

OpenSpaceChronicles

Newsletter of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space

Spring 2008

There **is** an alternative!

Creating local, sustainable, community-based "food systems"

"We are entering a postindustrial era of food; for the first time in a generation it is possible to leave behind the Western diet without having to also leave behind civilization. And the more eaters vote with their fork for a different kind of food, the more commonplace and accessible such food will become...the movement is renovating our food system in the name of health."

Michael Pollan, In Defense of Food

Eating locally grown food is the latest trend in our battle to eat better and live healthier lives. Searching out locally grown food has become the new alternative for many in the Hopewell Valley area and it makes sense for several reasons.

Freshness: With the average food item traveling between 1550-2480 miles, local, sustainable food production means less time to spoil. Research shows that produce picked at its peak has the highest nutrient content. Once picked, fresh produce gradually starts to degrade. In our modern age of preservatives, additives, altered crops and E. coli outbreaks, people are increasingly concerned about the quality and cleanliness of the foods they eat.

Environment: There are also benefits to the environment. Small, independent farms can encourage biodiversity by diversifying the landscape. Such diversity also reduces soil degradation, decreases agricultural run-off into rivers and streams, and provides habitat for wildlife. With fewer miles to travel, local food conserves oil and reduces pollution. Additionally, eating locally encourages the use of local farmland for farming, thus keeping development in check while preserving open space.

Supporting Local Economy and Small Farms: Farmers on average

receive only 20 cents of each food dollar spent, with the rest going for transportation, processing, packaging, refrigeration and marketing. Farmers who sell food to local customers receive the full retail value, a dollar for each food dollar spent. Supporting restaurants that support the local farming community



Grassfed beef graze at Beechtree Farm on Crusher Road. The Huebners sell their beef directly to the consumer at: beechtreefarm@mac.com.

helps secure the future of these small businesses who take the effort to negotiate with local providers and prepare the meals that highlight the local growing seasons. Their success inspires others to join in the challenge of including and promoting local food on their menus, again having a positive impact on the local farmer.

The interesting thing about the "local food movement" is that it really came out of the "organic movement," explains Mikey Azzara of NJ's Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA-NJ). "When some organic farms in California started to approach the size of large, "industrial" farms, the small organic farm and true organic believers started to differentiate themselves by being organic AND local.

Mikey credits the recent publication of a number of books, including Michael Pollan's *Omnivores' Dilemma* and Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable,*

Miracle along with reports from mainstreamers such as *Newsweek*, *US News and World Report* and *NY Times Magazine* for encouraging the public to take an interest in the importance of local food. NOFA-NJ, headquartered in Pennington, believes, "there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come. That is exactly the case for local, organic, and sustainable farming and food here in New Jersey and throughout the country."

A lot of work over the years has been done in this area in particular to bring awareness to this issue. NOFA-NJ has been busy since 1986, when farmers and consumers sat around a picnic table at the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association and talked about how they all wanted their food to be raised. Hosting a winter conference every January to educate both growers and consumers and a summer Sunday farm tour are a few of the programs NOFA-NJ spearheads around the state. NOFA-NJ's Regional Farmer-Chef meetings have been hugely successful in connecting local farms with restaurants, as well as retailers and grocery stores. Starting out with seven farmers and seven chefs in central New Jersey the first year, they are now meeting with over 150 participants in all parts of the state. Upcoming plans include a printed guide to farms and sustainable/organic restaurants statewide. Since 2004, they have also started gardens at the schools in order to raise awareness among youth, teachers, and families about fresh, wholesome food.

NOFA-NJ credits local visionaries for the success of this movement which is strong in the Hopewell Valley: Wendell
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There is an alternative!

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Berry of and the Whole Earth Center in Princeton - the founders of NOFA-NJ - Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association, and Jim Kinsel at Honey Brook Organic Farm, which pioneered the Community-Supported Agriculture model in the early 1990s.

Another focus of residents in the Hopewell Valley is the growing farm-to-school movement which addresses the quality of school food by connecting small farmers, school service professionals, food educators, parents, community leaders and most importantly the kids. Its implications has prompted the formation of a local citizens group, Real Food for Thought, formed in October 2007 to work on improving the food program in the Hopewell Valley School system.

Pam Flory, a Real Food for Thought charter member, explains, "the schools are the heartbeat of a community; it is the first place children understand how to be an active member of a thriving community. If schools are a place to learn, why then has the cafeteria been left out?"

