

PROTECTOR'S OF PINE OAK WOODS



STATEN ISLAND'S
LAND CONSERVATION
ORGANIZATION

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PROTECTOR'S MISSION

Protectors of Pine Oak Woods is committed to increasing the stewardship of Staten Island's existing parkland, bluebelt corridors and nature preserves, and to continuing the effort to preserve Staten Island's natural areas. Protectors advocates for protection and preservation by educating our members, the general public and elected officials at all levels of government through meetings, workshops, walks, articles, newsletters and sponsorship of environmental education.

50

YEARS KEEPING
STATEN ISLAND GREEN!
1975-2025

SPRING 2025

GO TO SIPROTECTORS.ORG FOR ALL 50TH ANNIVERSARY EVENTS!

Springtime is the best time to appreciate the value of Staten Island's natural areas.

WHISPERS OF NATURE: A SEASON OF AWAKENING

BY THE TIME YOU RECEIVE this bulletin, we will have turned the page into a fresh new season—a season of awakening young life, the soft, nurturing sun, and the nourishing light rains.

It's time to brush up on bird calls using my old Roger Tory Peterson CDs (anybody still have those?) until I am swamped in the lush chorus of birdsong and need my Merlin app to help me tease out the thrilling warbler from the competing symphony. My eyesight is not as sharp anymore, so I rely more on my hearing, and I thrill to the lazy “zee, zeee, zee, zoo, zee” of the black-throated green warbler and the haunting song of the wood thrush's reedy “wee-doh-lay.” A bird's courting song is so poignant because of its ephemeral quality—the perfect background music to our walks in the woods.

And walks we provide! **Our spring calendar** is chock-full of signature walks and special outings that bring back the essence of Protectors for longtime members while introducing new members to the work of our still-young, vibrant organization. Join us on our 10-mile Greenbelt walk, which covers the varied habitats of this important natural resource that requires ongoing tending and stewardship. Volunteer your time to help with the work of the Forest Restoration Workshop team, dedicated to removing invasive vines and spreading alien plants to create space for native plants to thrive. The Forest Restoration Workshop was initiated by former President and Protectors' co-founder Dick Buegler and is now led by Brian Smith with board member Don Recklies.

We are hosting our **semi-annual spring meeting** on Sunday, April 27, from 1 to 3 p.m. This meeting is the perfect starting point to learn about all the events we are promoting during this, our banner year. It is an opportunity to engage with our board and others from our partner organizations in environmental and land conservation efforts. It's also a chance for you—our members and the public—to speak with us directly about your concerns and visions for Staten Island's natural areas. We love meeting our members! This year, we are gathering in a new location: the Staten



Island Museum, on the beautiful campus of Snug Harbor. Arrive early and enjoy the spring blooms at the botanical garden.

As you plan your **spring gardens**, try to include a selection of flowering plants that support pollinators such as bees and butterflies. As reported in *The New York Times* (“See How Butterflies Are Surviving, or Not, Near You,” Einhorn, C. and Stevens, H., *New York Times*, 3/6/2025) butterfly populations are declining due to habitat loss, climate change and pesticide use, though the exact impact of each factor is unclear. But their numbers can be boosted by providing gardens filled with the flowers they love—such as milkweed, butterfly bush, coneflower and salvia. Avoid using pesticides and herbicides, as they create sterile environments inhospitable to the web of insect and plant life needed for a thriving habitat. Protectors provides an online resource to help you select the best plants for attracting butterflies. See the Gardening for Nature page on our website.

As always, a great way to stay in touch with Protectors is through our website. Our homepage has been redesigned to highlight the 50th anniversary campaign. Please subscribe to our website to receive notifications when we post updates to our blog. We also urge you to follow us on Facebook and Instagram. Please share news of our events with family and friends and consider supporting our **50th anniversary campaign** on GiveButter. Use the link on the homepage of our website at siprotectors.org.

— Hillel Lofaso, Editor

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EXPANDING ARDEN HEIGHTS WOODS NATURAL AREA

OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS, Protectors of Pine Oak Woods has worked closely with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and the NYS Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation to update the State’s Open Space Conservation Plan. Our focus has been on several Staten Island properties with high ecological value that need preservation.

