

# VINEYARD CONSERVATION

SPRING 2026



Inside: Sixty Years of Vineyard Conservation • High Impact Development • Leaf Blower Limits • Vineyard Lawns • PFAS Progress • Beauty in the Weeds

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# Welcome to Spring



Out my windows I see a melody in grays and browns, as I sit too far inland to catch any of the sharp blues of the cold season ocean. After many days of deep freeze, the recent temperature upswing has meant days of deep, ethereal fog, the stubbornly frozen ground and fickle mild air steaming over their discord and contrasting temperatures.

In addition to changing temperatures, our astronomy dictates that the days are lengthening, in ways you notice before you can quite name them: evenings and mornings stretching the elastic ends of each day. At VCS we can feel the season coming, because it is one of our busiest stretches of the year. The Earth Day Beach Clean-Up is just around the corner, followed by our student art and writing contest, the Memorial Day environmental film festival, and eventually our annual meeting in June. Interspersed between are six annual town meetings, where voters are empowered to directly make decisions guiding the future of the Vineyard.

With all that ahead, I hope this moment offers space and lightness on this seasonally-lopsided, summer-intense island. Whether you are here now, or arriving later, I hope you can sit and read these pages with a long cup of tea and deep breaths. Early spring days offer the rare gift of combined meditation and anticipation.

This particular year has marked a 60<sup>th</sup> birthday for VCS, quietly celebrated more in our own soul searching than any specific event. Moments like this offer the chance to reflect, and I hope you enjoy the memories we have highlighted at the end of this newsletter. There is inspiration in remembering old accomplishments, and lessons to be learned from the challenges. It puts today's work in a broader context.

Importantly, this is also a time for looking forward. What are our next 60 years? How are we serving the Island environment and community in the days ahead? We have hard and necessarily mindful choices ahead. A word I use too often these days is "complexity" – because our local environmental issues are increasingly complex. Land equals opportunity. But, is that opportunity residential development? Community infrastructure? Business potential? Or is it resource protection: wildlife habitat, climate change mitigation, and strengthening a spiritual connection to natural beauty? And for each of these, where and how much, and who decides? This is where VCS digs in, shows up, and is committed to putting our energy now, and in the years ahead. As our community engages in the dialogue that will chart our future, we are committed to being an increasingly active, informed, and relentless voice for the environment.

In practice this looks like a diverse spectrum of work, from passing new bylaws, to working with students, to sharing a flat calm morning with neighbors on a Winter Walk, and many more activities. I hope you enjoy the glimpse of our recent efforts in the pages ahead. We are always available at our Wakeman Conservation Center offices to chat about our work. It is our passion. We love to share it.

We also love to hear from you, to be informed by your experiences of living here and loving this place. At our last Annual Meeting we asked each of you to reflect on where you thought the Island was headed. What are your priorities? How do we feel about our conservation gains? We share a few of your observations and concerns below.

Nature. The Island. The environment. However you refer to it, it is our most essential home. It is our shared responsibility and our most basic and critical form of security. Stewarding it wisely and bravely is the most powerful thing we do. This is the air we breathe, water we drink, land we tend, the earth supporting our homes. Its endangerment or protection is our own. We look forward to carrying the work forward with all of you.

*Samantha Look, Executive Director*

PS: Mark your calendar for this year's Annual Meeting, June 30<sup>th</sup> at Stillpoint!



*“ Slow growth by protection of land  
Lawns are too green, especially near ponds  
Climate change  
Support large house size limits  
Implement a building moratorium  
Pass more water use policies  
Soon beyond carrying capacity  
Need to limit growth and summer traffic  
Overstressed infrastructure,  
especially wastewater and drinking water  
Commodification of the Vineyard,  
loss of the Island Way ”*

## Early Spring

Steel wool wind  
scours gray water.  
Black bird fans  
red and oranges sparks  
on his wings.

