Tin Mountain celebrates 40 years by looking to the future

ConwayDailySun.com
Tin Mountain Conservation Center board chair Rick Steber and Executive Director Lori Jean Kinsey stand Wednesday in front of a huge glacial erratic on the center’s soon-to-be acquired Hunt property across the road from the original easement. (JAMIE GEMMITI PHOTO)

Tin Mountain is ‘planting the seed’ for 40 more years

By Tom Eastman

ALBANY — Tin Mountain Conservation Center is growing — both literally and figuratively.

Not only is the education and research center set to close on a prime 73-acre parcel across the street from the 2005-built Tin Mountain Nature Center, but on the eve of its 40th anniversary, the member-supported non-profit recently embarked on an ambitious capital campaign intended to set the organization up for continued sustainability as it heads to its next 40 years.

The $1.3 million “Planting Seeds: The Next 40 Years” capital campaign was launched six weeks ago and has already raised $650,000, says Tin Mountain Executive Director Lori Jean Kinsey.

“We have been very excited and pleased with the
response to date,” said Kinsey.

The campaign’s goals include expanding the existing trail network to include an ADA-accessible nature trail; paying off Tin Mountain’s $80,000 mortgage on the Nature Learning Center; creating an endowment and self-funding maintenance account; building a new barn for storing vehicles, tools and equipment such as canoes and kayaks; and creating a children’s playground on the Learning Center property.

“The self-sustaining maintenance account will be funded and used for capital maintenance projects,” Kinsey explained. “If you have a leak in the roof, for example, that account will be used to fix it,” she said.

Kinsey — who has been with the organization for 37 years, first as a teacher-naturalist, then education director before succeeding her late husband Dr. Michael Clines as executive director — recently offered a tour of the 73-acre Hunt property that sits on the corner of Bald Hill Road and Chase Hill Road in Albany, which is being purchased from brothers Calvert and Gerry Hunt for $185,000.

It was the Hunts who in 2004 sold to Tin Mountain the 138-acre tract that houses the Nature Learning Center.

The Hunts, who have owned the land since the 1970s, no longer live in the area, with Calvert residing in Maine and Gary in North Carolina. As children, they used to visit their grandfather in Albany, according to Kinsey.

“We had always said after purchasing the first tract in 2004 for the Nature Learning Center if they were ever interested in selling the additional 73-acre tract that we would be interested. When we reapproached them recently, they said yes,” said Kinsey.

The soon-to-be acquired 73-acre parcel includes at least two cellar holes of abandoned structures, according to Kinsey.

“There was some prime development potential there but now it is protected so we feel good about that.”

She said the acreage’s relatively flat terrain makes it ideal for a nature trail “accessible to all for non-mechanical travel. We really want to open up the outdoors to all, which is after all, part of our mission at Tin Mountain,” said Kinsey.

“It will feature a sturdy, compacted surface topped off with crushed gravel,” she continued. “It will accommodate wheelchairs, strollers and everyone from toddlers to seniors — families, runners, cross-country skiers, snowshoers — and of course, bird-watchers.”

She said Tin Mountain plans to grade the parking lot. “The trails are flat, but the access from where we will build the parking lot is steep.”

Leading Monday’s walking tour, Kinsey stopped beside Cream Brook, a meandering stream in the shadow of Bald Hill, to see Tin Mountain
This is a 2,990 Sq. ft. Home on .70 acres located at 1324 Bald Hill Rd., Albany, NH being sold “as is/where is” consisting of a kitchen/dining area with cathedral ceiling, a living room with beamed cathedral ceiling & hearth with wood/coal stove, an additional kitchenette w/dining area and hearth w/wood stove, dining room, 2 bedrooms (plus 2 sleeping areas), 1 ½ baths, laundry area, storage room, 13 x 20 heated shop, and 24 x 30 basement area. Home has FHA RLOKHDW$QXQÀQLVKHGDUHDZLWKSRWHQWLDORIEHGURRPVGHQ EDWKVLVRYHUWKHFDUJDUDJH7KLVKRPHLVGHVLJQHGZLWKLQODZOLYLQJ
garage, and a 14 x 26 basement is under the kitchen/dining area. There is a 10 x 12 deck and an 8 x 10 Koi pond out front, a small covered back porch, and a blacktop driveway.

Possibly Financing Info:
There are at least 3 banks & mortgage companies in the area who have said they would be able to finance the property “as is” with the unfinished area above the garage and the shared well. Data is available on request. Or do you perhaps know of a potential mortgage company you would like to work with?

DUE TO SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS
OUR PRICE HAS BEEN REDUCED TO $239,900.

Call Tom at 603-447-8808 / 603-520-1615
to set up an appointment or with any questions.
Renamed the West Oxford Agricultural Society Barn, it’s the oldest barn in Albany, Kinsey said. “It’s such a beautiful structure, yet we’ve got it stock full of all of this equipment. As part of our capital campaign, we plan to build a new storage barn on the property and to make better use of this beautiful barn for our nature programming,” she said.

The capital campaign wish list also includes a “Nature’s Playscape” for children — a playground of rocks, tree stumps, footbridges and logs to “foster coordination and fun,” said Kinsey.

Rick Steber of Glen, chairman of the Tin Mountain Board, joined Kinsey at the site on Wednesday to talk more about the campaign, and how nature — and its built-in physical distancing component — has found a new audience due to COVID-19.

They said that what began in 1980 as Barbara Rockwell of Jackson’s vision has evolved into an ever-growing educational resource for learning about and enjoying the outdoors. David Brooks was the first executive director, followed by Richard Thompson-Tucker, Joel Rhymer, Cline and Kinsey.

