

# The Greenways Connector

Wachusett Greenways Newsletter • Connecting the Wachusett Community with Trails and Greenways

## Sunny Celebration – Trail Re-Dedication!

September 26 dawned clear and warm, just right for a day of celebration and fun on the rail trail. The day brought not only Family Fun Day and the Springdale Mill Site Celebration, but local officials joined more than 100 folks to re-dedicate the repaired section of the trail washed out last spring by beaver damming.

Participants in the ribbon cutting ceremony included Rep. Jim O'Day; Rep. Lew Evangelidis; Kevin McCormick, Chairman, West Boylston Board of Selectmen; David White, Vice Chairman, Holden Board of Selectmen; Leon Gaumond, West Boylston Town Administrator; John Scannell, DCR Regional Director; Bob Salvadore; Randy



Southwick, project contractor; and Colleen Abrams, President, Wachusett Greenways. Senator Harriette Chandler sent her heartiest congratulations and unwavering support, "The Mass Central Rail Trail project brings people in our community together like very few other initiatives do."

The great washout, which closed the much loved West Boylston section of the trail, led to a focused partnership between Wachusett Greenways, the Town of West Boylston and the DCR. The restoration included repairing the large breach in the trail caused by beaver damming, improving the trail surface

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## MCRT Construction 2009: Rail Trail Extends to Five Miles in Rutland

Despite unfavorable weather through much of the summer, industrious Wachusett Greenways volunteers and local contractors teamed up to open almost one mile of new Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT) in 2009. The trail construction in Oakham also included two new bridges.

From Muddy Pond in Rutland west to Route 122 in Oakham, dozens of Greenways volunteers helped fell, clear and chip trees and brush, the first step in trail building. They also placed hay bales, cleared culverts and clipped exposed roots as the project proceeded.

Construction contractor Mark Sadowski of East Hill Enterprises in Rutland worked from April through October, putting in the foundation for the new 48-foot-long bridge spanning Parker Brook. Mark also built the abutments and transported and installed the bridge's steel frame. Further east, he restored a large fallen slab bridge, removed stumps, graded, created drainage and brought in crushed stone. Final surfacing is scheduled for 2010.



Once the bridge foundation work was complete, carpentry contractor Peter Scott, of Gardner, applied his craftsmanship to building the deck and railings.

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## Directors' Corner

### *MCRT Stretching to the East and West*

Wachusett Greenways is pleased to learn of new efforts to expand the MCRT to our east and west. We're also glad to serve as a resource to others who are just beginning on the path toward building a multi-use trail.

To the west, East Quabbin Land Trust (EQLT) is developing the MCRT in Hardwick and New Braintree, where they are restoring two rail trail bridges. Greenways Task Force members Bruce Pennino and Ed Yaglou have been assisting in planning and design. EQLT executive director Cynthia Henshaw has also consulted with Greenways on signage bearing the MCRT logo.



### Mass Central Rail Trail

And to the east, several towns along the 25-mile Wayside corridor have new energy to develop the trail as the DCR assumes a long-term lease of the rail line to prepare the way for a trail. Recently Wayland requested Greenways to share our experience with a partnership approach to building the trail. From the enthusiastic crowd at the Wayland meeting, led by Larry Keirnan, came new offers of an easement for the trail, participation in the core planning team, more members and plans for a Community Preservation grant application.

Onward...with every new mile of the MCRT we are closer to connecting the 104-mile route.

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## Greenways Volunteers Participate in Training Series in Trail Design

The first in a new Massachusetts Trails Training Series was offered by Massachusetts Recreational Trail Advisory Board (MARTAB) in partnership with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Recreational Trails Program on Sept. 19th at the Trustees of Reservations Doyle Conservation Center and at Barrett Park in Leominster.

In the morning John Monroe, from the National Park Service, presented 12 Trail Design Principles using the approach of Troy Scott Parker (as described in his book *Natural Surface Trails by Design*). Afternoon hands-on



workshops led by seasoned trail professionals were designed to instruct and to make improvements to the Barrett Park hiking trails.