Trying to counteract the "fast food culture" of today, Real Food for Thought has begun a dialogue, most recently with the Food Service Director of Hopewell Valley Schools, in an effort to understand their challenges and exchange ideas. "When it comes to nutrition in public schools, numerous studies have shown that both behavior and academics are directly impacted by

what and how a child eats. "With some students reporting less than 15 minutes to eat lunch, and many kids not understanding the connection of their food to green spaces and local farming, we feel that there are some very doable steps that we can take to work within the existing system and make it better," adds Pam.

So, what actions can you take today that will not only improve your family's health, but also your environment and community?

One of the best pieces of advice is to buy directly from the farm at local farmers markets, as well as farm stores. In addition to seasonal farm stands, there are markets in nearby communities that are open year-round and other markets run by volunteers that are open one or two days a week during the peak of the growing season. Another option is to become a member of a Community-Supported-Agriculture (CSA) farm, such as Honey Brook Organic Farm. Programs like these provide a valuable connection to the farmer, to the land, and put you in touch with the seasons, as you get a weekly share of what's available at that time of year. You can find a list of many of the area's local farms on our website. In North Jersey, the Community Supported Garden at Genesis Farm has

a storage cellar, as well as greenhouse and hoopouses (unheated), which allows them to offer a 50-week CSA.

Many grocery stores and restaurants have begun to indicate where the products are grown. If they don't, then you must ask! As customers, we can encourage our grocers and restaurants to source more locally-produced products. And finally, support those who are in the business of providing local food. There is a growing trend among area restaurants to advertise the fact that their produce and meats are grown locally. Seek them out!

In today's society, we are all longing for community, for connection to other people, and to the land. Food can be one of

the most meaningful ways we connect to all three. In an effort to capture that spirit, Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space, in partnership with NOFA-NJ are launching its first annual "Eat Locally Tour!" on Sunday, September 14th.

The tour will begin 2:00 pm at Hopewell Valley Vineyards where guests will board a chartered bus and hear lively narration along the way to three local proprietors of local food. Once there, they will be privy to behind-the-scene information, VIP samples and gifts. The tour will finish with a return to the vineyard where Chef Will of Brothers Moon—a restaurant committed to incorporating local ingredients and products on their menu—and Sergio Neri of Hopewell Valley Vineyards will co-host a celebration of local food that includes music, delectable dishes, wine, and celebration of the connection between agriculture, open space, and healthy communities!



Sources:

EarthTalk, - *E/The Environmental Magazine*
Pollan, Michael – *In Defense of Food*, Penguin Publishing 2007



Chef Will of Brothers Moon. Located on Broad Street in Hopewell, this restaurant is committed to including a variety of local ingredients on its menu.

An alternative for our children?

- Only 2 percent of America's children meet all the recommendations of the USDA Food Guide Pyramid (USDA, Eat Smart, Play Hard).
- Less than 20 percent eat the recommended servings of vegetables and less than 15 percent eat the recommended serving of fruit (USDA, Eat Smart, Play Hard).
- In the U.S. at least one child in five is overweight. Over the last 20 years the number of overweight children has increased by more than 50 percent (USDA, Childhood Obesity: Causes and Prevention).
- According to the CDC, One in three U.S. children born in 2000 will become diabetic unless children start making serious changes to their lifestyles and eating habits.



Sergio Neri of Hopewell Valley Vineyards inspects grapes on his Pennington property.



President's Note

One of the things I have always cherished about living in the Hopewell Valley is the proximity to a wide variety of locally harvested food. Although I'm hard pressed to get my kids to eat a string bean when it is encountered on their plates, I've found that they will happily devour them while roaming the fields of Honey Brook Farm. Hopefully, such experiences will encourage them to feel connected to their food supply. And possibly even learn to love a string bean encountered at home as well.

In addition to his riveting books on the connection between eating locally and health, Pollan has reported that there is a bumper sticker often seen in Europe that reads "Eat your view!" As Pollan suggests, "if you want to preserve those views, then eat from the food chain that created them." FoHVOS has long supported land protection as a means to preserve the beautiful vistas that were born of our agricultural past. But in supporting FoHOVS – through your generous

donations and the many volunteer opportunities we offer – you are also supporting the conservation of the Valley's agricultural traditions and a local, healthy food chain. So "eat your Hopewell Valley view," "vote with your fork" when open space and agricultural conservation are on the

ballot, and hop on the "locavore" bus with us on Sunday, September 14th.