In addition, we have collaborated with Staten Island elected officials to revise funding formulas, ensuring that funds for land conservation benefit Staten Island and the other boroughs rather than being allocated solely to upstate sites. For example, of the \$400 million annually provided by the State Environmental Protection Fund, no funds have been spent in New York City for conservation land acquisition since the January 2001 purchase of Marsha P. Johnson State Park (formerly the Brooklyn Eastern District Terminal property).

Similarly, of the \$650 million earmarked for land acquisition from the November 2022 Environmental Bond Act (\$4.2 billion total), only two percent of allocated funds have been spent in New York City. This is despite the fact that city residents overwhelmingly supported the Bond Act and that over 40% of the state’s population lives in New York City.

While conservation land purchases upstate cost less per acre than those in the five boroughs, far more residents benefit from land conservation efforts in a densely populated area like New York City.

One of our top land conservation priorities on Staten Island is expanding Arden Heights Woods. Already the largest wetland classified by the DEC in the New York City metro area, Arden Heights Woods contains three privately owned parcels wedged between the City Parks section (183 acres) and the NYS DEC section (8 acres) of the preserve. These privately owned parcels total 32 acres and should be acquired with state funds to expand the NYS DEC portion of Arden Heights Woods. Incorporating them into the preserve will connect and enhance two separate sections of an urban park, minimizing habitat fragmentation.

Most of Arden Heights Woods consists of a forested hardwood swamp. It features several kettle ponds—bodies of water



Credit: facebook.com/stardenwoods

formed by glaciers—connected by an intricate network of streams and creeks. This natural water system provides flood control for the area, reducing the need for costly manmade sewage infrastructure

The area’s forests are successional, progressing through multiple growth stages from open fields to mature hardwood stands. In the climax portions of these forests, a variety of trees thrive, including hemlocks, black cherry, persimmons and eastern white pines. During the early colonial period, eastern white pine wood—five times lighter than white oak—was used for British Navy ship masts, helping to establish Staten Island’s early maritime economy.

In the swamps, two particularly notable plant species thrive. The first, blue flag iris, blooms from May through July, producing distinctive violet-blue flowers. These plants can be recognized by their sword-like leaves even when not in bloom. The second, phragmites, are tall grasses that grow up to 12 feet high in both brackish and freshwater marshes. Unfortunately, phragmites often invade wetlands, displacing native marsh plants.

Many owls frequent Arden Heights Woods, including screech owls, saw-whet owls, great horned owls and barn owls. Occasionally, barred owls from the south venture this far north. Hawks and warblers are also common, while salamanders, frogs and small mammals populate the forest

(Arden Heights Woods, cont’d on p. 8)

CONTINUE THE EXPERIENCE

Would you like to see an enhanced version of our articles? Visit our blog at siprotectors.org for links to videos and other supporting material.

CORRECTION

Re: “Amphibians in the spotlight” (Winter 2025, p. 5). Due to a transcription error, the inclusion of Eastern New Green Toad was incorrect in the list of amphibians found in New York City.

SATURDAY, APRIL 5, 1 P.M. TO 3 P.M.

Art in the Park: Frog Crafts at Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve – Come Celebrate the 50th anniversary of Protectors of Pine Oak Woods by making frog crafts and learning some cool frog fun facts. Clay Pit is where Protectors started their efforts in protecting open space 50 years ago. Due to the advocacy of Protectors, Clay Pit is now a 265-acre state park, containing ponds, streams, woodlands, birds, lizards, turtles and frogs, etc. This event is being held indoors by the environmental educators at Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve. It is for all ages (grandparents too!). Participants will meet at the Nature Interpretive Center at the park. Please use this address to navigate to the park: 2351 Veterans Road West, Staten Island, NY 10309. Folks who are interested in attending must register at Claypitponds.eventbrite.com Children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult. If we are sold out, feel free to walk up and see if we have open spots. Questions? Call (718) 605-3970 or email ClayPitPondsSP@parks.ny.gov.



Credit: NJ DEP

SATURDAY, APRIL 5, 7:30 P.M. TO 9 P.M.

Frog Watch Hike at Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve – Come Celebrate the 50th anniversary of Protectors of Pine Oak Woods with a frog watch hike led by the environmental educators at Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve. Join us at sunset, when we will walk up to 1 mile in the dark, to monitor the frogs in our ponds. Flashlights will be provided. Participants will meet at the Nature Interpretive Center. Please use this address to navigate to the park: 2351 Veterans Road West, Staten Island, NY 10309. This hike is for all ages. Children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult. Trails are not stroller friendly. Folks who are interested in attending must register at Claypitponds.eventbrite.com If we are sold out, feel free to walk up and see if we have open spots. Outdoor programs are subject to cancellation due to inclement weather; call for updates. Please dress tick-safe by wearing hiking boots or sneakers, tall socks pulled up over pantlegs, and bug spray. Questions? Call (718) 605-3970 or email ClayPitPondsSP@parks.ny.gov

SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 10 A.M. TO 12 P.M.

