

The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. Newsletter



Preserving History and Nature at Valley Falls

www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org

Volume XXXIII Number II

FALL/WINTER 2024

Another Year, Another Wreath - Thanks to FFA Students!

For the third year in a row the agricultural students at Rockville High School have made it possible for the Friends to continue the tradition of hanging a big holiday wreath on the side of the stable at Valley Falls Farm. The wreath is large enough to be seen from Bolton Road, across the field.



Agricultural students at Rockville High proudly showoff the wreath they made for Valley Falls Farm.

their wreath would be seen by many admirers of the beautiful hillside scene at Valley Falls Farm!

The students' annual FFA Holiday Sale is held early in December in the Agricultural Science and Technology building at Rockville High. Handmade by students and staff, all of the sale items are created from agricultural

Creating this scenic holiday setting has been an annual undertaking by the Friends since the early 2000s, shortly after the organization purchased the property. However, as years passed, our long-time wreath-makers were no longer able to take on the task. We heard about the wonderful holiday arrangements that the students in the Agricultural Science and Technology (AST) department at Rockville High made for their annual holiday sale. We asked if they could make our very big wreath, and they accepted the challenge! We were thrilled, and so were they – especially since they learned that



Dave Turkington makes light work of hanging the wreath, with help from Bruce Dinnie.

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products such as fresh greens and birch twigs and are sold to benefit the local Future Farmers of America chapter. We provided the big wire frame for our wreath and the students did the rest, topping it off with a big red bow, ready to be hung by Friends volunteers.



Board members and volunteers with the wreath: Bob Letendre, Ann Letendre, Bruce Dinnie, Brian Dinnie, Mike Winkler, Nancy Steffens and Bob Felber.

We are very grateful to the AST students and to our volunteers for creating this piece of roadside holiday cheer for the community to enjoy. Recently enhanced by floodlights, it can also be seen at night from Bolton Rd. Drive by and experience a peaceful Zen moment! 🌿

A Holiday Toast from the Board of Directors

To our members and contributors, our volunteers and supporters, a toast to YOU! We wish you a season of peace, love and gratitude with family and friends. We thank you for being a part of our journey and helping us carry out our mission - preserving history and nature at Valley Falls. We accomplished a long list of tasks this year - it could not have been done without you. May your holidays be bright and your New Year shine with successes! 🌿

FRIENDS OF VALLEY FALLS BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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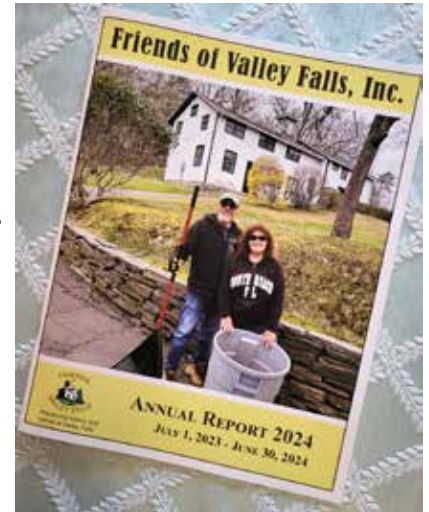
NEWSLETTER & PHOTOS

Nancy Steffens, Ann Letendre

Some Words From the Board of Directors

ANNUAL MEETING

Our September 29 Annual Meeting was enjoyed by about 25 attendees. The business meeting was followed by guest speakers who addressed the theme, "Wildlife in Our Backyards." Jane Seymour, Wildlife Biologist at the State of CT DEEP, gave the main talk on how the changing landscape in Connecticut impacts the diversity of insects, birds and mammals in our suburban and rural environments. Beekeeper Allen Valli provided an update on status of the five beehives at Valley Falls Farm and Sheryl McMullen's report on the success of the bluebird project at the Farm was provided to attendees.



The Annual Report is available on the website, www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org.

The Annual Report, distributed during the business meeting, was dedicated to the many volunteers who enabled the Friends to have a very productive year, under the guidance of Lynn Lusardi, Volunteer Coordinator. Volunteers carried out several major repair projects on the Farm, including installation of a curtain drain system around the farmhouse. Tours at the Heritage Center by the new volunteer docents enhanced the museum experience for visitors.

A NEW SIGN FOR THE HERITAGE CENTER

You may have noticed – a new sign for the Valley Falls Heritage Center is installed at the corner of Bolton Road and Valley Falls Road! Many thanks go to Nancy Steffens, Bob Felber, and the Building & Grounds



The new Heritage Center sign, at Bolton and Valley Falls Rd.