On one hilly trail a water bar was constructed. This is a small hump in the trail, diagonal to the direction of the trail, which diverts running surface water off the trail.

On another section of trail a wooden bridge was constructed across a four-foot-wide, fast-flowing stream. The most difficult part was the laying, leveling, and anchoring of the stringers. The treads were then laid across the stringers and nailed down, and then the trail was graded around both ends of the bridge to create a smooth transition to the bridge.

Trail signage was added to several trails. Laminate signs indicating the names of the trails had been prepared in advance. The signs were mounted at several trail intersections, and decals with arrows and mileage were then added. In a few places blazes were sprayed onto trees as indications that one was still on the trail.

This was quite a learning experience, and provided information and resources that will be valuable to Wachusett Greenways Trail projects. Greenways volunteers Laura Beckwith, Stephen Keimig, Colleen Abrams and Ed Yaglou attended. ■



# Sharing the Celebration: Springdale Mill and Family Fun Day

On Saturday, September 26, hundreds of families and friends were welcomed to the Oakdale entrance of the MRCT in West Boylston. There was lots to celebrate. After spring flooding caused by beaver dam activity closed the trail for months, Family Fun Day was rescheduled to coincide with the always popular Springdale Mill Historic Site fall event and the re-dedication of the trail after its restoration.



The range of festivities included face painting, a nature scavenger hunt, bugs in a bucket, guessing the number of beans in a jar and other

old-fashioned games that drew the attention of the children as they proceeded along the trail. Storyteller Gwen Callahan captured the youngsters' attention with fascinating tales. The StoryWalk, *Danny and the Dinosaur*, provided the perfect motivation for visitors of all ages to reach the Springdale Mill Historic Site, 1.5 miles from the Oakdale entrance.

Here, perfect weather, wholesome food served by the Spaulding family, activities related to the history of the mill site and the lively mill-themed songs of Chas Paddock and Deb McDonnell combined to provide young and old with a very enjoyable experience. As the day drew to a close, Chas and Deb performed a Greenways favorite song written by Chas when he discovered the first section of rail trail under construction back in 1997. His lyrics reminded us again of the vision for the MCRT:

"From steam to diesel to back packs and bikes,  
a vision one day for 100 mile hikes,  
where the iron horse once took to the track,  
regular people are surely taking it back" ■



## Patroller Down

Pauline Cloutier, age 79, was one of Greenways' original and most steady volunteers. Over the last 12 years she served on the board of directors, helped with trail work, baked cookies, led hospitality, painted trail blazes, helped with mailings, led trail events, coordinated annual meetings, donated and helped wherever needed. Pauline served as trail patroller on her beloved "Over the Hill" connector for the rail trail, which she hiked regularly at full speed.



In November Pauline suffered a stroke. Friends and family streamed into her hospital room for one more of her big smiles and a warm hand-holding. They told of how she joined them recently to walk a brisk five miles at the reservoir, or hike Wachusett Mountain or traveled the world to see the African animals she had always wanted to visit, or hand-delivered a heart-felt note to her grandson, or joined an Elderhostel adventure.

Sadly she died on November 18. A friend asked, "Who will I walk with?" One of her four sons noted that Pauline gave him his love of nature and the outdoors. Another son shared, Pauline was "such a vital woman." Peace be with you, Pauline, and our thanks. ■

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## Scouts Lead the Way

Now well into its second decade, Wachusett Greenways is fortunate to benefit from the efforts of young volunteers who have grown up enjoying the trails. Among these volunteers are a number of Eagle Scouts who chose to make local trail improvement the focus of their Eagle Projects.

Twin brothers Mike and Zach Kent have been frequent visitors to the Trout Brook trails since they were Cub Scouts. Zach, now a freshman at Vassar, cleared and improved a popular trail near Trout Brook that was damaged by the ice storm of December 2008. Meanwhile Mike improved another section of trail. "It was really gratifying to be able to give back to the trails that I enjoyed so much growing up," said Zach.