Living Breakwaters, Glacial and Beach Geology – Join Dr. Alan Benimoff, professor in the Dept. Engineering and Environmental Science at CUNY/College of Staten Island for a guided walk to visit the Living Breakwaters, an innovative coastal resilience project designed to reduce erosion, protect marine habitats and strengthen Staten Island’s shoreline against storms. During this walk, you’ll learn about the science behind the break-



Credit: billionoysterproject.org

waters, their role in restoring marine life, and how they contribute to climate adaptation. Meet at Conference House Park, 7455 Hylan Boulevard. Contact Alan.Benimoff@csi.cuny.edu for more information.

SUNDAY, APRIL 13, 12 P.M. TO 2 P.M.

A longing for Long Pond – We’ll meet in the North Mount Loretto State Forest parking area at the junction of Cunningham and Amboy Road. We will look for early signs of Spring, and make a loop through Long Pond Park, passing by an old found wood “fort,” Long Pond itself, and building lots that may be developed within the park. We will return to the parking lot by means of the North Mount Loretto Red Trail, passing by a “dead tree” swamp. For more information call Don Recklies at (718) 768-9036 (on the day of the walk call (646) 675-5787). Inclement weather – but not a drizzle – will cancel this walk.

SATURDAY, APRIL 19, 10 A.M. TO 12 P.M.

Forest Restoration Workshop in the Egbertville Ravine – We’ll meet at the entrance to the White Trail at the intersection of Rockland and Meisner Road. We will follow the trail south toward Nevada Avenue pulling and bagging invasive Garlic-mustard. We will also search for and remove invasive, twining vines from the trees in that area. If you’re counting, I think this is our 344th workshop! Protectors will supply gloves, bags, and refreshments. Please register at Eventbrite.com by going to Protectors’ web site (siprotectors.org/calendar) and using the link in the calendar there. For more information call Brian Smith at (917) 842-6585 or Don Recklies at (718) 768-9036. (Service credit is available.)



Credit: iStock

TUESDAY, APRIL 22, 12 P.M. TO 2 P.M.

Earth Day at High Rock Park, Pouch Camp – Feathers, ferns and flowers abound throughout the spring woodlands of High Rock Park. Participants will enjoy an exploration with Ray Matarazzo of birds, botany and more during an afternoon walk around Loosestrife Swamp and along the shores of Lake Ohrbach at Pouch Camp. Meet in the parking lot at 200 Nevada Avenue. For more information, call (917) 932-6902.

SUNDAY, APRIL 27, 1 P.M. TO 3 P.M.

Semi-Annual Spring Meeting – Join Protectors for a special 50th Anniversary Spring Semi-annual Meeting, open to both members and the general public. We will showcase the current projects Protectors is working on and have invited representatives from the

Important Disclaimer: Our walks and events are suitable for adults and children accompanied by an adult. While we strive for safety, the activities of Protectors of Pine Oak Woods (“Protectors”) have certain uncontrollable hazards which each participant undertakes and for which each participant is responsible. Protectors and its event leaders or substitute leaders are not responsible in any way whatsoever for any of these hazards. All participants assume the responsibility and risks of hiking and participating in Protectors events, and release Protectors, its leaders or substitute leaders, from any liability whatsoever for any loss, damage to personal property, or injury, however caused, of any kind, nature, and description. Protectors is not responsible for typographical errors or last-minute changes in the walk schedule.

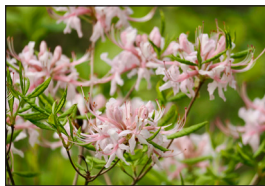
NYC Department of Parks and Recreation and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to give updates on several initiatives on Staten Island. Learn about all the walks and events we are planning this year and use this opportunity to renew your membership or to join as a first time member. Be a part of the ongoing mission of this decades' old completely volunteer, grassroots organization dedicated to open space preservation and natural areas stewardship. Parents and grandparents may bring school-age children for a crafts activity. Free admission, refreshments will be served. Includes admission to the galleries. Staten Island Museum conference room, Snug Harbor, 1000 Richmond Terr. Contact Madeline Paladino at mpaladino@siprotectors.org for more information.

