



BLOCK ISLAND CONSERVANCY

November 29, 2011

Dear Members and Friends of BIC:

It is somehow harder than ever to believe that, as I write this, December is practically upon us. Besides the usual too-rapid-passage-of-time reasons (whatever happened to fall, anyway? -- not to mention summer), there is also the simple fact that the continued mild weather promotes a sense of denial regarding the passage of seasons. It started with a warm and humid September that felt like June. Columbus Day at the beach could easily have been taken for a typical summer day. Even now, at the end of November, we've hardly seen a night where the temperature has dipped below 40. You can almost feel the grass agonizing over whether it's time to stop growing.

Then there are the poor hydrangea, whose response to repeated indignities has been rousing optimistic. Following the buffeting of Hurricane Irene there came, in early September, an impressive show of new blooms. Subsequent storms weakened the protective deer fencing to the extent that it became breachable by mid-October, when overnight defoliation ensued; now, in November, new leaf buds are bursting. Such plucky displays of fecundity can't help but be inspirational despite their misguidedness.

Be all of that as it may, we find ourselves this season, after a prolonged and frustrating period of fallowness, suddenly blessed by a relative profusion of possible acquisition projects. The big news, of course, concerns the awarding of a DEM Open Space Grant to BIC to support the purchase of a conservation easement over a 6-acre parcel at Payne Farm, the protection of which is highly significant for both ecological and historical reasons. (Please see the enclosed newsletter for an excerpt of the Block Island Times article reporting the award.) Our first priority in the coming weeks will be to formulate a proposal to make to the landowners that is both acceptable to them and affordable to BIC. Once agreement is reached, we will begin communicating with you in detail about how, together, we may most expeditiously reach the goal.

Meanwhile, over the course of the next few months, a couple of other projects that our conservation partners are quietly pursuing may come to fruition. If and when that should happen, BIC will be asked to play a role, at least in fund raising. 2012 may thus turn out to be a very busy year for all of us; and since it is the 40th anniversary of the founding of Block Island Conservancy, that seems most appropriate indeed.

The newsletter includes reports from the Treasurer and the Stewardship Director and articles about other activities of the past year: the continuing push toward accreditation, our very successful education partnership with TNC, and the latest accomplishments of ConserFest. Below are two other brief news items which you may also find interesting.

At their yearly meeting in August the BIC advisors divided into subcommittees to focus on three specific topics identified by the board as ones where their input and guidance could be most helpful. The results of one subcommittee's deliberations were embodied in the by-laws change proposal that the membership subsequently voted to approve at the annual meeting in October. The topics set before the other two subcommittees were, respectively, hunting on conservation lands and celebrating BIC's 40th anniversary. Both subcommittees produced detailed recommendations on which the board has since begun deliberations. You may expect to hear more from us about both topics in the coming months.

(over)

The annual Land Trust Alliance Rally was held in mid-October in Milwaukee. This year, to minimize expenses, Barry Saxe and I attended only the two days of seminars at the beginning of the conference since, in our experience, those sessions provide the most concentrated educational experience while still allowing useful opportunities for networking. This year I branched out a bit into sessions concerned with various aspects of strategic planning, an area that the Board should begin to address in concert with its accreditation work, while Barry continued building expertise in advanced topics related to stewardship.

The Thanksgiving season is the perfect time for me to express the Board's abiding appreciation for your continuing dedication to conservation and to Block Island. Without your generous response, year after year, to our annual appeal, programs such as our education partnership with TNC, which are helping to produce new generations of equally committed conservationists, would simply not be possible. Please take the time today to renew your membership with as generous a donation as you can comfortably afford, knowing that preservation of the Block-Islandness of Block Island will be your, and all of our, ultimate reward.

On behalf of the entire Board, I extend warm wishes to you for a happy holiday season.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Record". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent "S" at the beginning.

Stephen Record
President



BLOCK ISLAND CONSERVANCY

Block Island Conservancy Inc. Newsletter

December 2011



Photos by Katie Slessinger

Travis Greenlee performing on the deck at Yellow Kittens; Mary Conant and Dylan Hickey, the youngest Conserfest volunteers and donors

ConserFest Continues to Impress

If you have never heard of ConserFest or have yet to attend an event, you are missing out! For the fourth year, ConserFest has continued to impress by providing a fun platform to address young members of the community about the importance of land conservation on Block Island. Through music events Conserfest is doing its part in raising awareness about the importance and tradition of land conservation on Block Island, and the response has been amazing!

