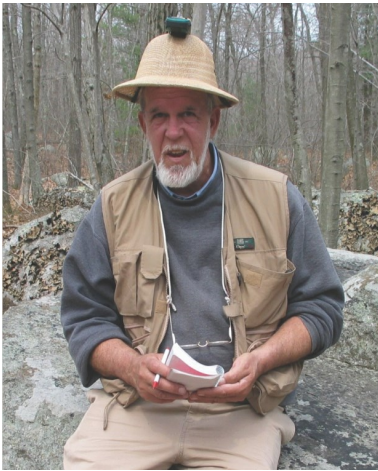




SPRING 2023

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE  
*Sharon Friends of Conservation*  
SHARE • MAINTAIN • PRESERVE • ENJOY

**From the Desk of the Outgoing SFOC President: Kurt Buermann**



SFOC President and Trail Monitor  
Kurt Buermann

I stepped down as Sharon Friends of Conservation president at the end of October of 2022. It is twenty plus years since I became president of SFOC, ( I may have been elected just because I didn't get out of the meeting room fast enough!). Even so, after a while I came to appreciate the amazing people who made up the board and general membership of this group. It was so rewarding to be working with them.

At the time, SFOC had emerged from several years of dormancy in order to serve as an *ad hoc* focal group for efforts to preserve Sharon's Rattlesnake Hill land. In the end, the land was not acquired (Twenty years later it finally has been.) Back then, rather than return again to dormancy, we thought our group should continue on. We started offering hikes on Sharon's conservation land as well as mapping trails and creating a Newsletter. The idea was that if we could educate Sharon resi-

dents about the trails and natural places of the Town, it might create an awareness and appreciation of them should

acquisition of the conservation land become a possibility in the future.

In some ways, I may be a victim of my own success. I have tried to expand SFOC's activity. We have supported and assisted in conservation land acquisition efforts. We have done extensive trail mapping. SFOC has created a bluebird monitoring program with volunteers who help to bolster this species' declining numbers. There have been numerous trail projects in collaboration with Sharon's Boy Scouts. SFOC deals with State and private conservation entities on a number of matters. These activities and others have taken a lot of time and effort. Even so, it has been enjoyable and rewarding.

As I dealt with these things, I tended to become the "expert" of SFOC. I came to know the overall doings of SFOC. I did not want to hoard this knowledge and came to feel that I should pass it on to others and let them take the helm into the future. And, finally, I am getting older to the point that I feel it is about time to hand over the reins to a younger generation.

I will still remain active in SFOC and will assist as I can, post-me.

Kurt Buermann

The Newsletter of the  
*Sharon Friends of Conservation*

Rita Corey & Jana Katz, editors  
Website: [www.sharonfoc.org](http://www.sharonfoc.org)  
E-mail: [sharonfoc@gmail.com](mailto:sharonfoc@gmail.com)

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**Housekeeping is for the Birds**

*by Kurt Buermann*

Putting up a bird house is one small thing you can do to help increasingly stressed wildlife. I think I have sound advice to share, having built and taken care of 30 bluebird houses for a number of years now. Residents of birdhouses are usually cavity nesters. These birds require a sheltered place to build nests and raise their young. Putting up a birdhouse benefits not only the birds but opens up a learning window on the amazing world of your avian residents. A successful birdhouse depends on four things: Location, construction, maintenance and observation.

Cont'd on p. 3

## Where will the Friends of Conservation be without Kurt?

by Peg Arguimbau

When a person decides to step back from a job they have done for so long, that is a question that comes to mind. Let's turn that question around and ask it this way...

What is the Friends of Conservation **because** of Kurt? The list is a long one:

SFOC is a well-led organization by a man committed to it's charge and dedicated to its success. So much so that he has served as it's "Prez" for over 20 years.

SFOC has a Board of Directors with officers to lead the group. The results of any fundraising activities are used in efforts that support the work and goals of the Town's Conservation Commission. SFOC was founded to be, and continues to be a strong supporter of the Commission's work.

SFOC has a well-established partnership with the Boy Scouts, thanks to the numerous successful Eagle Scout projects brought to fruition with the help - physical and financial - of the leadership of SFOC. Projects included mapping, boardwalks, bridges, trail construction and relocation and tree identification to name a few.

SFOC puts out a seasonal newsletter with articles whose authors have received gentle urging from the leadership to be of timely subject, informative, educational and to include photos. Kurt has submitted many an article on a variety of topics to keep the newsletter meaningful, and membership dues coming in.