SATURDAY, MAY 3, 12 P.M. TO 2 P.M.

Ambling through Arden – We will walk along recently rehabilitated trails in New York City's largest freshwater wetlands, making a loop clockwise from the parking lot off Arden Avenue (opposite Forest Green). Trails have been improved, but there will be slopes and streams to cross by stepping stones. And, if it has rained recently, be prepared for mud. For more information call Don Recklies at (718) 768-9036 (on the day of the walk call (646) 675-5787). Inclement weather – but not a drizzle – will cancel this walk.

SUNDAY, MAY 4, 9:15 A.M. TO 3:45 P.M.

Richard Buegler 10-mile Spring Greenbelt Hike – Join with Protectors of Pine Oak Woods for a hike through the spring woods of the



Credit: Kathleen Ward-Cullen

Greenbelt. Beginning at the Greenbelt Nature Center participants will traverse the Greenbelt, walking along the Meisner Avenue Pond, Loosestrife Swamp, Heyerdahl Hill and more. We will check to see what's blooming, especially our native pinxter azalea. Bring water and lunch, wear sturdy shoes,

and dress appropriately for the weather. Meet at the Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. Be sure to confirm that the walk is not canceled due to forecasted storms. To confirm a day prior please call Hillel at (718) 477-0545.

FRIDAY, MAY 9, 7 P.M. TO 9 P.M.

Evening Frog Walk at Buttonbush Swamp – Join Alan Pieluszynski and Protectorss for a nighttime adventure in the Greenbelt! We'll hike to Buttonbush Swamp, where we'll listen for the calls of our native frogs and try to spot the many other species that come out at night. We'll meet at the dam at Meisner and Rockland Aves. and hike to Buttonbush Swamp. Bring a flashlight and waterproof clothing if rain is predicted—perfect conditions for frogs to emerge! The walk will only be canceled in the event of thunderstorms. Call Alan at (718) 551-6096 for more details.

MONDAY, MAY 12, 7:40 P.M.

Sunset/Moonrise Walk, Full Flower Moon—Our Sunset/Moonrise walks, started by Dick Buegler, brought out old and new members for a pleasant family evening activity. If you haven't been on one yet, look forward to a relatively brief walk from the parking area to the top of Paulo's Peak (Moses Mt.), in anticipation of the sun setting with dramatic colors amid the clouds, and



then the full moon rising in the east over the hills of High Rock. Guests have often brought snacks to share. Bring flashlights for the return in the dark. Meet at the trailhead parking lot at Manor Road and Rockland

Ave., with additional parking along Meisner Ave. Call Hillel at (718) 477-0545. Sunset is 8:03 p.m. and Moonrise is 8:30 p.m. Completely overcast skies cancels walk.

SATURDAY, MAY 17, 10 A.M. TO 12 P.M.

Forest Restoration Workshop on the Todt Hill Blue Trail – We'll meet in the St. Francis Woodlands parking lot at the end of Helena Road (off of Todt Hill Road), then walk up the road to the Yellow Trail, then proceed southwest to the ruined foundations where we will cut and uproot alien devil's walking stick, and perhaps pull galic-mustard. After the work session we'll return to the parking lot by way of the St. Francis Woodlands boardwalk. Protectors will supply tools, gloves and refreshments. So that we know how many volunteers to expect, please register at Eventbrite.com by going to Protectors' website (siprotectors.org/calendar) and using the link in the calendar there. For more information call Brian Smith (917) 842-6585 or Don Recklies (718) 768-9036. *(Service Credit is available.)*

SATURDAY, MAY 17, 11 A.M. TO 1 P.M.

Graniteville Quarry Park – Come explore the historic Graniteville Quarry on Staten Island with us! This guided walk will take you through one of the borough's hidden geological treasures, where you'll learn about the site's history, its role in shaping the local landscape, and the fascinating rock formations that remain today. Meet at the south side of Forest Avenue between Simonson Ave. and Van Name Ave. Contact Alan.Benimoff@csi.cuny.edu for more information

SUNDAY, MAY 25, 12 P.M. TO 2 P.M.