The concept of ConserFest came from a conversation between ConserFest founders Cameron Greenlee and Justin Lewis, and Lewis's father David, a former BIC director. David Lewis told them that if they and their friends care about this place then it was time to take some ownership. The efforts of Block Island Conservancy have proven inspirational to the group, who recognize the importance of raising awareness for land conservation among the younger generations. "We realized that many of our peers were unaware of the personal

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BIC Wins \$400K State Grant

By Pippa Jack, *Block Island Times*

Block Island Conservancy is one of 15 organizations around the state to win an open space grant for land preservation, announced by Governor Lincoln Chafee on Wednesday, Nov. 2.

The group won \$400,000 in matching funds toward the purchase of a conservation easement on a six-acre parcel off Payne Farm that would become part of the existing, 66-acre Payne Farm Preserve.

"This is an important first step," said BIC vice president Bill Comings, who accepted the check from Chafee at a State House ceremony. "Without the grant, nothing would have been possible. With the grant, I'm hopeful that we can put this together."

BIC has first option on the land, Plat 10, Lot 23-1, owned by Blake Phelan. Comings said it will "have to do some significant fundraising" to meet the purchase price, which will be set once the land is appraised but is expected to top \$800,000.

The grassland lot has pastoral views and is habitat for the federally endangered American burying beetle and the state endangered barn owl, as well as the northern



harrier and Block Island meadow vole.

The \$400,000 grant was the maximum available under the program, which handed out a total of \$4.3 million in grants to 15 communities, land trusts, and conservation groups. The six-acre parcel was the most expensive of the 900 acres of state open space and farmland covered by the grants. "It was a long shot because Block Island land is so expensive," said Comings. "It was the maximum grant for the smallest amount of land, so winning it was quite an accomplishment."

The BIC grant proposal, submitted in May, detailed other advantages of the acquisition: the land would add to a preserve with an existing one-mile trail, and abuts one of five wells used for the town's water supply. It will be kept open in perpetuity.

High School Students Research Martin Property Plant Species

One of the stewardship goals for the Martin Property on West Side Road is to encourage the growth of native wildflowers. Block Island Conservancy hopes to accomplish this by first using a mowing schedule that encourages the growth of non-invasive flowering plant species and later

considering other methods to encourage the growth of wildflowers in particular.

In order to achieve this goal, baseline information on the plant species currently growing on the Martin property was needed. In the spring and fall of 2011, students in the

Continued on page 4

STEWARDSHIP CORNER

This year, the BIC stewardship committee has concentrated on completing the required paperwork for all our properties. The need for this paperwork became apparent during our planning for accreditation. The workload was very large, and therefore an arrangement was made with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to have TNC produce our baseline reports and handle monitoring of easement properties. BIC will continue to be responsible for fee property management plans and monitoring.

Some of you may wonder about the purpose of all this paperwork. There are three reports that fall under BIC Stewardship responsibility. A **baseline report** is required for all easement properties. It records the condition of the property at the time the conservation easement is granted and provides the foundation for future monitoring and, if necessary, enforcement of the easement. It contains information not generally included in the easement, such as photographs and maps, to substantiate the conservation values being protected and to illustrate how the easement meets the public benefit. A **management plan** is required for all fee properties.

A **management plan** outlines the proposed use of the property and the stewardship responsibilities required to maintain that use. These responsibilities may include activities such as mowing, planting, trail clearing and stone wall maintenance. Finally, both easement and fee properties are monitored at least annually and a **monitoring report** is produced. This process allows BIC to track any changes to the property and to identify any easement issues or concerns. This ends the boring technical portion of the article.