— Warren Woessner

*VCS Poet Laureate Warren Woessner is a former member of our Board of Directors. His most recent book is Exit~Sky.*

## Welcome Arch & Lucas

Previously a summer resident, **Arch Smith** and wife Gay moved to their Tisbury home in 2015 following Arch's retirement from Trinity-Pawling School in New York. As a chemistry teacher there, Arch wore many additional hats: coaching soccer, skiing, and tennis, running dormitories, supervising college placement, and, for the last 25 years of his career, as headmaster. In that role, he became the school's lead fundraiser, helping raise more than \$60 million in support of scholarships, campus restoration and enhancement, and endowment. Upon moving to the Vineyard, Arch put those skills to work for the Vineyard Haven Library, serving as Chair of the Trustees, and of a new 501(c)3 nonprofit created to raise funds for construction of a program space for 100 patrons. With an educational background in biology (BS, Trinity College) and chemistry (MALS, Wesleyan University), Arch emphasized environmentally-conscious practices for the Library project, including energy efficiency and minimizing microplastics. In joining the VCS Board of Directors, he plans to commit his skills to help protect the natural beauty of the Vineyard from the harms that have befallen so many other special places.

We are also thrilled to welcome **Lucas Thors** to the VCS staff as our new Programming and Communications Coordinator. We knew Lucas from his previous work at the *MV Times*, where he covered everything from town government to education to local events. However, it was environmental issues that intrigued him most, through reporting on responsible land use, innovative renewable energy technologies, local composting efforts, and more. Following the *Times*, he moved on to *Bluedot Living Magazine*, where he was able to dig even deeper into environmental issues.

Lucas grew up on Martha's Vineyard before attending Keene State College, where he earned his bachelor's degree in English and Multimedia Journalism in 2018. But it was his childhood spent outdoors, exploring and getting lost in the forests and marshes of the Vineyard, that eventually inspired him to pursue a career in environmental advocacy. Lucas is currently managing our public programming across many initiatives, as well as the Island Climate Action Network email newsletter and VCS social media.

*Welcome to the team, Arch and Lucas!*

# VCS News Round-Up

## ADVOCACY UPDATE: HIGH-IMPACT DEVELOPMENT

Over the past year, the MV Commission has been reviewing three unusually large development proposals, weighing their benefits and detriments, and ultimately deciding whether to approve, deny, or add conditions to the project. VCS has offered testimony on all three:

- **Edgartown Gardens** would have developed 55 to 57 condo units at the Donaroma's property at the Triangle in Edgartown. The proposal, which sought to exploit the state's Chapter 40B statute to overpower local opposition, was denied by the MVC in December. Prior to that, the applicant filed suit against the Commission, arguing that it is a "local board," not the regional planning agency it has long been understood to be, and thus has no authority to review their project. That litigation is ongoing.
- **Green Villa**, another 40B project from the same developer, proposes a dense apartment complex of 116 units, some to be sold to businesses for rental to employees and some sold directly to residents, for a roughly 8-acre parcel near the high school and YMCA on Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road. Unlike Edgartown Gardens, the majority of units here would be affordable housing.
- **Katama Meadows** proposes a suburban-style subdivision, on 54 acres near Edgartown Great Pond, consisting of 26 lots for market rate luxury houses, twelve lots restricted to buyers under 250% of Area Median Income, and 14 small lots to be donated to the town, ostensibly for construction of affordable housing. This is the latest iteration of a series of subdivision plans previously known as "Meeting House Place," the last of which was denied by the MVC in 2020. Litigation regarding that decision remains ongoing.

Individually and collectively, these projects will, if ultimately approved in anything like their current form, have an outsized impact on the future of the Island – its environment, economy, and community. The decision by the MVC to deny the first of these to come to a vote is an encouraging sign, but we must not be complacent. With applicants who are ready to litigate any denial (and likely any meaningful conditions as well), imposing significant legal defense costs on the MVC (and ultimately the towns who collect the tax revenue to fund it), the Commission is under great pressure to be accommodating. We need to maintain the powerful show of community opposition that enabled December's courageous decision throughout this unprecedented time of overlarge, inappropriate proposals. VCS will be there testifying on behalf of the Island, but we can't do it alone – join us!

## BRINGING EVERYONE TO THE TABLE

An engaged, informed, and connected community sits at the heart of all effective advocacy work. Over the past year, VCS has been working extra hard to find opportunities to meet Island residents and visitors where they are: out in front of grocery stores, at the farmers market, libraries, and public events. In the non-profit world, we call it "tabling" – after the ever-present fixture of such endeavors – but it is really about people, not

## Taking a Stand

*Excerpts from comments at the public hearing for Edgartown Gardens*

... VCS has testified in opposition to many large development projects over our 60 year history, including a lot that never came to pass: golf courses in the imperiled watersheds of Sengekontacket and Edgartown Great Pond, a series of suburban subdivision plans for Waskosims Rock, and a sprawling shopping center looming over the Tashmo Overlook.

