

# THE LAY *of* THE LAND

Volunteer Jason  
Engelhardt creates:

## A Family Legacy



ADAM COPPOLA, COPPOLAPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

News from the Madison Land Conservation Trust

SPRING 2016

Zoe and Silas Engelhardt enjoy the new Annyka Harper Trail  
—built by their dad and named after them.

## *You're invited to hike a beautiful new trail in Neck River Uplands*

**WHEN MADISON HIGH SCHOOL MATH TEACHER** Jason Engelhardt, his wife Katrina, and his infant daughter, Zoe, decided to move to Princess Drive about four years ago, they didn't realize that there was a spectacular MLCT property practically right next door. Neck River Uplands, a 115-acre parcel, was acquired about ten years ago—thanks to the efforts of many dedicated volunteers.

The trail head to Neck River Uplands North, the northern portion of the preserve, is right on Princess Drive. Jason, a life-long lover of the outdoors and committed volunteer MLCT trail steward—started exploring the trails on the property with his dog.

Immediately, Jason recognized what an extraordinary parcel it is: "There are about three miles of trails," he says,

"with three stunning streams that run together, woods, rock ledges, and cliffs with beautiful views."

But as he gradually got familiar with every square foot of the property, he decided that his favorite area of the property—a winding, half-mile trail just north of Route 80 that passes over a waterfall—needed some care and attention. Although there was a sort of unofficial trail, it wasn't well-marked, there were rocks and debris blocking the path, and litter was strewn on the ground near what must have been a "party spot."

Jason sought permission to clear, organize, and mark the trail—which, of course the MLCT was happy to grant.

He started working on it about two and a half years ago. "I remember the timing, because my wife was pregnant

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with our son, Silas, who's now two," he recalls. "I would head out to do some work every day after school."

One date in particular sticks in his mind. "It was May 29th, Silas's due date. Nothing was happening, so I snuck out to work for a couple of hours on the crossing over the waterfall. I built a rock bridge over the stream," he recalls. "That night, Katrina and I went to the hospital and Silas was born."

For Jason, that trail will always be a meaningful reminder of that day and his growing family—Silas (age 2) and big sister Zoe (age 4), who waited at home to welcome her new brother. To show our gratitude and appreciation for Jason's hard work, we are naming the new trail the Annyka Harper Trail, after Zoe Annyka and Silas Harper Engelhardt.

"The kids probably won't appreciate knowing that the trail is named for them until they're older. But it's a gift I know they will appreciate in the long-term. I hope they will visit it often for the rest of their lives, and take their own kids there," says Jason. 🌿

**Visit** [www.madisonlandtrust.org/neck-river-uplands-north-south](http://www.madisonlandtrust.org/neck-river-uplands-north-south) for directions and a map of the property.

 **We need you!**  
Become a volunteer on our Stewardship Committee, and spend as much (or as little) time as you want, helping maintain our trails. Interested? Email us at [info@madisonlandtrust.org](mailto:info@madisonlandtrust.org)



With donor support, we hope to save the historically important Rettich barn, ca. 1820.

*"I'm so grateful to all the people who worked hard to ensure this property would never be developed. It's a treasure I don't take for granted."* JASON ENGELHARDT



The Engelhardt family and their frog friend.

## Did you know?

**Scientists are making important discoveries on Land Trust properties.**

Dr. Kealoha Freidenburg and colleagues from the Skelly lab at the Yale School of Forestry are studying amphibians living on MLCT lands to learn how they are impacted by suburban environments. So far, they've found some species have skewed sex ratios and altered diets. And the body chemistry of one species has been greatly affected: up to 70% of the nitrogen in their bodies comes from wastewater (mostly septic).

 **You're invited to hear Kealoha talk about her work at our annual meeting in November.**



Measuring the well-house for repairs.



Clearing brush and picking up scrap metal.



Pruning and clearing the grapevines.

## Now look what you've done!

We are so excited to update you on progress you've made possible at the Rettich property, through your generous donations to the Land Trust.

**THE SPECTACULAR 10+ ACRES** of Hammonasset River frontage, woodlands, hay fields, and orchards were donated to the MLCT last spring, after owner Fred Rettich's death at age 97. He was passionate about preserving the property at 274 River Road that had been in the family for 115 years, and he knew that we would treasure and care for it.

An MLCT volunteer committee sprang into action to make the property safe for visitors and develop a plan for the future. Gifts from donors and supporters like you have funded a truly enormous amount of work in the past year.

**Read more** about the history of the Rettich property online. Look for the Newsletters button on our home page.

### To date, with your help:

- the committee brought in an environmental services company to manage asbestos abatement and lead paint removal on several buildings.
- in in-depth evaluation of all 24 structures on the property found that 19 of the buildings were beyond repair and would have to be demolished.
- over the winter, Jay Testori and his crew from Testori Brothers Excavation demolished buildings, removed old, broken-down trailers and farm equipment, and carted away tons of rotting hay (along with numerous critters that were living in it!). "Jay did a tremendous job," says Ben Diebold, member of the Rettich Committee. "He definitely went above and beyond. He even built a parking lot for us as a throw-in at the end."

### You answered the call

On a recent Saturday in May, over 20 of you responded to our email and Facebook calls for volunteers, and brought your muscles and tools to a Rettich property work party.

For over four hours, you worked to clear the grape vines and orchard of invasive poison ivy and bittersweet, cut brush, and mow the meadows. An enormous amount of cleanup was accomplished. **Thank you, wonderful volunteers!**

Next order of business: we'll be clearing a walking trail—about a 1-mile loop around the perimeter of the property, through meadow, woods, and riverfront. Our goal is to have the trail ready for the public by the end of summer.

And then on to long term planning for the future. There are so many possibilities for the property.... It's still too early to say for sure, but whatever we do, the Rettich property will always be here for the public to enjoy.

**Thanks to you!** 🌿

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Gooseberries (also known as currants) growing at the Rettich property.

## ALERT! Exciting green-space conservation opportunity coming your way

*MLCT purchase would prevent development of 64 acres in North Madison—but only with your help*

The South Central Regional Water Authority plans to sell 64 acres of beautiful open space, on Summer Hill Road just north of our 80 acre Summer Hill Preserve. And if the MLCT doesn't step in to purchase it, the property is approved for a new housing subdivision... development that could compromise the water quality of the Hammonasset River, increase the demand for town services, and shrink the natural habitat for threatened animal and plant species.

The MLCT is already working hard to win state grant funds to purchase the property, but we will also need donations—from Madison residents like you—who care about the future of our town's wild woods and wetlands. And if we are successful, this new acquisition

will connect several of our current properties—creating a spectacular corridor of contiguous preserved land linking to the Bailey Trail complex along the Hammonasset River to the south and to the Indian Rock Shelters property to the north. 🌿



**You can ensure that this gorgeous property is protected!**

In order to purchase this property, we must raise a down payment of several hundred thousand dollars by the end of this year. Stay tuned for more details from the MLCT to learn how you can be a part of this important effort. Or, **make a gift online now at:** [madisonlandtrust.org/make-a-donation](http://madisonlandtrust.org/make-a-donation)

### Join us!

We hope you'll be able to join us for a tour of the property this fall.

Make sure you receive notices about events.

**Join our email list at:** [madisonlandtrust.org/contact](http://madisonlandtrust.org/contact). Or like us at:

[Facebook.com/madisonlandtrust](https://www.facebook.com/madisonlandtrust)

### Thank You, Donors!

Your generosity keeps the MLCT going and growing!