Happy Hopewell strawberries in the month to come,

Celebrate National Trails Day

Help Build Another FoHVOS Trail!

When: June 7, 2008; 10 am - 2 pm

Where: Nayfield Preserve

Why: To begin a new 1.5 mile loop trail

Contact: Michael@fohvos.org
or 609-730-1560

Volunteers should bring a lunch and work gloves. Water and tools will be supplied.

Yes, I want to preserve open space throughout the Valley!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

☐ Yes, I prefer to receive your bi-annual newsletter via email.

☐ Friend - \$35

☐ Advocate - \$60.00

☐ Partner - \$100

☐ Student/Senior - \$25

☐ Steward - \$250

☐ Conservationist Society - \$500

☐ Other - \$ _____



News & Events

FOHVOS Protects Open Space in The Valley

FoHVOS finished strong in 2007 with the permanent protection of nearly 150 acres of open space and farmland in the Valley. Our largest project was Robert and Anne Wilson's donation of a 102-acre conservation easement along Hopewell-Amwell Road. This property harbors fertile agricultural soils as well as providing wooded

habitat for rare animals. The forested portion of the property is part of an 18,000-acre forest patch stretching throughout the Sourlands region.

The Vogler property was protected in partnership with Hopewell Township. It is an 11-acre parcel on the corner of Route 31 and Marshalls Corner-Woodsville Road. The property is about 2/3 agricultural field

and 1/3 forest & shrubland. There is a sign commemorating Mr. Vogler near the road's intersection.

FoHVOS also participated in a multi-partner project protecting the 40-acre Wright parcel, which includes a forest buffer along the Stony Brook and agricultural lands along Elm Ridge Road



Join us for our 2008 Annual Meeting

Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space announce this year's annual meeting will take place appropriately enough on Earth Day, April 22nd. The program is entitled, Where the Garden Meets the Forest: How Gardeners' Choices Impact Nature.

Following a brief update on FoHVOS' preservation and stewardship work accomplished in the Valley in 2007, an illustrated program will be presented by Dr. Michael Van Clef, FoHVOS Stewardship Director and expert on how native and non-native plant species affect plant and wildlife, and Hannah Suthers, Founder and Director of Featherbed Lane Bird Banding and Research Station and whose own garden is certified as a Backyard Wildlife Habitat. Please join us in celebrating Earth Day by attending the FoHVOS Annual Meeting on Tuesday, April 22nd, from 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm at St. Matthews's Episcopal Church, located at South Main Street in Pennington NJ 08534

Refreshments will be served

Hey, why don't you Take a Hike!

FoHVOS' 2nd Annual Guided Hike at Beautiful Curlis Lake Woods

This hike is fun for the entire family! On June 1st, join us for a guided stroll through one of Mercer County's most beautiful forests. Naturalist Jim Consolloy will lead a two-hour walk through this pristine 116-acre plot of land on the edge of Pennington Borough. This area contains a mature a beech forest and a 17-acre lake. See the results of FoHVOS first efforts that occurred in 1993 - the preservation of Curlis Lake Woods. The preserve, now contains hiking trails and serves as a connector to Mercer County Park Northwest.

Our group will meet promptly at

1:00 pm at the hiking entrance on South Main St. in Pennington Borough. As you drive south on Main Street look on your left for a large Board of Education building. Pass median of green lawn and trees on left and just beyond Baldwin Street you will see the trail entrance with chain across pathway and the Green Acres sign. Pull out on the East side of the street. For more information, go to www.fohvos.org. If you are not an active 2008 FoHVOS member, there is a \$5.00 donation for all participants over 12 years of age. Don't forget your water bottles!



Celebrate Earth Day

-- earn money and a T-shirt at the same time!

Is your group looking for a meaningful way to raise money for its own activities or to contribute as a group to FoHVOS? Then join us on Saturday morning, April 26, at the Hopewell Township Public Works building (located on Pennington-Washington Crossing Road) as part of our semi annual Clean Up Day event.

Clean Up Day is sponsored by FoHVOS in partnership with Hopewell Township and Hopewell Borough. There are over 100 designated clean up areas. Individuals, families and local organizations – from kids to adults – are invited to participate in this meaningful Earth Day inspired activity. A free FoHVOS T-shirt is awarded to anyone working at least two hours. In addition, cash - which can be designated to your own group or to FoHVOS- is earned through your participation. For more information or to register online, please go to www.fohvos.org and click on Clean Up Day.





