

Comments on Connetquot

Published by the Friends of Connetquot River State Park Preserve

VOLUME 30 NUMBER 4 Winter 2025



Photo by Janet Soley

Hello Friends! Welcome 2026!

The start of a new year always makes me reflect on the prior one and wonder at all that we accomplished! Every month the Preserve offered patrons amazing programs and events. We were awarded funds from the John C. Dunphy Private Foundation that allowed construction of the ADA walkway on the Red Trail to begin. We were granted electric assist wheelchairs and walkers which will be unveiled this coming spring. We put Connetquot on the Audubon Society's Birdability Hiking Trail map and held our first Birdability Hike. We were awarded a grant for I Love My Park Day 2026 projects. Many of our historic Registers were digitized by our volunteers and are ready to be put up onto the NY Heritage Website. Work resumed in the Ice House. We held twilight lantern walks to celebrate PRIDE and the Harvest Moon. 3 Parks – 1 Day was incredible! Our 2025 Gala was a huge success and lots of laughs.

2026 promises to be even better! Friends of Connetquot will be celebrating it's 30th Anniversary and the 200th Anniversary of the Incorporation of the South Side Sportsmen's Club. We will celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence throughout the year and will hold the Openings to the Riverside Community of Color and the Ice House exhibits. So much to look forward to! And none of this would be possible if not for our members and dedicated volunteers. Thank you all. If you wish to help us plan and make 2026 fantastic, please consider getting involved!

See you out there!
Janet Marie

What's Happening in the Preserve

By Patrick Hein

Red trail boardwalk project – Construction began on the week of December 8th. Portions of Red Trail loop around the Hatchery will be periodically closed due to the demolition and construction. Signage detailing dates and scope of project will be put out at trail egress points.

Grist Mill Pathway - Working on mitigating run-off damage to blue stone pathway going to Grist Mill

Hatchery Update - Brook trout eyed eggs are in the Hatch House and healthy

Multi-terrain wheelchair and walker have been delivered. Currently planning out policy for borrowing by the public

Trail Work - Trail pruning and maintenance has begun in full swing with the arrival of the winter months. Be wary on the trails and please do not enter trails that have been blocked off by Park's staff

BOARD SPOTLIGHT

Assistant Park Manager RYAN ALBINSKI



I began my career with OPRHP in June of 2011 as a summer seasonal assisting with routine marina and I beachfront park operations at Robert Moses & Captree State Park. Early on I eagerly sought to learn grounds maintenance, trade skills, the agency, and its patronage. I accrued more responsibility, and was awarded an entry level permanent position supervising seasonal work crews in daily operations, landscaping, and traffic control. In 2022 I was officially promoted to Park Supervisor at both facilities. At this time, I began honing my supervisory style while overseeing staff parkwide and focused on delivering the agencies' mission statement in commitments to People, Preservation, Service, and Leadership. I am truly thankful to those that taught me their skillsets in trades, supervision, and park management to further develop my career.

Throughout my time working on Fire Island, I attended Suffolk County Community College obtaining my Associates Degree in Occupational Therapy, and earned a Bachelors of Science in Bioscience at Farmingdale State College. In 2022 I joined NYS Work Life Service's Employee Assistance Program as a coordinator to provide assistive referrals to parks employees. Assisting friends and colleagues through hardships in and out of the workplace is a rewarding experience which also provides myself the ability to utilize my educational background. I grew up locally in Oakdale, and graduated Connetquot HS. I love being outdoors and traveling to new places. My wife Krysta and I welcomed Kaspian (Kaz) our first child, into the world this past October. The New York Rangers are better than the New York Islanders, if you agree or disagree let's talk about it!

I am excited to begin a new chapter joining the Connetquot State Park Preserve team as Assistant Manager, and working with the preserve's associated groups.

GETTING READY FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

Members of Girl Scout Troop 183 came over in early December to help the Friends decorate the clubhouse in time for Mr & Mrs Claus' visit!.



2026 Events

January

First Day Hike

February

Lunar New Year Program

March

Club style fishing with the Friends (TBD)

April

Riverside Community of Color Opening Reception

Members Meeting & Opening Celebration of the ADA Red Trail Walkway

May

I ❤️ My Park Day

June

Purple Martins with Park Ranger Ken Ernst

PRIDE Celebration

September

Mindfulness Month Forest Bathing

Harvest Moon Celebration

October

Wild Life Service Day

Friends Fall Fishing Outing

BIRDABILITY

November

Indigenous Recognition

December

30th Anniversary GALA



Gala Recap

Our 2025 Gala was an amazing event. So much more than a fundraiser although this was a record-breaking event! We made over \$15,000. But honestly, it really was FUN! 150 Friends gathered at the Snapper Inn in Oakdale on December 4th for an evening to celebrate our accomplishments and honor friend Tom Casey with the Gil Bergen Preservationist Award. Sherri Casey graciously accepted the award and shared her thoughts on a very special man that we will miss dearly.