I mention these just to point out that interest in building the wrong thing in the wrong location isn't something new – it's practically a Vineyard tradition, and it is entirely possible and appropriate at times to simply say "no." The current proposal is one of those times....

This project, if built, would add more traffic at the Triangle and more nitrogen to the Edgartown Great Pond, exacerbating two of the town's most serious ongoing problems. More surprising, as designed, it would likely not be effective at accomplishing its stated goal: to provide affordable housing suitable for year-round residents aged 55 and over.... Further, any basic understanding of the Island's real estate market suggests that this condo complex would primarily be creating new vacation properties. With a ratio of just 12 affordable units to 48 non, it offers little benefit to the island's year-round housing shortage, possibly even making it worse because of the increased demand for services from all the new residents and visitors.

*Follow-up written testimony, on impacts of incremental growth:*

During the review process, the applicant has argued in the alternative that even if it were true (which they deny, albeit inconsistently) that their project would exacerbate existing problems, e.g. nitrogen pollution and traffic, the present magnitude of those problems is so large as to make trivial their relative contribution to them. Rhetorically, this has been expressed through the suggestion that it is unfair to limit or deny their proposal because this would be treating them differently – more stringently – than existing sources of traffic on the Island. On a quantitative level, this attitude is reflected in their mitigation offers for wastewater and traffic, for example offering to pay a "fair share" of 1.4% of the cost of road improvements necessitated by the project – a number representing the amount of new traffic created by Edgartown Gardens divided by the total projected traffic at the site (as estimated by an inaccurate traffic study).

There is a certain appeal in this simplistic concept of fairness. Theoretically, all sources of traffic – pre-existing and proposed, business and residential – could pay for road improvements in amounts proportionate to the traffic they generate. We will leave it to the political scientists to decide whether replacing today's transportation funding model with some sort of use tax would truly be fairer. More important here is that this is not at all the way the current system works, so the applicant's "fair share" concept is as unrealistic as it is self-serving.

More fundamentally, the idea that it is unfair or improper to hold new development to higher standards than existing land uses ignores history and undermines a community's ability to plan for its future. It would be unworkable in practice, and unfair in its own right. The plain fact is that this island – its natural resources, community character, and quality of life – is under greater stress now than ever before. Today, when developers bring large proposals before our local and regional boards, they do so in that context. To pretend that a project as overlarge, inappropriate, and deeply unpopular as Edgartown Gardens would not add further pressure to a community that is straining under the weight of unsustainable growth is absurd. In only begrudgingly taking responsibility for a "fair share" of the more easily quantifiable detriments of the project, the applicant demonstrates a lack of understanding of the concerns of the local community.

*Find the rest of our testimony on this and many other issues at our website*

furniture. Making connections works both ways: it's energizing for VCS staff, board, and volunteers when passersby approach and ask what they can do to help, and every resulting conversation reinforces the existing enthusiasm within our community to protect the Island environment.

Thank you to all the local organizations and businesses that have lent us their space to be able to bring as many people to the table as possible.



## VCS JOINS FIRST FRIDAYS

If you came out for First Fridays in Vineyard Haven last summer or fall, you may have seen our Trash Tally trailer down at the end of Owen Park. VCS and the Beach Befrienders have been attending the monthly street fair as one new way of reaching the public. It's a great way to spread the word about programs like Vineyard Lawns and Take Back the Tap, important current events like bylaw campaigns and development reviews, and conservation issues in general. We plan to be there again this year, so next time you're at First Friday stop by the VCS table and get the latest scoop on what we're up to!

## SPIRIT OF THE VINEYARD

Congratulations to Penny Uhlendorf, winner of the 2025 Spirit of the Vineyard award! Presented by Vineyard Village at Home, the award is a well-deserved honor recognizing her extraordinary commitment to community service. An active supporter of many local non-profits, Penny served on our board for nearly two decades, bringing tireless energy, vision, and generosity to every project. In 1992 she helped launch the first annual Earth Day Beach Cleanup, and continued to organize the event for the next twelve years, building it into a beloved Island tradition. Penny also was the key organizer of VCS's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration at the Allen Farm.

