

# Family Happy To Preserve Land



PETER MARTEKA  
THE PATH LESS TRAVELED

A few years ago, former Somers resident Joan Swann gathered her family together to make a decision about a piece of land off Reeves Road in Ellington that had been in the family for decades.

"It wasn't really a hard decision," Swann said during a dedication ceremony at the Swann Farm preserve last week.

"I asked all four of my children if we should sell the land to developers or preserve it as open space, and all of them said it should remain as open space," she said. "I was very proud of them. We felt it was important to keep open space for farming and the woods for habitat and animals."

The Northern Connecticut Land Trust also benefited from the decision made by Swann and her children as the family sold the 56 acres to the trust for a little over \$300,000. Agricultural land — leased to a local farmer — makes up almost two-thirds of the property, or 38 acres.

Swann's father, William Hutton, owned the property in addition to the nearby Scantic Valley Farm off 9th District Road in Somers. He used the Reeves Road property — known as the Jobe's Hill Road Farm — to grow potatoes when north central Connecticut was a large crop producer.

"My father didn't grow up on a farm, but all he wanted to do was be a farmer," Swann said of Hutton, who also taught vocational education at Enfield High School. "He purchased the main farm in 1936, and soon after, the hurricane of 1938 struck and blew off the barn roof, blew down the silo and destroyed the tobacco shed, with it full of tobacco leaves. But everyone was in the same position after that storm."

The other one-third, or 18 acres, is comprised of hedgerow and a white

pine and oak forest. Under that canopy sits a healthy and thriving vernal pool.

Culver Modisette, president of the land trust, along with members of the board of directors, Swann and her brother Dick Hutton all gathered at a clearing on the property next to the rows of corn that were as "high as an elephant's eye."

"The trust was formed to protect agricultural land and open space," Modisette said. "And the purchase of this parcel does both. There will always be a crop growing here no matter how many houses spring up around it."

Although the group closed on the parcel in June 2001, the trust has been posting boundaries, clearing some of the hedgerow, removing invasive species and working on controlling erosion on the site. Since 1987, the trust has protected 390 acres and two active farms.

The trust, founded in 1987, was able to secure more than \$300,000 to purchase the property, including a \$182,500 grant from the state Depart-

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ment of Environmental Protection and a \$120,000 grant from the Hartford Foundation For Public Giving. The purchase was the

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largest financial project to be undertaken by the all-volunteer organization which serves

Somers, Stafford, Ellington, Enfield, East Windsor and Vernon.

"This was one of the first open space projects we funded," said Sharon O'Meara, a representative from the foundation. "When you consider less than 10 percent of Ellington is open space and agricultural land is a diminishing resource in the state, we thought this would be a great project to fund."

"Our mission has always been to improve the quality of life; we had just never been approached by environmental groups and trusts in the past," she said. "But open space and the environment is an important aspect of the community."

With the closing completed, the boundaries marked and the dedication held, the only remaining goal is figuring out how best to grant public access. While the farmland will always be leased to area farmers, providing income for the trust, members are trying to decide how to best showcase the 38 wooded acres. Some ideas include a trail system, path or a picnic area under the boughs of the white pines.

"There are a lot of possibilities," said Jerry Stage, chairman of the trust's land stewardship

committee. "Our philosophy is we don't come up with a management plan until you own it a couple years. We are still learning what's out here and what needs to be protected and preserved."