Along the Slopes of LaTourette, Richmond Creek – We'll make a loop from the Field of Dreams parking lot (off of Forest Hill Road opposite Costco) following the low trail along the marsh to the Old St. Andrew's Church and return by the high trail along the ridge (those not wanting to climb the hill to the high trail can return by the Greenway). Looking at signs of late spring, we'll pass the remnants of farm and mill ruins, the site of the Revolutionary War fort on the top of the hill, and walk across the berm of a former mill pond. If it has rained recently be prepared for mud; tick and insect spray will be available. For more information call Don Recklies at (718) 768-9036 (on the day of the walk call (646) 675-5787). Inclement weather – but not a drizzle – will cancel this walk.

SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 12 P.M. TO 1:30 P.M.

Rediscover Kingfisher Park – Some 28 years ago, Protectors worked with residents to save this 23-acre gem from potential loss. Learn about the history of this pond and the value of saving natural areas in communities to serve as living classrooms for the rhythms of natural habitats. Meet at Fairfield and Miles Aves. For more information, call Hillel at (718) 477-0545.

SATURDAY, JUNE 21, 10 A.M. TO 12 P.M.

Forest Restoration Workshop at Blue Heron Park – For this, our 346th workshop, we'll meet in the Blue Heron Nature Center parking lot, 222 Poillon Avenue, then cross the street to the Meadow Loop Red Trail to Blue Heron Pond where we will pull and pile mile-a-minute vine that is invading the park. This early in the year bagging what we pull probably won't be necessary, but in case we find some flowering we'll have bags with us. We began this mile-a-minute project in July of 2021, and there's enough work here for a decade (maybe more!). Protectors will supply gloves, bags and refreshments. Please register at [Eventbrite.com](https://eventbrite.com) by going to Protectors' website (siprotectors.org/calendar) and using the link in the calendar there. For more information call Brian Smith (917) 842-6585 or Don Recklies (718) 768-9036. (*Service Credit is available.*)

SUNDAY, JULY 6, 11 A.M. TO 1 P.M.

Dragonfly Talk and Walk – Join naturalist Paul Lederer and explore the lives of dragonflies, insects that have inhabited our planet millions of years before dinosaurs walked the earth. Paul will discuss the biology, life histories and identification of these

creatures of wonder and then conduct a “dragonfly safari” to the shores of Lake Ohrbach. Bring binoculars if you have them and dress appropriately for the woods and trails of the great outdoors. It is recommended that you bring water/hydration fluids, insect repellent and sunblock. Participants will meet in the main Pouch Camp parking lot along Manor Road, beside the Boy Scout store. Spots are limited so call Paul Lederer at (718) 354-9200 to confirm your registration.

THURSDAY, JULY 10, 8:10 P.M.

Sunset/Moonrise Walk, Full Buck Moon – Our Sunset/Moonrise walks, started by Dick Buegler, brought out old and new members for a pleasant family evening activity. If you haven't been on one yet, look forward to a relatively brief walk from the parking area to the top of Paulo's Peak (Moses Mt.), in anticipation of the sun setting with dramatic colors amid the clouds, and then the full moon rising in the east over the hills of High Rock. Guests have often brought snacks to share. Bring flashlights for the return in the dark. Meet at the trailhead parking lot at Manor Road and Rockland Ave., with additional parking along Meisner Ave. Call Hillel at (718) 477-0545. Sunset is 8:28 p.m. and Moonrise is 8:53 p.m. Completely overcast skies cancels walk.

PRESERVING NATURE: THE FOUNDING OF PROTECTORS OF PINE OAK WOODS

How did it all begin? How did a small, dedicated group of interested people come together to save a unique sandy corner of Staten Island that would become its first and only state park? Read Ellen Pratt's account of how Protectors of Pine Oak Woods formed 50 years ago.

IT WAS 1959 WHEN JOHN KIERAN wrote *A Natural History of New York City*. A few years later, Christopher J. Schuberth wrote *The Geology of New York City and Environs*. These two books, along with Arthur Shapiro's *Staten Island, New York City's Last Frontier*, formed the basis of Joseph Fernicola's focus on the West Shore of Staten Island.

Shortly after high school, Brooklynite Joseph Fernicola decided to visit the West Shore of Staten Island. He was searching for fence lizards, which Carl Kauffeld, herpetologist and Staten Island Zoo Director, had established there. He made the three-hour trip by public transit to Arthur Kill Road, then walked, arriving at Clay Pit Road, which he followed. He found some fence lizards and also discovered the clay depressions that had been dug during the previous century to mine clay for the Kreischer Brickworks. Joe was amazed by the sandy soil intermixed with clay layers and the unusual pines and oaks that grew among the cat briar.

