

A visionary effort to preserve land

7/9/08

By MARTY KLEIN

On June 23, I attended a real estate closing at the Registry of Deeds. Closings or transfers of property take place every day, but this one was special. Not only because it involved more than one person transferring property to another, but because it will serve to benefit the community of Easthampton and beyond.

Guest Column

And, perhaps, someday inspire others as an example of what can be accomplished when people come together for common purposes, even in difficult economic times.

Briefly, here's the story: In the fall of 2007, a developer approached the Ciak and Papalagis families, owners of 15 acres of land along East Street in Easthampton, on the slopes of Mt. Tom, with an offer to purchase of \$350,000. In December, because the land was in the state's Chapter 61 program, the owners were required to offer the land to the city by "right of first refusal."

Given the present economic circumstances, the city did not have the funds to meet the offer, despite the fact that this land was considered a priority for protection, given its location. The city, in turn, approached the Pascommuck Conservation Trust (PCT), Easthampton's land trust, in the hope that we

This is the first instance of a funding project that combines open space protection with affordable housing.

might be able to take it on. Given our limited resources as a small nonprofit organization, it was simply beyond our capacity, despite our belief that this land was important to protect.

So, we turned to the Valley Land Fund, a regional land trust, with more resources, and asked whether they'd be willing to take out a \$300,000 loan if we contributed \$50,000 and agreed to pay the interest costs. It took some convincing to reassure them that this risk was worth taking and finally their board agreed. In early January, they purchased the property. Next, we began discussions with the state Department of Conservation and Recreation to see whether they had an interest in acquiring the land and adding it to their existing holdings on Mt. Tom.

We also discussed the possibility, with Jim Sullivan of the Easthampton Housing Partnership, of splitting off a one-acre building lot with frontage on East Street that could be used to provide a site for affordable housing. Jim enthusiastically embraced the idea. Currently, we prepared to bring our proposal to the Easthampton Community Preservation Act Committee (CPC) to seek partial funding for the preservation of the land and for the purchase of the affordable housing lot. In late spring, we were notified that the state would pay \$200,000 for the 14 acres of open space and not long after,

the CPC approved our funding request, for \$150,000.

In June, following unanimous approvals by the City's Finance Committee and the City Council and final approvals from the state, we arrived at a successful conclusion to a six-month-long process that required both faith and a common vision from all those involved.

The end result — 14 acres will be added to the Mt. Tom Reservation, with the possibility of new public access from East Street in the future, and next year Easthampton will oversee construction of two units of affordable housing, its first such project. It is also noteworthy that in the history of the Community Preservation Act in Massachusetts, this is the first instance of a funding project that combines open space protection with affordable housing.

As a participant and coordinator of this project, I'd like to thank the following for their dedication, patience and vision: the board of the Pascommuck Conservation Trust, Jennifer Howard and Jennifer Sopor from Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, conservation consultant Terry Blunt, Jim Sullivan and the Easthampton Housing Partnership, attorney Dick Evans, the Valley Land Fund's board and its president, John Body, and the various Easthampton municipal officials and board members who contributed their time and expertise to this effort.

Marty Klein, of Easthampton, is a member of the Pascommuck Conservation Trust.

Scores help celebrate Easthampton farm's preservation

By LAURIE LOISEL
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — The collaborative effort to make sure the farm in the name Echodale Farm means something thrills Mayor Michael Tautznik.

Tautznik was among a half dozen state and local officials on hand Sunday to celebrate the preservation of the 165-acre Echodale Farm, which officials say is the largest farm in the city.

"Celebratory is a good way to put it," Tautznik said of the Sunday event, where in addition to addresses from state officials, Echodale's new owners, Gail Flood and Rodney Britt, spoke to the crowd. Horse-drawn carriages ferried visitors around the property. About 70 people turned out for the festivities.

"It was a celebration of our accomplishments," said Tautznik.

Tautznik said he is happy to see more land saved for farming in the city.

