

SHARED MEMORIES OF THE EARLY DAYS OF THE FRIENDS OF HOLCOMB FARM

FROM JOHN SCHUMANN, BOARD PRESIDENT FROM 1993-1998:

The saying goes that it takes a village to raise a child. Well, it took a village and the state legislature to give birth to the Friends of Holcomb Farm. Tudor and Laura originally left their farm to UConn's College of Agriculture, with the proviso that if UConn didn't or couldn't utilize it, the farm was to revert to the Town of Granby. UConn couldn't effectively use the farm, so they left it. And, when they left, they took every stick of equipment with them. I believe the reasons the school didn't use the farm were a combination of budget and distance from Storrs. There was never any doubt that Granby wanted the farm. However, to clarify ownership, our state representative, I believe his name was Joel Gordes, shepherded legislation clearly devising the Holcomb Farm from the State to Granby. Once Granby received clear title to the farm, the Board of Selectmen commissioned a committee to develop a plan of use for the farm. The committee represented a broad range of Granbyites, many of whom became members of the first board of directors of the Friends organization. The final strategic plan detailed multiple uses of the farm...agriculture (a CSA), arts, education, and recreation (a network of trails and a campground). The plan was unanimously adopted by the selectmen and incorporated as a part of a 25-year lease of the farm to a to be formed not-for-profit corporation, the Friends of the Holcomb Farm. The annual farm rental was \$1.00 per year. This entire tale demonstrates the power of a shared vision executed by committed individuals and supported by a "village."

The incredible generosity of people in sharing their time, talents and money made the Friends organization click almost from the very beginning. Because virtually all involved shared the vision of the strategic plan, there was NEVER any infighting among board members and/or countless volunteers. The original board redefined the term "working board." There were weekly workdays involving everything from clearing hundreds of bales of molded hay from the loft of the dairy barn, to whacking the original trails, to repairing the chicken coop and calf barn so they could be used. The Town granted the friends \$50,000 to put new roofs on buildings identified as necessary for the long term (including the two-seat outhouse!). Several buildings, mostly tobacco barns, were dismantled before they fell.

Volunteers with real skills were instrumental in incorporating the Friends and obtaining an IRS letter of determination of nonprofit status. Dr Bill Bentley brought his Yale School of Forestry students to identify trees needing to be thinned while developing hiking trails. Many of the trees thinned were removed not by skidders but by oxen and horses. We brought in Shetland sheep and Dominique chickens, both of which were on the list of endangered species

of farm animals. A rudimentary floating bridge was built across the West Branch of the Salmon Brook. The bridge was tethered to nearby trees to keep it from drifting during intervals of high water.

Without all the volunteer time and skill, the Friends would not have begun as successfully as it did. Put and Nannie Brown loaned their tractor to get the CSA underway. Mark Whinny and Liz Wheeler from the Hartford Food System invested incredible hours establishing and operating the first years of the CSA. Carole Day, Liz Daglio, Avis Cherichetti, and others organized farm days, art sales, card sales, Christmas ornament sales etc. I could continue endlessly naming people who physically and emotionally invested themselves in launching the Friends of Holcomb Farm. Commitment and hard work were keys to the early program successes critical to establishing credibility necessary for long-term program financing and support.

Fundamental to the Friend's strategic plan was the underlying principle of sharing Granby's abundance with neighbors in Hartford's inner city. I'm not sure what the statistics are now, but at the beginning of the Friends organization, Connecticut was the country's wealthiest state. Three of the country's ten poorest cities were in Connecticut...Bridgeport, New Haven, and Hartford. The CSA, the Link and Learn program, recreational opportunities, and adult education classes all were designed for sharing with others, especially Hartford residents. In the early 1990s Mike Peters, a retired firefighter, was Hartford's mayor. He was a tireless and effective promoter and spokesman for Hartford. He asked to come to the farm for a tour. When he arrived, he picked up a brick from around the foundation of the North Barn and, in front of a good-sized press corps, congratulated the town of Granby for being the first suburban community to begin removing bricks from the walls separating Hartford from its neighboring communities. Mayor Mike "got it."

AND FROM CURT JOHNSON, BOARD MEMBER FROM 1993-1998; BOARD CHAIR FROM 1998-2000:

Some Positive Memories for The Period 1992-2000

> April 8th, 1992, the Holcomb Estate Advisory Committee (HEAC) is formed; several residents appointed to HEAC by Granby, Board of Selectman (BOS).

> The guiding directive of the BOS was that the operations of HEAC/Holcomb Farm (HF) were to be financially self-reliant and self-sustaining, no financial support from the Town.

> HEAC was broken down into two subgroups with separate responsibilities: (1) Land Use: timber, land, and water (2) Facilities: buildings and operations.