Stewardship Corner *Ask Dr. Mike*

Gardens as Habitat

In my professional life as an ecologist, I tend to dwell on threats to biodiversity like overabundant deer and invasive species (see Spring and Fall 2007 newsletters). In all cases, the goal of my work is to support our native plants and animals by fostering healthy ecosystems. In my free time, I join millions of people by participating in the age-old hobby of gardening.

First, do no harm...

When considering purchasing plants for your garden, I encourage you to avoid the use of invasive plants that can spread into natural areas and cause harm. For many gardeners, it can come as a surprise that commonly available plants such as butterfly bush, Chinese silver grass (*Miscanthus*), and Japanese barberry are considered invasive. However, all of these plants have alternatives that are native to our area and provide benefits to wildlife while still providing beauty to your landscape.

Second, have fun loading up your garden with native plants!

There are two distinct benefits of using native plants – 1) enjoyment for the gardener from using new and interesting plants and 2) providing opportunities for our native plants and animals to flourish. Native plants can be used to attract a wide variety of butterflies and birds to your garden. The first year that I grew butterfly weed and spicebush in my garden resulted in immediate attraction of monarch and spicebush swallowtail butterflies...a 10 ft. x 10 ft. patch of purple giant hyssop attracts hundreds of butterflies on a daily basis...my flowering dogwood tree brings in flocks

of birds during September...the list can go on and on, but the point is that native plants have evolved to attract native animals to spread their pollen and seeds. Conversely, most non-native plants traditionally used in gardens have been cultivated for the sole purpose of

looking pretty to humans and tend to receive much less interest from butterflies and birds.



A Northern metalmark butterfly feeding on orange butterfly weed.
Photo courtesy of Michael Bisignano.

Monarch butterfly on spotted joe-pye flowers.
Photo courtesy of Michael Bisignano.



Field aster and native grasses provide beauty for the gardener, nectar for native bees and hunting grounds for dragonflies such as the painted skimmer.
Photo courtesy of Allen Barlow.

Many gardeners will ask the question – So, will native plants look like weeds in my garden? To be honest, most native plants are better off left in the forests and fields – they may have small flowers, short flowering times, or messy-looking growth habits. However, there are many natives with great beauty and form that can serve as excellent garden plants. I encourage you to Google some of the information sources nurseries below or feel free to

contact me (WARNING: I love talking about native plants and am likely to offer you free samples!).

Sources of Information & Native Plants

- Arrowwood Nursery, Franklinville, NJ (native plants, retail)
- Audubon Society (information on the "Healthy Yard Pledge")
- Book – Bringing Nature Home by Douglas Tallamy
- Book – Noah's Garden by Sara Stein
- Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve, New Hope, PA (information and seasonal native plant sales)
- Brooklyn Botanic Garden (information/book for sale – "Native Alternatives to Invasive Plants")
- National Wildlife Foundation (information on backyard "Certified Wildlife Habitat")
- Native Plant Society of New Jersey (information)
- Natural Resource Conservation Service (information on "Backyard Conservation")
- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (Invasive species policy providing a list of plants to avoid - http://www.nj.gov/dep/commissioner/policy/pdir2004-02_appendix.pdf)
- North Creek Nursery, Landenberg, PA (native plants, wholesale*)
- Pinelands Nursery, Columbus, NJ (native plants, wholesale*)
- Plants for a Livable Delaware (free informational brochure on native alternatives to invasive species)
- Toadshade Wildflower Farm, Frenchtown, NJ (native plants, retail)
- Vermont Lady Slipper Company (native orchids, retail)

*Wholesale nurseries will require you to purchase larger quantities, but you can always purchase them together and share with fellow gardeners!





Volunteer Spotlight

New walking trail is built by dedicated volunteers

What do you get when you combine picks, weed whackers, sweat and determination? A long awaited 1.2 mile loop trail on FoHVOS' Elks Preserve. Stewardship Director, Mike Van Clef explains, "Providing public access is a key component of our mission and Elks is the first of several short loop trails that we are creating in order to improve access to our open space." Chris Berry had heard of our plans and took ownership of the project by asking friends, family and fellow FoHVOS

Stewardship committee volunteers to join him. The project wouldn't have been completed without his careful planning and hard work. Chris' next project will be construction of a similar trail at the Nayfield Preserve on Hopewell-Lambertville Road.