"The preservation of Park Hill for agricultural purposes has been identified in master planning documents for years, and we've been working on it for years," he said.

He noted that Echodale is the third large piece of farmland on Park Hill to be preserved. The mayor gave credit largely to the successful collaboration among local, state and federal governments, nonprofit organizations and private citizens.

"It's always exciting to have a successful outcome," he said. "Not only is there a permanent protection on what is the largest single farm in the city, but it is also a coming together of the community."

Spearheading the project over a campaign that spanned more than two years were the Trust for Public Land and the Pascommuck Conservation Trust.



GORDON DANIELS

At the Echodale Farm celebration Sunday, Al Tetrault of Hatfield and his horses, Jim and Willy, gives wagon rides around the property.

The effort cost about \$2.85 million. Funding came from a variety of sources, including Easthampton, the state's Department of Agricultural Resources and Division of Conservation Services and many individual donors. The campaign made direct appeals to the public for support.

In the end, the project placed 140 acres under an Agricultural Preservation Restriction, known as APR, and the city purchased an additional 24 acres of the site, which is also under permanent

protection.

In 2006, the Trust for Public Land bought the 165-acre farm to protect it from residential development as it and other entities worked to find a way to preserve it forever as a farm.

Britt and Flood bought the farm this year, and plan to operate it as a family-run enterprise with livestock, beekeeping, vegetable- and flower-growing operations.

They plan to offer a retail outlet for vegetables and flowers grown on the property.

"We are excited to begin our involvement with the Easthampton farming community," said Britt in a prepared statement. Officials say that in addition to preserving the farm, the project protects habitat for threatened and endangered plants and animals along Bassett Brook.

The Trust for Public Land is a national nonprofit created in 1972; Pascommuck Conservation Trust, formed in 1982, is based in Easthampton, with the goal of preserving land in Easthampton.



GORDON DANIELS

Spring unfurls along Old Pascommuck trail

On an early April day, I take a late afternoon walk along the Manhan River on our Old Pascommuck/Florence E. Smith trail (directions below). Like many of Pascommuck Conservation Trust's properties, this is an underappreciated and beautiful place to experience nature, a few minutes from your home.

NEWSLETTER

Report from Pascommuck
Conservation Trust

We're fortunate in Easthampton to have a fascinating type of habitat – the floodplain forest, which has become increasingly scarce in many parts of the country. Much of the Manhan River flowing through the city, emptying into the Connecticut River Oxbow, is flanked by this feature.

What makes it so special? The forest and the various plants that thrive here must be able to survive being periodically flooded (with no oxygen in the soil) when water levels rise as they do during spring floods.

Trees such as the sycamore, silver maple, cottonwood, willow, box elder and a few others have successfully adapted to such stresses. So have ostrich, cinnamon and other ferns, horse-tails, red osier dogwoods, poison ivy and several other plants that colonize the forest floor.

This forest buffers and filters the floodwaters. In its absence, the floods would extend out much further into the landscape. Floodplain forests also serve as habitat and travel corridors for a variety



MARTY KLEIN

A salamander enjoys the moist spring woods.

of wildlife species.

A tufted titmouse announces its presence, repeating the mating call that returned to its throat a few short weeks ago. I see deer, coyote and raccoon and beaver tracks in the mud amid the dead leaves. Red silver maple flowers are just beginning to open overhead in contrast to the bare branches they grace. There's a small spider in front of me, trying to span distant branches with a silken line. A pair of resplendent wood ducks swims upstream, sensing my presence. Maybe they're interested in the nesting box we installed here recently.

Our trail is easy to follow. It's mostly high and dry, paralleling the river. I like to walk off the trail sometimes, to get closer to the

water, see the less seen. This time of year, and late fall through winter, are the best times to do that, as the poison ivy hasn't leafed out yet.

Influenced by the spring flood levels on the Connecticut, the Manhan has now spread out, so it's more like a big lake, gently flowing into the surrounding lands.