Committee for making it happen. The sign is designed to mirror the original historical sign that was created for Valley Falls Farm by the Beach family, owners in the early 1900s. We appreciate the guidance that the Town's Historic Properties Commission provided during the permitting process. The sign was made and installed by Sign Connection. We are especially grateful to Greg Bristow, owner of Sign Connection, for his advice and thoughtful attention to detail. Experience made a difference. We are very pleased with our new sign!

CHANGES ON THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We have recently lost three members on the Board of Directors. Unfortunately, our President, **Maryann Levesque**, resigned from the Board, as of the Annual Meeting in September. We are grateful to Maryann for the year she served as President, and for her five years as a Board member. The long list of improvements to Valley Falls Farm and to the Red Barn that she and her husband Ron Levesque accomplished is impressive.

Sadly, **Lynn Lusardi**, resigned from the Board position of Volunteer Coordinator. She also resigned from the role of managing the museum inventory. Lynn very capably took on these two newly-created roles and did a

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board words, continued from page 2

super job with them. Thankfully, she will continue to help on the Building & Grounds Committee. Lastly, **Jane Darico** has resigned from the Board. We are grateful for her contributions to the new Heritage Center and for the hours she spent welcoming its visitors. Thank you, Maryann, Lynn and Jane for the time you have given to the Friends of Valley Falls!

We are very pleased that Board member **Bruce Dinnie** has taken on the duties as chairman of the Building & Grounds Committee. This is a very big responsibility, and Bruce has already had a long list of accomplishments, with the help of his son, **Brian Dinnie**. The list includes installation of a new flower garden, removing invasive catalpa trees, and cleaning and organizing the storage areas in the woodshed and farmhouse basement. Thank you, Bruce and Brian, for an awesome job!



Bruce Dinnie and son Brian at work on the Farm.

History Corner - The Stable Wreath

For about 15 years the big wreath on the stable was made by Sally Katkaveck of Ashford.

An avid gardener, Sally and her husband Bill owned Variegated Foliage Nursery in Eastford. In 2018, at age 81, Sally let us know that that year's wreath would be the last one she could do. In appreciation for her work, we did an article in the Spring 2019 newsletter (reprinted below) telling how she came to know Valley Falls Farm and to make the stable wreath for all those years.

The Wreath on the Stable – And How it Came to Be (Reprinted from the Spring 2019 issue)

Every December a large wreath is hung on the east end of the stable – have you noticed? It has become an iconic part of the Farm during the holiday season. We thought you'd like to know how it came about, and whom we should thank for this lovely holiday treat, a perfect addition to the winter scene at Valley Falls Farm.

Board member Ginny Gingras tells us this story: "After the Friends purchased Valley Falls Farm in 2000, I took my friend, Sally Katkaveck to view the Farm from Bolton Road. She took one look at the

Farm and said 'Ginny, the stable needs a wreath.' I agreed and asked if she would be willing to make

one, and she has done so every year since. She gathers the greens from her yard in Ashford.



Photo of the last wreath made by Sally Katkaveck, December 2018. Standing, l. to r., Paul Gingras, Ginny Gingras and Sally.

When completed, Sally and her husband, Bill, drive to the Farm to deliver the wreath. Bill parks near the stable, climbs onto the back of the truck and with a

pole (made especially for the "project") places the wreath on the hook my husband, Paul, had made for it. I supply and tie on the ribbon. Sally is a terrific gardener, whom I met years ago at a meeting of the North American Rock Garden Society. She has made many wreaths and enjoys the delights they bring. This year will be the last one made for the stable." Thank you SALLY and BILL!

For the next five years, Jean Merz took on the challenge of continuing the tradition, even making the wreath and ironing the bow one year. She enlisted the help of Bob Poulos, who hauled the heavy wreath up the ladder to be hung. But time takes its toll, and Jean, too, could no longer take on the task. In 2020, Jean suggested that we contact the agricultural students at Rockville High – and, as our front page story tells you, the rest is history! ☺



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Fall/Winter 2024
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2025 Calendar of Events - Please Join Us!

We have set tentative dates for our major events for 2025. For the Heritage Center, we're planning fewer open days in July and August, but we also plan to extend open days into September and October, so the total number of open days will be the same as in 2024. More details to come, but for now, you may want to note your calendars!

SPRING WALKS IN VALLEY FALLS PARK:

BIRD WALK – *May 4th*

WILDFLOWER & HISTORY WALKS – *May 17 & May 18*

(We may also schedule a Tree Walk and a Mushroom Walk)

ARTIST DAY 2025 – *September 7*

ANNUAL MEETING – *September 28*

HERITAGE CENTER

Opening Day – *Saturday afternoon, June 14* (also CT Open House Day)

Sunday afternoons – *June 29, July 13, July 27, Aug 10, Aug 24, Sept 7,*

Sept 21, Oct 5, Oct 19 ☕



Wreaths were added to the Ice House and Red Barn this year to enhance the Valley Falls Farm winter scene.