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# News & Events

## Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association's Butterfly Festival

The Watershed's Butterfly Festival is scheduled for Saturday, August 13. Please stop by the Friends' booth to view maps of the Valley's open space, ask questions and pick up a t-shirt! We look forward to seeing you.



**Photo by Jack Koepfel**  
**Friends' President, Ted Stiles,**  
**shows Pennington residents the**  
**location of Curlis Lake Woods**  
**Preserve during Pennington Day,**  
**which was held on May 14.**

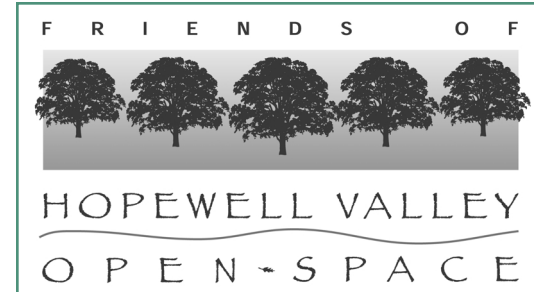
## Out & About

Friends' board members, volunteers and staff, spoke with hundreds of interested community members during this year's Pennington Day. Attendees had the opportunity to look at aerial photos of Pennington Borough and a map of all of the preserved land in the Valley.

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# FoHVOS News

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## Policy Recommendation on the Use of Hopewell Township Open Space Tax Money

### A Message from the President

Since it first enacted an open space tax, Hopewell Township has been a valuable partner in working with the Friends to tackle the challenge of conserving open space in the Valley. Together with the state's Green Acres Program and Farmland Preservation Program, and the open space tax programs in Hopewell and Pennington Boroughs and Mercer County, virtually every successful land conservation project that has occurred in the region has been a collaborative effort among these groups, the Friends, and other land trust partners. The Friends believe that Hopewell Township can best maximize the open space tax monies by adopting a policy that caps its contributions to both open space and farmland acquisitions to ten percent of a property's fair market value.

The Friends bring expertise to the table and create partnerships to use all of these funds for open space and

farmland acquisition, bringing an array of funding into the Valley. In addition, the Friends work with property owners to help them benefit from the economic opportunities associated with the sale of property to a charity or government. These benefits include: reduced capital gains taxes, no roll-back taxes, charitable donation deductions and the time value of money. Together, these factors can be worth 25 percent or more of the certified fair market value of the property. Using all these funds, as well as additional funding sources, the Friends create partnerships that yield fair offers. Property owners can either accept or reject these offers.

The history of land acquisitions that have used the Hopewell Township Open Space Trust Fund was reported in the Fall 2004 Township of Hopewell Report. Of the \$19,527,969 spent to acquire open space and farmland throughout the Valley, the Township has contributed \$1,479,705. This is approximately 7.6 percent of the total purchase

prices. The Township's contribution in many of these projects has actually been below 7 percent of the property value, as many of the parcels were bargain sales (purchased for below Certified Fair Market Value) that were negotiated in part by either the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space or the D & R Greenway Land Trust.

Because of the diversity of funding sources available to purchase open space, there is very little reason for Hopewell Township to spend more than the 10 percent of Township funds to acquire easements on farmland, as the Township's Agricultural Advisory Committee has encouraged the Township to do. The state's Green Acres Program or the State Agricultural Development Committee can provide 50 percent of the matching grants for Township acquisitions. Mercer County can provide an additional 15 percent in grants for open space or farmland purchases under their municipal assistance program.

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



# Preserved Land

## Bellando

The Bellando property was acquired from Maurice Bellando Jr. and Robert Bellando in 2003 under a cooperative agreement among the Friends, Hopewell Township and the State of New Jersey. This 42-acre property on Church Road is a major piece in the Baldpate Mountain project that has been a priority for acquisition since 1989. The property contains one of the most remarkable historic homes in Hopewell Valley. It was the mission of the Friends to save the open space, as well as the integrity of the historic structure.

The Friends worked with the State Green Acres Program to acquire the entire property. Since the Bellandos did not wish to retain the home, we negotiated to have the State purchase 32 acres of open space, while the Friends would purchase 10 acres with the historic home and subsequently resell the home on 10 acres of land. Hopewell Township agreed to acquire the State's portion of the property with the understanding that the State would later purchase that portion of the property from the Township. *continued on page 7*



The Brown/Bellando Farmhouse circa 1900



## Thank you for Your Years of Support!

Each year, the Pennington Market generously donates doughnuts, coffee, soda and other treats to help keep our Clean-Up Day volunteers going. The Friends would like to thank them for their continued commitment to making a difference in the community.

## Preserved Land - Bellando

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To document the historic elements of the home, the Friends hired Dennis Bertland Associates to prepare a Historical Assessment Report on the Brown/Bellando Farmstead. The Farmstead was dated to the middle of the 18th century bearing both Georgian and traditional construction. The interior is less altered than the exterior and retains much of its early character. The main block of

the house has kept its original three-room plan with a corner fireplace and newel-turned staircase. The retained, raised paneling on the wall of the large, front room is the dwelling's most notable original feature.

The Historical Assessment Report became the primary element of a Historic Preservation Easement that, along with a Conservation Easement restricting the subse-

## President's Message

*continued from page 1*

The value of the tax and other benefits from a sale to a government or nonprofit are often worth 25 percent of the value of the property.

Taken together, state and local funding, plus the benefits accrued from working with a partner, can easily constitute 90 percent of the value of any property. With only contributing 10 percent of the remaining funds, the Township can contribute to protecting open space, while using the public's funds wisely.