Water, water everywhere! I stand at its edge. The ground here is littered with dead leaves and the remains of last year's plants, in addition to all manner of flotsam and jetsam deposited by the receding waters. I can hear Interstate 91 off to my right. Once the trees leaf out, they'll act as a muffler against this intrusion. Noise and water filters.

I walk over to an impressive (10-foot circumference?) sycamore at the edge of the water. At its base is a large hole, a welcome refuge for raccoons and others. In the mud nearby, I see tracks where a beaver has exited the water. I continue on and see several trees at and above the floodplain that have been partially chewed by the beavers. They favor black birches here. Perhaps it's the wintergreen-flavored sap that attracts them.

This place is serene and sub-

lime. There are no spectacular views, but it's a wonderful opportunity to experience one of nature's cycles firsthand. I liken this time of year to the first trimester of a pregnancy. Much is happening, growing, moving ... unseen for now. Very soon, all this will change and spring, in all its glory, will burst forth on the landscape. In another couple of weeks, the ferns' fiddleheads will emerge with the rest of the greenery and this largely grey and brown scene will be transformed.

I urge you to visit.

To get to the trail, park on East Street by the Old Pascommuck signs and follow the trail down, under the bridge spanning the bike path. Or, from the bike path, park your bike at our rack where there's a sign for our trail. Visit our Web site if you'd like a trail map.

Coming events

May 3: Spring plant sale, Big E's parking lot, 8 a.m.

May 17: Trail maintenance at Old Pascommuck and Hannum Brook areas

May 25: Spring nature walk at Ed Dwyer Conservation Area, time TBD.

All events are open to the public. For more information, call 529-9594.

This column was written by Marty Klein, a member of the board of directors for the Pascommuck Conservation Trust.



MARTY KLEIN

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GAZETTE CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT

Grant to assess holdings

Land trust finds
\$10K 'really useful'

By MATT PILON
Staff Writer

1/17/08

EASTHAMPTON — A local land trust received an infusion of cash this month in the form of a \$10,000 grant that will help local environmentalists take better care of the trust's property and increase its membership base.

The Pascommuck Conservation Trust, which owns 16 properties totaling approximately 200 acres in the city, received the grant from the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, an association of 100 local trusts in the state.

Pascommuck Trust member Marty Klein said Wednesday that he and his volunteer colleagues are excited about the grant.

"It's going to be really useful for us," he said.

Klein said that for some time, the trust has wanted an environmental professional to perform ecological assessments of its properties.

The end result would be maps identifying certain species of plants and wildlife, whether native or invasive, as well as special features such as vernal pools and potential problems like illegal dumping or vandalism.

Klein estimated that the trust could pay for assessments on three to six of its properties using the money.

The goal, Klein said, is to increase public access to, and use of, the properties as well as to be certain what the properties contain.

"In order to steward them properly we really need to know what we have there," he said.

Although some of trust members have backgrounds in environmental studies, a professional is needed so that the already stretched-thin membership can stay focused on its regular duties, Klein said, which include property maintenance and staying abreast of potential properties to pursue.

Klein said that the money would also be used to try to increase the membership of the trust, which is currently hovering around 200, through mailings and outreach events.

"It's kind of stuck around that number for the past few years," he said. "Given the interest in protecting important open space, it seems we should be able to double that."

Land Trust Coalition Director Bernie McHugh said that the approximately \$150,000 in grants awarded this month are aimed at improving stewardship and increasing stability and growth of local land trusts from Worcester County to Berkshire County.

The program is a first for the coalition, he said.

"I think it really shows the power of what grassroots groups can do if you give them a little leverage," he said.

McHugh said that the funding came from a private source that wanted to remain anonymous.

"It was very nice of them," he said. "They're intensely interested in land conservation in Western Mass."

