



# BEAUFORT COUNTY Open Land Trust

Fall 2018 Newsletter

## *Whitehall Park* - A PARK FOR ALL

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*Thank You* to Beaufort County Council, Beaufort City Council, the Felburn Foundation, the Friends of Whitehall Park and the Whitehall Development Group.

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One by one they came to the podium and spoke to Beaufort County Council on September 24 about the proposed Whitehall Park. Beaufort County residents of less than one generation and those of five generations. They spoke about the unparalleled natural beauty of this area. Why they moved here. Why they stayed here. The unique location, history and unparalleled beauty of Whitehall. What would be irretrievably lost if Whitehall wasn't purchased. What would be gained. The memories of future generations that could be made. Our stewardship duty as citizens. Why Whitehall represents the heart and soul of Beaufort County.

After this unprecedented outpouring of public activism and support, Beaufort County

Council unanimously approved the purchase of 9.72-acre Whitehall Park with Rural & Critical Land Preservation funds. This vote followed Beaufort City Council's unanimous decision on Sept. 17 to accept management and maintenance of the Park. The Open Land Trust raised public and private funds to facilitate

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### Whitehall Park is now ours *- a park for all.*

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the County purchase of the Park, including critical early support from the Felburn Foundation. Although the Park is in the city limits of Beaufort, Beaufort County will own the Park, the City will maintain and operate the Park, and the Open Land Trust will hold a conservation easement on the property and has accepted perpetual responsibility for the care of the majestic trees that define the Park's scenic views.

During the last two decades, the highly

visible Whitehall property was sold several times for various development proposals that were never implemented. The Sea Island Coalition and the Coastal Conservation League carefully watched and reported on recent plans resulting in a public outcry over a proposed density increase to accommodate seven apartment buildings. The developers then redesigned the conceptual plan with a lower by-right density, and the plan was approved in February 2018.

In July 2018, the Open Land Trust made a final effort to purchase a portion of the property before permitting was to begin on the approved 20-acre buildout. Sam Levin, local resident and partner in the Whitehall Development Group, agreed to negotiate terms for the sale of 10 acres. Without Mr. Levin's and WDG's willingness to delay permitting and



# Letter from the Executive Director



Dear Members and Friends,

It has been my great privilege to work for Beaufort County Open Land Trust for over 20 years. The Trust was founded in 1971 by Marguerite Broz, John Trask Jr. and Betty Waskiewicz and was an all-volunteer organization until I was hired in 1992. The Founders saw an opportunity to protect the view of the Beaufort River from Bay Street and they acted! It was the first time that citizens of Beaufort realized that we could not take our beautiful scenery and environment for granted.

In the early days devoted members of the Trust did everything they could think of to raise money for their projects. They sold pot holders, published a now classic cookbook, *Sea Island Seasons*, charged tourist groups for luncheons prepared by members in historic homes and held auctions and plantation tours. The result was Freedom Park in front of the marina, open vistas along Bay Street and Bellamy Curve, and preserved open space on St. Helena Island.

In the early 90's conservation easements became a widely used tool for protecting land. The Open Land Trust began to use easements as a way to help land owners voluntarily protect family lands and agricultural lands, thereby preserving the rural character of much of Northern Beaufort County. As of today, OLT has protected over 23,000 acres through fee simple ownership and conservation easements.

The Open Land Trust has grown tremendously over the almost 50 years of its existence. However, we have never forgotten our original purpose which was to protect the spectacular scenic open vistas that give Beaufortians such a valued sense of place. The Trust has a history of successful partnerships with Beaufort County and the City of Beaufort and, just in the last couple of months, we again joined forces to preserve

10 acres of the Whitehall property on Lady's Island as a passive park. The view that is now protected is unparalleled and is the "Jewel in the Crown" of Open Land Trust's protected properties.

I will retire from my position as Executive Director at the end of 2018 and I want to assure you that OLT is stronger than ever moving forward. Kristin Williams will be your new Executive Director. She came to us in January from the Bahamas where she was Executive Director of Friends of the Environment for 10 years. Kristin is a natural leader and has a sincere passion for the work she is doing.

Also, the Trust is extremely fortunate to have Barbara Holmes in the role of Director of Land Protection. Barbara worked for Lowcountry Land Trust in Charleston for 9 years as staff attorney before joining us in July 2017. In addition to her Land Trust work she is the administrator on behalf of OLT for the Beaufort County Rural and Critical Land Preservation Program. Her expertise in land protection and negotiation has been crucial to our work.

Debbie Quirin has been our loyal Administrative Assistant for 15 years. Debbie takes care of the day to day operations, plans events, manages our membership campaigns and much more! I appreciate all that she has done for me more than I can say.