Those are but two of the countless contributions Penny made during her long tenure on the board, strengthening both our organization and the Island community. Today, she continues to volunteer with VCS, sharing her warmth, positivity, and steadfast support with everyone she encounters. We are profoundly grateful for her many years of devoted service, and all that she continues to do to make the Vineyard a more resilient, beautiful, and vibrant place for all.

## PFAS PROGRESS

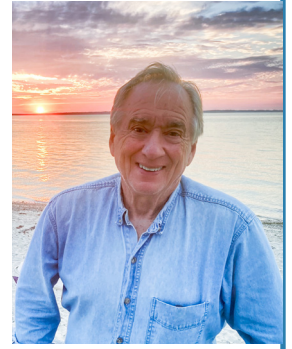
Thanks to a recent grant from the Farm Neck Foundation, we are excited to announce two new programs addressing the growing concern around PFAS contamination of drinking water. Known as "forever chemicals," these common pollutants are especially vexing because of their extreme persistence in the environment. On the educational side, we are beginning a new program to better inform the public of not just the risks of PFAS, but the potential solutions available. The first event, planned for late March, will be a panel discussion with PFAS experts. Second, the new funding has allowed us to purchase new water filters designed to remove PFAS chemicals, which will be a wonderful addition to the "Take Back the Tap" refill station program. So far, we have distributed the new filters to locations in Chilmark, West Tisbury, and Oak Bluffs that are considered most at risk for elevated PFAS levels.



Left: Penny working with the Oak Bluffs Brownies at the 2004 Earth Day Beach Clean-Up; Above: Lucas greeting shoppers outside Cronig's Market

## Time for it All

With the passing of Michael Loberg in early August of 2025, the Island lost one of its most thoughtful, dynamic, and dedicated community servants. After retiring from a long career in the pharmaceutical industry, he and his wife Melinda came to live on the Vineyard, where both dove immediately into the deep end of public service. Michael wore many hats – entrepreneur, scientist, activist – including VCS board member from 2017-2023. He wore all of them well, with humility, kindness, and good humor.



Michael was committed to both public health and protection of the Island's natural environment. He served on the Tisbury Board of Health and managed Vineyard Medical Care for more than ten years. Perhaps his greatest impact on public health will prove to be as the driving force behind the creation of the MV Tick-borne Illness Reduction Initiative, a unique public education effort that continues to grow stronger, and could someday be a model for other communities facing the scourge of tick-borne illness. Michael was also a leader in efforts to bring advanced de-nitrifying septic systems to the Island, pushing successfully for their deployment in the Tashmoo and Lagoon Pond watersheds.

As a member of the VCS board, Michael's skills as a scientist, manager, and innovative thinker were invaluable, as was his passion for the environment. Prior to joining the board he worked with VCS on the development of new regulations to limit lawn fertilizer, which he saw as the low hanging fruit in addressing nitrogen pollution. Longtime friend Joan Malkin, then a board member herself, recalls the collaborative nature of the project: "He pulled together this amazing multidisciplinary, cross-Island team of about 20 people, with experts on golf courses, residential landscaping, you name it ... He was deeply, authentically interested in the Island and everyone who lives here, and when he was behind a cause, there were no detractors."

While a leader in the movement to address nitrogen pollution through innovative technology, Michael was also deeply concerned about the broader environmental impacts of overdevelopment. He often cautioned against the risk of relying too much on nitrogen reduction while allowing growth to continue unfettered. The more fundamental change needed, he said, is to foster "a different set of priorities than those emanating from supply and demand based build-out models, that is, the number of buildable lots times homeowner demand, as a function of price."

We heartily endorse Joan's description of Michael as "a true renaissance man. He was so multifaceted – an entrepreneur, a passionate local advocate, a sailor, and an activist to some extent – all while being an outstanding husband, father, and family man. He really had time for it all." Thank you Michael – we will miss you.