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HAMPTON, WESTHAMPTON AND SOUTHAMPTON • PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE DAILY HAMPSHIRE GAZETTE

Plants by the truckload

Annual sale aids land conservation

By **MATT PILON**
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — Saturday, amid the hubub of local shoppers and the annual downtown clean-up, members of the Pascommuck Conservation Trust set up shop bright and early on Union Street to sell plants, shrubs and ornamental grasses.

The proceeds of the annual sale, held under a red tent in the Big E's Supermarket parking lot, go to the trust's land protection efforts around Easthampton.

Trust Vice President Sue Walz, a 10-year member, said that she always enjoys the sale because members are able to interact with the public.

"Generally when people are buying plants, they're happy," Walz said. "It's a good community event."

And it's a fitting benefit for a nonprofit whose members have fought for 26 years to preserve 190 acres of land in the city.

Many of the plants sold Saturday were donated by individuals and gardening groups, Walz said. The group prepares several truckloads of plants weeks in advance at "potting parties." It also takes donated plants on the morning of the sale.

She would not disclose how much was raised Saturday, but said hundreds of plants were sold and only one truck load of plants remained at the end of the day. The trust adopts leftover plants and tries to sell them the following year, Walz added.

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KEVIN GUTTING

Sofia von Stange of Southampton visits the Pascommuck Conservation Trust plant sale Saturday with her twin daughters, Lucy, left, and Phebe, 2½.

The Summit 9/24/09

Sand plains and swallowtail

Conservation group enhancing butterfly habitat

When the Pascommuck Conservation Trust hired wildlife biologist Molly Hale last year to conduct surveys of our conservation lands, we asked her to think creatively about opportunities for improving their wildlife habitat value.

NEWSLETTER

Report from the Pascommuck
Conservation Trust

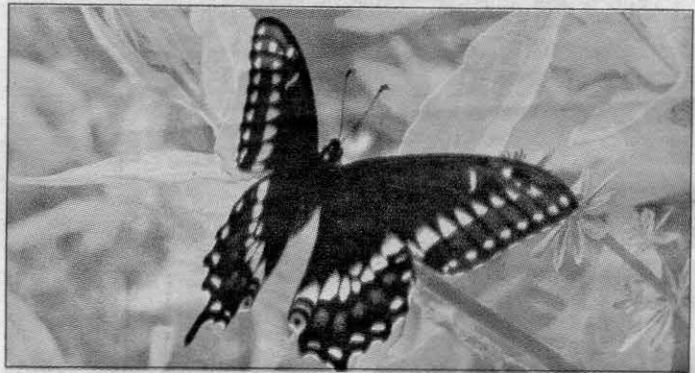
Among Hale's many ideas, one that we are particularly excited about is the concept of improving habitat for butterflies at the White Brook Plains Conservation Area. Due to its configuration, prior land use, and neighborhood context, this property has posed some management challenges for the Trust; Molly's idea presents an excellent approach to enhancing wildlife habitat in a way that is compatible with the ecological and social constraints on this parcel of land, as well as working with its natural assets.

Flowers for butterflies

This oddly-shaped property — consisting of scraps of land reserved from subdivision — breaks most of the rules of conservation planning, which dictate that reserves should be essentially circular or square to minimize disturbance in the interior of the parcel. To compound the conservation challenges, the meadow-dominated property gives more the impression of an extension of neighboring lawns than a protected open space.

Many species of wildlife native to New England, including birds and mammals, occur most reliably in interior-dominated areas, insulated from human activities beyond the perimeter. This requirement cannot be readily satisfied at the White Brook Plains Conservation Area. However, some species, including most insects, don't particularly need large interior areas to satisfy their lives' requirements. These species do just fine in small patches of habitat, and can occur in human-dominated areas.

