

25 Years of People, Paths, Possibilities

Conrad Reining, UVTA Board Chair 2013 - 2020

I can't remember when I first became aware of the trails alliance, but it must have been more than a decade ago. Perhaps it was my first meeting with Russ Hirschler, who at one point worked with my father-in-law help fund land conservation in the Upper Valley. Russ impressed me by his embrace of all that makes this area such a great place to live – its forests and fields, rivers and streams, backroads and, yes, trails that stretch for miles and miles across this wonderful landscape.

It was therefore an easy call when a board member approached me to join the board of the trails alliance. I ended up staying for years – I can't recall how many! – all of which I relished. What drew me was the dedication of the hardy crew of staff – and many volunteers – who pitched in with scarce resources but great camaraderie to help people of all walks of life to experience the outdoors of this place we call home. I was reminded of this hard work when I visited VINS and the forest of lights during the holidays. I hadn't been there in years but knew about the alliance's work to make those wonderful grounds as accessible as possible. Nevertheless, I wasn't prepared for the magnificent final result, the throngs of visitors moving easily along the gentle slopes and bends. Most folks didn't realize all the effort that went into that trail, but I did.

The trails alliance has been important in other ways. My younger daughter was part of the high school trails corps as a teenager, and I can still remember her coming home with mud on her boots and grin on her face after those days in the woods. She and her crew were featured in a profile in the Valley News, and that yellowing article is still tacked to the corkboard in her room.

One final thought revolves around Thetford, where we've lived for nearly 25 years. There is a rich network of trails that have emerged organically in the Thetford Hill area, and elsewhere. I, and several other folks in town, got interested in understanding where those trails are, who's using them, and if they pose environmental risks and/or are being used irresponsibly. To tackle these questions, we naturally turned to the alliance for advice, and they have been with us for years as we explored a host of (sometimes thorny) issues. Our small trails group is now considering a more formal structure and, once again, the trails alliance is there to help us as we take our next steps.

It's been a wonderful ride (walk?) these last many years, and I am looking for more!

With gratitude,

Conrad Reining