*Thanks also to Joan Malkin and Brendan O'Neill for their contributions to this remembrance*

# Lawns & Leaves: A Year of Natural Progress

Ever since the post-World War II housing boom in the 1940s and '50s, a deep green, manicured lawn has been the iconic status symbol of the American home. The Vineyard, thanks to a confident belief that different – specifically, more natural – is preferable to the ideals of suburbia, resisted the lawn trend for quite a while. But nothing lasts forever. Today, sprawling expanses of Kentucky bluegrass can be found across the Island, from the streets of town centers to the vast fields of green surrounding increasingly huge new houses (another issue VCS is working on!). Most new construction automatically includes laying down turf or seeding a new drought-intolerant lawn that will require large amounts of irrigation and fertilization.

Unfortunately, these lawns are straining our most vital ecological resources: fragmenting habitat, harming pollinators and other wildlife, depleting freshwater resources, and significantly adding to the nitrogen load that is harming the health of the Island's Great Ponds. The Vineyard Lawns initiative seeks to reverse this trend through education and the promotion of alternative options, from eliminating fertilizers and pesticides, to incorporation of hardy native grasses and ornamentals, to simply reducing the size of the mowed area.

This spring and summer, VCS will be holding a number of Vineyard Lawns events in an effort to reach homeowners, landscapers, and lawn care professionals. The first event in March focused on ways to modify current lawn care practices to reduce reliance on irrigation and fertilizer. An April event will look at the cumulative impacts of lawns in destabilizing our local environment, and we plan to wrap up the series with a talk focusing on the many beneficial “weeds” that grow in our yards.

Over the past fall and winter we have been reaching out to our landscaping community, working to build relationships with the experts who are already offering services that align with the Vineyard Lawns mission. One such landscaper is Marcello Meyer, founder of Deep Roots MV, who has been transitioning conventional lawns to meadows, and consulting with local homeowners and landscape companies on taking a healthier approach to lawn care. Marcello was kind enough to do an interview with our staffer Lucas Thors – we hope you enjoy their conversation!!

**Lucas Thors:** What do you envision an ideal Vineyard Lawn to be, and why do you believe in it?

**Marcello Meyer:** The concept of a Vineyard Lawn has been around for a long time. It's a better alternative to what people have his-

torically been looking for. It's better for water bodies, it's better for our bodies. It's better for the soil and for it's much more sustainable in the long term.

When I first started my company, Deep Roots, that was my opportunity to provide that service as a full-blown landscaping service. When someone comes to me, they come to me because I have learned from experience over the years to work with people to make sure they get a balance — a mix of their property looking really nice, but also being healthy, and making good choices for nature in your yard.

**What does it take to successfully create a Vineyard Lawn?**

Any landscaper can do a Vineyard Lawn, it's just they have to have the knowledge, they need to put in the time, and be invested in educating their clients. If a person comes to me and says they want a Vineyard Lawn, I have to be able to tell them what that means. A Vineyard Lawn is not perfect, but then I lay out the benefits to the homeowner, and that is where the issue lies. A lot of people don't have the knowledge to pass on to their clients and get them excited about it.

That is why I am so passionate about educating homeowners, because they can then go to their landscaper and tell them exactly what they want out of their lawn, and exactly what they don't want.

**How does a Vineyard Lawn perform over time?**

A Vineyard Lawn is also incredibly cost-effective once it's been established. You don't need to spend a ton of money fertilizing all the time, constantly mowing and blowing around leaves. The soil conditions are what make the lawn self-sustaining, so once you create that really healthy soil biome, the lawn is much better at taking care of itself.

Some people still want that immaculate, perfectly manicured lawn where there isn't a single blade of grass that's out of place. But that's not natural, and you are going to have to fertilize and apply

fungicides and pesticides and all these chemicals, you're going to have to irrigate an incredible amount just to keep that lawn alive. But a Vineyard Lawn uses hardy native grasses that are resistant to drought, they are resistant to heat and disease, and they are much less labor-intensive.

**You were a very early adopter of electric landscaping equipment. What encouraged you to so readily make the switch from gas to electric?** I have pretty much all electric equipment. Blowers and trimmers, chainsaws and pole saws, electric mowers, even some brush cutting. I try to not



It's a Blue Ribbon for Vineyard Lawns! Many thanks to interns Alex Rego and Rachel Salop, and new regular staffer Lucas Thors, for putting together a prize-winning display for the 2025 Ag Fair.



use gas powered equipment unless I absolutely have to.