Philip Blake of Sterling is making his mark at the Miles Road entrance to the Rail Trail in Rutland. In September



*Cameron Horton and Brian Walsh describe their projects at the trail dedication.*

Philip installed a split rail fence at the Miles Road parking area. Next he will create a roofed shelter for the bulletin board there. Four years ago Phil's brother, Nate, completed his Eagle project by decking a bridge and adding a fence on the trail in Sterling.

Brian Walsh channeled his enjoyment of history into his Eagle Project, an interpretive sign at the site of the old Rutland train depot and water tower. "I have been biking on the Rail Trail since I was a young kid and have seen over time all the improvements and extensions that have been made to the trail," said Brian, whose own improvements to the trail should be completed by spring 2010.

When Cameron Horton's scoutmaster told him that the Holden Fire Department often received calls regarding lost hikers on the MCRT, another Eagle Project was born. Cameron is currently working to place aluminum markers every 0.2 miles along the trail from Oakdale to Route 31 in Holden. The markers will correspond to the original railroad mile markers. "I am in love with the trail itself, and I couldn't possibly think of a more fun yet beneficial eagle project," said Cameron.

Thanks to all our committed Eagle Scouts, the MCRT and the Trout Brook/White Oak Trails will continue to be places where tomorrow's community leaders can discover the outdoors. ■

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## Focus on the Beaver: Friend or Foe?

Anyone who uses the West Boylston section of the rail trail has seen firsthand the downside of beavers' instinctual damming of streams and other waterways. In May, a "perfect storm" scenario brought together torrential rains, an old mill pond along the rail trail that housed a colony of beavers, and this colony actively doing what beavers do: damming the outlet from the pond. These factors in combination resulted in the precipitously raise the water level of the pond up and across the rail trail, which brought about the sudden and dramatic washing away of a section of the trail about 30 feet long and 15 feet deep.

The trail was repaired over the summer and is now open, but it is instructional to understand the curious behavior of the beaver (*Castor canadensis*), North America's largest rodent and relative of the gopher, marmot, chipmunk and squirrel, and its sometimes devastating impacts.

Beavers and their dams play an important role in nature. By constructing dams, they create wetlands – lush environments that attract fish, ducks, frogs and other creatures. However, beavers can become a big headache for farmers and landowners, as we saw in West Boylston.

Why do beavers build dams? Dams create a relatively safe neighborhood for a beaver family. Since beavers are



very good swimmers but fairly slow on land, deeper water creates a habitat where they can find more protection from predators.

Normally monogamous, the beaver is nocturnal but doesn't spend all night in the ponds or slow-moving streams created by its dams. Instead, it builds lodges – houses where a beaver couple and their children, or kits, live. Beavers gather sticks, mud, rocks and other available materials to shape these mound-like structures.

So while the beaver's damming behavior protects the species and creates environmental benefits, it can also make life difficult for us humans. If nothing else, the rail trail washout demonstrated just how intertwined is our relationship with *Castor Canadensis* – for better or worse.

LATEST NEWS: Unfortunately, our beaver friends, or at least a friend, have returned to the pond. Thank you to all the trail users who let us know about beaver activity. The beaver has built a small dam near the new culvert and a partial blockage of the old culvert. The DCR wildlife staff is taking steps to avoid a repeat of last spring. ■



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## December 10 – Thursday – Eagle Lake Hike

Enjoy a four-mile walk on the trail at Eagle Lake. If we happen to have snow, we'll snowshoe. Meet at 10 AM at the Mass Audubon parking area on Causeway Street in Holden. Call Colleen Abrams (508-829-3954) to sign up.

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## December 17 – Thursday – Princeton Hike

Meet at 10 AM for hike or snowshoe on Peabody property of the Princeton Land Trust, with lunch following at Mountainside Market in Princeton Center. Call Chris Nichols (978-464-2328).

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## January 9 – Saturday – Cross Country Ski

Ski about 2 hrs., starting 9 AM at the River Street, Holden parking for the Mass Central Rail Trail. Call John Gau (508-853-6254) to register. Difficulty intermediate (i.e., moderate grades, ungroomed snow, easy pace but not beginners). Walk if no snow.