SFOC conducts its annual meeting as a "Potluck Supper." Kurt has worked yearly to find speakers, local business donors, "chefs" to cook the dishes, and locations at which the gathering can be held. Kurt's appreciation for the photo contest entries and prizes helped that become a highlight of the annual meeting. Kurt and the Board have sought out and recognized, at the annual meeting, others whose contributions have furthered the cause of the SFOC.

SFOC conducts hikes throughout the year on various trails through town-owned property. Kurt has logged hundreds of miles on those trails, between using the Town's GPS equipment to locate the trails and include them on the website, to clearing, marking and inspecting their condition. This activity alone is important to make townspeople aware of the land that has been preserved on their behalf with the support of the SFOC and its membership.

SFOC had been dormant for many years, but came alive with Kurt's leadership and began to work on a special project - assisting the Conservation Commission in

the purchase of Rattlesnake Hill. Hikes were led up to its summit by members so townspeople could see the value of the land. It took some twenty years and with the collaboration of the Select Board, the Conservation Commission, SFOC, townspeople and the State, over 300 acres of Rattlesnake Hill was permanently preserved.

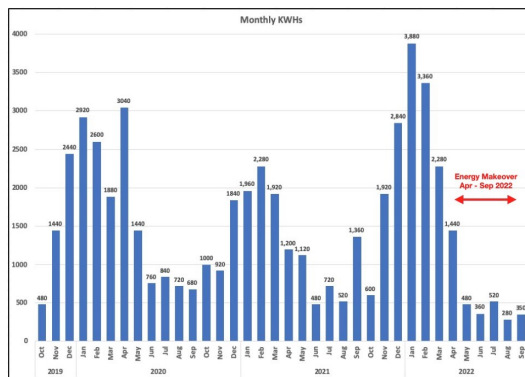
Clearly the SFOC and the Conservation Commission is indebted to Kurt for the leadership he has shown, the work he has done, and the example he has set as an advocate for environmental health. Whether it be open space, water quality, wildlife habitat and even town politics, Kurt has been in the mix. He will continue to be in the mix, just not leading the charge as "Prez". Many, many people are grateful for his unfailing effort and the town has benefited greatly from it. Because of Kurt, the SFOC has a firm foundation from which to continue its good work.

## Energy Makeover

by Paul Lauenstein

Heat waves. Droughts. Wildfires. Mega-storms. Melting glaciers. Rising sea levels. Disappearing species. The evidence is clear: climate change is happening before our eyes. We must reduce our emissions. New zero-emissions buildings are good, but we don't have enough time left to build our way out of this crisis. We must retrofit existing homes and businesses.

To that end, my wife and I did an energy makeover of the 50-year-old all-electric house our daughter bought last March in Pelham, MA.



Although we won't know for sure until after this winter, we expect that the improvements we made will reduce her electricity usage by at least 50%.

With electricity rates on the rise, that will considerably reduce her electricity bills.

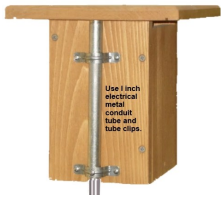
We started with a free energy assessment, and then we took advantage of generous rebates and a zero-percent, 7-year loan from Mass Save. Our daughter may even be eligible for tax credits on her federal tax return next April as a result of the Inflation Reduction Act.

The improvements we made are described on the National Solar Tour at: <https://www.nationalsolartour.org/tourmap/energy-makeover-of-1973-home/>

## Housekeeping is for the Birds

*Continued from page 1*

### Location:



While it seems O.K. to just fasten a birdhouse up in a tree, this may not be the best place. It affords predators an easy route to the front door. It's better to mount the house on a metal pole, less scalable by squirrels and other unwanted intruders. The pole should be

about 6 feet away from trees and about 5 feet high, allowing you to keep an eye on it. It should not be too close to large windows that birds can fly into. (You can put stickers on windows that prevent this.) A low bush, 10 or 15 feet away from the birdhouse will provide cover and a resting spot. It will also be a place for fledgling birds to fly to as they make their first flights. The opening of the birdhouse should face away from cold northerly winds. A southeasterly direction may be best, depending on the terrain and features around it.

