

State of the Paul Smith's College VIC – December, 2014

Submitted by Brian McDonnell

New York State transferred ownership of the VIC building to Paul Smith College on January 1, 2011 and was officially released from the lease on the VIC Center acreage owned by the College.

Paul Smith's College has expanded usage of The VIC following 5 guiding principles:

- A) Programs, events and activities linked to Paul Smith's academic mission.***
- B) The facilities and trails will continue to be accessible to the public.***
- C) An expanded connection to Culture and the Arts.***
- D) Greater opportunities for entrepreneurship.***
- E) The VIC will work toward becoming self- sustaining.***

The VIC has partnered with several groups to offer, promote and support activities.

- ❖ **National Outdoor Leadership School - NOLS'** "Northeast Branch" offers 13 day backpacking trips to teens. In its fourth summer, program offerings included the popular teen trips, combination canoe and backpack trips and a NOLS Pro course for adults. NOLS plans to continue to expand programs and grow its presence at the VIC.
- ❖ **Cornell Cooperative Extension** has partnered with the VIC through the Adirondack Center for Working Landscapes to offer varied educational programs and participate in the ACWL Homesteading Festival in September.
- ❖ **McDonnell's Adirondack Challenges (MAC'S)** conducts the day to day operations of the VIC. MAC'S employs staff; manages volunteers, student employees and interns; coordinates events, offers interpretive and recreational activities, and schedules myriad programs in the interest of broadening opportunities to PSC students and the public.
- ❖ **The Adirondack Birding Center** is coordinated by Paul Smith's College adjunct professor Brian McAllister. The VIC has gained a reputation as a "birding hotspot." Activities include The Great Adirondack Birding Celebration, "Teddy Roosevelt' bird walks, and the Junior birder club.
- ❖ **Friends of the VIC** have become the lead support organization for the Paul Smith's College VIC. The Adirondack Park Institute had historically been the "friend's organization" for both the Paul Smiths and Newcomb VIC's. It became clear that the API was not able to adequately support both facilities at a viable level. Given the charge to make the PSC VIC as self – sustaining as possible, it was decided to retain a relationship with the API as "a friend of the VIC" but develop its own group to specifically support programs, activities and major purchases. To date there are over 200 members contributing to the successful future of the Paul Smith's College VIC.
- ❖ **The Adirondack Center for Working Landscapes** is a faculty driven enterprise to offer activities focused on sustainable forestry, agriculture and tourism practices.
- ❖ **VIC Volunteers** are an integral part of our success. They give of their time and talent to provide information at the front desk; help with trail work; support events; make cookies; build Adirondack Chairs; be ambassadors in the butterfly house and out on the trail and assist with interpretive activities. VIC Volunteers provide over 3,000 hours annually.
- ❖ **The College Board of Trustees** has established a committee to explore the future of the VIC.

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VIC Interpretive Programming:

- **Local school outdoor education programs** – The VIC hosts over 1,000 students from area school districts annually.
- **The Breck Chapin Memorial Native Species Butterfly House** - Sue Grimm is “the butterfly queen.” Program is supported by the Friends of the VIC. Butterfly house is staffed and open to visitors every day of the summer, June 15 through September 15.
- **Naturalist led walks and paddles** - VIC naturalists lead a themed interpretive walk every day of the summer. Regular themed activities include interpretive paddles, mushroom walks, wild edible walks, wild flower walks, treks identifying trees, ferns and habitats and tracks, owl prowls and snowshoe walks in winter.
- **“TR” Birding Series and - Beginner Workshops** - A series of bird walks led by Adirondack Birding Center Coordinator, Brian McAllister. Participants are challenged to see and hear many of the bird species identified by a young Teddy Roosevelt in his research while visiting Paul Smiths in the 1870's.
- **Forest Ecosystem Research and Demonstration Area** – The FERDA plots, in two locations at the VIC, offer opportunities for education and research of varied forest management practices in side by side comparison. The VIC staff recently completed an update of the research begun by USFS representative Mark Twery. PSC forestry classes are gaining practical experience by updating the management practices prescribed for the varied plots in the study.
- **Ongoing research and presentations** – There are numerous research projects going on at any given time on the VIC property. Fish population surveys; deer fly trapping; salamander, varying hare, small rodent population studies; geology, herpetology and carnivorous plant monitoring; experiments in the new “interpretive sugar bush”; ample opportunities for individual and group capstone projects for students.

VIC Outdoor Recreation:

- **Cross Country and Snowshoe Center**– We have expanded the trail system to over 25 miles, and will add more trails in the Little Black Pond area. The VIC is in a “pond effect” snow zone that provides consistent, reliable snow fall and colder temperatures than other areas of the Adirondack Park.
- **Trail Runs** – The VIC has established itself as a great trail running location. We have partnered with High Peaks Cyclery to promote The Adirondack Holidays Trail Running Series and evening “5K Fun runs” every other Wednesday of the summer.
- **Orienteering:** The VIC has a permanent “map walk” orienteering course available.
- **Geocaching:** There are reports of several geo caches around the 3,000 acre woods!

Art at The VIC:

- **New Moon Art Shows** -The VIC works with over 50 local artists to present a new art show every month in conjunction with the new moon.
- **Plein Air Festival paints the VIC** – Saranac Lake Artworks hosts an annual Plein Air Festival in August. One of the featured festival events is a day at the VIC.
- **Juried Art Show** – Every July the VIC hosts a “Life on the lakes” themed juried art show. Numerous local artists submit work.
- **The VIC is a member of Saranac Lake Artworks**, an organization formed to promote and support the growing regional arts community.
- **Music at the VIC** - We feature local musical talent on Sunday afternoons all winter. We will also continue to host concerts on a request basis.