The Friends clearly support the preservation of farmland in the Township, but I feel it is a good policy for Hopewell Township to restrict its contribution to open space and farmland purchases to 10 percent of the certified fair market value.

*Ted Stiles*

quent development of the property, became part of the deed when the Friends sold the property to a private buyer.

The historic home is bounded on two sides by the 32 acres of land preserved under the Green Acres Program. This beautiful field connects to the Washington Crossing State Park and may, at some point in the future, serve as a gateway to Baldpate Mountain.



# Getting Greener

What do a vacuum cleaner, snow shovel, large decorative pinwheel and car mat have in common? They were all found discarded on Valley streets during the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space's 28th semi-annual Clean-Up Day.

On Saturday, April 9, over 100 volunteers spent hours picking up discarded trash and recyclables from local roadways. The total amount collected – a whopping 217 bags of trash! This was enough to overflow the dumpster at the Township Municipal Building.

In addition to keeping the Valley clean, volunteers also earned money for their favorite charities. Thanks to a grant from the Clean Communities Program of the Department of Environmental Protection, volunteers were able to select a charity to receive a donation for their "dirty" work.

The next Clean-Up Day is tentatively scheduled for November 5, 2005. If you are interested in participating, and would like us to notify you closer to the date, send an email to [fohvos@yahoo.com](mailto:fohvos@yahoo.com). Please include your name and mailing address.



**Lisa Lafferty, Ellen Sherwood, Sarah Sickels and Christina Jawarsky (from left), show some of the unusual finds they collected during the Friend's semi-annual Clean-Up Day.**



**Hopewell Valley Central High School students (from left) Ben Van Selous, Ben Jarrett and Wes Purvis spent hours cleaning up the Valley on April 9 to earn money for the school's Robotics Club.**



**Cory Allen and Gus Huebner pile up bags of trash they collected on a small stretch of Trenton-Harbourton Road during the Clean-Up Day.**



# Members Updated On Friends' Growth

Undeterred by the day's ice storm, dozens of Friends' members attended the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space's annual meeting on March 8 at the Pennington School.

Friends' President, Ted Stiles, greeted attendees and gave a summary of the organization's efforts in 2004. Stiles announced that the Friends preserved three new properties in 2004, resulting in 44 additional acres of protected open space in the Valley! With several additional properties under contract, the Friends anticipate preserving even more land in 2005. The contracted parcels represent the organization's on-going commitment to linking preserved open space between the Valley and surrounding municipalities.

One of the evening's highlights was the presentation of the annual Jack Gleeson Environmental Award to George Hawkins, the former Executive Director of the Stony-Brook Millstone Watershed Association. Hawkins was honored for his commitment to improving water quality, open space preservation and environmental regulations throughout the Township. During his seven years at the Watershed, the organization became the largest watershed association in the nation.

The evening's keynote speaker, Jennifer Bryson, is President of the Sourlands Planning Council. Bryson detailed how the "fate of the Sourlands will be determined in the next three to five years." The 90-square-mile, forested, mountain region, which provides the Valley with a significant portion of its drinking water, is facing increased pressure from developers. Bryson urged audience members to take an active role in protecting this unique ecosystem. For more information on the Sourlands Planning Council, visit [www.sourland.org](http://www.sourland.org).

The Friends' next annual membership meeting is scheduled for May of 2006. We hope to see you there.



**Photo by Jack Koeppel  
Jennifer Bryson, President of the Sourlands Planning Council, speaks about her organization's efforts at the Friends' annual meeting on March 8.**



# Looking for a Way to Get Outside and Enjoy the Sunshine?

Whether you have thirty minutes, or a whole Sunday afternoon, Curlis Lake Woods Nature Preserve will delight the avid hiker or the novice explorer with its untouched natural beauty.

Considered by many to be the crown jewel of the Mercer County Park system, Curlis Lake Woods Nature Preserve has 88 acres of hiking trails. Purchased in 1993, along with what is now the Mercer County Equestrian Center, this property was once owned by Howe's Nursery in Pennington. Curlis Lake was created by the State of New Jersey in the late 1950's as one of a series of erosion control lakes along the Stony Brook.

The preservation of this beautiful forest was the prime motivation for the formation of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space under the guiding

eye of the late Jack Gleason. A survey at the time claimed that this property contained one of the largest stands of mature American Beech trees east of the Mississippi River. Many of the trees are several hundred years old. Faced with the possible development of the ill-fated Pennington By-pass, this property was the subject of much debate. In the end, the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space negotiated the deal and Mercer County acquired the land.

Now preserved as permanent open space, this park affords a wonderful outdoor experience

that is within walking distance of Pennington Borough. The visitor may enter the nature preserve from three locations. A small grass lane appears on South Main Street in Pennington, just below Vannoy Avenue. A Green Acres sign is the only visible marker. A short walk in leads the hiker to a large sign with a map of all the trails in the park. Hikers can also access the trails from the south end of Oak Street, which is adjacent to

Pennington Borough. The third access is from the Mercer County Equestrian Center on Federal City Road, just east of Pennington. Parking is available to the public there and hikers may enter the woods by walking along the edge of the fields to the right. A series of loop trails have been created from old logging roads, nursery lanes and deer trails. The recent addition of color-coded trail markers has made exploring the area a little bit easier.



Curlis Lake Woods

Photo by Jack Koepfel

