

# CELEBRATING THREE DECADES OF OBI LAND TRUST

*Grants Further Success in our Milestone Year*

Stone wall on Potters easement - photo by Lee Ellsworth

The history of land protection along Jefferson County's shoreline towns traces its start to the early 1990s, when a group of local residents got together for the sake of land preservation. Now in our 30th year, OBI Land Trust is celebrating grant awards that will help make this major milestone even more meaningful for our volunteer-run organization.

On May 2, 2023, OBI was notified it was awarded funding for projects totaling more than \$40,000. This includes grants exceeding \$26,000 from the New York State Conservation Partnership Program, a collaboration between the Land Trust Alliance and the state Department of Environmental Conservation. The remaining funding, a required grant match, is a result of donations from OBI supporters.

The Capacity and Excellence Grant will fund important outreach efforts in our service area during this important anniversary year for OBI with an array of events and updated materials while also improving efficiency at the organizational level. A separate Transaction grant will partially cover costs associated with a 243-acre "Rocky Ridge" conservation easement in the town of Henderson that was finalized in August 2022. It is the largest forestland under protection by OBI.

**The Capacity grant exceeds \$18,000. The grant's scope includes:**

- hiring a consultant to update strategic plan
- digitizing of important land documents
- meet and greet with key landowners in Henderson
- dedication of a new nature viewing deck at Downybrook Nature Reserve
- updated brochures, promotional video and drone footage of our properties to help with education in the community and private landowners
- 30-year celebration and donor recognition event in August

Timing of the grant is especially helpful as OBI settles into an office at the Lyme Community Foundation in Chaumont. The grant will help us make the most of our first-ever functioning headquarters.

Over three decades, OBI has conserved nearly a thousand acres that include some very unique properties. The most recent is "Rocky Ridge," located off Gilman Road in the town of Henderson. The Transaction Grant totals nearly \$8,000 and will help fund OBI's expenses related to the land deal. The conservation easement keeps the 243-acre land on the tax rolls and in private hands, yet it ensures the natural beauty of its scenic ridge and forestland will be protected from development. It features sheer limestone cliffs that are visible from the Great Lakes Seaway Trail (Route 3) and serve as a flyway and nesting area for migratory songbirds as they make their way up the lakeshore.

Henderson is part of an 8-town service area for OBI. Other towns include Cape Vincent, Lyme, Brownville, Pamela, LeRay, Hounsfield and Ellisburg.



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 www.obilandtrust.org

**Board of Directors**

- Carrie Fleming, **President**
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- Lee Ellsworth, **Land Steward**
- Joan Treadwell-Woods, **Treasurer**
- Vicki Hanley, **Secretary**
- Tracy Valentine, **Editor and Historian**
- Joel Block
- Robin Caprara
- Barbara Donaldson
- Marie Smith
- Jim LaPlante, **Emeritus Board Member**  
(1948-2022)
- Sally Hirschey, **Emeritus Board Member**  
(1939-2020)
- Urban Hirschey, **Emeritus Board Member**  
(1938-2022)

**Join Us!** The non-for-profit OBI Land Trust relies on contributions from the public and grants from foundations to fund our projects in land conservation.

Please send your contributions to:  
 P.O. Box 117, Chaumont, NY 13622.

**Become a “Friend of OBI.”**

Levels of membership range from \$100 Protector of the Land to \$1500 Friend of the Land.

**We need and appreciate support of OBI!**



# OBI ELECTS BOARD LEADERS

Five months after a rare special meeting was called to elect temporary leaders, the 10-member board of directors met for an annual meeting on April 17, 2023 to unanimously approve **Carrie Fleming** and **Rosanne Weir** to head up OBI Land Trust for the next year.

Fleming is now President and Weir is Vice-President of our all-volunteer governing board. Both were elected to interim leadership roles on November 17, 2022 following the sudden and unexpected death of OBI’s longtime leader, Jim LaPlante.

