

FRIENDS  
OF



Preserving History and Nature at Valley Falls

Website: [friendsofvalleyfalls.org](http://friendsofvalleyfalls.org)

VALLEY FALLS

Facebook: The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc  
Vernon CT

Dear Members and Friends,

Thanks for a Great First Year at the Heritage Center!

We are excited to report that over 560 people paid a visit to the Valley Falls Heritage Center since its opening in June! Following the June 10 Grand Opening, the Center was open Sundays in June, July and August, and several Sundays in September. Ages of visitors ranged from toddlers to senior citizens and feedback was very positive.

Among some of the last people to visit the Heritage Center before it closed for the season was a group of about 25 students taking part in a program sponsored by Vernon Youth Services. Lauren Meares, Youth Program and Prevention Coordinator for the group, sent us these comments from several parents:

- *We really enjoyed the farm, thank you for setting this up. Please let the heritage center know that I really enjoyed the volunteers. They were the best*

*guides I've experienced on a field trip! So warm and informative. Thank you for having us!*

- They did a great job. They mentioned wanting to get more kids' field trips in the future, like Girl Scouts, so maybe a hands-on activity? My girls really enjoyed it though, we actually sent a thank you last night.*
- We all had a great time on Tuesday - thank you so much again! Someone had mentioned that there will be bird walks, flower walks and tree walks during the spring. If possible, I would love to schedule a bird or flower walk for our group this spring!!*

The Heritage Center will open for its second season in Spring of 2024. Opening day will be posted on our website, Facebook page and in the local papers. We hope to see new visitors and returning ones, too! Also watch for the dates regarding the Friends' Annual Spring Walks at Valley Falls Park.



FVF Board Member Ann Letendre describes one of the exhibits in Heritage Center to these young students who toured the property this fall. Over 560 people have paid a visit to the Valley Falls Heritage Center since its June opening.

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## **The Sun was Shining on Artists Day 2023!**

With all the rain we had this year, it was no surprise when thunderstorms forced us to postpone Artists Day 2023 to October 1. Fortunately, the rain date turned out to be a beautiful day, with sunny skies and mild temperatures. Nine artists who enjoy painting in the "Plein Air" style set up their easels early in the morning and spent much of the day outside, painting the beautiful views or graceful structures at Valley Falls Farm.

From noon to 3 pm, over 100 people came out to watch the artists paint, ask questions, and look at additional works the artists had on display and for sale in the Red Barn.

The day also included music by East Windsor group "Oh Brother," with the four-piece band performing folk, country and mellow rock from the top floor of the Red Barn. The acoustics were so good, a number of people at Valley Falls Park walked up to the farm to check out the music.

Visitors could also attend a talk given by artist Dorothy Hall, who voiced concern about threats Artificial Intelligence could pose to the artist community. The Bolton resident also noted the importance of keeping pieces of art you might initially view as a failure. She illustrated her point by showing a completed painting that she had originally discarded.

Throughout the day, visitors were also able to tour the Heritage Center, with volunteer guides providing additional information about the unique buildings and interesting history of the property and its owners.

Special thanks to Vernon Girl Scouts and Brownies who provided complimentary refreshments, and to artist and photographer Denise Letendre who designed a special coloring sheet depicting the property. At an Art Table next to the stable building, budding artists of all ages were welcome to color the sheet, create freehand drawings of the farm, or ask art-related questions.

It was a wonderful day to visit the Farm and Heritage Center and enjoy an

afternoon of art, nature, history and music. Many thanks to the talented artists who painted this year: Terry Cardinal, Barbara Groff, Hannah Goodman, Jane Penfield, Jeanne Reed, Linda Spencer, Sugar Sweet, Dawn Tyler and Alexandra Walters.



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### Partners in History (and in Helping Free Trapped Birds!)

CT Humanities staff described it as "the best meeting at a restored manure shed we've ever had!" Members of the organization, along with representatives from the CT League of History Organizations (CLHO) made a visit to the Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center in August to see the progress made since they were last at the property in the early spring.

While the Friends of Valley Falls are very appreciative of the funding and/or guidance received from CT Humanities, the CT Cultural Fund and CLHO, just as valuable has been the advice and support provided while we were working to clean and repair buildings, set up displays, create information posters, and navigate operational issues for the new Heritage Center.



In addition to touring the Heritage Center buildings, an informal meeting in the red barn focused on best practices when showcasing historical properties.

Always ready to roll up their sleeves, several of our visitors also helped free a bird that had unwittingly gotten trapped in the Piggery and was trying to find its way to freedom.



From left: Maryann Levesque FVF Board Member; Dana Meyer and Emily Garfunkel of CLHO; Scott Wands, CT Humanities Deputy Director of Grants and Programs; CLHO Executive Director Amrys Williams; and FVF Board Member Ann Letendre. Also in attendance but not in the photo: FVF Board Members Nancy Steffens and Bob Letendre.

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### **The Bluebirds Are Back!**

On a recent sunny afternoon at Valley Falls Farm, several Friends walked the fields with Sheryl McMullen to check the Bluebird houses. Sheryl is a

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certified Wildlife Rehabilitator, a former chairman of the Vernon Conservation Commission, and a long-time member of the Friends. She volunteered this year to lead a project to revitalize the aging houses, with the goal of attracting Bluebirds and other supporting birds.

Working with her husband Tim and Board member Bruce Dinnie, the boxes were repaired or replaced in the early spring, and many were repositioned or placed at different heights to improve the habitat.