The wildflower promotion project is continuing on the Martin property on West Side Road. In 2011, a spring and autumn vegetation survey was conducted on the property by

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Block Island Conservancy continues to benefit from the financial support of its members despite the fiscal challenges of the past few years. General contributions over the last twelve months have rebounded and showed an increase of \$12,000 over the previous fiscal year. The 2010 Conserfest events were very successful and BIC received over \$9,000 from those fund raisers, an increase of more than \$3600 over 2009. Interest income on CDs and money market accounts continues to be weak due to low interest rates. The above-mentioned funds are dedicated to covering operating costs which include maintaining an office with a part-time paid administrative assistant, keeping our members and the community informed of our endeavors and supporting our conservation partners on the island. Operating funds also cover attorney's fees relative to land acquisition, appraisals and the expense of the annual financial review and tax return preparation by our accountant. A new expense in 2010 relates to initiating the process of attaining accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance. The BIC Board hired a consultant to assist the Board to perform a self-evaluation, a necessary first step to the

process. 2010 accreditation expenses were approximately \$4300. An additional \$10,000 is budgeted in the current fiscal year to hire an administrative assistant to help collate materials and convert them into the required format. The Board will do the bulk of the work which includes writing policies and procedures relative to Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices.

Excess revenues over expenditures of the operating fund are targeted for land acquisition. In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2011, BIC was able to add over \$19,000 to the land acquisition fund. At this time, BIC has completed all current land acquisition commitments. BIC will continue to add to the land acquisition fund while it awaits the next opportunity to acquire land and/or easements. In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2011, operating funds generated by donations and investments totaled \$71,414. Our operating expenses totaled \$52,262.

We continue to receive Mitchell Farm pledges as expected. In the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2011, we received \$56,200 in pledges. The balance of pledges due is \$77,514 payable by the end of 2012. As we move forward, the pledge money will continue replenish the land acquisition funds used to accelerate payments to Adrian.

The Stewardship Endowment Funds

at the Rhode Island Foundation have recovered from the economic downturn. In December 2010, the Board of Directors once again elected to forgo receipt of the December interest payment in favor of allowing that money to earn interest and help the accounts recover principal. The Stewardship Endowment Fund experienced a one year growth of 17.8% as of June 30, 2011, and a 7.3% growth overall since the account was created in May, 2008.

Memorial and honorary donations increased last year from \$11,000 to \$12,700. The interest earned on the endowment funds and memorial and honorary donations are what BIC uses to cover the costs of maintaining our properties and trails. Block Island Conservancy did not print trail guides in 2011 but had residual income from the 2010 guides. The net proceeds of the trail guides are designated as stewardship funds. In all, income to Stewardship in fiscal year ending June 30, 2011 was \$19,650 against expenses of \$10,890.

We are thankful for the continuing support of our members. This support enables us to continue our commitment to protect Block Island's natural heritage, rural character and public access to its resources by preserving land as open space through acquisition or via conservation easements.

Debbie Howarth
Treasurer

Scott Comings of TNC and students from the Block Island school, under the direction of teacher Sue Gibbons (see related article elsewhere in this newsletter). This winter the back field will be mowed for the first time since the autumn of 2009. The spring 2012 survey will help us determine whether the delayed mowing has produced an increase in the variety of plants

Our Beach Avenue property is a four acre site that overlooks Trim's Pond, with a large open meadow and trails cleared through the fields and along the stone walls. We are considering allowing the currently mowed portion of this property to be used for haying. Haying will require a change to the mowing

schedule and area, and because of the proximity of wetlands, the State's Coastal Resource Management Commission (CRMC) is involved. During discussions with CRMC it became apparent that we had obtained approval from them to mow our trail system, but had never obtained approval for the mowing of about half of the property to maintain the open meadow. We are now in the process of gaining approval from CRMC to mow and hay the property. Agricultural activity is seen as a positive use of conservation land and the haying of other conservation properties is well established.

Finally, after discussion with Scott Comings (TNC), we have decided to change

our off-season mowing from the usual autumn schedule (October and November) to February and March. This will maintain ground cover through the winter and early spring, a benefit to our Island's small mammals and wintering birds.

What's on the table for next year? We will continue the work associated with BIC's accreditation process and on-going monitoring of properties. Our message to BIC membership and their families and friends remains the same: we encourage you to walk the properties and enjoy the natural beauty of Block Island.

Barry Saxe
Stewardship Director

Accreditation Marches On

Our accreditation efforts have continued this year with progress being made on many fronts. In the fall of 2010 the BIC board engaged a consultant, Manes Consulting LLC, to lead us through an organizational self-assessment process looking at the status and function of the BIC. This is the first step in the process of accreditation required by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. This assessment was based on the Land Trust Alliance 12 Standards and Practices developed by the LTA to guide conservation groups in conducting their business and organizing themselves to safeguard the land they protect in perpetuity. They are also the basis for evaluating the performance of a conservancy group for accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission.