People ask me if it's expensive, yes at the beginning it can definitely be more expensive than gas. But there are incredible improvements in longevity for batteries, durability, and power output. In 2026 I am going to invest in electric and solar panels and solar chargers to charge all my equipment. For this winter my plan is to have my full setup with a mobile charging station ready to charge all my equipment.

After I buy all my electric gear, I no longer have to worry about whether my crew is mixing the correct ratio of mixed gas for a blower, that's a variable that people don't think about, but it's something to consider. With the electric equipment I almost never have any issues with maintenance.

I don't have to buy gasoline as much, that's the upside. Also, it's a misconception when people say electric equipment doesn't work the same. Of course, it's the battery aspect of it. But when a machine is fully charged, it's ready to do the same job as a gas blower. I have enough batteries where I can easily run a crew for the entire day on just electric gear.

#### How do clients and your crew respond to electric equipment?

My clients like the fact that there is minimal noise. I had cases this summer where I was running against time and I had to do some work on the weekend for clients, and they were worried about the noise when they are trying to relax on their Saturday or Sunday, I assured them that there is virtually no noise, we will show up and then leave and you'll hardly know we were there.

Not only is the noise mitigation good for clients, but my crew doesn't have their heads pounding at the end of the day because of all that noise from the gas blowers. It makes a huge difference when you add up all the hours that you are exposed to that really high decibel noise. Yes, the electric blowers make noise, but not nearly as loud as gas-powered ones.

#### How did your shift to electric equipment align with the ethos of your company?

My whole philosophy of electric equipment started with me talking to people, and that's how this whole thing started. People told me this is what they want, and there isn't anybody providing it. A lot of people told me the same thing, that gas is out and electric is in, it's becoming an industry norm, it's becoming a

societal norm. People think it's an MV thing, but it is becoming more popular around the country. Many clients are willing to pay a little more, but they don't have to deal with the noise, they know that they are helping the local environment.

### LEAF BLOWER BYLAW UPDATE

Last year, voters across the Island sent a clear message in support of cleaner air and reduced carbon emissions – along with preserving some measure of peace and quiet – when they approved at Town Meeting new regulations to address the problems caused by the increasingly excessive use of leaf blowers. Limits on the days, times, and seasons in which leaf blowers may be used took effect last fall, and eventually, in spring 2028, gas-powered blowers will be banned entirely.

With the new regulations in effect, the priority now is to spread the word to landscapers and homeowners. Though the issue garnered a lot of attention during Town Meeting season, there are still many leaf blower users who are unaware of the new rules or confused about the details. VCS has created a postcard with information (in Portuguese and English) on the new rules. The postcard, pictured below, will be available at town halls as well as our office; more information, including resources for making the transition to electric lawn equipment, can be found by scanning the QR code. In addition, several of the town-level organizers who were so essential in winning passage of the bylaw last year are now working on creating their own materials to support education in their town.

**Vineyard Lawns Visits**  
 Are you interested in having VCS bring the Vineyard Lawns message directly to your neighborhood/road/homeowners' association? We are always excited to visit new neighborhoods, answer questions, and provide resources. Contact our office to schedule a presentation for your community!



### Leaf Blower regulations are in effect.

Beginning Fall 2025, the following restrictions apply to leaf blower use in the towns of West Tisbury, Tisbury, Oak Bluffs, and Edgartown for both homeowners and commercial operators, and in Chilmark for commercial operators only.

#### Gas-powered and Electric leaf blowers may only be used during the following times:

- **Mon through Fri: 8:00am–5:00pm**
- **Sat: 10:00am-5:00pm (8am-5pm in Edg.)**
- **Sun & Federal Holidays:**
  - **WT & OB - No gas or electric leaf blower use**
  - **Tisbury: No gas leaf blower use**
  - **Edgartown & Chilmark: No gas or electric leaf blower use for commercial operators**
- **No more than 2 leaf blowers may be used simultaneously on the same property.**

Restrictions only apply to gas-powered leaf blowers in VH  
Restrictions only apply to commercial operators in Chilmark

#### Gas-powered leaf blowers may only be used during the following dates:

Spring clean-up: Mar 15 through May 31  
Fall clean-up: Oct 15 through Jan 15



**Remember:** Gas-powered leaf blowers are **completely banned** starting Spring 2028. For tips and resources on transitioning to electric, scan QR code on this card.