Fleming is a resident and native of Chaumont. She joined OBI in 2020 and was elected vice-president in spring 2022. Weir has served on the OBI Board since 2015. She is the widow of LaPlante and

often worked alongside him doing land trust work.

The slate of officers also included the re-election of officers to one-year terms. **Joan Treadwell Woods** is Treasurer and **Lee Ellsworth** is Land Steward. **Vicky Hanley** serves as Secretary and **Tracy Valentine** is Editor/Historian.

Seven board members were elected to two-year terms: Tracy Valentine, Vicky Hanley, **Joel Block**, Carrie Fleming, **Marie Smith**, **Barbara Donaldson** and **Robin Caprara**. Two-year terms for Joan Treadwell Woods, Lee Ellsworth and Rosanne Weir will be up for renewal in 2024.

“I’m very proud of what we’re accomplishing and I’m excited for our future,” Fleming told board members at the annual meeting.



## Strategic Planning Meeting

As we celebrate our 30th anniversary, OBI Land Trust is actively planning for the future. The all-volunteer board of directors met with Connecticut-based consultant Connie Manes, Circuit Rider with the Land Trust Alliance, on April 26-27, 2023 to help us set goals and also review land documents. We spent several hours discussing OBI’s strengths and accomplishments, community needs and outreach and also steps OBI can take to become stronger. The meetings were held at the Lyme Community Foundation in Chaumont, which is also now home to OBI’s headquarters. The sessions were an important first step toward updating the OBI Land Trust Strategic Plan for 2023-2028.



Shadblush - photo by Lee Ellsworth



Spring Beauty - photo by Lee Ellsworth

OBI was founded in Chaumont in 1993 as an all-volunteer land trust and has since protected nearly 1,000 acres in our service area, where agriculture and tourism are a way of life. This includes:



- 243-acres of scenic ridge and forestland in Henderson, including vast hardwood forest and several hundred feet of “rocky ridge”- a high bluff with sheer limestone cliffs that are a geologic feature and a local landmark
- a 180-acre nationally-recognized wildlife preserve
- more than 1700 feet of undeveloped shoreline in Henderson Harbor
- 400-plus acres of ecologically-sensitive alvar community
- immature hardwood forestland and abandoned farmland
- a unique 15-acre conservation area/woodland trail that includes an endangered Indiana bat habitat



Lee Ellsworth

OBI Land Trust’s premier public use property is Downybrook Nature Reserve. Much of our volunteer efforts are aimed at ensuring proper stewardship of this unique and scenic property, which is a popular place for families, birdwatchers and nature lovers. OBI Land Trust acquired a conservation easement from twin sisters Helen & Mary Eldrett in 2011, more than 40 years after they began creating the reserve. Then in 2015 OBI was entrusted with the ownership and care of the unique property. It is recognized as a Backyard Wildlife Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation and is designated as an official Wildlife Refuge by the National Campers and Hikers Association.



Ruffed Grouse - photo by Lee Ellsworth

# OBI’S INSPIRING EMERITUS BOARD MEMBERS

Though they are no longer with us, the three Emeritus members of the OBI Board of Directors share a legacy of dedication that will inspire our Board of Directors for years to come.

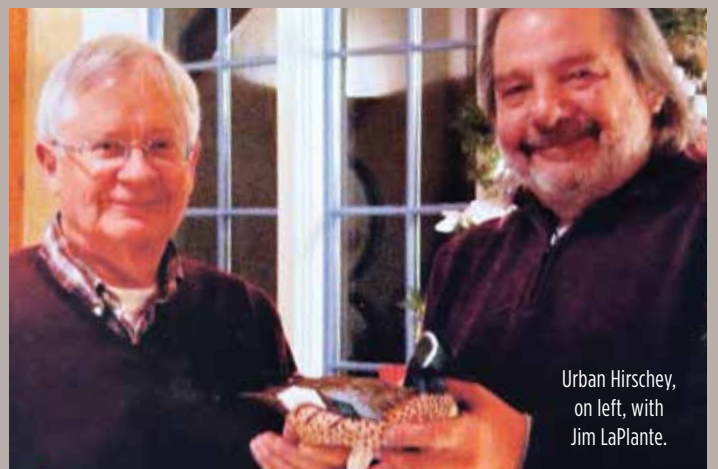
**Jim LaPlante** (1947-2022) was OBI’s longest-serving leader of our Board of Directors. He joined OBI in 2006 and was elected chairman in 2010, a position he held until his sudden passing in November 2022. Under his tireless leadership, OBI saw great success in securing key funding as well as conservation easements.