In addition, I am proud to say that the Trust has a Board of Directors that is engaged and committed to helping OLT be the best conservation organization that it can be. I greatly appreciate the support I have received from all of the very outstanding citizens of Beaufort who have served on the Board over the years.

Lastly, I want to pay tribute to the best employee OLT has ever had, and who was never paid a dime. Debbie's dear husband, Dennis Quirin, passed away in July after a battle with cancer. I cannot begin to detail all that Dennis did for

OLT. He was our "go to guy." He fixed anything that needed fixing, moved anything that needed moving, arrived at Auldbrass each day of the tours before 7:00 a.m. to set up and was the last person to leave, carrying the day's trash. He kept an eye on Widgeon Point and always made sure the barn was in good shape for events, and he brought donuts to us in the office. He did all of this with great good cheer in his quiet way. He was a part of our OLT family. We loved Dennis and miss him every day.

Cindy Baysden





# Whitehall Park - A PARK FOR ALL

(continued)



construction while the County considered the purchase, the sale of the Park property would not have happened. In addition, WDG offered

in-kind services and contributions toward the infrastructure and development of the Park.

The Friends of Whitehall Park self-organized in early August 2018 immediately after learning that a park project was being considered. Paul Butare, President of Friends, and its Directors, felt that a call to action in engaging the public, was a key to success. They created a website, a Facebook page, and an online petition for citizens to demonstrate support. As the number of signatures grew, so did the awareness of the decision makers. Friends encouraged attendance at City and County public meetings, encouraged supporters to contact their elected

local representatives and organized “A Walk in the Park” to allow the public to actually visit the park. Ultimately, the 6,000 signatures collected and the show of support by the public helped sway the decision favorably.

The opportunity to create Whitehall Park did not happen by accident – it came about through the dedicated, passionate, and hard work of advocates, the vocal and financial support of the community, and courageous decisions by our elected officials. If you have the opportunity, please extend your appreciation to these individuals and groups. Because of them, Whitehall Park is now ours – a park for all.

## The Whitehall Park Movement!

The Whitehall property means a great deal to so many Beaufort residents, nearly 6,000 to be exact. That is how many people signed a petition to support the purchase of a 10-acre park at Whitehall. In just two months, residents of Beaufort County came together like never before to preserve this iconic property on Lady’s Island overlooking the Beaufort River and the City of Beaufort.

Friends of Whitehall, a recently formed community-based organization, was instrumental throughout the intense approval process,

working tirelessly to publicize the project and to rally support for public ownership and permanent protection of Whitehall Park. The Friends group hosted a special event at Whitehall, A Walk in the Park, on August 24 to showcase the property and how it could benefit the community. Several hundred people attended the event to show their support and to learn more about Whitehall’s history and majestic beauty. It is people - the public - that made Whitehall Park happen. We hope you are as proud as we are. It would not have been possible without your support.





# TRANSPORTING INJURED BIRDS FOR BIRDS OF PREY

By: Barbara Holmes

I learned about the Avian Conservation Center/Center for Birds of Prey in Awendaw when working a conservation easement on the property in 2009. The Center operates the only medical facility in South Carolina dedicated to treating injured raptors and shorebirds, treating over 700 birds last year. I volunteered for seven years at the Center, but with my move to Beaufort realized the way I could help the most was to become a transport volunteer. With Beaufort County's abundant waterways, coastline and bird habitat, a significant number of injured birds are recovered here and need immediate transport to the Center.

If an injured bird is found in the Beaufort area, the Center's dispatcher calls transporters until an available one is found. I always have a cardboard carrier and leather gloves in my car. Some situations require me to capture an injured bird, other times I meet another transporter who relays the bird to me for transport. Being close to humans causes immense stress in wild birds, so we are trained to be very quiet when a bird is in our care - we can't play the radio in the car or talk on the phone.

Some birds survive their injuries and some do not, however, I find satisfaction in being able to mitigate some of the damage that humans and our never-ending quest for "progress" causes wildlife. I have had the honor of transporting bald eagles, great horned owls, barred owls, screech owls, Redtail hawks, pelican chicks and many others. My longest transport trip was 622 miles one way – to take a snowy owl found in South Carolina to Newark, Delaware to a facility that had the expertise and experience to treat him. He was eventually released – the release video is posted on Tri-State Bird Rescue's Facebook page. The most rewarding experience happens when I am asked to transport a rehabilitated bird from the Center back to its territory for release. Watching a bird released back to the wild makes every quiet mile worth it!

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If you see an injured bird,  
please call the  
Center's Injured Bird Line at  
(843) 971-7474, Ext. 1.

