

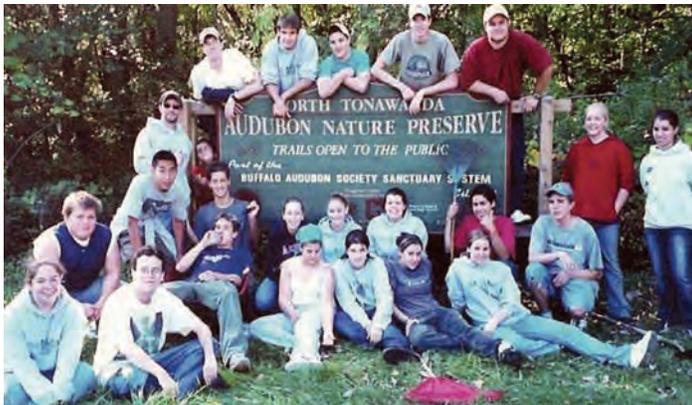
The Resource

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERN NEW YORK LAND CONSERVANCY

Spring 2015

land project updates

THE NORTH TONAWANDA AUDUBON NATURE PRESERVE



Local high school students helped create trails at the preserve.
Photo by Liz Kaszubski

We are in the final stages of placing a conservation easement on a 28-acre portion of the 36-acre North Tonawanda Audubon Nature Preserve, also known as Klydel Wetlands. The preserve is one of the largest remaining areas of open space within the city limits of North Tonawanda. It is owned by the Buffalo Audubon Society, with some portions co-owned by the Land Conservancy. The conservation easement will help ensure that the property remains open and natural in perpetuity.



The wooded wetlands at the preserve look a lot like the cypress swamps in Louisiana and Florida. Photo by Chuck Rosenburg

Liz Kaszubski, founder of Citizens for a Green North Tonawanda, a community group that spearheaded efforts to create the preserve, said, “Klydel Wetlands is an incredibly important natural asset for everyone in North Tonawanda. It took multiple years and the hard work of many concerned residents, organizations, and other supporters to protect the wetlands. We are thrilled that the Land Conservancy and the Buffalo Audubon Society, in partnership with our community groups, have committed to stewarding it now and into the future.”

The North Tonawanda Audubon Nature Preserve is home to an extraordinary ecosystem. It includes a large wooded wetland with mature forests intermingled with seasonally wet vernal pools. These forests are home to numerous species of wildlife, including the small eastern screech owl which nests in tree cavities there. Wetlands and forests along the Niagara River are home to at least eight species of frogs, two toads, and seven salamanders, some of which are threatened with extinction. The vernal pools at the preserve likely host some of these amphibians. The forests and wetlands at the preserve also provide benefits to the surrounding community in the form of ‘ecosystem services’ by improving local water quality and providing flood control for adjacent neighborhoods. Unfortunately, wooded wetlands like these are often drained to make way for other uses. Even Klydel Wetlands is only a fraction of the size that it once was.



The North Tonawanda Audubon Nature Preserve is open to the public and has several walking trails that can be accessed from Fairfield Drive, Wurlitzer Drive, Sunset Drive, or Kinkead Avenue. The Buffalo Audubon Society hosts regular nature hikes at the preserve, including very popular ‘owl prowls’ where visitors often see or hear eastern screech owls. The preserve is also an active site for school-based outdoor learning activities and research. Don’t pass up an opportunity to visit and experience this fascinating place!

You might see, or hear, an eastern screech owl if you visit. Photo by Dick Daniels

mission

The Western New York Land Conservancy is a regional, not-for-profit land trust that permanently protects land with significant conservation value in Western New York, for the benefit of future generations. We envision a future in which natural areas, working farm lands, wildlife habitat and scenic beauty are cherished and protected as part of the landscape and character of Western New York. The organization is one of 1,700 land trusts nationwide, including 90 in New York State, which have protected 40 million acres over the last 20 years.

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TWO LESSONS FROM AN ISLAND NATION

By Nancy Smith, Land Conservancy Executive Director



LESSON ONE:

In November I had the amazing good fortune to visit New Zealand with my husband to travel with our daughter at the end of her semester abroad. The natural beauty of this place is almost indescribable. On our third day we were walking through a lush forest on the South Island. The ceiling was covered in moss and tree ferns, and the ground was a carpet of orchids and ferns as deep into the forest as we could see. A series of small streams and waterfalls laced along the trail bubbling and chirping to us as we walked. We saw seven rainbows that morning and had the thrill of spotting wildlife – kiwis, blue penguins, fur seals and albatross. I thought to myself, “This is a beautiful place”.

