



Once again, outdoor enthusiasts enjoyed a rare opportunity to see their beautiful valley from a different perspective during the annual Fun Float co-sponsored by Otsego County Conservation Association and BVA on September 11.

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### Special Thanks

to Community Bank for their generous donation to support our efforts.

**BUTTERNUT  
VALLEY  
ALLIANCE**

*The BVA is a 501(c)(3)  
that serves the communities  
within the watershed of the  
Butternut Creek*

# THE CURRENT

Fall  
2021

*Connecting and Sustaining the Butternut Creek Watershed*

## What a Remarkable Year It Has Been

**COVID-19, sadly, is still with us. The Delta variant and vaccine hesitancy have prevented us from eliminating** this scourge and we, like everyone else, are learning to live with it for the foreseeable future. BVA has persevered through the ongoing pandemic. Indeed, we have thrived.

We began the year with an updated strategic plan in which we affirmed our commitment to our mission:

To encourage the Butternut Creek watershed to become a better place to live, work, and play. Our activities connect communities, protect the environment, and promote the arts.

Out of this process came actions to improve the effectiveness of the organization. We also made a commitment to expand our reach to include

promoting arts, culture and recreation and facilitating community and economic development in the watershed while maintaining our commitment to environmental stewardship.

On the Trail of Art treated area residents to a delightful walk through the beautiful Texas Schoolhouse State Forest where they enjoyed artistic expressions created by local artists and art students from Morris Central School and Gilbertsville-Mt. Upton Central School. The event was a resounding success enjoyed by artists and viewers alike.

BVA continued its water quality monitoring of Butternut Creek and conducted an on-line educational program on riparian buffers.

In a historic land preservation transaction consisting of 85 acres in Morris, BVA provided Otsego Land Trust, Upper Susquehanna Coalition and The Wetlands Trust useful ideas, information

and connections to residents of the valley including potential donors. The land encompasses 24 acres of wetland, 77 acres of prime soils, nine acres of woods and 9,000 feet of frontage along the Butternut. The Wetlands Trust will act as stewards in the conservation of these environmentally and ecologically important natural resources.

In partnership with Otsego County Conservation Association, BVA sponsored the annual Fun Float down the Butternut. We also worked with the Town of New Lisbon to install a bicycle route and to improve the trails in Texas Schoolhouse State Forest including installing interpretive signage. We partnered with Central New York Cycling to put on the popular New Lisbon Gravel Grinder, a mixed-surface bicycle ride that attracts cyclists region wide.

Following the flood events in July,  
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**30 Miles** {  
Length of the watershed

**4,400 People** {  
Approximate population

**130 Sq. Miles**  
Watershed area

by Carla Hall

# Forest Gallery

## BVA Hosts Outdoor Art Festival

On June 12th and 13th, the Butternut Valley Alliance transformed the Texas School House State Forest into an open-air art gallery. More than 250 people attended the two-day event.



*Morgan Keuhn's entry, a perky crocheted frog among a bed of mushrooms, rested on a fallen tree welcoming visitors at the start of the trail.*

"Our goal was to celebrate the arts and our natural resources, exhibiting student and professional artists along a one-mile walking trail," BVA Executive Director Graham Stroh said. "This event successfully ignited the conversation among our communities about Art and Place."

Over 25 local volunteers and NYS DEC forest rangers made this exhibit



*One of the collaborative efforts, this mosaic was created by students in Morris Central School's seventh grade class.*

possible. "It was an enormous challenge to turn a forest into an art gallery without putting a nail in a tree," says BVA director Tom Washbon. "But after a walk-through of the trail in March to explore the concept of trees defining the space, the show's layout developed quite organically."

"The task of installing over 150 pieces of artwork to survive the elements for a two-day exhibit was daunting," Washbon added. Volunteers met with representatives from Golden Artist Colors to solve the challenge. "Golden Artist Colors was happy to donate materials to the schools to withstand the weather," says Golden's Material and Applications Specialist, Greg Watson. "This event will have a lasting impact on the Butternut Valley arts community."

BVA supplied art students from Gilbertsville-Mount Upton and Morris Central schools with 12x12-inch treated plywood boards to showcase their creativity. Nearly 100 upper-class students contributed individual pieces and elementary students collaborated on classroom projects.