He was fascinated by the pine barrens ecology, which was similar to the New Jersey Pine Barrens.

Joe became even more convinced that a natural areas state park should be established there. He contacted the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, now called the Staten Island Museum. At the Nature Section, he met Dick Buegler, a high school biology teacher. Joe and Dick convinced members of the Nature Section of their proposal. Joe also met George Pratt, Executive Director of the Museum, who then introduced them to Terry Benbow, President of the Museum, who introduced them to Joseph Holzka's law firm to incorporate the organization.

In 1975, a group of environmentalists—including Joe, Carlton Beil, Tilly Weingartner (Curator of Science at the Museum), Dick Buegler, Ed Milanese, and George Pratt—began work with the Holzka law firm to incorporate a new organization, Protectors of Pine Oak Woods. This referred to the unique pines and oaks of the Clay Pit area. Their mission was to protect, preserve and educate the public.

The general public was becoming more aware of natural areas. In 1972, the NYS Environmental Quality Bond Act was proposed and approved by voters to raise money for parks in New York State.

Organizations and local governments were instructed to apply for bond act funds. Joe Fernicola and Christopher Schuberth wrote a grant proposal specifying unique areas covered in the bond act to secure money to purchase land for the park.

Dick Buegler introduced Joe Fernicola to Brooklynite Edward Milanese. They became friends. Ed was a good writer and typist. He spent many evenings working with Joe, writing letters to agencies, organizations, politicians and anyone they could reach. Dick, Ed and Joe led many walks through the Clay Pit area to involve the public in the proposal for a West Shore park. Ed contacted the Nature Conservancy. The Nature Conservancy became inter-



Credit: Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve by D. J. Evans

ested in this section of New Jersey Pine Barrens extending into New York State. They helped by purchasing some of the land that was needed to establish the park. The Nature Conservancy turned this land over to State Parks on September 30, 1980, with the creation of Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve. Shortly thereafter, the State purchased the Gericke Farm, adjacent to Clay Pit. It is thought to be the old-

est organic farm in the United States. The State uses the farm to teach horticulture to special needs students.

As of 2025, Protectors is attempting to add the mouth of Tappen Creek, which drains the Clay Pit area, to the park. This includes the sandy beach where it flows into the Arthur Kill waterway, connecting to Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve.

Meanwhile, Protectors' early board

was busy. They met at the Kantors' home. It was decided that Dick Buegler would be President, and Wolfgang Kantor would be the first Treasurer. Ellen Pratt took the job of Corresponding Secretary, a position she held for forty years. History was in the making, and Protectors soon became an ardent champion for the cause of land conservation on Staten Island.

— Ellen Pratt

50TH ANNIVERSARY CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED!

THIS YEAR MARKS Protectors' 50th anniversary — a milestone we are using to launch a special campaign to advance our mission. Our mission is to increase stewardship of Staten Island's parkland, bluebelt corridors and nature preserves, while continuing our long-standing efforts to preserve Staten Island's natural areas.

Our focus has always been to engage fellow Staten Islanders in this mission, fostering a deeper sense of stewardship for the parks and natural spaces that every New Yorker should value. The 50th anniversary campaign is a celebration of this commitment. Through targeted walks, public meetings and community outreach, we aim to highlight and promote the work we do. Additionally, we have launched a fundraising campaign designed to strengthen and expand our support base. We believe that every donation builds not only our organization but also a sense of partnership, pride and connection between Protectors and our supporters.

Unlike other initiatives, the 50th anniversary campaign is centered on enhancing the value Protectors holds in the community. It is an opportunity to share our story with both steadfast donors and a new generation of concerned citizens. After 50 years of dedicated work and accomplishment, Protectors is an established institution — but we are also a forward-looking organization, committed to remaining dynamic and useful for all those who value the preservation of natural areas.

Use the QR code to donate so that Staten Island's natural beauty is protected for generations to come.