- > Implementation of the overall Proposed Plan of Use (Land and Buildings) commenced in 1992-1993.
- > 1993-1994 Friends of The Holcomb Farm, Inc. (FOHF) was established as a 501(c) (3).
- > Revenue for FOHF was generated from grants, fundraisers, corporate and individual donations, and program fees.
- > Land (timber, land, water) Use Plan: The land on the East Side was dedicated to pastureland management. The West Side was dedicated to passive recreation, trails and a timber management program.
- > Around 1995, FOHF enters a partnership with The Hartford Food System to form the Community Supported Agriculture Program, West Side, on approximately 26 acres.
- > Singer Bruce Springsteen, a supporter of reducing world hunger, vocalizes his support for The Hartford Food System during one of his concerts.
- > Efforts taken to protect the West Branch of the Salmon Brook and its high-water quality. Developed aquaculture learning programs for children and youth e.g., Salmon Restoration Program in collaboration with State of Connecticut, Dept of Fisheries.
- > Talented artists from Granby form program objectives for adults and youth.
- > The number of volunteers grows as does the number of families bringing their children to the Holcomb Farm; tractor rides provided around the farm.
- > Each year Holiday Greeting cards and paintings are created by local artists and sold to the public. Artists are now coming to HF from outside Granby; art shows expand.
- > Buildings - Proactive steps taken to preserve the historic barns and farmhouse; convert structures into habitable space for farm staff and several educational programs. Local architects, engineers and contractors offer their expertise.
- > 1994/ongoing - FOHF receives grants from Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and other foundations, allowing FOHF to commence upgrades to barns and the farmhouse.
- > 1994-1995 - Volunteers remove the cow stanchions and concrete stalls in the Wisconsin Dairy/Main Barn beginning upgrades for the Arts and Environmental Learning Center.

> 1994-1995 - FOHF re-affirms, to the public, the core mission to offer Agriculture Programs, Arts Programs, a Community Supported Agriculture Program, Environmental Education, Passive Recreation, Timber Management, Trails, and Walking Bridge over the West Branch of the Salmon Brook connecting the East with the West side of HF.

> A "Voisin Grazing System" (known as rotational grazing) commenced in partnership with Henry Holcomb (a local farmer); numerous cows graze the land and are rotated in paddocks on a frequent basis. It was great to see cows on the Holcomb Farm!

> FOHF and Henry Holcomb enter a lease agreement allowing Henry to hay the fields. Hay also provided for livestock housed at HF e.g., the famous goats Randy and Hawthorne.

> Austin (Dunny) Barney introduced Scottish Highland cattle (rustic cattle with a shaggy coat and very long horns) to the lower left quadrant of the East Side property. They attracted a lot of very curious children and adults!

> HEAC partnered with representatives (Dr. William R. Bentley) from the Yale School of Forestry and with local arborists. The Timber Management initiative and mitigation of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid insect disease has commenced.

> 1990's - Who could forget The Holiday Tree Lighting of the magnificently tall fir tree located on the center green across from the main barn. Enjoyed by many people!

> 1997-1998 - FOHF brings schools from Granby together with schools from Hartford at the Holcomb Farm to participate in the learning programs serving to build collaboration. Program enrollment continues to grow.

> Winter 1998, FOHF receives permission from the Town of Granby and Lost Acres Fire Department to proceed with a fundraiser on the second floor / upper loft of the Wisconsin Style Dairy Barn/Main Barn.

> March/April/May 1998 - volunteers clean, sweep and vacuum the Second Floor Hay Loft of the Main Barn to accommodate the May 1998 fundraising event.

> May 16, 1998 - The Barn Raising Presentation was produced by directors, officers, staff and many volunteers of FOHF and supported by local individuals and organizations. A meaningful level of financial donations was received from corporations and individuals.

> Note: It was inspiring to have The Lost Acres Fire Department support FOHF with multiple Fire Trucks on location, to meet the Fire Code requirement. Thank you LAFD!

- > October 1998 - FOHF is host to Connecticut Chapter of The Nature Conservancy for their Annual Meeting. Strong attendance on a beautiful weather day!
- > 1999 - A CPA Audit of FOHF for the year ended 1998 was conducted. The results of the Audit yield strong Working Capital, a solid Net Worth, and a low Debt to Equity ratio.
- > Self-sustaining financials of FOHF continues in 1999 through 2000.
- > 1999 - FOHF is approached by representatives of The Discovery Center (DC), an entity formed and funded by Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, also founders of many other organizations including The Hole in The Wall Gang Camp, Ashford CT. They offer to form a partnership with FOHF to relocate the DC to Holcomb Farm.
- > 1999 - Significant consideration is given to the DC proposal by the FOHF, Town of Granby officials and residents. After considering numerous opinions and viewpoints from the public, FOHF made the decision to remain focused on its guiding objectives and overall mission.
- > 2000 - The Link and Learn Program enters its 4th year in partnership with Granby Public Schools and suburban public schools; over 600 students enrolled.
- > The CSA grows as do the Arts, Environmental Education Programs. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, the 4-H, Granby Horse Council, and other groups enjoy use of HF. Trails continue to expand.
- > New board members are added, and new staff members are hired.
- > Always a challenge to raise new sources of funding, FOHF continues to be financially self-sustaining and without any meaningful town funding support; commitment honored.
- > 2001 - new directors and officers are handed the reins of the FOHF to maintain their stewardship of the FOHF and HF into the next decade.