Sally Hirsche

**Sally Hirsche** (1939-2020) was OBI’s longest serving board member when she retired from the Board of Directors in the summer of 2018. She was a major donor for OBI and a vocal advocate of OBI. She was known for moving meetings along and asking all of the right questions. She also brought a touch of class to our annual cookout.

**Urban Hirsche** (1938-2022) joined the OBI Board of Directors in 2016 and for many years was a top OBI donor, along with wife, Sally. His enthusiasm for OBI’s mission was unwavering. Some of the most memorable OBI picnics fundraisers were held at their beautiful shoreline home in Cape Vincent.



Urban Hirsche, on left, with Jim LaPlante.



Rocky Ridge’s spring forest - photo by Lee Ellsworth

**Why OBI?** OBI Land Trust came onto the scene in 1993, at a time when there was no land trust devoted to the towns bordering Lake Ontario – Cape Vincent, Lyme, Brownville, Hounsfield, Henderson and Ellisburg. These would become the initial service area, which would later be expanded to include LeRay and Pamela. Today, OBI stands out as one of the area’s only all-volunteer land trust organizations.

Our non-profit organization was originally named Ontario Bays Initiative, Inc. and included a small group of community members who decided to take a hands on approach to preserving the rural character of Jefferson County’s shoreline towns. At our 25th anniversary in 2018, we announced a new name “OBI: A Land Trust” to more easily convey our mission: land protection. Our non-profit status means we are qualified to accept conservation easements, which are a great way for people to preserve private land for lasting public benefit.

The last five years leading up this 30-year milestone anniversary have arguably been the most important yet in terms of positioning OBI for the future. A new logo, marketing efforts and this newsletter have aided in our goals. OBI has hosted more events in the past few years, and is trying out new and different ideas to get people out in our service area.

The impressive grant-writing capabilities of our all-volunteer board has resulted in major grants that, when combined with private donations, has had a powerful positive impact. Some highlights:

- **Education & Outreach Grant to educate the community about OBI.** Grant funding of \$15,000 in 2018. This has resulted in work with area youth groups, including trail upgrades and clean-up events.
- **Phase 1 Upgrades at Downybrook Nature Reserve.** New walkovers, bridges, observation deck on west side, informational kiosks and expanded parking on west side. Grant funding of more than \$40,000 in 2019.
- **Phase 2 Upgrades at Downybrook Nature Reserve.** Gravel entrance on east side, including new driveway and parking area. Grant funding of more than \$37,000 in 2021.
- **Nature viewing deck constructed in summer 2022 at Downybrook** with major donor support from Dani Baker of Cross Island Farms on Wellesley Island plus grant from Northern New York Community Foundation Youth Philanthropy Council.
- **The Northern New York Community Foundation** has been a key partner in terms of outreach and provided critical financial support in the earliest days of our organization.
- **The Lyme Community Foundation** has been a key partner in Chaumont, where OBI is based. In January, OBI opened its first-ever office space in LCF’s Copley House on Main Street. It will improve efficiency and visibility and OBI is pleased to be a non-profit partner with the foundation.

Many volunteers have served as board members and officers, donating their time and talents to help with everything from field work to fundraising. Some have been with us a decade or more, creating a legacy of volunteerism and dedication that is rare.

The donations by people like you is vital. Private donations fund our operating budget and we appreciate the loyal supporters of so many over these three decades.

In this year of celebration of a 30-year anniversary, OBI remains focused on preservation of our area’s ecological assets – undeveloped shoreline, woodlands, farmlands and open spaces – for future generations to enjoy in this special part of Northern New York we call home.