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## January 15 to 18 – Friday to Monday – Ski Weekend

Share the AMC ski weekend in Vermont's Green Mountains. Contact John Gau (508-853-6254) to register. Besides the downhill areas, there are three commercial Nordic centers nearby, one of which has snowmaking. Blue Gentian lodge, Magic Mtn., Londonderry VT, 3 nights, 3 brkfst, 2 dinners.

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## January 30 – Saturday – Moonlight Rail Trail

Enjoy a moonlight walk with refreshments to follow from 7 to 8:30 PM with Greenways and Leominster Land Trust and Rec. Dept. Bring snow shoes or skis if there is snow. Meet in Sterling Center at the Cider Mill entrance. Contact Chris Nichols (978-464-2328).



Hiking Mount Wachusett.

Join us for more Trail Work as we continue trail clearing and maintenance along the Mass Central Rail Trail and White Oak Trail. Contact Colleen Abrams (508-829-3954 or [colleen.abrams@verizon.net](mailto:colleen.abrams@verizon.net)) or Stan Miller (508-752-3580) to sign up!

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## February 4 – Thursday – Reservoir Hike

Join us for a winter hike – or cross-country ski if we are lucky enough to have snow. Meet at the intersection of Rt. 110 and Chase Hill Road in Sterling at 10 AM to hike through the woods and by Wachusett Reservoir. We'll stop at Meadowbrook Orchards to warm up and have lunch after our hike. Dress warmly and bring water. Contact Dee and Dotty Kormeluk ([kormeluk@comcast.net](mailto:kormeluk@comcast.net) or 978-422-7716) to register.

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## February 7 – Sunday – Winter Natural History

Explore the natural landscape in winter with Robert Bertin. Families welcome. Walk or cross-country ski on Barre Falls Dam property. Meet at 1 PM at the parking lot on Cold Brook Road immediately north of where it intersects Rt. 122. Questions to Colleen at (508-829-3954).

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## February 13 – Saturday – Happy Heart Walk

Family Valentines walk on the rail trail in Rutland. Hot chocolate and cookies provided. Children welcome. This two-mile walk begins at 1 PM at Miles Road rail trail parking in Rutland. Friendly, leashed pets welcome too. Contact Sheila Dibb (508-886-2822) to sign up.

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## February 17 – Wednesday – Family Rock House Ramble

The Trustees of Reservations' Walker Korby will lead a woodland tracking adventure for children and families. Explore signs of creatures at Rock House Reservation. Travel west on Rt. 9 in North Brookfield to parking on the right, 1 mile east of where Rt. 9 joins Rt. 32. 10 A.M. to noon. Call Walker at (978 248-9455) to sign up.



Bicycling the Blackstone.



## Rail Trail Extends to Five Miles in Rutland

*Continued from front page*

Volunteer engineer Bruce Pennino once again planned the new structures and supervised their construction, resulting in a bridge of handsome proportions (see sidebar). Meanwhile, volunteer project manager Ed Yaglou kept a close eye on the proceedings.



In 2008, Bruce and Ed had built a mini-bridge just west of Muddy Pond in preparation for the 2009 work. The mini-bridge and the slab bridge are capable of carrying fully loaded ten-wheeler construction trucks, while the Parker Brook Bridge is rated for autos and pickups.

In total, the new segment extends the continuous section of the MCRT to almost five miles, from the Miles Road trailhead to the Route 122 crossing. This section cuts across three ponds and through the ledge at Charnock Hill Road at a depth of 35 feet.

"Like all Wachusett Greenways projects, this year's trail work was the product of diligence and teamwork by many dedicated volunteers and skilled professionals," said Ed. "We look forward to extending the trail in coming years for more and more people to enjoy."

You'll find parking for this section in Rutland at Miles Road at the Rutland State Park Entrance Road, at the Midstate Trail Parking Lot on Route 122, or at the Mass Highway rest area in Oakham. ■

He's Greenways' volunteer civil engineer *extraordinaire*! He's designed and overseen every major structure in our quest to build the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT), from bridges, to a tunnel, to culverts, along with construction, surveying, soil analysis and much more.