### Construction:

You can buy or build a birdhouse. Avoid frippery and gew-gaws. Wood is the best material. It should be thick,  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch or more. This provides insulation from heat and cold. While uncoated wood is best, you may paint the outside of the house with a light color. Do not paint the interior. Coatings may be toxic to nestlings. A good roof will prevent any water from leaking in. If possible, the interior ceiling should have a cedar layer, perhaps a cedar shingle nailed to it. This discourages wasps or bees from building nests. A good size for the entrance hole is  $1\frac{1}{4}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches. This will suit a variety of species. The house should include a way, such as a side opening door to gain access to the inside for maintenance. A side opening door also allows for cleaning and repairs.

### Maintenance:

There's not much to maintaining a well-built birdhouse. It is advisable to check the house every week or so to head off problems. Look for any broken wood or fasteners. Clean out in fall after all the young have left. A stiff brush will do. Best to wear a mask while doing this to avoid inhaling dust. Throw out any old nests. Dispose of them in the trash or a good distance away from the house. You don't want birds re-using old nest materials. Old nests can contain parasites which might harm the next generation if used to build the next nest. Finally spray the interior with a 10% bleach solution. This will disinfect but will be detoxified by the time spring arrives. NEVER use any insecticides or soaps!

### Observation:

Monitor your birdhouse. I can guarantee that paying attention will teach you a lot about birds and their lives as your guests prepare for and raise their young.

These days it is

possible to train a camera on a birdhouse. The camera will record only scenes of activity making it easy to review the footage. Otherwise keep a pair of binoculars handy. Do remember not to place the bird house too close to windows. Birds can fly into them or see their reflections and become stressed, thinking they are seeing another bird competitor. There are many great bird houses available online. If you decide to try your hand at building one, please visit:

<https://www.audubon.org/news/how-build-bluebird-nest-box>



## Join or renew your SFOC membership.

Mail:

SFOC 45 Furnace St., Sharon, MA 02067

Online:

[www.sharonfoc.org/become-a-member-of-sfoc](http://www.sharonfoc.org/become-a-member-of-sfoc)

*SFOC does not share or make your information available to anyone.*

☐

NEW MEMBERSHIP

☐

RENEWAL

*Dues are \$ 25 per year. Includes family.*

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

WOULD YOU LIKE TO VOLUNTEER? SPECIAL SKILLS? \_\_\_\_\_



## No bones about it: our local invertebrates:

by Gaurav Shah

If we met aliens from another planet, we'd be thrilled with how exotic they are. We'd study and marvel at their bizarre life cycles – how they feed, how they mate, how they compete and co-operate.

I have good news: we have aliens in our back yards. They're just as wondrous, and there's no reason to ignore them just because their distance is measured in feet rather than light-years. I'm going to share a close encounter that's as marvelous as any alien.

Several years ago, when I was just getting into this fascinating hobby, I was in the backyard when I noticed some ants on a tree. When I took a photo, however, it turned out the ants weren't alone.

The stem was filled with lots of tiny aphids right next to the ants. What was going on? Let's back up a bit.

Aphids belong to the order Hemiptera, often called true bugs. Members of this order typically have mouthparts made for sucking fluids. Some hemipterans use this for attack: sucking the fluids out of their prey. Aphids, as every gardener knows, use their mouthparts for sucking sap from various plants.

In fact, they find a phloem vessel on the plant, and puncture it with their proboscis. Then, they simply wait. The pressure of the sap automatically fills up their bellies. It's like drinking from a firehose.

This sounds like an easy lifestyle, the equivalent of sipping cocktails at the beach, but there are many problems. For one, it's not easy to defend yourself whilst stopped in one spot, sucking on the sap. Aphids are prey to many different creatures, such as ladybug larvae, lacewing larvae, and the charmingly named rat-tailed maggots (Syrphid fly larvae; don't scorn them, they're critical pollinators and an important part of the ecosystem).



There's another problem: sap just isn't that good for you. It has lots of sugar, but not much of anything else. In order to get enough nutrients, aphids have to go through enormous quantities of the stuff. Ingesting all of it would make them

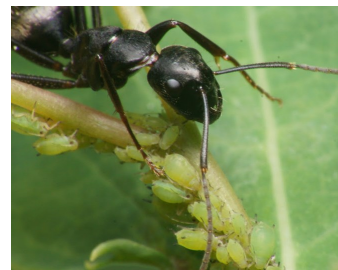
balloon up, which would make them even more easy to pick off. What's an aphid to do?

Aphids solve these challenges in various ways. First of all, there are bacterial endosymbionts in their guts that are able to use their diet and synthesize amino acids, which they share with the aphids.