During our two-week journey, it became clear that a magnificent natural environment with unparalleled natural systems doesn't exist by accident. There are always challenges and threats to be held at bay. One such threat to the wildlife in New Zealand is from introduced mammals (e.g. rats and opossum) who have invaded this unique island ecology and are decimating the native populations of flightless birds.

As a special treat, we visited Stewart Island, one of the most intact natural communities in the country. The pure wildness and beauty of the forests and the seashore were magical, almost haunting. It dances in my dreams and fires my imagination. How can we preserve, enhance and create places like this in Western New York?

Two hundred eighty families live on Stewart Island's 674 square miles. We learned that every family is involved in an action-oriented and specific way in helping keep the island ecosystems intact. What if every family in Western New York worked to enhance our natural resources? The Land Conservancy is hiring a new full time staff member right now to facilitate exactly this level of engagement.

Since we have been blessed with amazing fresh water resources: two Great lakes, a dozen major creeks with hundreds of tributaries, extensive wetlands, natural and manmade lakes and ponds; Niagara Falls – an internationally renowned natural phenomenon that each year brings nine million people to our region; and plentiful prime soils for agriculture, we owe it to ourselves to preserve and enhance our natural capital. We invite you to spend time in and fall in love with our natural places and to join us in our quest to preserve and restore our natural resources so that they can be the places that fire the dreams of our children and our children's children.

LESSON TWO:

As idyllic as New Zealand appears to be, the sustainability of natural ecosystems is as much an issue there as it is here. In New Zealand there are 4 million people and 31 million sheep. While this massive scale of grazing sheep creates a landscape that is incredibly scenic, it also has implications for sustainability as it limits the space on the land for natural ecosystems. Forests in New Zealand are harvested in a way that was new to me. In this unique climate, entire plantations of trees can be harvested, regrow and be harvested again every 28 years. By replacing ecologically diverse forests with monocultures, increasing erosion and reducing soil quality,

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TWO LESSONS FROM AN ISLAND NATION

Continued from page 2

this forestry practice was trading short-term economic gains for the long-term resiliency of the land.

One very strong voice for sustainability in New Zealand comes from that nation's indigenous people, the Maori. I believe that here in Western New York we too should listen to the voices of our native communities. In the 1800s much of our land was cleared for agriculture. In parts of our eight-county region, we had industrial contamination that was so profound that it sparked the entire environmental movement, and even today we have a remarkable land use pattern that combines a declining population base with sprawling development in a way that defies both logic and wisdom.

What can we learn from the lessons of the Maori people and the Western New York Haudenosaunee nation? In both of these cultures, leaders are encouraged to remember seven generations in the past and consider seven generations in the future when making decisions. This is a voice that calls for responsibility, reciprocity and balance. This year the Land Conservancy will be crafting our next five-year strategic plan. I hope that a focus on decision-making from the perspective of seven generations will be the lens that we use to prepare our plan and I hope that all of us will spend time in nature with our children – and that this will inspire us to save it for them and them to save it for us.



Nancy Smith, *Executive Director*

events...

UPCOMING NATURE HIKES

This year we are bringing back some of your favorite nature hikes. We have already scheduled three, but have just hired a new Community Engagement Director who will arrange many more events on our properties throughout the year. Registration is required for all events. Please call 716.687.1225 or email info@wnylc.org for directions and reservations. All hikes are free and open to the public.

Saturday, May 2nd, 1 pm to 3 pm

WILDFLOWER HIKE ON THE NIAGARA ESCARPMENT PRESERVE



*Visitors searching for wildflowers at the Niagara Escarpment Preserve.
Photo by the Land Conservancy*

Join Ed Fuchs, Joanne Schlegel, Matt Candeias, and Erin Redding on a walk through the Niagara Escarpment Preserve in Lockport in search of spring wildflowers. Located on the Niagara Escarpment, this 36-acre property is part of a unique geological formation and home to woodland plants that are found at few other places in such high diversity and

numbers. Ed and Joanne are long-time members and past presidents of the Niagara Frontier Botanical Society, Matt is the founder of the very popular "In Defense of Plants" Facebook page, and Erin is an environmental scientist with Gomez and Sullivan Engineers.

events...

