

# The Conway Daily Sun

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## ‘Planting Seeds’



Tin Mountain Conservation Center Executive Director Lori Jean Kinsey and Board Chair Rick Steber hold a map of soon-to-be acquired land near the Albany center. (JAMIE GEMMITI PHOTO)

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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  
THE CONWAY DAILY SUN

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

see **TIN MOUNTAIN** page 3

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A fox and a snowy owl keep watch over the library at the Tin Mountain Conservation Center. The building is closed to the public due to the pandemic. (JAMIE GEMMITI PHOTO)

## TIN MOUNTAIN from page 2

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 Cline 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** page 4

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**TIN MOUNTAIN** from page 3

note that the path will feature interpretive nature spots that will help explain the tract’s diversity of flora, birds and wildlife.

“This is a common mixed Northern hardwood-conifer forest,” according to Kinsey. “It abuts the 90-acre Albany Town Forest and a 53-acre White Mountain National Forest tract off Chase Hill Road.” Not to mention, it isn’t far from the greater White Mountain National Forest along the Kancamagus Highway and Swift River.

The tour ended at the Allard cemetery, located behind a vacant dwelling that is to be torn down as part of Tin Mountain’s acquisition of the 73-acre site.

“You can make out some of the names of Allard families who once farmed here,” said Kinsey, pulling back branches from a tombstone in the family plot.

One former landowner was Capt. David Allard of the New Hampshire State Militia, who died in 1872 at age 76. His wife, Martha, was the daughter of J. Moulton, an original land grantee. Her faded tombstone shows she died in September 1878.

The area was known as the Moulton-Allard neighborhood and welcomed many of the earliest settlers.

The original 138-acre tract sold to Tin Mountain by the Hunts includes Chase Pond, a quarry and the nature trails of the Rockwell Sanctuary, named after Tin Mountain founders Barbara and Henry Rockwell. The adjoining 91-acre Dr. Michael Cline Memorial Forest was added in 2018.

The new acquisition brings Tin Mountain’s total to over 300 acres of land.

On the main site sits the timber-framed center, with its great room and granite fireplace built by David Shedd from the quarry on the property. That building houses classrooms and a nature library,



**Tin Mountain Conservation Center Executive Director Lori Jean Kinsey and board chair Rick Steber at the old Allard barn, which was built in 1820. It is currently used for storage, but Tin Mountain would like to run programs for the public there. (JAMIE GEMMITI PHOTO)**

along with staff offices on the second floor.

Adjacent is the intern cabin, built in 2012, that sits next to an array of photovoltaic solar panels.

Due to the COVID-19 safe social-distancing guidelines, this year the cabin housed only one intern this past summer. Two additional interns were local valley residents so they did not need to be housed on

the Tin Mountain campus.

The property is also home to the 200-year-old Allard barn, whose restoration in the early 2000s by local builders Shedd, David Condoulis and Nate Reid was funded by the West Oxford Agricultural

see **TIN MOUNTAIN** page 5

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**POSSIBLE 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?

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**TIN MOUNTAIN** from page 4

Society (presenters of the Fryeburg Fair) and an LCHIP (Land and Cultural Heritage Investment Program) grant from the state.

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 liter-



The Tin Mountain Conservation Center got new solar panels installed in 2016. (JAMIE GEMMITI PHOTO)

ally 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

see **TIN MOUNTAIN** page 6



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**TIN MOUNTAIN** from page 5

became a “ride on your own and get a goodie bag and travelogue of the ride.”

Rather than having summer campers 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 Tuesdays were another camp alternative.

“Whenever possible, programs were modified or adapted rather than canceled,” added Kinsey.

However, Tin Mountain did hold its annual Brownfield Bog canoe and kayak outing and other smaller, limited-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



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)

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 Bearpaw 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 employees, plus one intern (staff increases to about 15 in summer).

Kinsey was proud to note that thanks to the Payroll Protection Program 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 passion 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 purchase in order to extend our mission

see **TIN MOUNTAIN** page 8

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Tin Mountain Conservation Center Executive Director Lori Jean Kinsey walks back to the original easement from the newly acquired land in Albany on Wednesday. (JAMIE GEMMITI 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-Al-lard 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](http://tinmountain.org) or call (603) 447-6991.

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