Ashley Hughes, Gilbertsville-Mt. Upton CSD art teacher, pleased with her students' output, said, "They all started with the same baseline but came up with varied media, creatively expressing their individual artistic personalities!" Tom Washbon added, "We collected all the student art and began to choose its placement in the exhibit. When we viewed it as a whole, we were awestruck at the coherent visual narrative the artists expressed about the Butternut Valley and its future without having been given any conceptual direction."

Since Ashley usually works with a minimal budget for art materials, she thanked Golden's for their contribution saying, "Acrylic is the 'Cadillac' of paint." Having taught virtually for the past school year, she appreciated seeing her students' work on display in the outdoor setting for everyone to enjoy.



Beth Collins, art teacher at Morris Central School, said, "My students had so much fun with this assignment. They enjoyed the freedom." Beth's eighth graders created art from birch bark, responsibly harvested from fallen trees on her property to reduce environmental disturbance.

MCS students Tessa and Liam Hoosock (virtual students due to the pandemic) contributed individual pieces and said, "Seeing our paintings on the art trail made us feel good." Liam gives the exhibit "two thumbs up" and wants to do it again. Tessa was inspired by "seeing all the art."

Alongside the student entries, artists Simone Mantellassi and Carla Hall curated 25 submissions from professional Butternut Valley artists including sculptures, paintings, prints, stained glass and fabric banners.

Welcoming visitors at the beginning of the trail, *Prayer Wheel*, by Richard O'Keefe of Morris, evoked a Tibetan Buddhist tradition — an invitation to offer a prayer by tying a colored ribbon



*Student artists Liam and Tessa Hoosock on the Trail with their artwork.*



on the wheel. “As the ribbon degrades, the prayer will be released into the world,” the signage read.

Vivaldi’s music accompanied Marcus Villagran’s stoneware sculpture *Song and Dance*, inspired by sketches by Elizabeth Nields, also a renowned ceramic artist. Nield’s *Forest Icon* created a profound presence along the trail.



*A young visitor adds a ribbon to Rick O'Keefe's "Prayer Wheel", one of the many interactive pieces at the exhibition.*

Swaying elegantly among red pines, beckoning visitors deeper into the forest, Carrie Mae Smith’s four banners titled *Pollinators* included references to local species of Monarch and Swallowtail butterflies and Luna and Cecropia moths.

Charlie Bremer’s wood and aluminum ‘sound sculpture’, *Enchanted Forest Chime Tree*, resonated as visitors used mallets to strike the chime and listen. “The 14 tone bars tuned to a pentatonic scale are one of the earliest scales ever developed,” Bremer said.

Jody Isaacson’s *The Art of Losing* featured 15 wax pendulums hanging high in the trees. Honoring some of the people she had lost, each pendulum was dipped according to the age the person was when death came.

Also exhibited were Katelyn Robinson (BVA’s 2020 Visionary Scholar Award winner), Kim L’Heureux, Jay Roth, Zena Gurbo, Michele Farwell,

Andrea Hull, Kathleen Stroh, Betty Anne Fraley and Dennis Stahl, among many others.

Butternut Valley Arts and Crafts President Susan Andrus engaged children with hands-on art leaf-rubbing projects. Elizabeth Gayle made jewelry. Jim Whitaker demonstrated the art of broom making. Julie Koch shared techniques of Pysanky Ukrainian egg decorating and Marilyn Roveland painted with watercolors.

Fiddler John Potonik accompanied visitors as they ambled up and down the forest road.

“It was rewarding to reach out to local professional artists, underscoring our mission to connect our community to nature and the arts,” said Carla Hall, BVA director. “There is so much talent in this community and BVA was thrilled to be able to share it.”

Public reaction to On the Trail of Art was positive. County Representative Michele Farwell said, “It was great to see Butternut Valley creativity on display in a forest as well as the visitors exploring the new trails and signage at the site. I especially enjoyed seeing the range of student art offered by MCS and GMU.”

“It’s just great. I’m really enjoying being with the bird songs the entire time. There’s also a great mixture of student and professional art,” said Carol Lernihan of New Lisbon.

“It’s fantastic. They did a great job of placing the art among the trees. I



*Young and old alike stopped to try out Charlie Bremer's "Enchanted Forest Chime Tree".*



*GMU student Jenna Carpenter used found trash to illustrate a poignant note "Dear 2045" apologizing for the harm done to our environment. "We're killing the earth, and that's really fun. No one believes us because we are young..."*

hope BVA will host this exhibit again,” said Wayne Coursen who, with his wife Marieanne, was visiting the forest for the first time.