The other solution they use is ingenious: it combines the two dangers and uses them to solve each other. And this brings us to our little tree in our little town.

Since the aphids have to process so much sap, they discard some of it. No need to waste it though: the ants have evolved to collect it and take it back to their colonies. It might not have much by way of nutrients, but the sugar provides plenty of energy.

In return, the ants protect the aphids from the various predators that we listed. Ants are fairly well respected in the insect world: there's a reason that so many insects have evolved to imitate them.



In this photo, you can see an aphid secreting a drop of so-called honeydew (which sounds heavenly, but remember that it's expelled from the anus), and the ant collecting it.

It's useful to realize that this is a pretty sophisticated transaction, not a simple exchange. For example, the aphid knows not to produce the honeydew until the ant strokes it with her antenna. Additionally, aphids that are part of a mutualism with ants actually produce honeydew of a different character than if they weren't part of this relationship, with more amino acids. It's amazing what levels of complexity nature can come up with, given millions of years of evolution!

Take a minute to think about this process: plant sap, ingested by bugs, processed by bacteria, shared with ants in exchange for protection. It's happening in your backyard.

## SFOC Welcomes Jana Katz to the Board

Born and raised in town, Jana grew up enjoying Lake Massapoag. She loves to swim and take her cairn terrier, Bailey, on her kayak for sunset paddles. Almost two years ago, she began working for the Conservation Department and recently joined the board of Sharon Friends of Conservation. Jana attended the University of Massachusetts at Amherst where she studied journalism and mixed media art. While there, she began to learn about sustainability and her gratitude continues to grow for the work SFOC does to support the Sharon community. A former member of the Commission on Disability, Jana, has especially enjoyed learning about accessibility and environmental stewardship. Jana looks forward to serving as secretary and enjoys writing, photography, & pottery.



## Knotweed Removal

by Rita Corey

In June, as part of an effort sponsored by Sustainable Sharon to clean up our two town beaches, SFOC Board member Judy Karlin, Beth Nathan and I worked at digging up and cutting back knotweed near the end of the Community Center Beach closest to Massapoag Ave.

In August, when the subject of invasive knotweed spreading in some spots along the lake and at the two town beaches, and mention was made of injecting glyphosate (Roundup) into the cut knotweed in some test spots, my ears perked up. Glyphosate and Roundup are very harmful to monarch butterflies, which I raise, as well as to other pollinators who come in contact with it. I called Judy and Beth to see if they would like to help remove knotweed by pulling or digging it up or cutting it down. We worked



Judy Karlin

along the Community Center lakeshore, the roadway from Massapoag Ave up to the Community Center, at the edges of both parking lots and in the area that overlooks the lake in front of the building. We filled many enormous bags with knotweed as well as two other invasive plants: bitter-sweet and loosestrife. We would like to extend our thanks to DPW workers who removed the heavy bags to a dumpster.

There are many places in Sharon where you see large stands of knotweed. One is at the train station, inbound side, along the entire edge of the parking lot. Another is on the Massapoag Trail as you enter from Cottage Street.

If you have some on your property, you can keep it in check by pulling or digging it up, covering it with black plastic weighted down with rocks, cutting it back over and over again. The superintendent at Borderland State Park, Andrew Buckley, was successful in doing this to a stand of knotweed. He said he was persistent and it took 10 years, which I think is worth the effort. Why use more chemicals and degrade our common environment even further, especially when we live in a town that has wells and we all drink from that water source?

## OPPORTUNITIES TO VOLUNTEER

### SFOC Trail Committee:

Mike Sherman, Chair, writes: "We need the collective knowledge trail stewards have about trail conditions, urgent needs, ideas for improvements. To do this in an organized way, I want to develop a simple format so we can know things such as 'King Philip trail needs bridges to get through swampy sections' with as much detail as you would like to provide. I hope to get something out in the next few weeks. And it may be good if people have some availability to get together and talk, either by zoom or even in person.

I'm reachable at [msherman51@outlook.com](mailto:msherman51@outlook.com) any time.

I would like us to develop a list of projects over the next few months and figure out priorities. I know people have varying levels of involvement and time and appreciate anything they can do to help."

