

Harford Land Trust News



Decades in the making -

OAKINGTON PENINSULA

Now preserved FOREVER



To work with landowners, private and public, to conserve land and protect its natural resources, scenic beauty, rural character, and promote a healthy quality of life in Harford County.

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You give us so many reasons to be thankful.

Dear friends and supporters,

As we head into colder months with an unknown 2021 ahead of us, it's hard not to feel uneasy about all of the things we can't control. But, there is one thing I have never felt more confident about—our community's commitment to this special place that we are blessed to call home.

Without missing a beat, you continued to fuel HLT's work with your encouragement, generosity, and stories of the land. Know that this matters, deeply, to our Board and staff as we continue to stay focused on delivering our mission.

HLT's vision is for all residents of Harford County to have access to open space. We know that the lives of people of every age and background are enriched by the abundance of natural resources in our county. Driving on a scenic road, buying local food, watching blackbirds migrate overhead, walking on a public trail—our quality of life is better because of the land.

Much of this edition is devoted to the recent purchase of Belle Vue Farm. We are elated that this iconic property is preserved forever and will become another outdoor space for you to visit and enjoy.

As you'll see on the back cover, we aren't resting on our past successes, but forging ahead with new projects that we look forward to sharing with you soon.

We look ahead to 2021, thankful in the knowledge that we live in a place with such natural beauty, and confident in the fact that our work to preserve Harford's farms, forests, and sensitive waterways continues undeterred.



On behalf of our Board I wish you a Happy Thanksgiving and good health during the upcoming holiday season.

With thanks,

Benjamin Lloyd
President

Cover: Chesapeake Bay coastline of Belle Vue Farm (photo by Harford County Government)

WELCOME!

Scott Kearby and Deborah Bowers join HLT's Board of Directors



HLT is delighted to welcome Scott Kearby and Deborah Bowers to the Board of Directors.

A graduate of The U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Scott joined the US Army as a civil engineer before joining the Air National Guard as a base civil engineer at Martin State Airport and later the Harford County Department of Public Works where he managed numerous road and bridge building projects as well as watershed protection and restoration initiatives.

A Harford County resident since 1982, Scott has been involved in numerous land and watershed protection projects. "A few years ago, I became aware of all the things going on to protect land in Harford County. The character of the land is one of the great things about living and working here," he said. "I've seen the good effect HLT has had around the county and I wanted to be a part of that."

When not working with HLT or volunteering to support local watershed protection, Scott enjoys hiking, kayaking and being on the water at Eden Mill or along the Ma and Pa Trail.

Deb has been an advocate for land preservation for decades. She founded the Farmland Preservation Report, a nationally recognized periodical, and co-authored the book "Holding Our Ground: Protecting America's Farms and Farmland" in 1997, which remains a leading resource for farmland preservation practitioners. Bowers played an essential role in the creation of Harford County's agricultural land preservation program, through which the county has permanently preserved over 30,000 acres since 1993.

In 2009, Deb was a founding member of the Save the Rocks campaign. The group successfully worked with the State Highway Administration on improvements to Route 24 that safeguarded the aesthetic and historic value of the Rocks and prevented erosion into Deer Creek. She has years of experience as a land preservation manager with several land trusts in Baltimore County as well as the Agricultural Land Preservation Manager for Carroll County.

In 2019, HLT recognized Deb's many contributions to conservation by awarding her with the HLT Conservation Award.

A Historic Conservation Victory

Because of you, Belle Vue Farm is now permanently protected



Thanks to you, our members, Belle Vue Farm, a historic and ecologically rich property, will be preserved forever.

On September 24, representatives from Harford County Government, Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG), HLT, and the Davis family gathered at the 347-acre Belle Vue Farm in Havre de Grace to transfer ownership to Harford County and permanently preserve the historic property.

Located less than three miles from the centers of Havre de Grace and Aberdeen, Belle Vue Farm sits at the center of an area of land rich in natural and cultural resources known as Oakington Peninsula. Made possible with your help, The Belle Vue acquisition completes the longstanding goal of permanently preserving the only undeveloped area

of privately owned Chesapeake Bay shoreline in Harford County. The property is contiguous to Swan Harbor Farm and Old Bay Farm to the north and Eleanor and Millard Tydings Park (also known as Oakington Farm) to the south. Together, these four properties total 1,250 acres of preserved land, 90% of which is now public parkland.