He's **Bruce Pennino**, of Holden, a former college professor at Springfield Community Technical College and these days a semi-retired engineering consultant.

It was in 2001 that Bruce responded to a Greenways ad seeking a technical design for what became the MCRT's Jeremiah Kaplan Bridge, spanning the Quinapoxet River in Holden. Bruce brought in his students to help with the design, and his connection with Greenways mushroomed from there.

"The Charnock Hill Road tunnel in Rutland has been our most ambitious project yet," says Bruce, "and Greenways biggest single accomplishment. I'm pleased to stay involved."

Looking forward, Greenways' ever-ready, ever-energetic engineer is working on soil analysis and foundation design for a 110-foot bridge – by far our longest – on the next extension of the rail trail west of Route 122 in Rutland, slated to be opened in 2010.

Kudos and thanks to Bruce Pennino! ■



## Sunny Celebration – Trail Re-Dedication!

*Continued from front page*

and upgrading some drainage. Greenways contracted Bob Salvadore who worked with Jim Ryan and Randy Southwick to complete the job. Their professional and dedicated work resulted in enthusiastic reviews of the "new" trail.

Following the ribbon-cutting, celebrants enjoyed a beautiful rail trail themed cake created and donated by Gerardo's Bakery of West Boylston. Participants of all ages left

notes declaring their affection for the trail: "We love the smooth trail and the fall leaves!" declared the Callahan family. "Maggie loves riding bikes with Daddy." "This is a wonderful place for kids to meet nature!" "I love to walk now. This place changed my life." "Use it every day!!! Thank you!!!" "The best walking trail in Massachusetts."

The project cost \$64,000 in goods and services. Wachusett Greenways' cash share of this was \$34,000. Generous donors including 140 Greenways members and several donors at the celebration, who have contributed nearly \$12,000 to help fund this unanticipated expense. All additional donations will be used to replenish Greenways rail trail construction fund to continue expanding the trail. ■





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## Ice Storm Clean-Up Continues

Almost one year later, the cleanup from last December's ice storm continues. Volunteers of all ages have given hundreds of hours working tirelessly to bring the trail back from the ravages of countless downed trees and branches. First, the trail patrollers and other new volunteers tackled the immediate job of opening the trail. Then Greenways crews rallied along all sections of the Mass Central Rail Trail and several sections of the White Oak Trail to restore the aesthetics and safety of the trail. Volunteers even contribute their own chain saws (with maintenance donated by Overlook Services in Rutland) and provide trucks for pulling a rented chipper.



Greenways trail volunteers are a hardy lot. "It was a pleasure working with everyone last Saturday. There's nothing wrong with hard, dusty, dirty, wet and limitless work ... when everyone pulls together as they so often do on trail work," noted David Henrichon, Rutland trail volunteer. Along with a dozen volunteers, David helped cut and chip brush on the Glenwood Road section of the trail in Rutland on a cool November day.

Also in November an army of YAHOO volunteers (that's Young Adults Helping Out Others) arrived from Holden to help clear the rail trail in Rutland. One enthusiastic



YAHOO exclaimed, "I could do this all day long!" as he hefted a good sized pine tree and dragged it far from the trail. Rutland Selectman Sheila Dibb welcomed the youth with a large "thank you" as YAHOO leader and Holden Selectman Ken O'Brien encouraged the young volunteers to continue in community service.



Cub Scouts from West Boylston Pack 151, *Webelos Den 1* arrived with enthusiasm at the White Oak Trail in Holden to clear the trail and remove litter at the parking lot. Their team of Webelos, parents and den leaders worked with determined confidence as they lifted long branches and carried them away from the trail.

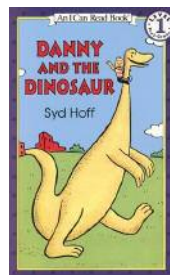
Greenways welcomes all who wish to help keep the trails clear. Whether you pick up branches as you hike or come out for a day of trail clearing, we greatly appreciate your contribution! ■

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## StoryWalk Brings Reading Out-of-Doors

Two of Margaret Lock's passions are the outdoors and children's literacy. So she read with excitement about a program called *StoryWalk*. This program displays the pages of a book along a path, brings the act of reading outdoors, and makes reading more than just a rainy day activity.