Thanks to their work, there are now 15 birdhouses and the fields once again offer a welcome place for birds to lay their eggs. But the work didn't stop there. Over the summer, Sheryl found herself visiting the boxes every few days, observing the activity, removing destructive birds from the houses, taking photos, and keeping a detailed log to document what worked and what didn't. She also met other people with Bluebird houses to gain knowledge and share advice.

For 2024, plans include several new box placements, inviting the community to take part in events involving the houses (including the Annual Spring Bird Walk at the Park), and developing a team of volunteers to share information and help monitor the houses. Sheryl also hopes to place additional Bluebird boxes at Valley Falls Park.

A huge thank you to Sheryl and Tim! It has been wonderful to see the houses repaired, and once again occupied by so many beautiful birds and their babies.



If you look closely, you can see a Bluebird peeking out of this new box at the farm.

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## Taking Care of the Land

Jane Seymour, wildlife biologist for the CT DEEP Wildlife Division and a long-time advisor to the FVF, once again volunteered her expertise to help the Friends with land management at Vernon's Valley Falls Farm. Jane is the steward of the 760 acres of land in the state's Tankerhoosen and Belding Wildlife Management Areas in Vernon. A portion of the Belding acreage abuts the Farm.

Several FVF Board members recently walked the field areas with Jane to determine best ways to handle the grasses and plants that grow in and around the small stream that runs through the field. Populated with mostly native



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grasses and shrubs, the goal is to ensure the area is not overrun by invasives that will choke out beneficial plantings.

The group identified many beneficial flowering grasses and shrubs, but invasives that included autumn olive, honeysuckle, and 10 catalpa trees, were tagged and removed. The cuttings will be used to build homes for wildlife, such as squirrels and rabbits.

Many thanks to Jane for helping us manage existing plantings and suggesting additional native plantings to attract birds, bees and other beneficial wildlife. Thanks also to Bruce and Brian Dinnie for volunteering their time in removing the invasives. The goal of Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center is to ensure the preservation of history and nature, and it couldn't be done without a fantastic team of volunteers!



Jane Seymour (left) walks the farm's fields with Bruce Dinnie, Sheryl McMullen, and Bob Letendre.



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## **A Partnership to Preserve History**

In June, the Friends of Valley Falls signed an agreement with the Town of Vernon for use of the Red Barn at Valley Falls as part of the Heritage Center. This collaboration between the Town and the Friends provides us the opportunity to incorporate the historic 1911 barn in the Heritage Center. The barn now serves as a welcome area for the center, includes historic farm exhibits, and provides visitors with a restroom and parking area.

Subdivision of Valley Falls Farm in 1958 separated the barn from the other buildings. Eventually, the barn was owned by the Town of Vernon while the white farmhouse and buildings across the street came under the ownership of the Friends of Valley Falls. The agreement "reunites" the dairy barn with the original Valley Falls Farm complex.

This agreement is a great example of a partnership that best serves Vernon and surrounding communities with a Heritage Center that preserves a fascinating part of the town's history.

A recent inspection of the barn revealed several cracks in the support beams. Another collaboration is being formed to provide a temporary fix until a permanent solution is in place. More on that in our next newsletter!



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### Volunteers Needed for Next Season

If you love history and nature, you may want to volunteer at Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center. We could use your help when the museum and farm re-open this spring!

Potential volunteer opportunities include:

- **Heritage Center:** Museum greeters and docents; publicity and newsletter assistants; grant writers; clerical and computer assistance; building cleaners and maintainers; exhibit assistants.

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- **Farm and Grounds:** landscape and garden maintainers; periodic clean-up projects; touch-up painting of buildings; carpentry; exterior building maintenance.

During the 2024 season, the Heritage Center and Farm will be open most Sundays during June, July and August, and on special days for groups such as Scouts, School groups, Senior Citizen clubs, or researchers.

Interested? If you would like to volunteer with the Friends, or want more details on what you can do to help, please contact Lynn Lusardi at 860-930-2451 or llusardi9@gmail.com.

Founded in 1972, the Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving history and nature. The Heritage Center and Farm are located at 345 Valley Falls Rd. in Vernon.

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### **We Appreciate YOU!**

Thank you for supporting the Friends in its mission to preserve the history and beauty of Valley Falls Farm and Park, and the new Heritage Center.

### **Stay in Touch!**

Please visit our Website: [www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org](http://www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org)

Like Us on Facebook: the Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. Vernon CT

### **How You Can Help the Friends**

Please consider helping the Friends of Valley Falls in these ways:

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- Make a contribution to the Friends building fund.
  - Purchase a gift membership for a friend or family member.
  - Make a memorial donation or commemorate a notable event.
  - Designate Friends of Valley Falls in your will or give the gift of stock.
  - Hold a fundraiser to celebrate your birthday, special event, or retirement designating us 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.
  - Contribute from your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)

### **Help Us Grow Our Membership**

If you know someone who would be interested in Joining the Friends (or if you want to give them a gift of membership) please download a membership form from our website at [www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org](http://www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org). The form can be found under the membership tab. Membership levels include Senior, Student, Individual, Family, Preservation Partner, and History Hero. Lifetime memberships are also an option. With the opening of the new Heritage Center, community support is more important than ever. Thank you for helping us grow our membership.





Thank you for your support of Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center. Wishing all of our Friends a peaceful holiday season with family and friends.

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