Historic significance

Belle Vue is one of several properties in Harford County continuously owned and farmed by the same family since well before the revolution. Garrett Rutton was granted the land in 1661. His direct descendent Mary Garrettson later married Dr. Elijah Davis who took title to the land in 1794. Dr. Davis served in both the House of Delegates (1807 and 1811 terms) and Maryland State Senate (1813 and 1815 terms), eventually becoming



For HLT, the effort to protect Belle Vue Farm spanned nearly three decades, almost the entirety of the organization’s existence. There is no better example in Harford County of the patience and determination required to conserve land.

president of the latter body. Victoria “Vicky” Davis, the wife of the late Griffith H. Davis, sold the property to Harford County on September 24 ensuring its permanent preservation.

Mary Garrettson’s sister, Elizabeth, married Samuel Griffith of Swansbury, another Harford County historic property and home in Aberdeen. Belle Vue’s buildings and ground are included on C. P. Hauducoeur’s famous 1798 map of Havre de Grace, labeled simply as “Dr. Davis.”

The historic home at Belle Vue is a two-story brick house dating to the mid-18th century and remains in good condition. The house is in the Georgian style and has many of this style’s standard features. Its main façade is Flemish bond brick with elliptical arch windows facing the Chesapeake Bay.

Tax rolls from the turn of the nineteenth century

indicate numerous outbuildings including a kitchen, carriage house, two slave quarters, stable, meat house, hen house, and fish house on the shore. The 1814 tax roll notes as many as 34 enslaved people lived at Belle Vue.

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail runs along the Oakington shoreline. The trail commemorates Captain Smith’s exploration of the Bay in 1607 through 1609 and is the nation’s first all-water national historic trail.

Reportedly, the property is well-known for its archeological significance, particularly for Native American relics.

Natural features

Belle Vue Farm contains a mile of undeveloped Chesapeake Bay coastline. Views from the shoreline bluffs provide a spectacular panorama



over the Chesapeake Bay and the distant hills of Cecil County's Elk Neck Peninsula. The property also includes 60-acres of Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, denoting lands within 1,000 feet of tidal water bodies.

The gentle ridge of the Oakington Peninsula divides Belle Vue into two main watershed areas and ecologically significant zones. Gashey's Creek and the associated nontidal wetlands flow into Swan Creek along the western edge while the eastern portion of the property drains directly to the Chesapeake Bay.

The lower portion of Gashey's Creek, and the tributary which drains into it from the west, are designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services as critical habitat for the Maryland Darter, a nationally endangered fish species. Unfortunately, this species, which is endemic to Harford County, has not been seen for over fifty years and is thought to be extinct. Today, the riparian area is home to significant bird, amphibian, and reptile populations. The forests along the Gashey's Creek stream corridor are important for absorbing nutrients and runoff that would otherwise harm the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay.



The Chesapeake Bay shore of Belle Vue encompasses two shallow tidal coves and associated wetlands. The area contains an ecologically fragile intertidal zone made up of cobble, sand, and mud. It provides ideal habitat for two nationally rare plant species – the Maryland Bur-marigold (*Bidens bidentoides* var. *mariana*) and Parker's pipewort (*Eriocaulon parkeri*). The habitat is unusual in the upper Chesapeake Bay, making the Oakington shore among the most significant habitats in Harford County. The coastal bluffs also house numerous Bald Eagle nests and other valuable bird habitat.

More than 260 species of birds have been seen at Swan Harbor Farm, making it arguably the top birding location in Harford County. Given the similar habitats found at Belle Vue Farm, the property likely hosts well over 200 bird species. Of note are the large number of wintering waterfowl and migrating shorebirds on Oakington Peninsula.



Agrarian heritage

Belle Vue Farm is an important component of the county's agrarian heritage. Its soils rank among the most productive in Harford County with two-hundred acres of the property currently cultivated for corn and soybeans. It represents one of the few remaining active farms within the county's allocated growth area, otherwise called the "Development Envelope" of Harford County.

Reportedly, numerous developers explored options for creating an industrial park, business complex, and a high-end residential community at Belle Vue.

The fields are interspersed with forest stands, covering approximately 90 acres. The forested acreage contains species typical of the Coastal Plain including white oak, loblolly pine, sweet gum, and American holly. One of Belle Vue's American holly trees is listed as a Maryland's Big Tree, a program sponsored by the state Department of Natural Resources Forest Service. The property contains an impressive boxwood that the Davis family estimates to be more than 300 years old.

Acquisition

Efforts to acquire and preserve Belle Vue Farm began in earnest in 1994 around the same time that the county acquired Swan Harbor Farm from Johns Hopkins University. HLT, a local nonprofit land conservation organization, devoted significant time and resources to purchase the property during a generational transfer following the death of Dr. E. Hollister Davis. Griffiths Davis, the oldest of Dr. Davis's nine children purchased the property from his siblings in 1996 and lived there with his wife Vicky until his death in 2016.

