**Happy Holidays and Happy 50th Anniversary to the Friends of Valley Falls!**

As we look back on our 50 years as a private non-profit, we can be proud of many accomplishments. Certainly, raising the funds needed to take ownership of Valley Falls Farm in 2001 was a highlight, but there have been so many other achievements: making renovations and improvements to the farmhouse and outbuildings, developing a plan to manage invasive plants in the park, repairs to the red barn, nature walks and events, and creating a soon-to-open Heritage Center.

This past September we held our annual meeting in the red barn, and on display were historical documents, news articles, older annual reports, past meeting minutes and notable photos to help celebrate our 50th anniversary. We also had the pleasure of honoring Ginny Gingras, one of the seven original founding members of the Friends. Ginny, who was thanked for her dedication and many years of service, was excited to see new faces and a continued commitment to protect the natural resources and history of Valley Falls.

The meeting also featured farm beekeeper Allen Valli, who reported harvesting 200 pounds of honey from the hives in the spring. Although several of the hives failed in the fall, overall it was a good year for honey and jars were at the meeting for purchase.

Following the meeting, Jean Luddy, Museum Director with the Vernon Historical Society, shared her research from the Society’s archives on the town’s cemeteries, both old and new. She entertained her audience by providing information about stones in the Old Burial Ground on Bamforth Road, and how they reflect Puritan attitudes toward life and death. She also noted that Valley Falls Cemetery, the town’s newest burial ground, serves a different type of community.

 Upon opening the 2022 Annual Meeting, Vice President Maryann Levesque thanked the many volunteers who have worked over the past 50 years to preserve Valley Falls Park and Farm. She also introduced the Board members, including newest member, Jane Darico. Jane’s family has a long history at the farm and her historical knowledge of the property is a valuable asset, especially as the Friends continue to develop the Heritage Center.

When Treasurer Bob Letendre provided a summary of the financial highlights of FY 2021-2022 at the meeting, he was able to report that our organization continues to be debt free.

Thanks to a $150,000 state grant from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the Friends have been able to restore buildings and create a Heritage Center in the white stable overlooking the property. Scheduled to open in Spring of 2023, the Center will be a museum to showcase the history of the farm and the surrounding area.

The Friends were fortunate to receive a generous endowment several years ago, and the rental of the farmhouse also provides a source of revenue. However, with the $150,000 grant close to being spent, we need to seek out new grants, use membership dues wisely, and find other funding sources to maintain the property, operate a museum, and offer programs to the public including bird and tree walks, Artists Day, and nature events.

In addition to your membership dues, please consider helping the Friends of Valley Falls in these ways:

* Make a contribution to the Friends of Valley Falls Farm endowment fund.
* Purchase a gift membership for a friend or family member.
* Make a memorial donation or to commemorate a notable event.
* Designate Valley Falls Farm in your will or give the gift of stock.
* Hold a fundraiser to celebrate your birthday, special event or retirement, designating Valley Falls Farm as the recipient.
* Consider a tax-deductible contribution when compiling your list of annual charity donations.
* Check with your employer to see if it has a matching gift program.
* If you have a traditional IRA and are age 72 or older, you can contribute your Minimum Required Distribution (RMD) to Valley Falls Farm.

Thank you for all that you do to support the Friends of Valley Falls and preserving Vernon’s past and present.