Left to Right: Janet Marie Soley, David Reisfield and Sherri Casey Photo credit: John Williams

The Live Auctions were Lively!! Hatchery Manager Matthew Caputo sold A Day of stocking the river. You will never look at the river or the trout the same way after walking the length of it. Guest Auctioneer, Richard Remmer stole the room with his smile and demeanor offering a tour of the Bayard Cutting Arboretum. Jessica Anderson-Ruiz and David Reisfield worked the room over with their charismatic personalities and smiles for the amazing vintage alcohol and VIP Air Show Gifts.





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Susanne Wuehler

Hoof Beats

By Carole Scialdone

The colorful leaves are mostly gone now. The strong winds have ushered in some bitter cold air and we've already experienced our first significant snowfall, all well before the official first day of Winter! It makes you wonder if we are in for an extra cold and snowy Winter this year. Now that there is snow on the ground, it is always fun to

jump on your horse and find trails with the freshly fallen snow so you can be the first to traverse them! Of course, our horses need special shoes with snowpads and borium cleats to safely ride the trails in the Winter. Riders will bundle up in order to enjoy the trails during Winter. Protecting your face, hands and ears from the biting wind is a must on those long, cold trail rides. The horses are happy to be out and have a spring in their step. The cold doesn't seem to bother them, in fact, they are enjoying not being bothered by the biting flies. There is something magical about riding silently in the snow. It is completely quiet, except for the crunch each hoof step makes.

The trails are in excellent shape, thanks to the Park staff. They have been busy mowing and cleaning up downed trees after the wind storms we've had. They've been dragging trails to keep them in tip top shape. We truly appreciate what a great job they do to keep our trails in such great condition. It may be cold, but there is still plenty of wildlife activity out in the Park. The turkeys and deer are foraging for food to fill their bellies and keep them warm. The magnificent bucks are looking for love and are roaming the park daily. The stunning and curious red tail foxes are always on the hunt for their next meal. The tree limbs are lined with crystal white snow that glistens in the sun. It is such a blessing to ride in this Park and get to witness so much beauty every day.



Photo by Kathy Schlosser

The 2026 Connetquot Bridle Path Permits are now on sale in the Park office. The Annual Permit is \$60 and is worth every penny. Make sure to stop in and get your permit today!

History Team Update

By Ritamarie Weigand

I'm happy to report that not only did the History Team finish inventorying all 200 boxes of documents which took about three and a half years, we recently completed the review of the ten SSSC boxes recovered from the original 200. We have divided the remaining SSSC documents into two groups: Primary and Secondary. Primary are documents written by SSSC members or staff such as bills, payment records, employment records, and cancelled checks. Secondary are articles written about the SSSC organization or its members. These documents will now be organized and eventually scanned for uploading to the New York Heritage web site, under Friends of Connetquot: nyheritage.org. All History Team members, past and present, deserve a tremendous amount of thanks from the entire FOC organization and NYS Parks for all of the hard, tedious work involved in the archiving and placement of all of the documents. All this information will eventually be scanned and uploaded to the New York Heritage web site for public access.

We have not been able to organize our return to LILRC to resume scanning due to scheduling conflicts. The History Team will be breaking until February when we'd like to resume scanning at LILRC.

As dedicated as it is, the History Team cannot do all the work without a few more committed volunteers. If interested, contact the Director of Historic Preservation, Ritamarie Weigand at 631-560-5731

Friends of Connetquot Programs

Register at www.friendsofconnetquot.org

Our Programs are free to members, \$5 for non-members. Seasonal Parking Rate Applies

Lunar New Year Celebration Long Islands Equestrian History

Saturday, February 21, 2026 - 11 am



1st - we hike in the brisk February weather

2nd - we warm up with New Year soups and traditional sweets

3rd – Enjoy our Speakers Jerry and Rita Trapani

Jerry and Rita Trapani will present A Look Back at The Rich Equestrian History of Long Island in the 19th and 20th centuries. Jerry and Rita Trapani are life members of the Carriage Association of America, Inc., American Driving Society Inc., the Four in Hand Club, and are founding members of the 40-year-old Paumanok Driving Club of Long Island.