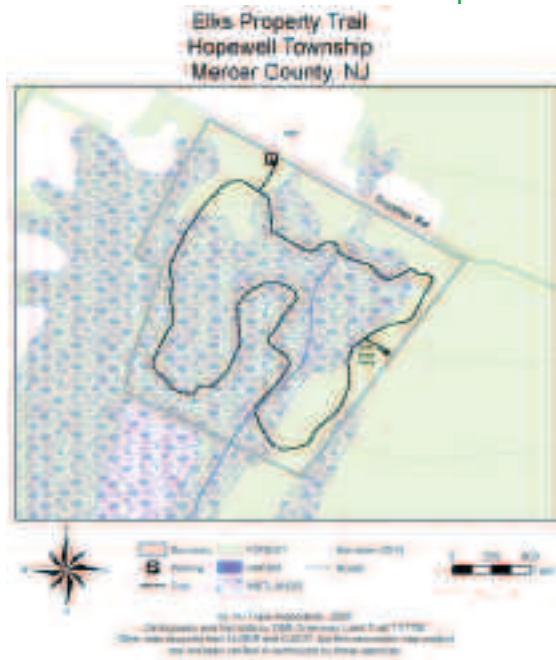
The benefits of walking are far reaching. Since short walks are the easiest way for Hopewell Valley families to incorporate health benefits and relaxation into their busy lives, FoHVOS has put plans in place for access to several properties throughout the Valley. Given the relatively short distance and easy terrain, people of all abilities and ages can use these trails.

This is a very pleasant walk through a red maple forest. Remnants of a red cedar woods and the growth of



Elks Trail Volunteers: Top: David Berry, Chris Berry, Kevin Michaels-Grant, Jens Riedels. Bottom: Simcha Rudolph and Michael Van Clef. Not pictured, but also volunteering were Jessica Berry, Tom Baker and Tom Ogren.

American beech can be observed. Nearly fifty species of birds have been documented at the site including the state endangered red-shouldered hawk.



Trail Details

Distance: 1.2 miles

Time: One hour of leisurely walking. Markings: White diamonds painted on trees

Trail Usage: Walking/Hiking. Dogs permitted on leash

Parking: A small cleared area will hold 3-4 cars

Directions:

From Trenton: Take Route 31

North: Turn right onto Route 654 toward Hopewell.

At 2 miles turn right at the Quarry Swim Club sign onto Crusher Road. In 0.3 miles turn right onto an old dirt road opposite # 167 Crusher Road. The parking lot is the cleared area on the immediate left.

Thinking about volunteering?

FoHVOS has several opportunities for individuals, groups and families wishing to make a difference.

Families and Groups – Clean Up Day (see News and Events) or Help monitor one of our many FoHVOS properties – makes for a great annual family project – we'll give you all the information you need!

Individuals – Bring us your talent and enthusiasm - consider volunteering on one of two committees below. For more information, contact us at info@fohvos.org.

Marketing and Outreach – FoHVOS participates in several community events throughout the year. We are also looking for creative ways to promote the importance of open space conservation. You must be able to meet 4 times per year.

Event Committee – Are you passionate about "Eating Locally" and the Environment? Or, do you know how to plan a great party? Either way, we need your help in launching our first annual Eat Locally Food Tour and Celebration being held in September. We will meet in person at least 5 times from May – September 2008.

Families, Groups and Individuals Stewardship Volunteers – Do you want to feel a real connection to the outdoors? Enjoy hands on volunteering? Then this is the committee for you. Help with a variety of meaningful community stewardship programs that can include groups such as schools, business community, civic organizations, and families. Help FoHVOS support biodiversity protection efforts on our ever-growing inventory of conserved land. Upcoming projects include: 1) Assist with trail building and maintenance projects; 2) Become part of the Hopewell Valley Invasive Species Strike Team by searching for and removing newly emerging invasive species, and 3) Assist with our forest health monitoring system that helps guide our Deer Management Program.



My Favorite Hike: Pennington Loop Trail

This issue's contributor:

by Pennington resident & hike enthusiast, Kay Widmer



Spring is a wonderful time to explore the Pennington Loop Trail. Be prepared for mud if the weather has been wet. This trail traverses a floodplain forest of oaks, sycamore and hickories with tulip poplar and red maples. It climbs up to Baldwin Lake through some beautiful beech groves. From the lake one may walk to North Main St. (follow the Orange markers) along the lake or back toward Kunkel Park (follow the yellow or blue trail markers) through an upland woods.