“When we first started, we literally were in two elementary schools and in just the third grades: Jackson Grammar School and Josiah Bartlett Elementary. We now serve over 17 schools in Mount Washington Valley, including western Maine, as well as the Gorham and Berlin school districts. We originally started out with maybe 60 kids and now we have 3,000 per year from preschool to high school,” Kinsey said.

Like every educational facility, Tin Mountain was forced by the pandemic to adapt to a new way of providing programming.

“Starting last spring, we did a lot of teaching online, hoping that people would get inspired and take to the natural world with their kids,” said Kinsey.

“The whole COVID-19 experience has shown that people need and want to be outdoors,” she added.

“I think we need it even more,” said Steber, a retired industrial engineer and wildlife photographer who has served as board chair for the past 2½ years and who has been on the board for nearly six years.

He and Kinsey described how Tin Mountain put both its classroom and adult programs online, utilizing Zoom and other internet platforms, while also presenting some programs outdoors.

The Nature Learning Center has been closed to the public since mid-March.

Another first this year — Tin Mountain held its First Season Festival Benefit auction entirely online. Normally, the dinner/auction is held at Fryeburg Academy’s Wadsworth Arena but the pandemic made that impossible last March.

According to Marketing and Communications Director Dawson Winch, it still netted a respectable $27,000, compared with the previous year’s live auction net of $39,000.

Plans call for next year’s also to be held online (on March 20-28) in conjunction with local restaurants in a format that is still being finalized, Kinsey said.

The pandemic also led to the cancellation of such major fundraisers as the traditional Mt. Washington Auto Road Bicycle Hillclimb. That and the Mount Washington Century Ride...
became a “ride on your own and get a
goodie bag and travelogue of the ride.”

Rather than having summer camp-
ers come to Tin Mountain this year,
families signed up for Camp in Box,
Summer Camp Challenge — complete
with a video and a box of activities to do
at home. Family Explorations on Tues-
days were another camp alternative.

“Whenever possible, programs were
modified or adapted rather than can-
celled,” added Kinsey.

However, Tin Mountain did hold
its annual Brownfield Bog canoe and
kayak outing and other smaller, limit-
ed-number group outings.

This fall, Tin Mountain has
remained outside. “In the past (pre-
COVID-19), we would go into the
schools and then head outside, but
now it is all outside or we are doing
remote learning,” said Kinsey.

Meanwhile, adult programs that
have in the past attracted an audience
of 60 people to Tin Mountain have
drawn an equal or greater number to
virtual sessions, Kinsey said.

“We had 71 the other night for our
lynx program. I am very proud of how
everyone has adapted,” said Kinsey,
noting that next up on Dec. 11 at 7
p.m. is a virtual program on climate
change by NHPR environmental
reporter Annie Ropeikiek.

That will be followed Dec. 17 at 7
p.m. by “Winter Bird Ecology” (an
online program led by Tin Mountain
board member Will Broussard) and
Dec. 19 by the 32nd annual North
Conway Area Christmas Bird Count.

Of the count, Kinsey explained:
“Every year, volunteers count the
number of birds in a 24-hour period
surveying the same defined area so
they can contrast each year’s data.”

The success of the winter bird
census depends on a troop of devoted
volunteers both in the field and at
home watching their feeders.

“Bird counts are useful tools for
evaluating yearly and long-term
trends of the birds wintering in our
area,” Kinsey said, adding you do
not need to be an ornithology expert
to participate. Volunteers may email
Nora Dufilho (nbeem@tinmountain.
org) for more information.

In addition, “people are very much
using our trails, especially our Bear-
paw tract over by the State Line Store
for mountain biking, and our Jackson
Tin Mountain property is also getting
use,” she said. They also offer weekly
online nature-related trivia contests.

Membership currently stands at 460
members, with a staff of 12 employ-
ees, plus one intern (staff increases to
about 15 in summer).

Kinsey was proud to note that
thanks to the Payroll Protection Pro-
gram and the Nonprofit Emergency
Relief Fund, she didn’t have to lay
off a single staff member. She said she
continues to apply for grants as well.

As Tin Mountain stands on the
threshold of its 40th anniversary,
Kinsey and Steber shared a vision of a
local resource that fuels people’s pas-
sion for the outdoors.

Steber writes in the “Plant a Seed”
brochure that “we are now protecting
our footprint on Bald Hill Road in
Albany with an adjacent land pur-
case in order to extend our mission

Tin Mountain snowshoers shown last winters on a tour of the 73-acre Hunt property that Tin Mountain
expects to purchase next week. (COURTESY PHOTO)
TIN MOUNTAIN from page 6

for the next 40 years. This includes preserving additional forest property that offers a natural corridor to the National Forest. With this action, we’ll create a larger ‘four-season’ presence and open up new outdoor nature experiences to a growing population of friends, donors and visitors who together comprise the future of Tin Mountain.”

He and Kinsey said the Moulton-Allard neighborhood also has generously contributed toward the effort. Tin Mountain shows its support for the town by making a payment in lieu of taxes every year.

“I think the original goals remain strong,” said Kinsey. “And that is to continue with the education of kids and their parents exploring their own backyard and nature around us.

“To this day, my greatest satisfaction is seeing the enthusiasm that sparkles in kids’ eyes. They love the natural world and are like sponges that absorb what is around them.

“And,” she added, “I really enjoy working with the adults, too — education, after all, is a lifelong endeavor, and I appreciate the curiosity of everyone, whether they are 6, 16 or 65.”

To support the “Planting Seeds: The Next 40 Years” capital campaign and learn more about membership, programs and camps, go to tinmountain.org or call (603) 447-6991.