

President's Report

By Eric Reenstierna

Newton Conservators Annual Dinner
June 2, 2004

I have been “on the job” as President of the Newton Conservators for a full year now. I want to say how honored I am to be in this position to lead the Conservators. When I started last year, I said that there was no other organization in this city that I would rather serve as president, and that is true still today. We are an organization with a mission. Our mission is to see to it that there is some proper balance between the things that are man-made and all the other things that some might call God's creation. And of all the things there are to do, I can't think of any that are more important than that. We definitely aren't alone in this. For every one of us at the annual dinner, there are seven others who are members of the Conservators. For every member of the Conservators, there are another 80 or so voters in Newton, and the voters overwhelmingly support the protection of open space. I read a statistic that in recent years, something like 85% of the open space initiatives that are put on the ballot nationwide are approved. We saw that in Newton when the Community Preservation Act was put on the ballot. The voters of Newton actually voted to tax themselves additionally to fund open space protection, along with other goals. We are the voice of the big majority that wants to see the protection of open space.

It is one thing to believe in something. It is another to do something about it. This past year, the Conservators have taken action. We have been as effective as we ever have been in the 43 years of our existence. For the most part, we don't take individual credit. We work as a team. So, what, as a team, have we done?

We have grown our membership. We are now 510 members.

We have grown our financial health, as we have heard from our Treasurer.

We have run our series of walks, canoe trips, and bike rides and have taken part in the Newton's annual bird count. We celebrate the outdoors by getting out in it.

We have presented our lectures by noted naturalists.

We have brought to the community the word of what we do. We have turned out five newsletters in hard copy, which eventually, five times a year, involves getting together for a stuffing party at Bonnie Carter's house.

We have put out a whole other newsletter at various times online, by email. We have written in the Tab on nature topics, helping our neighbors to know a little bit more about the wildlife around us and how to maintain our yards for good health and biodiversity, without exotics and without poisons. Some of us have been on NewTV.

We have set up a new Web site. And that is a whole new way for us to get out the word of our activity and what we are about. Our Web site is full of beautiful photography, and our Webmaster attends to it all the time, to keep up with the new things we are doing. Of all that we've accomplished this last year, that has to rank right up there.

I said we are a team, and we don't take individual credit. I want to break that rule for once, to say thank you to a few individuals who have given extra of their time and expertise. These people have put in late nights at city hall. Two have worked behind the scenes on financial and legal matters. They have given time that has had to come out of their lives at work or their personal time, to carry a big load so that this team's work can get done. These people - Doug Dickson, Duane Hillis, Katherine Howard, Ted Kuklinski, and Bill Shaevel from all of us deserve a special thank you.

Among other things that we have done, we have distributed our Map Guide. (The Map Guide team was honored at the Annual Dinner.)

We have advocated for open space, especially at Kessler Woods. We have learned to team with others, like the City, and with developers, like Cornerstone at Kessler Woods, to make open space happen. We have worked with others, like the Conservation Commission, the Aldermen, Habitat for Humanity, the Housing Authority, the Newton Historical Society, and Green Decade.

We have served on committees of the city. The City has become our main partner. We helped the city to take on its big initiative to save Kessler Woods. We have brought some of the most important proposals that have come before the Community Preservation Committee.

We have expanded our stewardship activity and provided better stewardship for the land we own. Jim Broderick's team has taken that on and done some serious fundraising. Along the way, we have learned what it is to be a good steward.

We have learned how to evaluate land that is brought to us as a gift, to know whether in fact we can be good stewards. We have held fairly heated debates where people have taken strong positions. We have heard each other out, and we have recognized that we all share the same passion for this mission.

We have made grants. And we are looking for more students and more people that we can help financially.

That's a part of what we have done in the past year. And there is what we would like to do.

One is to produce some shows for NewTV, so that we can bring these open spaces in Newton into people's living rooms - so that the people who don't get out and maybe can't get out can see some of what we see. We already have these shows half prepared. They

are the walks that we conduct. It's a matter of getting those walks into a few good-quality videos. We need some people power to get this done. We need some help from outside the circle of Directors who already put in so much time. And if we succeed, the word about who we are, the Conservators, will get out to the bigger community, and we will do the community a real service.

Past that, we want to save Angino Farm. And not as just a pretty place. But as a real, working farm, so that farming can be alive here a little bit, and people can see where the fruit and the vegetables come from, and kids can know what farming is about.

We want to keep on doing what we've done - celebrating wildlife, celebrating this place.