— Hillel Lofaso

TRIBUTES TO PROTECTORS

WHEN I FIRST MOVED to Staten Island from Chicago in 1996, a good friend called and urged me to go on a Protectors hike. She enthusiastically introduced me to Protectors legends, Dick Buegler, Herman Zaage and Sylvia Zaage. I couldn't believe how much they knew about every plant we encountered. I also couldn't believe how much green space they had helped protect and preserve within the confines of New York City. My husband and I had recently been working on environmental campaigns around the country, so I felt so fortunate that I could be a part of a "movement" on Staten Island. And the passion of those who call themselves "Protectors" really is similar to the passion I've encountered on other environmental campaigns.

I am a part of Protectors because I know that citizens who want to protect the natural areas in their community must be vigilant, especially when that community is part of one of the largest cities in the world. Over the past 30 years, I have seen precious pieces of natural beauty here on Staten Island, my home, disappear. I believe every Staten Islander must keep this in the forefront of their minds: Don't take your green spaces for granted! However, I know that many, many more spaces have been saved here on the Island because Protectors has been vigilant for the past 50 years. I am so grateful to past and present members of Protectors of Pine Oak Woods who have devoted hundreds upon hundreds of volunteer hours to this effort. I know that this is what inspired me to get involved almost 30 years ago, and I hope it continues to inspire others in our community to do the same.

— Lisa Pillarella, Board Member

I GREW UP IN BROOKLYN and always thought of Staten Island as a special place that you traveled to by ferry. When I was a child my father used to tell us stories about going to Staten Island on vacation. It was "the country," a special place.

I moved to Staten Island when I was in my twenties, attracted, in part, by all its beautiful open space. My daughter was born in 1976 and I was so happy to be living in this special place. However, I noticed the encroaching expansion of residential and commercial space, and recalled Joni Mitchell's song lyric, "They paved paradise, and put up a parking lot."

Sometime in the '80s, through some dear friends, I became aware of the non-profit organization Protectors of Pine Oak Woods and the important work that they do. My connection began by enjoying the 10-mile hikes with my daughter and my friends. These Protectors' walks were conducted by knowledgeable leadership who directed and educated the participants about the environment, the history of the area, issues of concern and pending legislative issues. For me, Protectors was providing a very valuable service helping to maintain the special natural wonder that is Staten Island. Protectors delivers the critically important message that when the green spaces are gone, they will be gone for good.

At my retirement in 2019, I relocated to New Jersey with my daughter, and I lost track of Staten Island and the Protectors for a time. In 2024 I reestablished my membership in time for the 50th anniversary. As in the past, Protectors continues to educate on important legislative issues and work with elected officials and planners.

— Catherine Madden, Renewing Member

HELP KEEP STATEN ISLAND GREEN: MEMBERSHIP DRIVE NOW OPEN

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT a Staten Island with scant green spaces, dangerous debris on its shoreline, neighborhoods devoid of trees and a sky empty of birdsong. Now, see the reality of Staten Island today, a borough that has been tended to by dedicated city, state and federal workers; by elected officials actively concerned with our environment; and by the oldest all-volunteer conservation organization in New York City, the Protectors of Pine Oak Woods.

Some of you have been members since the formation of the Protectors in 1975, and some of you became new members just this month. Yet all of you have the same desire to participate in the stewardship of a green Staten Island.

Our Spring membership drive is the perfect time to answer the call to join, renew and update by using the attached membership envelope to remit your check; or, easier still, by paying online at siprotectors.org/donate with your credit card or PayPal. Choose your member level, and consider supporting the Protectors' efforts by making an additional donation. Please include your email address and cell phone to facilitate our correspondence. Our member list is proprietary and will not be released to other organizations or businesses.

What better way for Protectors to celebrate our Golden Anniversary year than with a growing, active group of members who are well-informed through newsletters, semi-annual meetings, guided nature walks, and special events. All members will receive in the fall our 2026 wall calendar containing curated color photos of Staten Island's flora and fauna. Most importantly, everyone will enjoy the results of fifty years of keeping Staten Island green. We all have a part to play in the future of our beautiful Island, so let's look forward to the next fifty! Thank you for your support.

—Madeline Paladino, Membership Secretary, mpaladino@siprotectors.org

We are requesting member testimonials for Protectors (see p. 6). Please feel free to submit your short contribution to Madeline at mpaladino@siprotectors.org

Protectors of Pine Oak Woods Membership Coupon

Please enroll me as a member in the following category:

- NEW RENEWAL
- \$15Student
- \$25Senior (62 and older)
- \$30Individual
- \$40Family/Household
- \$75Contributor
- \$150Supporter
- \$250Benefactor
- \$500Patron
- \$3000 ...Life
- \$5000 ...Corporate/Organization

Date: _____

Here is my additional donation of \$ _____ for:

- \$ _____ General donation
- \$ _____ SI Natural Areas Defense Fund
- \$ _____ DEC Teen Camp Scholarship Fund
- \$ _____ In honor of _____

Already a member? Please use this form to give generously to further our mission.