From our organizational self-assessment review, Connie Manes prepared an Organizational Work-plan that focused on and identified key areas of our policies and

procedures: some where we are already very strong, and others where we could review and make some improvements. Using the Organizational Work-plan document we have assigned sub-groups of the BIC board to look at our policies and procedures and prepare new language or whole new policies for adoption, where appropriate. Changes that were identified through this process and acted on by the whole BIC membership were the policies on term limits and re-election of directors that we voted on and approved at the annual meeting. The schedule for completion of our work is to be fully prepared to apply for accreditation in December of 2012, marking the end of BIC's 40th anniversary year. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission review would begin in the Spring of 2013 and we hope to achieve accreditation by the end of 2013.

Derek van Lent
Accreditation Committee

Conserfest continued from page 1

effort and financial sacrifice required to keep Block Island as open as it is today. It's time for us to step forward as the next generation of conservation leaders," Lewis said. Through benefit concerts, Conserfest aims to further the work of BIC and reach out to young members of the community.

The 2011 Conserfest events included daytime surfside performances at Fred Benson Town Beach, as well as a matinee event on the deck at Yellow Kittens, followed by a full night of music at the inside stage. The events were well attended and brought together many generations of people unified in their support of land conservation and environmental awareness. Throughout the day there were a total of 16 acts that performed. The musicians included local and off island artists, all of whom donated their time and talents. A silent art auction was also held and featured donated artwork from 12 local artists. Over 120 new or returning members signed up to become active members of BIC, and over \$8,300.00 was donated to BIC's general fund. Thank you to all who volunteered their time and effort for the 2011 Conserfest Block Island events!

Block Island Conservancy Board of Directors:

Stephen Record, *President*

Bill Comings, *Vice President*

Debbie Howarth, *Treasurer*

Shannon Cotter Marsella, *Secretary*

Barry Saxe, *Stewardship Director*

Laura Michel Breunig

Logan Mott Chase

Tom Doyle

Sue Gibbons

Steve McQueeny

Rosemary Tobin

Derek Van Lent

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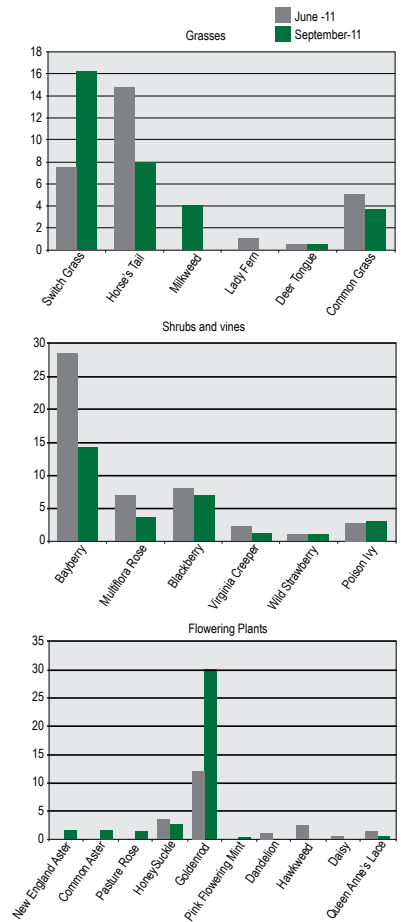
Student Research continued from page 1

Block Island School Field Biology class, under the direction of Scott Comings (Director of Land and Freshwater Conservation for The Nature Conservancy) and Dr. Susan Gibbons (Block Island High School Science Teacher and BIC Director), collected baseline data on the northwest field of the property. The students first learned to identify a wide variety of native plant species in classroom and field environments. They then visited the Martin property to develop an initial list of observed plant species and a system for collecting data. Using Google Earth technology in the classroom, students mapped the property and created a grid that divided the lot into four approximately equal quadrants, and then transferred this grid to the actual property. Data sheets were developed, and students walked the property quadrants in small groups, tallying plant species and determining the approximate percentage of each species in their quadrant. This process was completed in June of 2011 and again in September of 2011, since dif-

ferent plant species are more readily identifiable in the spring and fall seasons.