Saturday, June 6th, 8:30 am to 10:30 am

BIRDWATCHING HIKE AT THE STELLA NIAGARA PRESERVE



A black-crowned night heron flying over Stella.

Photo by Amanda Cesari

Hike hosts Erin Redding and Greg Coniglio will lead the search for year-round resident birds and late migrants at the future Stella Niagara Preserve property along the Niagara River in Lewiston. The Niagara River is considered a globally Important Bird Area, a designation shared with Yellowstone and the Everglades. The 29-acre property has forests, a large meadow, and a quarter-mile of shoreline, all contributing to high bird diversity. Greg is a volunteer with several organizations including the Land Conservancy.

He previously served on the Land Conservancy's Board of Directors and is a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) expert with Ecology and Environment, Inc. in Lancaster. Erin is also leading the wildflower hike described previously.



Participants from the 2013 Kenneglenn hike. Photo by Jay Burney

Sunday, August 9th, 10 am to noon

GEOLOGY HIKE AT THE KENNEGLENN NATURE PRESERVE

Led by Stan Radon, this hike features a walk right through Hunters Creek, views of the gorge walls, and a small waterfall at the Kenneglenn Nature Preserve in Wales. This popular hike is a great family outing on a hot August day. Stan is an engineering geologist with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Stan teaches geology, energy, and environmental classes at SUNY Buffalo and Daemen College.

protecting

THE COULTER FARM IN CAMBRIA AND WILSON

The Coulter Farm, located at the intersection of North Ridge Road and Wilson-Cambria Road, has long been an anchor in Niagara County's farming community. Its owners have been leaders in farmland protection and farmer advocacy issues for many generations. The farm continues to provide fresh and healthy produce throughout the region, and its farm market and 'u-pick' berries attract visitors to the local community. Right now, the Land Conservancy is working with its current owner, David Coulter, to protect more than 100 acres of the farm with a conservation easement by this summer. This has been made possible by the foresight and generosity of the Coulter family who designated the Land Conservancy as the recipient of memorial gifts when the David's father, James Coulter, passed away.



Families enjoying a tour of the farm. Photo by Coulter Farms

The Coulter Farm is important both as farmland and as wildlife habitat. In addition to many acres of fertile soils, the property includes a large cherry, beech, and walnut forest that are home to spring ephemerals such as trillium and jack-in-the-pulpit. The property also includes 2,500 feet of 12-Mile Creek, part of the creek's floodplain, and wetlands associated with the creek. The creek has populations of rainbow trout, brown trout, and Coho salmon that are important for Lake Ontario's recreational fishing industry. The property also supports the threatened northern harrier, a hawk that hunts for rodents in the farm fields.

Wright H. Ellis, the Supervisor of the Town of Cambria, said "The Coulter Farm has been an important part of our community for more than 100 years. Protecting the Coulter Farm as working farmland will help maintain the character and quality of life of Cambria, and ensure that our agricultural economy lasts for many more generations."



Peaches from the farm's orchards. Photo by Coulter Farms



Pumpkins and squash just after harvest. Photo by Coulter Farms

The implications of this farmland conservation project are even broader. Niagara County has some of the most important farmland in New York State. Micro climates along the Lake Ontario plain created by weather conditions between Lake Ontario and the Niagara Escarpment make for great growing conditions for fruits and vegetables. Unfortunately, like many counties across the state, Niagara County has been losing working farmland over the last half century. There are many causes for the loss of farmland, including a changing economy, urban sprawl, and the high cost of purchasing land for new farmers. Protecting working farmland with conservation easements prevents farmland from being lost to development and makes farmland more affordable to new farmers.

In a region that is losing highly productive farmland at a rapid rate, the Coulter Farm conservation easement could not come at a better time. Unlike Erie County to the south which has several municipal farmland conservation programs supported by the Land Conservancy, Niagara County has none. The high profile of this project could change that. To date, the Land Conservancy has protected only three other farmland properties in the county. The Coulter Farm will be the fourth and largest of our protected farms in Niagara County. It is hoped that it will spur additional farmland conservation in surrounding communities.

gifts

HONORARY GIFTS

*In honor of Anthony Eckert
from Tom Machmer*
*In honor of Donna J. Keppel
from Donna Keppel Rzepa*
*In honor of Barbara Landree
from Eric Landree*
*In honor of Lee Oprea
from Robert & Sara Skerker*