# 30 YEARS



*“We are so lucky to have OBI and the dedicated volunteers in our community that give their time to preserve the open spaces,*

*shorelines and wildlife of this special place we all love,” Anne “Boo” Harris, Chaumont resident and former member of OBI Board of Directors.*



*“The Lyme Community Foundation congratulates OBI on their 30 years of service to the community and we are honored to have them housed in*

*our home, the Copley House in Chaumont,” Paul Carr, President of the Lyme Community Foundation.*



*“Over its history, OBI has consistently demonstrated the tradition of appreciating and caring for the places that make life here so special. They understand thoughtful stewardship not only of natural resources, but of financial and human resources as well,” said Rande S. Richardson, Executive Director of the Northern New York Community Foundation.*



*“They have embraced the true meaning and value of partnerships in support of that goal. We feel honored to continue to work alongside them in their endeavors in ways that have enduring, multi-generational importance for our community.”*



OBI vintage photos - top to bottom: Rick West and Birds of Prey; Four former OBI leaders Bob Wardwell, Jerry LeTendre, Maureen Barros and Cora Lee Phillips; Longtime OBI Secretary Verna Docuteur with Jim LaPlante; OBI Board members at 15th anniversary in 2008; Jean Emery at 2014 dedication of Alex C. Velto Eagle Ridge Bat Conservation Area, named in honor of her late husband.



Lakeshore at Stony Cove - photo by Lee Ellsworth

# IN MEMORY OF T. URLING WALKER & WILLIAM C. COUCH

Our all-volunteer land trust relies on the support of donors and leaders in our community who believe in our mission of land conservation in the Jefferson County shoreline towns. **T. Urling “Tom” Walker** and **William C. Couch** contributed to OBI Land Trust in ways that will ensure them each a lasting legacy. Both were community leaders, longtime residents of Watertown as well as longtime loyal supporters of OBI.

When he died at age 95 on January 3, 2023, Mr. Walker’s philanthropic support had touched our land trust as well as many other non-profit organizations throughout northern New York. He regularly joined us at our annual fundraiser alongside wife, Mabel, who died in 2020. The couple’s support shortly after we were established in 1993 helped us gain a foothold as the region’s only all-volunteer land trust. In 2015, they sponsored the Walker Challenge in which they matched contributions to our non-profit totaling up to \$10,000. The program exceeded the \$20,000 goal as it helped inspire support from throughout the service area.

Mr. Couch died January 4, 2023. He and wife, Peggy, have been supporters of OBI as well as partners in conservation with OBI since 2006, when a conservation easement with OBI protecting more than 400 acres of their property was finalized.

This is the single largest OBI conservation easement to date and the private property includes one of the few alvar habitats in North America. The couple joined us at our annual fundraiser and we have appreciated their generous support over the years. The opportunity to work with Mr. & Mrs. Couch was vital in helping to preserve ecologically significant land in our service area and it was also a key factor in helping further our success as a non-profit.

OBI Land Trust honors the memory of both Mr. Walker and Mr. Couch as people who epitomize the spirit of land conservation and who will always be remembered.



T. Urling “Tom” Walker



William C. Couch

## OBI Board of Directors Welcomes New Members

After spending several years as a volunteer at Downybrook Nature Reserve, **Marie Smith** joined the OBI Board in November 2022. She and husband, John, have been monitoring the bluebird boxes and helping to maintain the trails. A longtime resident of Brownville, she spent a 41-year career in nursing. Her work with OBI has helped her appreciate the role of OBI in protecting special property for future generations.



Marie Smith

“As I found out more about this great organization and what they do help landowners to preserve the beautiful Lake Ontario habitat, I became more intrigued,” said Marie. “I have always had an appreciation for nature and spending time outdoors is a powerful way to recharge ourselves and clear our minds.”