Plant species data is shown in the charts below. For ease of interpretation, species were divided into three major groups including grasses and similar plants, shrubs and vines, and flowering plants. The data shows that in both seasons the most common plants by category are: grasses -- switch grass and horse's tail; shrubs and vines -- bayberry, multiflora rose and blackberry; and flowering plants -- goldenrod and honeysuckle.

This project was an excellent learning experience for the students, allowing them to participate in the development of research data that will be used for stewardship purposes, and connecting their emerging knowledge of plant species to a real life project. Data will be collected each spring and fall so that the baseline information can be compared to future years, as we move towards the goal of increasing wildflowers on the Martin property in a scientific and thoughtful way.



TNC Education Partnership

BIC has had another successful year partnering with The Nature Conservancy's education program. Every year BIC donates funds to help keep TNC's educational programs up and running. The funds go towards paying and supporting interns, educational programs for the Block

Island School students and preschool students, educating off-island school groups, and monitoring scientific research programs and volunteers. One program even allows students from the mainland, who may have never even seen the ocean before, to experience Block Island and all of its amazing

sites. In addition, during the summer there are frequent nature programs open to the public and, for children, the ever-popular Camp Mohegan as well. The program also helps in the fight against invasive species, such as the removal of Black Swallowwort, multiflora rose, and Asiatic Bittersweet.



Scott Comings works a great deal with students of all grades at the Block Island School including the fifth and sixth graders in these photographs. Starting in fifth grade, the students do an extensive beach study on the beach in front of the Surf Hotel. The students note the plants and animals found there and follow up with an identification project in the classroom. By helping the students understand their unique Block Island environment now, these programs ensure that they will be more willing and able to protect it in the future.

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Stephen Record, President

This newsletter was prepared by Shannon Cotter Marsella, Laura Michel Breunig, Justin Lewis, Derek van Lent, Barry Saxe, Debbie Howarth, Martha Ball, Stephen Record, Sue Gibbons, Rosemary Tobin, and CRI Design.

Annual Meeting Report

The annual Block Island Conservancy meeting was held on October 2nd, 2011, at Saint Andrew Parish Center, with approximately 80 people in attendance. During the business portion of the meeting, President Stephen Record presented brief updates on BIC's activities during the past year as well as summaries of the annual reports of Treasurer Debbie Howarth and Stewardship Director Barry Saxe. (The complete versions of those reports may be found elsewhere in this newsletter.) Since the decision on awarding DEM Open Space Grants had not been reached at that time, we were not aware of what would quickly become the biggest BIC news story of the year when it was announced on November 2nd: the award of \$400,000 in matching funds to put toward the purchase of a conservation easement on a critical undeveloped lot at Payne Farm. (See the Block Island Times article reprinted in the newsletter for more information.)

There were also two other items of business: changes to the By-laws, and the election of directors. The changes to the By-laws recommended by the Board affect directors' term lengths and limits and the use of written proxies for establishing quorums and voting in Board meetings. Under the changes, the nominal length of a director's term shrinks from four years to three, but allowance is made for a director to serve successive terms with the concurrence of the



Payne Farm

remainder of the board and the approval of the membership; and the use of proxies in Board meetings is discontinued. These changes were approved by the assembled membership without opposition.

By an unusual coincidence, the three director nominees presented to the membership for approval had been previously appointed by the board to fill unexpired terms and were now seeking full terms in their own right: Tom Doyle, Sue Gibbons, and Steve McQueeny. The assembled membership voted unanimously to approve all three nominees.

Stephen then had the pleasure of introducing the guest speaker, Janet Coit, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, former Rhode Island state director of The Nature Conservancy, and lifelong conservationist and devoted friend of Block Island. Janet has been a champion for the environment throughout

her decades of environmental and legal service, including stints at the Department of the Interior and the Department of Justice, and working for three U.S. Senators from New England. From her earlier work in the U.S. Senate, to her decade with The Nature Conservancy, and now at the RIDEM, Janet has worked closely with islanders on many issues over the years, and holds Block Island close to her heart. Her talk was passionate and inspirational, invoking the successes and the heroes of the past and urging our rededication of energy and redoubling of effort to accomplish the goals that are yet unachieved, and left no one in the audience unmoved.

