

Pleasant Valley Preserve

Most Syracuse area cyclists have ridden along Pleasant Valley Rd in the town of Onondaga and enjoyed the outstanding terrain, views and peacefulness. This 5-mile stretch offers a very enjoyable ride in one of the most beautiful rural valleys in the area.

The Central New York (CNY) Land Trust has launched a two-phased \$622,000 campaign to purchase (Phase 1), and to enhance and endow (Phase 2) 203 acres in the Town of Onondaga. The beautiful property is located across from the Cedarvale Maple Syrup Company store, on Pleasant Valley Rd. The property was previously owned by Karl and Mary Wiles as part of their former maple syrup operation's maple sugar bush and Christmas tree plantation; they also managed agricultural fields. Additionally and importantly, the property features streams, ponds, fields, upland forest, and open and wooded wetlands that support a diverse bird and wildlife population.

A successful campaign will conserve this incredible 203-acre parcel. The parcel is the keystone property linking to other CNY Land Trust properties having no road access, and knits together almost 300 acres of conserved and accessible land. The Pleasant Valley Preserve will be a tremendous community resource for wildlife and recreation. Currently, approximately 3 miles of trails are marked for hiking.

Many people in the Town of Onondaga and neighboring communities are familiar with beautiful Pleasant Valley, which runs from Cedarvale to Marcellus. The Haudenosaunee used its woods and wetlands for hunting and for sources of medicine. In the early 1800s Europeans and New Englanders set up farms and gristmills near the waters of Cedarvale Creek and the west branch of Onondaga Creek.

Many of these early settlers are buried in cemeteries along Pleasant Valley Rd., in nearby S. Onondaga or Navarino, or in smaller family plots in the area. In the 1940s people drove cars from Syracuse for an "outing" in Pleasant Valley, just as cyclists enjoy its scenic beauty in regular rides through this valley today.

In early 2018 the Wiles family decided to retire from farming and sell the property. The idea that such a beautiful section of the valley might face unknown housing development spurred a group of neighbors to look into ways to save it for future generations. They contacted the CNY Land Trust to advocate for purchase of the property. The CNY Land Trust already had a history in the valley: they owned adjacent parcels which were previously donated by the Lockwood family for conservation. The new Wiles parcel could open these previously landlocked CNY Land Trust properties. Thus the dream of the Pleasant Valley Preserve was born.

However, time was of the essence. The only option in the short term was for neighbors to be the financial support for the CNY Land Trust until funds could be raised from the community to complete its purchase. Instead of unknown development (a big housing development of new homes?) there will still be beautiful natural countryside for cyclists to enjoy as they ride the road.

Half the money for the purchase of the land was immediately donated or pledged by the neighbors and other donors (\$150,000 total) to create a matching gift campaign that is currently underway to complete the purchase of the Pleasant Valley Preserve by early 2022.

A Friends of Pleasant Valley Preserve (FPVP) group, led by neighbors to assist with fundraising for the project and to help care for the land as well as encourage interested individuals to help save this beautiful site.

When this project is successful it will close a chapter in a remarkable story of the partnering between people with a shared passion to conserve our community: the land advocates, the land trust, and understanding sellers. This land will become a place where the community can stop and relax while biking. This property supports hiking, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, fishing and simply enjoying the bounty and beauty of nature.

The CNY Land Trust is a 47-year-old 501c3 non-profit, membership-driven land trust organization with a mission to preserve and protect natural areas in order to provide our communities clean water, clean air, wildlife habitat and a chance to connect with the land. Programs include land protection, land stewardship, and outreach and education.

The CNY Land Trust office is located at 7 Fennell Street, Skaneateles, NY. To learn more about the CNY Land Trust and Pleasant Valley Preserve, check out their website: <https://cnylandtrust.org/>.

Please visit the Pleasant Valley Preserve fundraising site at gofundme.com/f/help-save-pleasant-valley and make a donation today! Also, look for and support future Friends of Pleasant Valley fundraising activities (or join FPVP)!