

An Open Space Savior Steps Down

Bonnie Van Alen; A Conservation Legacy

After 25 years of serving Willistown Conservation Trust as President, Bonnie Van Alen has transitioned to President Emerita, in addition to serving on Willistown Conservation Trust's Board of Trustees.

Bonnie's land conservation legacy began over 40 years ago when she raised concerns over development threatening the rural Willistown countryside where she lived with her husband Jim and three boys. In the early 1980's, Van Alen left her work at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia to launch a satellite program under the Brandywine Conservancy, with the purpose of conserving local land with conservation easements held by the Brandywine Conservancy.

Following years of successful conservation easement negotiations — 90 in total — that inspired a community of conservation in Willistown, Malvern and beyond, Van Alen partnered with friend and current Trustee Alice Hausmann to create an independent 501(c)(3) organization in 1996.

Trustee Alice Hausmann: "From the very beginning, Bonnie was committed to her vision and putting it into action. Her passion for the natural world and her desire to share that passion with others governs all that she does and informs all she has accomplished for over 40 years."

Called Willistown Conservation Trust, the organization soon began preserving public trail easements and three public nature preserves — Ashbridge Preserve, Kirkwood Preserve and Rushton Woods Preserve — in addition to completing more conservation easements with landowners, including Malvern's Randolph Woods. Under Van Alen's leadership, the Trust expanded to over 25 employees, 22 Trustees and hundreds of



photo by Jennifer Mathes

volunteers, and today it offers nationally renowned, research-based Programs for public engagement, including the Bird Conservation, Community Farm, Education and Outreach, Land

Protection, Stewardship, and Watershed Programs.

"The landscape of Willistown would look completely different had it not been for Bonnie's foresight, hard work and determination," says Van Alen's successor Kate Etherington. "It is inspiring to see and learn from another woman's leadership in our community."

In addition to her conservation work at the Trust, Van Alen is also the co-founder of Delchester Group, Inc., a nonprofit organization formed to acquire and preserve critical properties by re-sale to conservation-minded buyers. Within the Trust's focus area of 28,000 acres, Willistown

In her transition, Van Alen will continue dedicating her time to the Trust's goal of conserving 4,000 more acres in our area by serving on the Trust's Board of Trustees, acting as President Emerita and working with Delchester Group, Inc. to save more land from development.

About Willistown Conservation Trust: Found 20 miles west of Philadelphia, Willistown Conservation Trust's focus area is comprised of 28,000 acres within the watersheds of Ridley, Crum, and Darby Creeks of Chester and Delaware Counties. Since 1996, the Trust has permanently conserved over 7,500 acres, including three nature preserves open to the public. The Trust offers six nationally renowned programs for public engagement and research: the Bird Conservation, Community Farm, Education and Outreach, Land Protection, Stewardship, and Watershed Protection Programs. www.wctrust.org

Conservation Trust has conserved over 7,500 acres, and Delchester Group, Inc. is responsible for saving more than 2,000 acres.



Alice Hausmann and Bonnie Van Alen photo by Jennifer Mathes

