

Rock River Land Purchase Completed! Thank You!

On Tuesday, November 20, 2018, Rock River Preservation Inc. Treasurer Hugh Russell signed the closing documents that placed 21 acres of the Robert Swartz property along Rock River under the ownership of RRP, the nonprofit organization formed thirteen years ago by gay men who dreamed this goal might someday be achieved.

This historic transaction was made possible by generous donations from gay men across the country and Canada, some of whom have been gathering on this land for decades, some of whom made their way there for the first time this summer. As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of Stonewall in 2019, this purchase takes on added significance, reminding us that Rock River is a national gay landmark that provided (and continues to provide) a safe haven for gay men in challenging times.

“This is a momentous occasion,” RRP Board Chair Thom Chiofalo wrote to donors in anticipation of the closing, “because this will ensure that the land will remain as it has been in the past: natural and undeveloped. The Rock River experience will be as you have always known it to be: a space where men gather and commune with other men and nature. The fear that someone will buy the land and restrict its use and access is now a thing of the past.”



The contracted sale price was \$75,000. RRP had paid \$12,500 over the summer for a deposit and an advance payment. At the closing, Hugh presented a certified check in the amount of \$66,453 to cover the remaining costs for the purchase of the land plus a variety of closing costs, including a survey, an engineering study, fees and attorney charges. An additional \$10,000 has been placed in reserve to pay an anticipated assessment from the State of Vermont – the sale of the 21 acres left Dr. Swartz with less land than required to maintain his “current use” tax status, and withdrawal from that status incurs a significant penalty, which RRP agreed to cover.

Two hundred individuals and couples from at least 15 states, the District of Columbia and Canada made this possible, a testimony to how deep and widespread the love of this special place is. Donors hail from all six of the New England states, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, D.C., Michigan, Texas, California, Alaska and Ottawa.

The purchase and fundraising were completed by volunteers. While every effort was made to “do it right,” some mistakes were made, including possibly not recognizing and thanking every individual. If you haven’t heard directly from a member of the volunteer fund raising committee or the RRP board, please know that however you’ve contributed this summer and over the years has helped make a difference at Rock River. Formal thank you letters, which document the tax-deductible contributions for tax purposes, were mailed in the week of November 12. If you have not received our personal thanks and whatever documentation you require, please let RRP Secretary Jim Russell know through the RRP email at rockriverpreservation@gmail.com.

Following is a list of donors – thank you all!

Adam B	Donald F	John T
Al J	Donald M	John W
Al W	Dorian D	Jonathan K
Alain D	Doug V	Jose B
Alex T	Duane D	Joseph Wa
Alexander L	Eli S	Joseph Wo
Andres B	Eric Da	Josh B
Andrew K & Steven D	Eric Du	Joshua B
Anonymous (6)	Eric H	Justin S
Arturo R	Eric K	Ken S
Benjamin K	Fernando A	Kevin M
Bill Kenney	Flavio R & Bryan H	Kian T & Jim D
Billy T & Charlie W	Fred G	Kolin S-B & Ken S-B
Bob S	Gary P	Kris H
Brian B	Gary T	Larry R
Bruce C	Glenn K	Lawrence B
Carmen V	Grant S	Lewis L
Carmin C	Greg H	Logan S
Charles C	H. Paul R	Louis S
Charles D	Hank L	Luiz F
Charles H	Henry A	Mark Ca & Steve L
Chris C	Henry N	Mark Cu
Christopher E	Howie P	Mark F
Christopher N	Hugh R	Mark H
Court C & John N	Jack H & Ronald S	Mark M & Todd S
Dan D	James F	Mark R
Dan J	James Le	Mark S
Daniel C & Matthew L	James Li	Matt B
Daniel K	James P	Matthew H
Daniel P	James S	Max M
Daniel S	James T	Michael B
Daniel W	Jason O	Michael D
Darrel H	Jay R	Michael G
Darryl C & Andrzej K	Jay W & Jim J	Michael M
Dave K & Scott H	Jayson V	Michael W
David H	Jeff P & Billy M	Mike P
David Pe & Gerry V	Jeff R	Moon M
David Pi & Dan G	Jeffrey H	Nick R
David R	Jeffrey M	Oliver R
Dean B	Jeffrey S	Owen
Dennis C	Jim R	Patrick F
Dennis H	Jimmy L	Paul G
Dennis M	Joe V & Marc S	Paul P
Dennis P	Joel M	Paul Ro
Dick W	John B	Paul Ru
Dominic S	John H	Paul W
Donald Bl	John K & David K	Peter Ba
Donald Br	John L & Arturo R	Peter Bo