HLT met with Ms. Davis and members of her family in late 2017 to express interest in purchasing the property and permanently preserving the land. While the Davis family was very amenable to preserving the land, they engaged a realtor to market the property widely to better understand their options before entertaining the offer from HLT.

Reportedly, numerous developers explored options for creating an industrial park, business complex, and a high-end residential community at Belle Vue. Despite being within the county's designated growth area, the property is currently zoned agricultural and is not planned to receive public water or septic.



The scenic, historic, agrarian, and environmental values of the area are irreplaceable. The window of opportunity to set aside places for public access to Harford County's stunning landscapes and waterways is limited, making the preservation of Belle Vue truly momentous.

Given the property's proximity to APG, HLT engaged its partners at the installation as a candidate for the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program. Through this program, for over a decade, HLT and APG have worked together to preserve land outside of the installation to reduce incompatible development and protect habitat. In late 2019, HLT and APG strengthened the preservation Old Bay Farm to the north of Oakington Peninsula with a permanent conservation easement.

HLT also made the Harford County Government

aware of its intention to purchase Belle Vue Farm in late 2018. From that point forward, HLT and Harford County Government worked in partnership to pursue the acquisition of the property as a future county park.

Ultimately, the partnership entered into an agreement of sale with Ms. Davis on April 14, 2020 for a purchase price of \$6,270,000. The acquisition and transaction costs were co-funded by Maryland's Program Open Space, Harford County Government, APG, and HLT.

The property is permanently preserved by a Program Open Space conservation easement with the State of Maryland and restrictions imposed by APG through the ACUB program. Additionally, according to the wishes of Ms. Davis and her family, the property will continue to be called by its historic name of Belle Vue Farm.

Public access and future plans

Harford County's Department of Parks & Recreation, with the participation of APG and HLT,



has begun assessing the condition of the historic home and developing a long-range management plan. The county will continue to lease the cropland, as it does with Swan Harbor Farm.

The preservation of Belle Vue Farm offers a variety of public recreational and educational opportunities.

Further environmental study and historic research are required to determine the most compatible uses that would be suitable for the property.

Possibilities include an extension of the Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway from Havre de Grace south to Oakington Peninsula. The property might allow for active uses such as hiking and biking; access to the Bay for scenic views or recreational fishing; and picnic or tent camping areas, as well as educational and interpretive opportunities.

Reflections

Thanks to your help and dedication to preserved land, the protection of Belle Vue Farm, and Oakington Peninsula, is one of the most important conservation successes in the history of Harford County. The scenic, historic, agrarian, and environmental values of the area are irreplaceable. The window of opportunity to set aside places for public access to Harford County's stunning landscapes and waterways is limited, making the preservation of Belle Vue truly momentous.

For HLT, the effort to protect Belle Vue Farm spanned nearly three decades, almost the entirety of the organization's existence. There is no better example in Harford County of the patience and determination required to conserve land. Success was only possible because of the years of loyal support from HLT members and the government partners who wholeheartedly embraced and joined the preservation effort.

Photos by Wild Echo Media and Harford County Government



"I am so happy that I can continue to go 'Home' for the rest of my life to enjoy the peace of Belle Vue. It is so important to us that the wildlife and trees and plants that have been on the farm for generations will continue to have a haven in this hectic and changing world."

- Sally Cassilly (née Davis)



Photos by Septimus Davis and provided by the Davis family

Hundreds Take to the Trails for Harford 20/20 Challenge

Whether hiking or boating, on two legs or four, by bike or boots – hundreds of HLT supporters chose their own adventures while showing their love for preserved land this summer. Your enthusiasm made August's Harford 20/20 Challenge a huge success and celebration of land for all!

Participants of all ages saluted land preservation by exploring area trails and waterways throughout Harford County to meet a 10 or 20-mile goal. Together, our trekkers covered over 3,000 on land and

water. Regional data are showing us what we already know to be true – people are turning to parks for health and recreation more than ever. To make exploring even easier, Challenge participants received an interactive map filled with trail, park, and boat launch locations throughout the county.

HLT was thrilled to welcome dozens of new supporters through the self guided Challenge. We received many reports of discoveries of new favorite outdoor attractions throughout Harford County.

Your continued dedication to preserving valued land throughout Harford County ensures there will be parks and greenways for solace, adventure, exercise, and inspiration for generations to come.