The event was made possible with public funds from the Decentralization Program, a re-grant program of the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of former Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, and administered by The Earlville Opera House. Other sponsors include Gilbertsville Expressive Movement, Golden Artist Colors, Otsego County Conservation Association, Town of New Lisbon and individual donations.

Responding to the outpouring of enthusiasm from the community, BVA is planning to host a similar event in 2022, tentatively scheduled for June 11-12. If you would like to be an exhibiting artist, volunteer at the event, or just be kept up to date on BVA activities, please join our mailing list.

*Visit our website to view the entire exhibit and enjoy the immense talent in our community.*

# Power of the People The Calhoun Creek Cleanup



*Morris resident Alan Springett works aloft to detangle plastic.*

Among the extensive damages caused by the local flash flooding on July 17, Calhoun Creek was draped in miles of plastic agricultural wrap when over 700 hay bales were washed into the water. Recognizing the environmental risk the plastic posed, and the enormity of the task of removing it, BVA volunteers organized a series of cleanup events.

Over the course of three Saturdays, 45 area residents, 33 students from the SUNY Oneonta Geology Club led by Carlene Eaton, 11 students from Morris Central School chaperoned by Environmental Sciences teacher Heather

Grant and BVA volunteers removed nearly three tons of plastic from the waterway and surrounding creek bed.

"As a new resident of Morris, I was very moved to see how quickly, and with what perseverance, a diverse group of volunteers concerned about the health and beauty of our watershed responded to the call," commented BVA's volunteer coordinator Andrea Hull.

"The effects of the flooding were larger than any one person could manage," explained board member and geology professor Les Hasbargen. "Looking to the future, it will require joint efforts from the community to address other such events. Unfortunately, this kind of flood is in line with future predictions from river and climate scientists."

"It was an enormous task," acknowledged BVA Co-chair Maggie Brenner, "but thanks these volunteers, the creek is essentially clean again."

The volunteers cut and dug and pulled streamers of the plastic that were twined around tree roots, buried under gravel beds and covered with muck and mud. They carried the plastic to

carts and then hauled the loaded carts to waiting garden tractors where it was loaded into wagons and transported to a central location.

Following each event, Otsego County Soil and Water Conservation District baled the plastic for future recycling. Support from Morris Central School and the Village and Town of Morris gave the volunteers access to the entire stretch of the creek and a site to store the plastic bales. Following the SUNY Oneonta event, student volunteers were treated to lunch provided by the school and Weaver's Farm Market.



*SUNY Oneonta Geology Club students after the haul.*

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BVA was quick to respond. We reached out to Otsego County Emergency Services and to a local expert on FEMA, Alan Springett, for information and then disseminated what we learned to affected residents directly and via an online presentation. BVA directors Maggie Brenner, Les Hasbargen and Tom Washbon organized a cleanup of Calhoun Creek where an estimated 700 round hay bales shed their plastic after being washed away by the flooding.

There's more to say about the past year but only limited space. Looking ahead, we anticipate new challenges and opportunities. Our greatest challenge will be to continue the progress we've been making despite the pending departure of our Executive Director, Graham Stroh. During his three years with the organization, Graham has been instrumental in helping BVA embrace its mission more fully while continuing its work on environmental stewardship. His lead-

ership and guidance will be missed but, luckily for the organization, Graham will remain involved and is expected to be elected to the board of directors. We wish Graham well as he now returns his attention to urban planning and national policy debates in which he was engaged prior to joining BVA and we look forward to continued work with him. The BVA will have a period of reflection, discussion and planning before we decide how best to replace the many functions previously performed by Graham.

In 2022, we look forward to a return of the BVA Summer Harvest Festival following a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19, as well as to repeats of the events mentioned above and more. Stay tuned for details.

BVA depends on generous donations from its members, friends and volunteers as well as their guidance and input to support our mission and activities. Please make suggestions of programs and events you would like to see and

consider volunteering to help make them happen by contacting Andrea Hull at [andreaullvideo@yahoo.com](mailto:andreaullvideo@yahoo.com). Donations can be made on line at [butternutvalleyalliance.org](http://butternutvalleyalliance.org) or by check to BVA, 230 Dockstader Road, New Lisbon NY 13415.

Ed Lentz  
Chairperson, BVA

## Your Neighbors, Our Board

**Chair:** Edward T. Lentz

**Co-Chair:** Maggie Brenner

**Secretary:** Bob Thomas

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