In the flood plain look for vernal pools with wood frogs and salamanders. One may also hear spring peepers near the Stony brook. Look for wood and mallard ducks, migrating mergansers and nesting geese along Stony Brook and look for swans on the lake.

This is also a fun place to explore in winter when the ground is frozen. Blue birds and numerous woodpeckers can be seen along the yellow and blue trail seeking shelter from the wind and exploring for insects in the dead trees.

Distance: 1.5 miles, about a 40 minute hike
Dogs permitted on leash

Parking: Southeastern end of trail is accessed from Pennington Borough's Kunkel Park, which has parking for a dozen or more cars. The northeastern end of trail is accessed from North Main where a couple of cars can pull off of the road at the gap in the guardrail just east of the railroad overpass.



Get Outside!

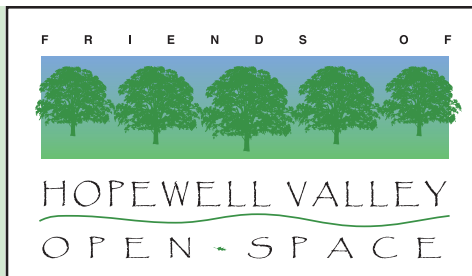
How good it feels when the early spring sunshine warms your face after winter's biting winds and frosty nights have left for good. That's exactly how the earliest spring wildflowers feel, when dappled sunlight softens the damp, rich humus of the forest floor, releasing its earthy fragrance and triggering the plant hormones that unlock dormancy. Spring beauty, bloodroot, wood anemone, cut-leaved toothwort, and early saxifrage push their way through the detritus of last year's leaf-fall and dot the forest

floor with jewels of purest white or pale pink or, in the case of trout lilies, yellow. Known to botanists as spring ephemerals because of their transitory nature, these native treasures must grow, bloom and set seed before the trees leaf out and while plenty of sunlight can still penetrate the forest canopy. This brief season is moving forward on the calendar as our climate changes, but mid-April to early May is still the best time. So, get outside! Walk gently on the trail and, of course, take

photos but do not disturb these fragile gems.

Read about spring ephemerals at www.naturesmart.com/articles/04_16_04.htm. Enhance your stroll through the woods with a wildflower identification guide. Two excellent choices: Newcomb's Wildflower Guide by Lawrence Newcomb; and, A Field Guide to Wildflowers: Northeastern and North-Central North America (Peterson Field Guide) by Margaret McKenny and Roger Tory Peterson.





The purpose of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space is to promote conservation in the Hopewell Valley region through open space preservation, wise stewardship, education and outreach.

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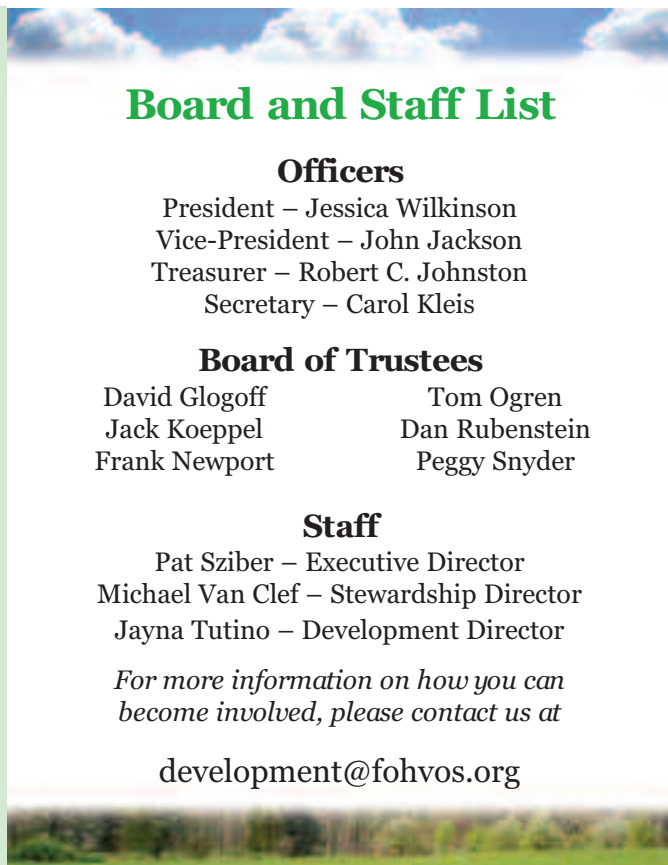
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For more information on how you can become involved, please contact us at

development@fohvos.org



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