Jerry is retired farrier and Rita is a retired art teacher and artist. They have shown their horses in many disciplines and bring a lifetime of knowledge and love of history. Let's take a trip back in time together!

Jerry & Rita Trapani are the owners of Shadbelly Farm. Learn more at www.shadbellyfarm.com

Register at www.friendsofconnetquot.org

Our Programs are free to members, \$5 for non-members. Seasonal Parking Rate Applies

Great State Park Programs!

Reservations are required and are taken beginning 2 weeks prior to each program.

To make a reservation, visit Eventbrite.com and search #NatureEdventure (Notice that's "Ed" not "Ad").

Fees: \$4.00 per adult, \$4.00 per child and children under 3 are free.

Seasonal Parking Fees are required.

Outdoor programs are rain or shine, so please dress appropriately.

Tiny Tots: "Nature Discoveries"

Explore the natural world around us. These programs will connect children and their parents with nature through short walks, story time, animal visitors, and crafts. For children ages 3-5.

Held on Wednesdays

Great Groundhog Club

January 21st

Superb Owls

10:30-11:30am

Snowman and Me

February 18th

Seal Splash!

February 4th

Lucky Little Leprechauns

March 18th

March 4th

Clubhouse Tours: Family Program

Held on the 1st Sunday

10:00am ~ 12:00pm and 1:00pm - 3:00pm

A docent will discuss the history of the tavern and the high society Club which shaped Connetquot River State Park Preserve into what it is today. Tours of the historic Nicoll Grist Mill are included and will be offered after your house tour. Recommended for children 8+.

There will be a short talk outside before viewing the inside.

Bird and Breakfast: Adult Program

Saturday

January 10th

8:00am – 11:00am

A continental breakfast and short presentation on winter ducks followed by a guided walk through the preserve. Binoculars are provided, or bring your own.

West Side Hike: Family Program

Saturday

January 17th

10:00am-12:00pm

Join us for a hike in the less traveled "Bayard" property of Connetquot! We'll look for signs of wildlife along the way.

Spy Through Parks: Family Program (ages 10+)

Saturday

January 31st

1:00pm-3:00pm

Become a code breaker like Washington's spies! Learn how the Culper Spy Ring used codes during the American Revolution, then try to crack the secret code for real!

Black History- Space Explorers: Family Program

Saturday

February 7th

5:45pm-8:00pm

Learn the history of the Black men and women astronomers and astronauts that shaped our understanding of the cosmos!

Full Moon Hike: Adult Program

Friday

February 13th

5:45pm-8:00pm

Discover your nocturnal neighbors in a walk through the park at night. See how your senses change when the light fades!

Self -Care Saturday: Adult Program

Saturday

February 14th

1:00pm – 2:30pm

Create a relaxing craft to help explore mindfulness techniques and discover simple self-care. Create your own aroma therapy Simmer Pot Recipe for pampering relaxation.

Red Trail Phase 1 Construction Begins!

By Janet Marie Soley



I'm excited to report that the construction contract has been awarded and work has begun for Phase 1 of the Red Trail Loop. The contract was awarded to Diamond Head Construction Inc. of Commack NY. Contact period of performance is October 29th, 2025 - March 27, 2026. On site work began the week of December 8th with the demolition of bridge 4 December 10 -12th. The location of bridge 4 is circled for you on the left side map. As I am writing this article, the first delivery of wood and the construction trailer arrived on site. Meetings are held every two weeks and engineers and inspectors from the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Engineering will come to the site as necessary.

Keep in mind that this work will continue throughout the winter months, so please be mindful of closed trails.

Red Trail Phases 2 and 3 –Funding applications are being submitted for Phases 2 and 3 of the “Loop”. Phase 2 will span from the Rainbow Bridge over the Canal Bridge. Phase 3 will complete the “loop” by linking the Canal Bridge, going past the fishing sites to the parking area.

Give Us Your Best Shot

Share your photos of the Preserve with us! Send us up to four photos, in .jpeg or .png digital format, for a chance to win a free year's membership in FOC. Photos must be current (within a year of submission) and shot within the park. Please give the approximate location of the scene whenever possible.

DEADLINE for next issue: March 15, 2026.

Send your files to Janet Soley at janetmariesoley@gmail.com

Visit us at www.friendsofconnetquot.org



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SAVE THE DATE!
Friends of Connetquot
Members Meeting & Open House



Saturday, April 18, 2026

The Friends of Connetquot thanks Parks and Trails New York and
the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic
Preservation for their support of our efforts.



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