"When I brought the idea to the Wachusett Greenways board, they were very supportive" said Margaret. Wachusett Greenway's first StoryWalk was launched in the autumn of 2008 with *Leaves* by Ezra Stein. Currently, the West Boylston section of the trail features *Danny and Dinosaur*. Each StoryWalk presents dif-



ferent challenges, and all involve willing volunteers to help with laminating, painting, stapling, drilling and pounding stakes into the ground.

Margaret shared some of the more than 100 comments from StoryWalk visitors. Towns represented were West Boylston, Sterling, Dudley, Holden, Worcester, Douglas, Auburn, Shrewsbury, Fitchburg, Upton, Grafton, Princeton, Northboro, Westminster, Lancaster, Clinton, Vassalboro ME,

Woonsocket RI and Boston. Ages of "children" ranged from one month to 94 years. There were nine suggestions

*Continued on next page*

## The Spaulding Family

The Spaulding family, of Holden, has become synonymous with the Springdale Mill Interpretive Site.

During the year, family members mow the cellar holes, fix the signs and generally monitor the site. As autumn approaches, Ruth Spaulding takes an active part in planning the annual Fall Mill Event, as chairman of the Springdale Mill Site committee. Son-in-law Mark Coccio cooks the hotdogs and trimmings for the big day while the rest of the family – son Roger, daughters Ronda and Robin and grandkids – is on hand to greet people and keep things running smoothly.

How did the Spauldings become interested in the mill site? It helped that they live just through the woods near the site. For years they had cleared a path to the Quinapoxet River and wondered about the stone relics scattered near the river and the cellar holes up above. When Ed Yaglou approached Ruth about six years ago to join the mill site committee, Ruth agreed, and was hooked at the first meeting, where they discussed the possibility of an interpretive site. “It was my backyard, the mill and the cellar holes,” Ruth says, “and I wanted to learn about it.”



*The next generation of Spaulding enthusiasts for history and the outdoors.*

Historian Chuck Skilling and committeemen Jim Lafley and Anthony Costello “made me appreciate the history of the place, to think about how people lived, how children looked, and picture how life was 100 years ago, and the DCR was very supportive.” Ruth continued, “History and proximity were my foot in the door.”

Besides the mill site, the Spauldings have been involved in other Wachusett Greenways activities as volunteers. Ruth worked on the auction and cookbook and participates in gate watching. Dick Spaulding, with other committee members, built the wonderful 19th century wooden locomotive featured at the Rutland 4th of July parade and West Boylston bicentennial celebration. The life-size model train will reside at Stillwater Farm, in Sterling, and will be available for other civic events.

Realizing the joy her family's keen interest in the outdoors and history has brought, Ruth wants to encourage more to join in, “I just wish people knew how many volunteers contribute their time and money and labor to making Wachusett Greenways the community asset it is.”

We all thank the Spauldings for their interest and participation in so many Greenways activities. ■

## StoryWalk

*Continued from page 7*

for books people would like to see on the trail. A few of the positive comments:

“We think this is awesome! Thanks”

“I like reading the book to my cousins”

“Our boys loved this and helped to keep their attention as they stayed in their strollers. Such a fun activity!”

“We all have great fun. Mom’s a teacher and we view the connection between nature and reading as a winning combination”

“Excellent idea – nature, exercise and education wrapped up into one!”

“I absolutely love this idea. My daughter kept running to the next one and I was also able to get a good walk in!”

Recently, Margaret was walking on the trail with her two-year old granddaughter. A passerby commented that it was a lovely idea to have a book on the trail.

Margaret agreed. It is a lovely idea. ■



*Greenways hospitality continues with Barbara and Gene McCarthy and Stan Miller at the Sterling Fair.*

For updates, events and general  
information visit  
[www.wachusettgreenways.org](http://www.wachusettgreenways.org)