Peter M	Ron H & Bill H	Steven H
Peter S	Ron K & Ted S	Steven Jon C
Preston S	Scott B	Thom C
Randall C	Scott G & Carey J	Thomas D
Rene M	Scott H	Thomas F & Bill O
Richard C	Scott M	Thomas L
Richard M	Shane H	Thomas M
Richard T	Sherwood C	Tim B & David W
Richard V	Stephen B	Timothy S
Rick H	Stephen N	Todd M
Rob D	Stephen Pa	Todd R
Rob S	Stephen Pe	Tom V
Robert C	Steve E	W S
Robert H	Steve G & Steve R	Warren C
Robert Re	Steve H	Warren P
Robert Ri	Steve S	Wayne K
Roger S & Drew D	Steve W	William M

This campaign caught the attention of Boston Spirit magazine, a quarterly publication for the GLBTQ community, for which [Scott Kearnan wrote a touching article](#) from the perspective of landowner Robert Swartz and his daughter Jennifer, who quietly but consistently welcomed gay men onto their property over the years. A few years before the sale, Robert and Jennifer asked RRP to develop a formal stewardship plan for the portion of their property used by the local gay community. That recognition of the stewardship that gay men were already performing led to the offer to sell. In closing his article in Boston Spirit, Scott acknowledges the fleeting time we have to enjoy this “Shangi-La” and the contribution we are making to those who will follow us in generations to come: “No single steward lives forever. But the spirit of this sacred place now will.”

Thank you!

Volunteer fund raising committee:

Steve Goldberg
 Dave King (with significant assistance from partner Scott Heller)
 Moon Morgan
 Hugh Russell
 Gary Taylor
 Jay Warren

Rock River Preservation Inc. Board of Directors:

Thom Chiofalo, chair
 Hugh Russell, treasurer
 Jim Russell, secretary
 Bob McCandless
 Preston Samuel

Continue the Stewardship by Volunteering to Maintain the Trails

Thom Chiofalo has served as chair of Rock River Preservation, Inc. for most of the past decade. He’s been the chief trail fixer for even longer. He will be stepping down from the RRP board in the coming months, but he will continue to take a leading role in stewardship of the trails, chairing a **volunteer committee** of like-minded folks who are devoted to making our visits as safe as possible. Following is a message from Thom asking you to consider joining him in this effort.

Hello River users.

It is obvious that there is need for improvements to the trail coming into the swimming sites along Rock River. While the home page of rockriverpreservation.org states in red that the trail is a “wilderness experience,” the last couple of years and Hurricane Irene have increased the difficulty in a few more spots. Plus, there is need to repair the first stair case at the third hole. Another area needing labor is the lower path around the second hole’s “Hug Me Rock,” which was damaged in the flood of October 2017.

Having enjoyed the past fourteen years maintaining the trail as best I could with occasional help from many, I find my life has taken me away from my chances to enjoy the river. While I will head up the trail volunteer group in 2019 with RRP’s newest board member, Preston Samuel, being my assistant for the first year, there is much need for many hands to make the necessary improvements. Besides two of us, three other frequent river users have mentioned their interest in giving time to these projects.

This is an opportunity to participate in a good old fashioned work bee or communal work project that will increase everyone’s sense of community and ownership and be a source of pride for years to come with each person who passes along the trail.

If you’re willing to lend your time and efforts to improving the trail, Please, email rockriverpreservation@gmail.com and give us your name.

Thank you in advance!

Thom Chiofalo, Chair, Board of Directors
Rock River Preservation Inc.
PO Box 1095, Brattleboro, VT 05302