From a butterfly's perspective, if an area has adequate host and nectar plants, chances are the area will meet its needs. Also, butterflies aren't controversial. Their presence won't



PASCOMMUCK CONSERVATION TRUST

Black Swallowtail

have any unwanted impacts on neighbors, and managing for them essentially means leaving the land much as it is while adding a greater variety of flowering plants, which in themselves would be an improvement over the existing conditions. Finally, there is evidence to suggest that this humble parcel may be capable of providing habitat for a number of butterflies that are unusual or imperiled in our area.

PCT has a few management goals relating to the enhancement of butterfly habitat at White Brook Plains. First, we want to provide host or nectar plants for a variety of relatively common butterfly species already found to be present on the property, including spring azure, American lady, Eastern tiger swallowtail, and monarch.

We envision meeting this goal through supplemental planting of wildflowers such as New England aster, butterflyweed, bee balm, and Joe-Pye weed. Second, we believe that elements of the landscape are potentially favorable for several rare and uncommon species, so we want to provide host or nectar plants for these, too. Frosted elfin, wild indigo duskywing, and oak hairstreak, for examples, are not known to occur on the property, but perhaps if we establish the right conditions, they or related species will find the area and take up residence.

Sandy soils

Our hope for attracting rare butterflies to the White Brook Plains property rests on the geological setting of the area, and the habitat the land likely supported before European settlement. Based on the sandiness of soils in the Plains section of Easthampton, its flat terrain, and the occurrence of pitch pine

in undeveloped areas, this part of the city may have once hosted a similar forest as you'll find on the Montague sand plains. This forest type, a pitch pine/scrub oak barren, is the habitat for numerous rare butterflies and moths where it occurs in Massachusetts (mainly in the Connecticut River Valley and the southeast portion of the state). Given the dry, mineral soils of the White Brook Plains site, it is an ideal location to attempt to reconstruct part of this uncommon forest type.

We envision adding species such as lowbush blueberry, wild indigo, New Jersey tea, and wild lupine to the driest portions of the property. These species will provide interesting and attractive color and structure to this area, and, with luck, will draw in some unusual butterflies and moths — some of which have few remaining habitats available to them in the state.

Volunteers sought

While we have a good idea of what we want to accomplish with our butterfly-friendly plantings at White Brook Plains, we are still working out details and discussing the best way to implement our vision. However we proceed, we think this will be a project that our volunteers and neighbors around the site can adopt, with support from the directors. If you want to participate in this project in any way, from creating a part of a planting plan, to donating plant material or labor, please contact Molly Goodwin, our volunteer coordinator, at goodmol@hotmail.com or 529-1805.

This column was written by Tom Lautzenheiser, a PCT trust member and the central/western regional scientist for the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

Habitat group eyes Easthampton for 2 homes

By MATT PILON
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — The Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity is looking to build two homes in Easthampton — a first for the city.

The local Habitat for Humanity chapter plans to apply to the Zoning Board of Appeals in the coming months for a 40B permit so that it can build a "zero lot line" home, containing two dwellings, on a 1-acre East Street parcel, Pioneer Valley Habitat Executive Director M.J. Adams said in a recent interview.

She said the homes would be Habitat's first in Easthampton.

"We've been wanting to work in Easthampton for a long time," Adams

"There's a need for homeownership for families who used to be able to afford it."

*M.J. Adams, executive director,
Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity*

said. "There's a need for homeownership for families who used to be able to afford it."

The city's Housing Partnership Committee, which works to identify and promote affordable housing developments in Easthampton, has been in discussions with the nonprofit since the summer about building on the land, which was carved out of a 2008 purchase of 14 acres on the Mount Tom slopes made possible through a

partnership between the city and the Valley Land Fund.

The City Council voted in 2008 to spend \$150,000 in Community Preservation dollars toward the acquisition of the property after a local developer signed a purchase and sale agreement with the former owners.

Mayor Michael A. Tautznik exercised the city's right of first refusal, which was possible because it had been taxed less under a recreational land provision. Thirteen of the acres became a part of the Mount Tom state reservation and the remaining acre was kept for affordable housing.