**Scenic Roads:** Did you know that Sharon has 31 streets designated as Scenic Roads?

**Bay Road, Billings Street, Bullard Street, Canton Street, Cedar Street, Deborah Sampson Street, East Street, East Foxboro Street, Edge Hill Road, Everett Street, Furnace Street, Gunhouse Street, Lakeview Street, Mansfield Street, Mann's Hill Road, Maskwonicut Street,**

**Massapoag Avenue, Mohawk Street, Mont Fern Avenue, Moose Hill Parkway, Moose Hill Street, Morse Street, Mountain Street, Old Post Road, Pine Grove Avenue, Pine Street, Richards Avenue, South Walpole Street, Upland Road, Walpole Street Wolomolopoag Street,**

Help pick up trash on these special streets, many of which have litter in wooded sections. If you would like to be responsible for a section of a street, please contact [rita-corey@earthlink.net](mailto:rita-corey@earthlink.net)

**Invasive Species:** Want to help with Knotweed Removal and other invasive species at Beech Tree Park, Memorial Park Beach and the Dog Park at Deborah Sampson? Contact Rory McGregor at **508-400-4719**. Want to help do the same thing at the Community Center area or the train station? Contact [ritacorey@earthlink.net](mailto:ritacorey@earthlink.net)

## A Rare Bear Sighting in Sharon

by Paul Lauenstein

Last July 30, Selectboard member Emily Smith-Lee saw a black bear in her yard, and had the presence of mind to photograph it. She reports, "a black bear came out of the woods behind our house on Moose Hill Parkway and walked across our back yard before going back into the woods."



Black bears are seldom seen in Sharon. Since moving to Sharon 36 years ago, I have never encountered one, despite spending a good deal of time hiking Sharon's trails. Emily's black bear sighting is the only one on the Sharon Friends of Conservation web site ([sharonfoc.org](http://sharonfoc.org)), which has accumulated over 1,200 wildlife sightings and over 500 species since its inception 14 years ago."

Emily's bear might have been passing through Sharon seeking a territory of its own. Around June, adult black bears tend to roam. They are seeking female bears without cubs as mates. This could explain the bear sightings as they pass through Sharon on their quest. A few years ago, a Sharon resident reported finding bear scat on her deck. Mass Fish and Wildlife confirmed that it was from a bear. So far there have been no reports of bears *residing* in Sharon. Even so, since black bears are solitary creatures, there is the possibility...

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources provides this advice in the highly unlikely event that you encounter a black bear. Black bears are powerful, and they can run faster than an Olympic sprinter, but they are not normally aggressive. According to Lynn Rogers, PhD, founder of the North American Bear Center, "When I began hunting in my teens, I believed bears would charge me in instant anger. I wondered if I could kill a bear before it got me. At 18, I saw my first wild black bear. It sniffed me from head to toe and moved on into the darkness. At 28, I began studying them. Now, after over 50 years of studying black bears and learning about their true timid nature, I

reflect on how the magazines and media continue to mislead people. If black bears were like they are often portrayed, I would not have been able to work with them as closely as I have.

- **Don't panic.** Stop what you are doing and evaluate the situation.
- **Make your presence known** to the bear by speaking in a calm voice. Try not to startle the bear.
- **Alter your route or back away slowly**, preferably in the direction you came.
- **Walk, do not run**, and keep your eye on the bear so you can see how it reacts. In most cases, the bear will flee.
- **If the bear walks toward you, act boldly, yelling and throwing something at it. Do not climb a tree.**
- **If you have bear spray, remove the safety pin and be ready to use it if the bear approaches you.**

To learn more about black bears' diet, researchers followed them around in the woods and filmed them foraging, as shown in this video:

<https://bear.org/scat-analysis-versus-walking-with-bears>

## A Boardwalk Beyond

by Kurt Buermann

Walkers along the stretch of the Massapoag Trail from Lake Massapoag to Ames Street should find the trek somewhat less arduous. Some years ago, Jacob Archer, as his Eagle Scout project, built a 90-foot boardwalk spanning a particularly wet and mooshy area. In the ensuing years, the area at the boardwalk's end which was normally dry ground grew muddy and remained wetter for longer. This is the case on several other trails. I think it may have to do with a change in seasonal rain patterns. Instead of precipitation concentrated in the early torrential spring rains of past years, we seem to be seeing lighter rains persisting throughout the summer. While not as much rain falls, it falls more frequently and keeps the ground wet for longer periods. Whatever the cause, there remained a very muddy patch for walkers to traverse to get to higher ground. This is not only a problem for people but also for the trail environment. When hikers encounter mud, they tend to skirt the edges, thus widening the area. This damages and inhibits plant and animal life in the area. It also creates channels for runoff which further degrade the trail.

