

# Hiker's commitment raises funds for Land Trust

By Julie Cotnoir

For the Journal Inquirer

While many may consider carving out time for two or three walks a week an accomplishment, John Sheirer, a professor of English and communications at Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield, has taken his commitment more than one step beyond. The Enfield resident has decided to combine a year of daily hiking with fundraising to benefit a local land-preservation organization.

After taking up hiking to rehabilitate from major knee surgery, Sheirer decided to see if he could hike every day for a year. He began his journey on May 17, 2005 (his 44th birthday), and will finish on May 16. He came up with a set of rules for himself and made a pledge to stay true to them. The rules include making one hike a day on the 2-mile Shady Brook Trail at the McCann Family Farm in Somers, located on Route 190. He would record the time, temperature, and weather conditions for each hike and write a book about the year's hiking experiences. He was inspired by books like Bill Bryson's, "A Walk in the Woods." Having never been afforded the opportunity for a long-distance journey like the Appalachian Trail, Sheirer decided that he could accomplish something similar by writing about his 365-day loop.

Recently, Sheirer decided to begin soliciting pledges from friends and colleagues for each of his 365 hikes. The money raised will be donated to the Northern Connecticut Land Trust, a non-profit organization he volunteers for that owns and maintains the 84-acre McCann Family Farm. He asked people to pledge whatever they could with those pledging one cent a day giving \$3.65, five cents a day \$18.25, and so on. Those committing 25 cents a day (\$91.25) will receive an autographed copy of the book he is writing, "Loop Year: Reflections on Hiking the Same Two-Mile Trail Every Day for a Year." For \$1 a day (\$365), contributors will receive the book and a framed photograph, taken by Sheirer, depicting a McCann's scene in all



Join John Sheirer on Friday.

hike just before midnight, with a second hike starting at 12:01 a.m. so he'd be free to do something on New Year's Day. He hiked through 2 feet of snow in February and even when he was sick with the flu, suffering from poison ivy, or limping on a bad knee. Last October's flooding nearly wiped out a bridge and left much of the trail under water, which made the hike even more challenging. Despite the challenges, he found creative ways to get each day's hike done without

breaking his rules or a leg.

Most hikes were solo, but he has invited anyone interested to join him for one of his final hikes at McCann's on Friday, May 12, at 4 p.m.

Sheirer's book, "Growing Up Mostly Normal in the Middle of Nowhere: A Memoir," has been getting strong reviews, and he hopes "Loop Year" will be published sometime in late 2006 or early 2007. He will be teaching a course on memoir writing at Asnuntuck this summer.

Each of the 365 entries in his new book features a 365-word piece describing and reflecting on his experiences for that particular day. He records everything, including people encountered, the changes of the seasons, and wildlife spotted (no bears, Sheirer reports), and reflects on how his hikes connect with his life off the trail.

Those wishing to make a pledge to the Northern Connecticut Land Trust can contact Sheirer by e-mail at [jsheirer@acc.comnet.edu](mailto:jsheirer@acc.comnet.edu) or by phone at (860) 253-3138.

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tour seasons.

Sheirer even found a corporate sponsor for his project. The Hi-Tec shoe company made a donation to the Land Trust and has supplied his hiking shoes.

Sheirer's undertaking has been rewarding, but not without sacrifice. He has taken no vacations, just day trips, with hikes sometimes being done at night by flashlight after a busy day. He completed his New Year's Eve