It's a process that Habitat is familiar with, said Adams.

■ See HABITAT / Page B2

Habitat

■ Continued from A1

Habitat builds its virtually all of its housing on donated land, usually from a municipality or institution.

For example, a purchase of 80 acres of conservation land off Ryan Road in Northampton in 2000 netted Habitat enough room to build two homes. Habitat is also in the middle of building five homes on Garfield Avenue in Northampton.

"Habitat can work at that scale," Adams said. "That's the beauty of us."

The nonprofit uses volunteer — and homeowners' "sweat equity" — labor to build homes, then sells them at cost to families who make 50 percent or less of the area median income. In Easthampton, that means a family of four making less than \$39,000 will be eligible to buy one of the homes, Adams said.

The nonprofit then issues a zero interest mortgage to the buyers.

Committee member Jackie Brousseau-Pereira said she views the use of CPA money for this project as a win, because the

preservation of open space and construction of affordable housing are two of the four goals of the CPA.

For now, the city still owns the parcel, but would sell it to Habitat for \$1 if the organization is successful in getting its 40B permit from the ZBA, City Planner Stuart Beckley said. The City Council would also have to sign off on the land transfer.

Brousseau-Pereira said the two years it has taken the volunteer housing committee to issue a call for proposals and find a developer shows how difficult it can be to get affordable housing built.

"It's really hard to build affordable housing and make a profit," she said. "The market does not solve this problem."

Preliminary plans

Habitat plans to seek a 40B permit so it can build a "zero lot line" home, which Adams explained is a duplex-style unit in which two three-bedroom homes share a center wall. The city has requested that one of the units be made handicapped-accessible, she said.

The shared wall configuration

is not permitted under zoning rules on East Street, but would be under the provisions of 40B zoning.

The 1-acre lot is too small to subdivide, under city zoning rules, and Adams said that Habitat tries to avoid putting first-time homebuyers into a condominium association because of the added complexities.

Beckley said the 40B permit would allow Habitat to bypass several setback requirements, including space between the two homes and distance from the road.

Brousseau-Pereira stressed that the 40B permit would be a "friendly 40B," which means it has support from local officials.

Beckley confirmed that the project does have local support and that a request to transfer the land should be before the City Council by next month.

Adams said Habitat plans to listen to input from neighbors once the designs are presented.

"We've built homes in the area that we think complement the neighborhood," Adams said.

Matt Pilon can be reached at mpilon@gazettenet.com.

Easthampton eyes Park Hill Road land for garden space

By MATT PILON
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — Residents with a green thumb could soon reap the benefits of tending gardens thanks to the city's purchase of a piece of a well-known Park Hill Road farm.

The Conservation Commission Monday will air plans to create community gardens on the western 24 acres of Echodale Farm, purchased by the city in 2007 with Community Preservation Funds and the help of lo-

cal fundraising. The meeting is set for at 6 p.m. in room B of 50 Payson Ave.

The gardens, which would be the city's first, could be in place for this growing season as a pilot program, commission members hope.

"This is something we've been trying to plan for a long time," said Commission Chairman Kelly Richey.

A \$25,000 grant from the Trust for Public Land meant to be used to maintain the Echodale property as well as memorial

donations for commission member Laura Fisher's grandfather Ted Sparks, an avid gardener, are being eyed to help make the gardens a reality.

"I think there's a pretty big demand for something like this," Fisher said. "We have a perfect parcel of land for it on Park Hill Road."

Advocates for the project have started a Facebook group called Easthampton Community Garden.

Commission member Peter Cleary said that the initiative

comes amid a review of the commission's conservation properties in the city made possible through a lull in construction projects that has lowered the number of wetlands permits sought by developers.

"We're going around and visiting the land and seeing what we can do with it," Cleary said.

The commission has not made any final decisions on the gardens, which could encompass about three acres. The commission is seeking ideas from the public, hoping to gauge support

for the idea Monday.