MEMORIAL GIFTS

*In memory of Gerhard Neumaier
from David Donohue*
*In memory of Dr. Lynne White Scheider
from Marcia Wopperer & William L. Scheider*



protecting

THE MONKELBAAN FARM IN AMHERST

In January 2015, the Town of Amherst and the Land Conservancy finalized a conservation easement on the 67-acre Monkelbaan Farm on Hopkins Road in Amherst, protecting that land for farming in perpetuity. The farm's development rights were purchased with \$357,120 from a NYS Ag and Markets Farmland Protection Implementation Grant and \$75,507 from the Town of Amherst. The property owners also contributed a portion of the easement's value through a bargain sale of the development rights.



At the signing of the conservation easement, from left to right: Donald Seitz, Esq. (attorney for Monkelbaan family), Marie Monkelbaan (landowner), Karl Monkelbaan (son), Ruth Stegner (daughter), and Patrick Kelly, Esq. (Amherst Deputy Town Attorney). Photo by Jason Engel



The Monkelbaan Farm in early fall.

Photo by Jason Engel

growing vegetables. Since the family retired from farming, nearby Spoth Farms has continued to grow corn and wheat on the property. In addition to its importance to agriculture, the property is also ecologically important. It includes a woodlot, a meadow, and a forested riparian area along Ransom Creek.

Town of Amherst Supervisor, Barry A. Weinstein, said, "Amherst has a long record of supporting the agricultural community through an active farmland protection program. This purchase of development rights protects one of our most important farmland resources and a key element of that program."

This program, known as the Amherst Farmland Protection Program, has protected approximately 800 acres of nearly contiguous farmland. The Monkelbaan Farm is the twelfth conservation easement on farmland to be co-held by the Land Conservancy and the Town of Amherst. Congratulations to everyone who worked so hard to make this happen!

The Monkelbaan Farm has some of the highest quality soils in the region. Its fertile soils have supported agriculture for generations and the property was already being farmed when the Monkelbaan family purchased it in 1946. The Monkelbaans operated a dairy farm and later transitioned to

GET INVOLVED!

There are many ways to get involved with the Land Conservancy and to support our work. If you are interested in any of these opportunities, please contact Jajeon, our Development Director, by emailing him: jajeon.rose@wnylc.org.

Board and Committee Members: As a not-for-profit, the Land Conservancy is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. Board members devote their time and expertise to the work of the organization. Both Board members and non-Board members can serve on one of our committees that include Governance, Finance, Conservation, and Development. Would you or someone you know like to serve as a Board member or help with one of our committees?

Volunteers: The Land Conservancy needs volunteers. Each year we host several events and nature hikes. We clear trails, pull invasive plants, and monitor and steward our properties. We do outreach at festivals and fairs. We send letters and newsletters to our members. If you are interested in volunteering, please complete a volunteer form that is available on our website and send it to Jajeon.

Donating Tools and Office Furniture: In the past, many people have supported the Land Conservancy by donating office supplies, furniture, and equipment. Right now we need lamps for the office, and tools to help with office maintenance, gardening, and grounds keeping. Do you have any lamps or tools that you can donate to us?



Become a Member or Renew Your Membership Today!

Please consider becoming a member or renewing your membership by returning the enclosed donation form with your generous contribution, or by visiting our online giving page at www.wnyc.org. Your tax deductible donation will make our region a great place to live for generations to come. Thank you!

The wonder of the world; The beauty and the power. The shapes of things. Their colours, lights, and shades. These I saw. Look ye also while life lasts.

- as carved on a Scottish tombstone

We are looking for quotes about nature to post at our office to inspire our work. Do you have favorites? Please share them with us!

updates

A \$200,000 CHALLENGE GIFT FOR STELLA!

We first spoke with the Sisters of St. Francis just over two years ago about working with them to purchase a portion of their property on the Niagara River in Lewiston. It was clear even then that this beautiful land was one of our region's most remarkable natural places. The Stella Niagara Preserve, as it would soon be called, was only an idea that came with a more than \$3.2 million fundraising lift.



A small chapel stands at the edge of the river. Photo by Paula Sciuk

Because of incredible support from our community, we have already raised most of the money we needed and are hoping to purchase the property by June 1, 2015. If all goes well, we will open the Stella Niagara Preserve to the public with walking trails, fishing, and kayak access later this summer. However, we are not done yet and our June 1 fundraising deadline is quickly approaching. Thankfully, a Lewiston couple, Pamela and Joe Priest recently offered a very generous contribution - a \$200,000 challenge gift that will match each new donation, dollar for dollar!