cont'd on p 7



# Sharon Friends of Conservation Events

Spring 2023

See our website for more info as events near: [www.sharonfoc.org](http://www.sharonfoc.org)

**Sunday, March 19 at 1 pm, Massapoag Trail South Hike:** from Mann's Pond to Hammershop Pond and rotary at Lake Massapoag. Distance is about 1.6 miles. Mainly easy walking with one or two steeper places. Park at Mann's Pond parking lot (near 161 Billings St). Questions? 781-784-4625 or [sharonfoc@gmail.com](mailto:sharonfoc@gmail.com)

**Sunday, April 2 at 1 pm, Edge Hill Road Conservation Area Hike:** Park at the wooden stairway entrance along the road, between Tiot and Dedham Streets. (This is *about* # 203 Edge Hill Rd.) Some uphill hiking. Nice wide trails. Questions? 781-784-4625 or [sharonfoc@gmail.com](mailto:sharonfoc@gmail.com)

**Saturday, April 15 at 6:30 pm, Potluck & SFOC Annual Meeting** at Our Lady of Sorrows in O'Connell Hall 52 Cottage St., Sharon. Presentation from Neponset Watershed Alliance about water protection and conservation. Questions? Judy Karlin, 781-784-1958 or [judykarlin@gmail.com](mailto:judykarlin@gmail.com)

**Sunday, April 23 at 1 pm, Sharon Botanical Trail Hike** A trail established in 2013. Distance about ½ mile. Easy walking. Meet and park at the south end of Rob's Lane which is located at the end of Glendale/Glenview Street. Questions? 781-784-4625 or [sharonfoc@gmail.com](mailto:sharonfoc@gmail.com)

**Sunday, May 7 at 1 pm, Massapoag Trail North Hike:** from Mann's Pond to Brook Road and Devil's Rock. Much of our route follows the bank of the Massapoag Brook. Easy walking. Distance about 1 mile. Park at Mann's Pond parking lot (near 161 Billings St.) Questions? 781-784-4625 or [sharonfoc@gmail.com](mailto:sharonfoc@gmail.com)

**Sunday, May 21 at 1 pm, Old Foundry Trail Hike:** We will visit the Old Foundry site where cannons were made for the Revolutionary War. Our walk on easy pathways will take us past several ponds. These trails may be some of Sharon's lesser-known. Distance out and back is about 1.5 miles. Meet and park at the paved corner of Grapeshot and Foundry roads, in the Sharon woods area. [Questions? 781-784-4625 or sharonfoc@gmail.com](mailto:sharonfoc@gmail.com)

**Spring Collection of Bikes,** date and location TBD. Please save your used bicycles and parts for collection in conjunction with Bikes Not Bombs. See their website for details on what is useable: <https://bikesnotbombs.org> Questions? 781-784-4533 or [ritacorey@earthlink.net](mailto:ritacorey@earthlink.net)

## Boardwalk Beyond

cont'd from p 6

Jacob Archer's father, Steven noticed that the muddy patch was worsening. He undertook to build a boardwalk extension of some 80 feet to connect his son's boardwalk to where the trail continued on higher ground. Working with the Sharon Friends of Conservation and the Sharon Conservation Commission, Steven secured funds for the project. MiTek company, Steven's employer and a global supplier for the construction industry, supplied him with some materials for the project as well as allowing him



time off work to complete the boardwalk. Steven found a few good days this October and set to work, completing the project.

The "Ames Boardwalk" as it is called, is one of many boardwalks on Sharon's trail systems.

Other boardwalks are largely the work of Sharon Friends of Conservation, Sharon's Boy Scout troop 95 and the Sharon Conservation Commission.

**Sharon Friends of Conservation**

**45 Furnace Street**

**Sharon, MA 02067**



Sharon Friends of Conservation was started in 1986 "to promote, encourage and foster the preservation, care and maintenance of all public lands, waters and wildlife in the Town of Sharon in order to further the recreation and enjoyment of the town's residents." It is a non-profit, 501(c) (3) organization.

We welcome all contributions this newsletter and we are eager for more, especially those of young people. Please write about a conservation issue of importance to you, We also welcome artwork, stories, and poetry.

SFOC Newsletter  
45 Furnace St.,  
Sharon, MA 02067

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Ph.(781) 784-4625