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## *Interesting facts:*

The Center relies on a network of approximately 100 statewide transport volunteers who transport injured birds from where they are found to the medical facility. Last year, transporters collectively travelled over 26,000 miles transporting injured birds to the Center.



Sometimes transporting involves other wildlife. On April 10, 2018, Kristin and I helped to release a rehabilitated turtle that had been hit by a car on Lady's Island Drive. She was released to her original destination – Crystal Lake!



*Snowy Owl at Center, November 2017*

# Thank you to our Local Business Supporters!

A big thank you to Paul Nurnberg of Nurnberg Photography and Aaron Miller of Miller Design and Marketing for donating their time and expertise to the Open Land Trust. Paul has spent countless hours using his drone to capture aerial images of our properties and Aaron used those photos to create powerful displays that demonstrate the importance of land protection in our community.



## November 6, 2018

### RURAL & CRITICAL LAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM ON BALLOT

Beaufort County residents have made the protection of our community's abundant natural resources a true community value by strongly supporting the Rural & Critical Land Program since 2002. The Rural & Critical Program has protected 23,873 acres through 112 projects including such sites as Fort

Fremont, the Bluffton Oyster Factory, Pinckney Point, Lemon Island, Mitchelville, Crystal Lake and, most recently, Whitehall Park. We need your support to continue this valuable program that is administered by the Open Land Trust. Your November 6 ballot includes a "Local Question" for \$25,000,000 in General

Obligation Bonds for renewed funding of the Program. This referendum also will help us work towards additional public access to Rural & Critical properties, by allowing up to 20% of the funds raised to be used for park planning and improvements.

So Vote Yes – Save Water & Land on November 6!







Photo by EK Collaborations

## *The McGowan Family's Gift to Future Generations*

A lifelong resident of St. Helena, well-known local author Pierre McGowan is a true proponent of conserving the lands, creeks and waterways that surround his rural home on Dory Island, on the eastern side of St. Helena Island on Station Creek. His books extol the wonders of the habitat, the wildlife and the people that call St. Helena home. Mr. McGowan had recently listed 6.2 acres of uninhabited property for sale. However, he and his children collectively decided they would rather see this magnificent piece of property permanently protected rather than developed for residential use. When approached by the McGowan family, the Open Land Trust was honored to accept the donation of this portion of Dory Island to ensure that it will remain in its natural condition forever.



Left to right: Pierre McGowan, BCOLT President Alex Shuford, Pierre McGowan Jr.



# Conservation Bank Reauthorization

On July 31, Beaufort County Open Land Trust, along with its conservation partners, attended the ceremonial bill signing of 2017-2018 House Bill 4727 at the State House in Columbia. This bill is a historic win for conservation in South Carolina as it secures permanent reauthorized funding for the state's Conservation Bank.

In addition to removing the sunset limitation, H.B. 4727 expands the Conservation Bank Board, focuses on increasing public access, coordinates state required mitigation and requires a prioritized conservation map for the State to be approved by the General Assembly. Annual funding for the Bank will come directly from the State's General Fund rather than from real estate fees.

Since its inception in 2002, the Bank has protected over 300,000 acres across South Carolina and we are thrilled to know it will continue to protect our beautiful places for generations to come.



*Photo Left to Right:  
Patrick Moore, Open Space Institute  
Kate Schaefer, Coastal Conservation League  
South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster  
Kristin Williams, Beaufort County Open Land Trust*

## NEW OLT PROPERTIES ON ST. HELENA ISLAND

The Open Land Trust was recently deeded ownership of five undeveloped parcels located on Lands End Road on St. Helena Island. These properties are situated between a wetland system, which is located on another BCOLT protected property and an active rookery that provides habitat for a variety of wading and shorebird species. The property is home to mature, Spanish moss-draped live oaks that along with the trees on the other adjacent lots, add to the lovely scenic canopy at the gateway to the Lands End community on St. Helena Island.





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**AULDBRESS**

**TICKETS ARE STILL AVAILABLE**

NOVEMBER  
9, 10 & 11  
2018

Purchase your tickets on  
Eventbrite.com

Contact:  
auldbressstours@gmail.com  
or call 843-816-6377



## A Gentle Reminder

Perhaps our membership letter went astray. We know you believe in our mission because you have supported us in the past. Your annual membership is critical to the success of our organization. **PLEASE JOIN OR RENEW TODAY AT [WWW.OPENLANDTRUST.ORG](http://WWW.OPENLANDTRUST.ORG).**

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Please provide us with your most current contact information including email address. Send to: [info@openlandtrust.com](mailto:info@openlandtrust.com)