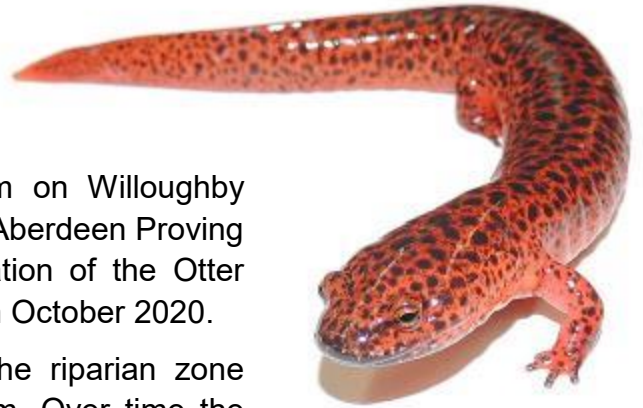
Thanks again to all who participated and for sharing so many of your outdoor adventures (and pictures) with us!





Caring for the Land

Edgewood stream restoration underway



In 2016, HLT acquired the 50-acre Welzenbach Farm on Willoughby Beach Road in Edgewood with help from our partners at Aberdeen Proving Ground. After years of planning, we began the restoration of the Otter Point Creek tributary on the eastern side of the property in October 2020.

Increased stormwater surges and historic grazing in the riparian zone significantly impaired the coastal plain headwater stream. Over time the streambed eroded, confining the energy of the stream to the channel, rather than allowing it to access the floodplain.

The project will reduce the flow of nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment into the Bush River and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay. A secondary goal of the work is to stabilize the forested land to allow for continued farming to the west of the forest.

The forest at the Welzenbach Farm provides important habitat in a largely residential area for species such as eastern box turtle, opossum, red salamander, and red-bellied woodpecker.

As this work indicates, land preservation is only the beginning of our work. HLT also invests significant resources to manage the lands in our care.

Thank you to our project partners - Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, GreenTrust Alliance, and Harford Soil Conservation District.

THE VISION

5,970 Linear feet of stream	1.3 Acres of forested wetlands	4.0 Acres of upland stream buffer
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Success in Havre de Grace

Donation preserves farm and woods

In late September 2020, HLT received a generous donation of two conservation easements, permanently preserving 54 acres in Havre de Grace.

The two contiguous properties, off of Level Road, are owned by the same landowner and include rolling pastures, forest, and a tributary that flows into the Susquehanna River. The property is also adjacent to 165 acres of preserved land to the north.

The donation completes the landowner's longstanding vision of securing the property as a haven for native wildlife. The 32-acre forest is particularly important habitat for forest interior dwelling birds, small mammals, amphibians, and reptiles.

HLT's Executive Director Kristin Kirkwood recalls her excitement after first speaking with the landowner more than three years ago about her intentions to preserve the property.

HLT worked with our State partner, the Maryland Environmental Trust, to complete this transaction.



This October, Harford Land Trust hosted *Harford Harvest*, an online giving campaign raising funds for land preservation and emergency food needs in Harford County.

When it became clear that COVID-19 would not allow HLT to host our annual Harvest Moon Dinner and Auction, we quickly pivoted to an event that gave HLT an opportunity to address both our needs as an organization and the increased needs of our community members during this unprecedented time.

From challenges in keeping shelves stocked to increased financial hardship, COVID-19 has shown us the vulnerabilities of our food supply chain and the value of productive and protected farmland that the local supply chain depends upon.

We recognize that the protection of local farmland is also the protection of essential local food networks. For this reason, half of all *Harford Harvest* proceeds will soon be distributed to over 100 Harford County food pantries through our partnership with the Harford Community Action Agency and Mason-Dixon Community Services to meet the immediate and increased emergency food needs of families throughout Harford County.

Thanks to you, our generous sponsors and supporters, our community came together to raise over \$28,000 for *Harford Harvest*! We sincerely appreciate everyone who donated and helped spread the word about the campaign. Your support will have an immediate and lasting impact on our community and HLT's continued efforts to protect the land that nourishes us all.

Photo courtesy of Edwin Remsberg



Harford Harvest

LOCAL FARMLAND - FOR LOCAL FOOD - FOR LOCAL FAMILIES

Thank you to our generous sponsors.



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SNEAK PEAK

WE'VE BEEN BUSY AND WE CAN'T WAIT TO TELL YOU ALL ABOUT IT!

**Your generosity makes
all the difference.
Because of you, HLT is
taking on bigger and
bolder land
conservation efforts in
Harford County.**

Photo by Harford County Government