At the subsequent Board meeting on October 9th, the following officers were elected to serve for the next year: Stephen Record, President; Bill Comings, Vice President; Shannon Cotter Marsella, Secretary; Debbie Howarth, Treasurer; and Barry Saxe, Stewardship Director.

Block Island Conservancy is on Facebook



This past year Block Island Conservancy has launched a Facebook page, becoming a part of the huge trend in social networking. Data from online payment service WePay "indicates that charitable causes publicized through Facebook and Twitter yield increased donations to the relevant campaigns.... Specifically, when a link is shared on Facebook, it boosts donations to a campaign by about \$5."

Not only will the page increase our donations, but it is also a great source of outreach and education. Through Facebook we can reach out to Facebook "friends" of all ages both in the United States and internationally. Posting information about what we are doing can allow people to be informed about Block Island Conservancy daily. People can follow progress of a conservation effort, find out when the next event is planned

or learn about what we have already conserved and how it is maintained. Social networking is all about people sharing similar information. It is the "word of mouth" computer style. It has been a very successful launch: we have over a hundred who "like" our page. In the Facebook world if you are liked that is pretty much it! View our page with the link below.

<http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Block-Island-Conservancy/166079953452353>

Memorials

Dan Hart
Viola Rogers
Diane Bean
Martha Ball
David & Peggy and
Justin & Daniel Lewis
David Shipley
Adrian Mitchell
Patricia Kriegel
Elliott Brodsky
Fred & Debbie Howarth
Dan & Rosemary Millea
Melissa Hempstead
Bill & Margie Comings

Colby & Ruth Barrell
John & Laura Breunig

Esther Brownstein
Barbara & Michael Abrams
Dan & Rosemary Millea
Bill & Margie Comings
Jennifer Russel
Anna Iacangelo

Stanley Ziobro
Steve & Connie Finn

Ulric Cyr
Diane Bean
Dan & Rosemary Millea

Read Kingsbury
Diane Bean
Dan & Rosemary Millea

Don Huggins
Diane Bean

Caroline Bronkar
Diane Bean

Helen Bean
Diane Bean

Margaret Milone
Diane Bean

Frank Joseph
Carol A.R. Joseph

Al Starr
Dick & Susan Warren Ibach,
Libby Warren

Jean Forbes
Jessie Edwards

Jack Warfel
Jessie Edwards

Jeanette Batchelder
Jessie Edwards

Mary Newhouse
Jessie Edwards

Norma Lewis
Julia Rubin

For Friends
Marilyn Bogdanffy

Dennis Wolkoff
Laura Rosenzweig

Capt. J.R. "Rob" & Alyce Lewis
Laura Rosenzweig

Eric Jess Spirer
WPCarey
Jan Frederick & Hilary Karst

Weld Cox
Paul & Caroline Hudak
Hudson & Patricia Stoddard
Richard & Micheline Weisbroat
Shiulun Gary Ng &

Catherine Chan-Ng
C.C. & Carol Kern
Cathedral Village

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Edward & Eleanor Nemeth
Dr Ted Strayer & Judy McVety
Edward & Fredda Goldstein
Norma Feldman
Jessica Feldman

Matt Helterline
Graham & Gay Jones
Frances Migliaccio
David & Peggy and
Justin & Daniel Lewis
Vin Ryan & Carla Meyer
Richard Hayes Jr.
Chelsea Phelan & Josh Redd
The wait staff at Winfields
James & Beverly Sniffen

Honors and Celebrations

Misses Mia and
Annika McCarrick
Mary Meeker
Sim Attwood
Susie Weissman

Werner Fiebes & Jacob "Jim" Schmitt
Mark & Karen Roberts

Kim Gaffett
Nancy Sweeney and Birding Friends

Michael Oppenheimer &
Leonie Haimson
Geoffrey Lawrence

In Memory & Honor of
Bob & Carol Louttit
Robert Hale

Mary Meeker
Blaise & Anna Anello

Honor & Thanks to Justin Abrams
for his farm
Henry & Diana Asher
Thomas & Joanne Reymont

To honor our children's marriage
The Durbin and Rahrig families

Caroline's birthday
John & Caroline Ellis

On behalf of our Wedding Guests
Cira Pace & Michael Malta
Katherine Duggan & R.K.
Marsland

Merry Christmas Joan Corwin
Theresa Cipriani