They told us: "We couldn't have asked for a more personally fulfilling cause to support than the Stella Niagara Preserve project. Our family drives by its location on Lower River Road almost daily and enjoys the pastoral scenery it provides when boating on the Niagara River in the summer. The Stella Niagara Preserve is especially meaningful to us because our children both graduated from the adjacent Stella Niagara Education Park. Our daughter continues to be educated by the Sisters of St. Francis at the Buffalo Academy of the Sacred Heart. The Stella Niagara Preserve project continues the tradition of stewardship and protection of the environment that the Sisters of St. Francis have shepherded for over 100 years and we are honored to be part of it."

When matched, we will have met our fundraising goal. Donations of all sizes are still needed, and different naming and recognition opportunities are available to donors of \$10,000 or more. You can find out more about the project or donate online at www.wnylc.org. If you have any questions, please contact our Executive Director, Nancy Smith, at (716) 687-1225 or nancys@wnylc.org. Thank you for your support!



Participants on a hike last fall. Photo by Paula Sciuk

IMPORTANT VOTE ON BY-LAWS AT THE UPCOMING MEMBER MEETING

Your support for the Western New York Land Conservancy has helped us develop into the premier land conservation organization in our region. Now in our 24th year we would like to thank you for your continued support as we enter our next stage of organizational development and effectiveness.

At our upcoming June 4th Annual Member Meeting and Reception, our Board of Directors will seek input on a revision to our bylaws. Members of the Land Conservancy will have the opportunity to vote on changing the organization's format from a formal to informal membership structure. This will change the organization from one in which the membership elects the Board and amends the bylaws to an organization in which the Board of Director fulfills those functions.

When the Land Conservancy began in 1991, it was an all-volunteer organization with no staff. Its members did all of the work. Since that time, the Land Conservancy has grown to include a five-member staff and an annual operating budget of \$420,000. In our 24 years, we have helped protect more than 6,000 acres of irreplaceable forests, meadows, farms, and scenic views. We are now recognized as one of the region's leading and most trusted conservation organizations. We are also in the final stages of applying for accreditation from the national Land Trust Accreditation Commission, meaning that we adhere to the highest professional standards in our industry.

The proposed change reflects our many achievements over the years, as well as our continued commitment to excellence. This change will update our bylaws written in 1991, and will align us with the best practices of the nation's leading land trusts that have advanced significantly since our founding. It will allow us to be more effective and efficient, aiding our long-term sustainability.

Changing the membership structure of the organization will not impact the Land Conservancy's mission as a regional, not-for-profit land trust. Our members will continue to be a vital component of our organization and contributions from our members through their ideas, their time, and their donations will be as crucial to the success of our conservation work as ever. There will still be many opportunities to participate in our work - by volunteering, joining a committee or the board, attending hikes and events, and receiving our newsletters. Your input is always welcome by staff and board members.

Land Conservancy members will receive an invitation to the Annual Member Meeting and Reception in late April. Although both members and non-members can attend the annual member meeting, only members will be able to vote. The Land Conservancy defines a member as anyone who has made a donation to support the organization between 18 months and one month prior to the membership meeting (December 4, 2013 and May 4, 2015). The Annual Meeting will be held at The Buffalo History Museum on June 4, 2015.

We greatly value your input. Please contact Nancy Smith, the Land Conservancy's Executive Director, if you have any questions about our proposed change to the bylaws or any questions about our broader work. She can be reached at (716) 687-1225 or nancys@wnylc.org. Please visit our website in late April to view both the current and proposed bylaws, or ask Nancy to send you copies by mail. Thank you for your past and continued support!



RYAN O'GORMAN, THE NEW OWNER OF EDEN'S MEYER FARM

By Larry Brooks, Land Conservancy Vice President

According to the American Farmland Trust, New York State continues to lose a farm to development every 3 1/2 days. UB's Regional Institute, on their One Region Forward website, reports that this region loses 500 acres of land growing fruits and vegetables every year. It is critical to save our remaining farms and protecting those farms is part of the important work of your Western New York Land Conservancy. Of course, none of this would be of any use without the individuals and families who actually farm these protected lands.

