous donation that enabled us to give every child a pumpkin, 115 in all.

Attendees participated in a variety of activities thanks to the efforts of several program hosts. Children created books out of recycled materials, played a xylophone and drums made from re-purposed materials, learned about bees and honey from a beekeeper, drew pictures with children's author and artist Gordon Morrison, and much more. There was also great music from two local bands, Milltown Rounders and The Pennies.

We're also grateful to the adults and students who helped throughout the day. Over 100 hours of volunteer community service were provided by students from Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, Wayland High School, Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, Sudbury Boy Scout Troop 63, and a very enthusiastic group from the Youth in Philanthropy program at the Foundation for MetroWest.



All photos: SVT





SUDBURY  
VALLEY  
TRUSTEES

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
HOLLISTON, MA  
PERMIT NO. 72

Wolbach Farm  
18 Wolbach Road  
Sudbury, MA 01776

 Printed with soy inks on recycled paper  
using 100% post-consumer waste.  
Printed with 100% wind power.

## Calendar of Events

Registration is required for all SVT events. Register online at [www.svtweb.org/events-calendar](http://www.svtweb.org/events-calendar) or call 978-443-5588.

**Tuesday, November 18, 7:00 to 8:30 pm.**

**Presentation: "The Return of Bald Eagles to Massachusetts,"  
Wolbach Farm, Sudbury**

Join Andrew Vitz, Ph.D., State Ornithologist, Mass. Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, as he discusses how the bald eagles were reintroduced to Massachusetts after having been extirpated from the state in the early 1900s. Members: Free; Non-Members: \$10.

**Thursday, November 27, 10:00 am to 12:00 noon.**

**Thanksgiving Day Walk at Mt. Pisgah, Northborough**

Give thanks for the land! Join Executive Director Lisa Vernegaard for a moderate-paced hike, exploring the three-mile trail network of the Mt. Pisgah Conservation Area. Meet at the parking lot on Smith Road, Northborough. Members: Free; Non-Members: \$10.

**Sunday, December 21, 7:00 to 8:00 am.**

**Winter Solstice Sunrise, Half Moon Meadow Brook, Boxborough**

On the shortest day of the year, view the winter solstice sunrise through the stone structures (allegedly Native American ceremonial stone structures) at Half Moon Meadow Brook. It's a beautiful way to start the winter. Leader: George Krusen, SVT Member. Members: Free; Non-Members: \$10.

**Winter Events Sign-Up List: Dates to be determined**

We hope to hold some impromptu winter outings such as snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, or tracking walks when snow and weather conditions are favorable. To be added to the e-mail notification list for these ad hoc events, sign up at [www.svtweb.org/events-calendar](http://www.svtweb.org/events-calendar). Members: Free; Non-Members: \$10.

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**Saturday,**  
**February 28**



**SVT's Annual Benefit**  
2015 Theme: *Beehive Jive*  
More details at [www.svtweb.org/benefit](http://www.svtweb.org/benefit)

Cocktails and  
Hors d'Oeuvres  
Dinner and Dancing  
Silent Auction