"It's both to get information out and to get input from people who are there," Cleary said.

The session will also take up topics like fertilizer restrictions, how large the plots might be and what they might cost to use for a year, Cleary said.

The Trust for Public Land purchased the 165-acre Echodale Farm in 2006 and held it while a local fundraising campaign led by the Pascommuck Trust ensued. The city put up \$450,000, much of it from a con-

servation grant, to purchase the western acres, which officials said could be used for passive recreation. A family that purchased 140 acres of the land in 2008 is now farming and raising heritage breeds.

City Planner Stuart Beckley said that the city's land, which has not been used as farmland for a long time, would need to be tilled and plowed if the commission turns it into community garden space.

Matt Pilon can be reached at mpilon@gazettenet.com.



KEVIN GUTTING

Something new in the garden

Mieke Bomann and Jeff Meckling of Florence browse the selection of flora available at the Pascommuck Conservation Trust's annual spring plant sale in the parking lot of Big E's Foodland in Easthampton recently. They settled on a globe thistle.

First Person

'One more time'

By Margot Cleary

Regular visitors to the Easthampton Savings Bank's main office likely knew the face, even if they didn't know the name.

For years a white-haired woman could frequently be found sitting in a folding chair outside the bank's side door, a collection can in hand. Sometimes she was asking for donations for the Pascommuck Conservation Trust. Sometimes for Dollars for Scholars. Sometimes for the Manhan Rail Trail. Stella Wiernasz had a lot of causes.

Last Thursday her chair was set up for the final time. She had died the previous Saturday, May 1, at the age of 91. Her family thought her empty chair would be a fitting memorial, and a way of telling people that she was gone. A cardboard sign propped on the chair had a large photo of her, the dates of her birth and death, and the words "Thank you for your support." A couple of collection cans tied to the chair were labeled "One more time."

STELLA WAS, SIMPLY put, a character, and I'd long wanted to write about her in Hampshire Life. She'd always turned me down, politely. But in 2002 I ran into her — at the bank, of course — shortly after I'd done a story about a young woman who was raising her brothers after the untimely death of their mother. Stella told me she'd been moved by Danielle Timothy's difficult situation, and had sent her a few dollars. Then she added this: Maybe I could write about her after all. Her 85th birthday was coming up the next year, and she was planning a party. Instead of giving her presents, she was hoping guests would donate to one of her causes. She figured a well-timed story might boost the take.

In our interviews Stella was frank, forthcoming

and full of stories about a life that had had a considerable number of rough patches. Other people I interviewed for the story spoke admiringly of all the good work she did for Easthampton, but also noted that you just couldn't say no to Stella; she wouldn't let you. "When Stella's trying to raise funds for a cause she is very determined" is how Mayor Michael Tautznik diplomatically put it.



In memory of Stella Wiernasz

Kevin Gutting

THIS WEEK Tom Brown, the senior vice president at Easthampton Savings, described Stella as "pleasantly convincing." Then he chuckled.

She would read an article in the paper about some group in need, Brown recalled, and soon he'd hear from her: Would it be all right if she set up her chair? She would always ask his permission, always address him as Mr. Brown, and always send him a thank-you note afterward.

"If she were here today she'd be out there collecting for Easthampton's 225th," he added. Stella's

last session outside the bank was back in November, before she became too ill to venture out.

Her obituary was the old-school kind, just the facts. She was an old-school person, too — beautiful handwriting, beautiful manners — and her final notice was dignified. Only at the end did a touch of whimsy creep in.

There was to be a memorial service at her church, and afterward, a gathering at the community center — a Stellabration, according to the obituary.

It would be a celebration of her life.

And, of course, a chance for people to donate to Stella's favorite causes, one more time. □

Margot Cleary can be reached at MCleary@gazettenet.com. To find the 2003 Hampshire Life profile of Stella Wiernasz visit this story at www.gazettenet.com.