Barbara Donaldson

**Barbara Donaldson** is a lifelong Chaumont resident who joined the OBI Board in February 2023. She enjoys many outdoor activities, including boating, biking and golfing. Her professional background includes working in the insurance industry and as a financial assistant. Barb’s work with OBI will include securing new conservation easements and she will serve as assistant treasurer.

For **Robin Caprara**, the mission of OBI fits well with her interests and lifestyle. She joined the OBI Board in April 2023. “I am really looking forward to helping make a difference working with OBI Land Trust to preserve what we have here in the north country,” she said.

Robin’s love of nature was cultivated while spending time at her aunt and uncle’s camp in the Adirondacks. Her passion is photography, particularly birds of prey, various species of ducks and Blue Heron. She enjoys kayaking, biking and spends summer weekends in her family’s restored 1969 Airstream.



Robin Caprara

All three women were elected to two-year terms of service at OBI’s April 2023 annual meeting.

## A Heartfelt Message in Memory of a Dear Four-legged Friend

*Enclosed is a picture of our beautiful Sadie on the trails at Downybrook. We lost Sadie in July after twelve and half years. Sadie and I have walked the trails at Downybrook since she was a puppy. In those days, we would stop and visit with the Eldrett sisters, identically clad working the trails on their gator... Downybrook holds a special place in our hearts.*



Sadie at Donnybrook

- From Mark & Marcia Buzynski, Brownville, December 2022



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**CELEBRATING 30 YEARS  
OF LAND CONSERVATION**

**OBI LAND TRUST  
INVITES YOU  
TO JOIN US**

**AUGUST 7, 2023  
WISE GUYS RISTORANTE**

Invite your friends to connect  
online: [www.obilandtrust.org](http://www.obilandtrust.org)

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**SPRING & SUMMER EVENTS...**

**SATURDAY, JUNE 10 DOWNYBROOK NATURE VIEWING DECK DEDICATION**  
9:30 AM | Downybrook Nature Reserve, 24353 Perch Lake Road, Brownville, NY

**SATURDAY, JUNE 17 DOWNYBROOK "FOREST BATHING"**  
9:30 AM | Downybrook Nature Reserve, 24353 Perch Lake Road, Brownville, NY  
RSVP: [info@obilandtrust.org](mailto:info@obilandtrust.org)

**SATURDAY, JULY 8 ALL ABOUT SCREECH OWLS - A SCREECH OWL HOUSE BUILDING WORKSHOP**  
11:00 AM - 12:30 PM | White Caps Winery, 11544 County Route 125, Point Salubrious, Chaumont, NY  
Sign-up deadline is July 6: [whitecapswinery@gmail.com](mailto:whitecapswinery@gmail.com)

**MONDAY, AUGUST 7 ANNUAL "FRIENDRAISER" CELEBRATE 30 YEARS OF LAND CONSERVATION**  
5:30 PM | Wise Guys Ristorante, Main Street, Chaumont, NY  
RSVP required: [info@obilandtrust.org](mailto:info@obilandtrust.org)

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 12 ALL ABOUT BLUEBIRDS - A BLUEBIRD HOUSE BUILDING WORKSHOP**  
11:00 AM - 12:30 PM | White Caps Winery, 11544 County Route 125, Point Salubrious, Chaumont, NY  
Sign-up deadline is August 10: [whitecapswinery@gmail.com](mailto:whitecapswinery@gmail.com)

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 19 A TRIP TO THE ENCHANTED EDIBLE FOREST AT CROSS ISLAND FARMS**  
10:00 AM | 44301 Cross Island Road, Wellesley Island, NY  
RSVP required: [info@obilandtrust.org](mailto:info@obilandtrust.org)

For more information about events, please visit our website at [obilandtrust.org](http://obilandtrust.org)

**EARTH DAY AT DOWNYBROOK NATURE RESERVE**



**T**een volunteers from the Northern New York Community Foundation's Youth Philanthropy Council joined OBI Land Trust for spring cleaning and trail clearing at Downybrook Clean-Up Day on April 22, 2023. **What a great way to celebrate Earth Day!**