Can Your Employer Offer Matching Grants?

Enclosed is a tax deductible check for \$ _____ made out to **Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, Inc.**

Name (Mr./Mrs./Ms.) _____

Address _____ ZIP _____

Telephone () _____

E-mail address _____

Contact me. I want to volunteer my help _____

Mail to: Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, Inc., P.O. Box 140747, Staten Island, NY 10314

Questions? E-mail membership@siprotectors.org

To join/renew/donate by PayPal or credit card, visit siprotectors.org/donate

UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUR MEMBERSHIP DUES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

AS A VALUED MEMBER of Protectors, it's important to understand that your membership dues are more than just a donation—they are a vital investment in the programs, services and initiatives that propel our mission forward. Every contribution plays a critical role in helping us grow, strengthen and expand the impact we make together.

In 2024, our total income from membership dues and other donations amounted to \$17,101. Of this amount, \$3,000 was a ConEd grant earmarked for a future project. Our expenses totaled \$21,651, resulting in a deficit of \$4,550.

As shown in the accompanying pie chart, the majority of our membership income was directed toward Operations. This category supports our main advocacy platforms, including our four seasonal bulletins, website maintenance and post office mailings and fees.

Contract Services consisted of costs related to our accountant and public rela-

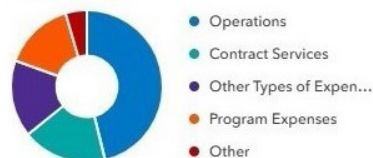
tions partner, while Other Expenses covered essential items like insurance. Included in this category were one-time costs to honor Cliff Hagen for his years of service as Protectors' President. Program expenses were directed toward calendar production and tools for our Forest Restoration Workshops.

We appreciate your continued support and want you to know that every contribution is essential to advancing our mission and the benefits you receive from being a part of Protectors. Recent 990s are available at ProPublica.org.

FY 2024



EXPENSES: \$21,651



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(Arden Heights Woods, cont'd from p. 2)

floor and pond edges. Bats find shelter here, feeding on the swamp's abundant insect population.

In 1993, the City assigned the first 175 acres of Arden Heights Woods to the City Parks Department. Two years later, an additional 8 acres were added, establishing park boundaries along Arthur Kill Road, Arden Avenue and Legate Avenue. Acquiring the three adjacent privately owned parcels would expand the preserve to 215 contiguous acres.

Arden Heights Woods is New York City's largest wetland—a rare example of untouched wilderness in one of the world's biggest cities. Arden Heights Woods is ideal for birdwatching, dog-walking, nature study, wildlife viewing, fishing, photography and leisurely strolls.

A parking lot is available on Arden Avenue between Dover Green and Forest Green. A map of hiking trails can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/4329rwwk>

Your generous support of Protectors of Pine Oak Woods will greatly assist our efforts to save these 32 acres and expand the Arden Heights Woods Natural Area.

— Mark Latour

PROTECTOR'S SEMI-ANNUAL SPRING MEMBERS MEETING SUNDAY, APRIL 27, 1 P.M. TO 3 P.M.

Join Protectors for a special 50th Anniversary Spring Semi-annual Meeting, open to both members and the general public.

- **Showcase of Current Projects:** Learn about the initiatives Protectors is working on.
- **Guest Speakers:** Representatives from the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation will provide updates on several Staten Island initiatives.
- **Upcoming Walks and Events:** Get details on planned walks and events for the year.
- **Membership Opportunity:** Renew your membership or join as a first-time member.

Be a part of the ongoing mission of this decades' old, completely volunteer, grassroots organization dedicated to open space preservation and natural areas stewardship.

Parents and grandparents may bring school-age children for a crafts activity in the back of the room. Admission to the museum galleries is included.

SAVE THE DATE: SUNDAY, APRIL 27, 1 P.M. TO 3 P.M.

Location: Staten Island Museum

1000 Richmond Terrace • Free Admission

Contact Madeline Paladino at mpaladino@siprotectors.org for more information