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Other Activities at the VIC

Festivals –

January – The Annual Chili Ski Fest

April – The Science Arts and Music Festival (SAMFEST)

June – The Great Adirondack Birding Celebration

September – Adirondack Rural Skills and Homesteading Festival

The Adirondack Farmer's Market

Shakespeare at the VIC

Armchair Traveler and Science Lecture Series

A variety of workshops

Maple and Birch Syrup production - The VIC partnered with The Wild Center and The Cornell Maple Program on a Northern Borders Commission Grant to promote and expand maple syrup production in the region. Through the grant, and with additional support from the Campus Sustainability Fund, The VIC was able to develop an interpretive sugar bush and construct a classroom sized sugar house. We have produced VIC maple syrup for the past two seasons and last spring cooperated with Mike Farrell from Cornell to collect and produce birch syrup.

Firewood Give away and Sale - New this year, the VIC joined forces with the Natural Resources Management and Ecology School to distribute firewood to people receiving assistance from the Brighton Food Pantry. We have given away over 100 face cords of fire wood. In addition, we have sold over 50 cords to faculty, staff and the general public. The program benefits NRME clubs, the VIC, and NRME.

VIC Projects for 2015

- ❖ **Rebuild the Floating Bridge** – The center portion of the bridge will need to be taken apart and reinforced and the coated cable needs to be replaced.
- ❖ **Resurface the Black Pond Trail** – We have estimated we will need 6,500 buckets of wood chips to coat the trail around black pond! A great student intern crew project for next summer!
- ❖ **Design and Improve Trails in the Little Black Pond Area** – Tim Curran of Seaway Timber Harvesting assisted new trail development in the area that his company cut last summer. Now we need to lay out trails and do the finish work for some great trails.
- ❖ **Improve Interpretive Signage** – Many of the signs are faded or missing. We will work with local artists to bring back the interpretive information around the trails.
- ❖ **Redesign the trail map** – New trails mean new map. Also we plan to change some colors to make them more visible. Your comments and suggestions are welcome.

VIC Staff:

- ❖ Director - Brian McDonnell
- ❖ Coordinator of Interpretive Programs / Adirondack Birding Center – Brian McAllister
- ❖ Coordinator of Educational Programs and Calendar – Deborah Paradis
- ❖ Butterfly Queen – Susan Grimm Hanley
- ❖ 6 – 10 Student Work Study each semester, 3 - 5 Student Summer Interns
- ❖ Friends of VIC and Volunteer Administrator – Karen Potts
- ❖ Trail Boss – Chip Briant
- ❖ VIC Volunteers
- ❖ VIC Program Consultant and Chief Bureaucracy Navigator – Susan Sweeney

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Sources of Funding

The college has invested a significant amount of money in upgrading the facilities. Programs, events, rentals, timber harvests, grants and generous donors have contributed to bring the VIC close to self - sustainability. Program activities and revenue generating opportunities are reflecting the growth of the popularity of the VIC to regional residents and visitors. Attendance at events and paid programming continues to expand.

Friends of the VIC (FOV) - has shown steady growth and support of VIC programs. The popular Native Species Butterfly House was supported with generous specific donations from FOV, along with people who joined at the Monarch level. FOV has continued to support Interpretive Education activities and school group visitations, FOV volunteer activities and specific promotion and organization development activities. There are over 200 members.

The VIC was awarded four grants this year:

- ❖ The NYS Zoos, Botanical Gardens and Aquariums program supports the maintenance and protection of collections across the State. The VIC earned an inaugural three year \$15,000 per year grant to pay staff associated with the butterfly house and interpretation of our collections.
- ❖ The John Ben Snow Foundation Awarded the VIC \$5,000 to resurface the Barnum Brook Trail and make it more accessible to the visiting public.
- ❖ The US Forest Service contracted with VIC staff to update the 14 FERDA plots on VIC property. We reset lines, replaced numerous markers, inventoried trees and shrubs and catalogued information in this ongoing research project. Faculty, students and VIC staff worked on this project. Budget for the three phase project was over \$12,000.
- ❖ Northern New York Audubon and the Cullman Foundation once again underwrote the fees for guest speakers and trip leaders to attend the Great Adirondack Birding Festival at the VIC. The VIC was awarded \$2,000.

Rentals: The VIC hosts several weddings, conferences and birthday parties every year. We also attract a number of smaller events, classes and programs that have become regular features like Yoga, Quilting, NYS Forest Products Association seminars, and BOCES.

Our long term renter (The USDA soils office) is back up to 3 full time staff. NOLS is exploring expanding its rental space at the VIC as their programs and staffing needs continue to grow. Cornell Cooperative Extension is also interested in exploring new programs at the VIC.

The VIC will host three major weekends in June of 2015 – The Great Adirondack Birding Celebration, The First ever Birch Syrup Producer's Conference and the NYS Maple Producers Association Tour of Franklin County. Attendees will be staying on campus. Maple and Birch Syrup programming opportunities continue to expand as the syrup minor develops and Paul Smith's redefines its role in maple and birch collection and production.

Thank you for your continuing interest in and support of the Paul Smith's College Visitors Interpretive Center, the VIC. There are lots of great things happening here! To learn more about the birds, butterflies, wildflowers, mushrooms and trails at the VIC, visit volunteer Ellen Jones' website, adirondackvic.org. You can also visit our website pscvic.org for regular information and regular program updates.

When you are in the area, please stop by for a visit. We'll all be glad you did!

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