In January 2014, the Land Conservancy permanently protected the 90-acre farmland home of Frank and Linda Meyer in the town of Eden. Frank Meyer's great grandfather purchased this land in the 1800s and it has been in his family since then. The Meyer Farm conservation easement will ensure that the farmland remains available for agriculture in spite of development pressure surrounding it.



Frank Meyer's grandfather and uncle holding the reins of seven horses.
Photo from Frank and Linda Meyer

In July 2014, Ryan O'Gorman purchased the 90-acre Meyer farm. Even though Ryan owns the farm he believes we should, "keep calling it the Meyer Farm". His first crop, coming later this year, will be broccoli. Ryan grew up and worked on a dairy farm. He got into vegetable farming in high school, then went to Cornell where he received a bachelors and masters degree in plant science. Ever since graduation he's been looking for a farm in our area. Ryan says the Meyer farm was a "perfect opportunity with some of the best acreage in Eden. It hadn't produced vegetables for over fifty years, as it was rented to a dairy farm for corn and soy." It has "nice clean, virgin ground." As for the deal to purchase the land, Ryan thinks, "it worked out perfectly." The conservation easement made the property much more affordable for a young farmer just getting started. With an aging farmer population and the high cost of developable land, using agricultural conservation easements to facilitate farm transfers is a win-win for both younger and older generations.



Trees on the Meyer Farm in fall.
Photo by Frank and Linda Meyer."

Farming is a year-round vocation, and at this time of year Ryan is doing planning and maintenance. When I called Ryan in the dead of winter, he was "out drilling a well." Ryan also works on an additional 350 acres owned by WD Henry and Sons. Vegetable transplants are started in the WD Henry

greenhouses before the end of February so they will be ready when the weather breaks. Everything Ryan helps grow is marketed through WD Henry and Eden Valley Growers. It's all sold commercially, mainly to supermarkets. Their farming methods adhere to good agricultural practices, called GAPs — administered by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service — "a certification you normally won't find in roadside markets" says Ryan.

When asked about farming, Ryan says, "It gives me something that's my own and that I'm pretty proud of." In the future, his intentions are to "stay close to home and expand the business."

The Town of Eden is very progressive about working to keep its farms and farmed land productive. They have an Agricultural Advisory Committee, a Conservation Advisory Committee, an Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, and a Committee by this same name. Another sign of the success in Eden's farming community is the selection of the Eden Valley Growers, a member-owned produce cooperative, as the newly designated WNY Food Hub. This facility will allow small local growers to work together to successfully market their produce with higher volume institutions.

The Meyer Farm was the second farmland property in Eden to be protected by the Land Conservancy, following 2012's protection of the Surgenor farm. Dedicated farmers like Ryan O'Gorman make all of this hard work worthwhile.



NEW BOARD MEMBER

ROBBYN DRAKE works as the Director of Citizen Action for Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, where she has conducted educational programs, volunteer coordination, planning, and program development since April 2003. She also teaches as an Assistant Professor in Erie Community College's Department of Physics. Robbyn holds a B.S. in Environmental Studies from U.B. and is working towards a master's degree at Buffalo State College's Great Lakes Center. In the 1990s, Robbyn was a leader in the effort to preserve Amherst's Natureview Park from development. This success instilled in her a lifelong appreciation of land trust strategies for habitat protection. Robbyn spends as much time as possible on and in the Niagara River. She holds an American Canoe Association Instructor Certification for Level 2 Kayak and Level 1 Canoe. She is a founding member of the Scajaquada Canoe Club, and when on vacation can be spotted either lazing in a boat drifting downstream, or paddling desperately upstream during race training. You may also run into Robbyn and her Husky, Bowser, walking near her home along Buffalo's Riverwalk on arctic winter evenings. At least one of them will be warm and happy.



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annual member meeting & new gala



ANNUAL MEMBER MEETING

Please join us on the evening of Thursday, June 4th, for our 24th Annual Member Meeting and Reception. The event will be held at The Buffalo History Museum in Delaware Park overlooking Mirror Lake and the Japanese Gardens. We will have drinks and hors d'oeuvres, and will elect incoming Board members. There will also be an important vote by our members, described in more detail earlier in the newsletter. Please save the date and watch for an invitation in the mail in late April.

GALA

This fall, for the first time in our history, the Land Conservancy will host an elegant gala. The gala will be our most important fundraising event for 2015. The exact date and location are still to be determined for this new signature event, so please watch for invitations in the mail later this summer.