# Inspiring a New Generation of Vineyard Conservationists

## CONGRATS SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

We're thrilled to announce the winners of the inaugural edition of the Blum Family–VCS Environmental Scholarship, a new program dedicated to empowering young Island leaders as they pursue studies in conservation, sustainability, and environmental science. Awards of \$2,500 toward tuition went to three outstanding high school seniors, **Annabelle Metell**, **Quinlan Slavin**, and **Holden Brew**, along with returning college scholar **Charles Porterfield**. Their scholarships recognize not just the students' exemplary academic and community achievements, but their commitment to protecting the natural world. Board member **Jennifer Blum**, in developing the new program along with husband **Jonathan**, described the goal as "to inspire future careers in conservation, and to nurture a lifelong love of the environment ... we're thrilled to support these students as they deepen their education and explore their passion for the planet."

The program has been slightly revised for 2026, with eligibility now focused on Vineyard high school students only, with awards of \$1,000/year for four years. We look forward to announcing this year's round of scholars at Scholarship Night, June 5<sup>th</sup>.

## THANK YOU, ALEX & RACHEL!

VCS internships offer college and graduate students a unique opportunity to gain hands-on experience working at the intersection of environmental protection, local decision-making, research, and public communications. Last summer, we were very fortunate to welcome two outstanding interns, Alex Rego and Rachel Salop, in the first year of the newly-created Virginia Jones Internship in Civic Leadership and Environmental Advocacy. Their enthusiasm, curiosity, and dedication enriched every project they touched.

## Honoring Ginny, Supporting the Future

A long-time VCS board member, Virginia "Ginny" Jones was deeply devoted to protecting the natural world and rural character of Martha's Vineyard. A true pillar of the Island community, Ginny was dedicated to public service, believing that meaningful change happens when informed, passionate people engage in the civic process. While being a tireless advocate for the environment, she was equally committed to supporting Island youth – encouraging curiosity, the development of leadership, and boosting their confidence to speak up for what matters.

This summer, we are very proud to again be able to add two young people to the VCS team through the awarding of the Virginia (Ginny) Jones Internships in Civic Leadership and Environmental Advocacy. In combining those two essential skills and values, these paid internships are meant to honor Ginny's life and legacy while offering students hands-on experience working with a local conservation advocacy organization. We are especially grateful to the Jones Family, whose support has helped us extend these opportunities.

At the 2025 MVRHS Class Night at the Tabernacle, **Annabelle Metell**, **Broden Vincent**, and **Quinlan Slavin** (L-R) receive the good news from VCS Executive Director **Sam Look**.



**Alex Rego** runs the numbers for the pop-up Trash Tally at this year's Ag Fair. Asked about her experience with VCS, Alex said, "I am so grateful to be part of a legacy of impassioned stewardship that has been pushing the envelope for generations"

## COMMUNITY YOUTH AMBASSADORS

Ever since the beginning, young people have always been a vital part of the annual Earth Day Beach Clean-Up. Now the kids are making waves throughout the year with a set of new volunteer opportunities, including monthly beach clean-ups and the creation of DIY kits to be shared through Island libraries. Volunteering offers a fun and

engaging way for young Islanders to connect with the natural world, learn about marine ecosystems, and experience the tangible impact of helping to protect our shores. A heartfelt thank you to our young marine stewards!

## LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCE

The Beach Befrienders team had a blast last year in partnering with students from the Experiential Learning program at MV Public Charter School. Together we tackled beach cleanups and the logging of trash collection data, all while folding in topical environmental lessons along the way. Team leader **Laurisa Rich** noted that educational programs like these are essential to building a full understanding of how plastics and other marine debris affect our beaches – and our daily lives.

This year, we're excited to expand the program to include students from K-12. Offerings will range from climate activism workshops for older students to outdoor exploration and hands-on learning for the younger cohort. Our goal is to grow this into an Island-wide program that provides lasting environmental mentorship opportunities at all local schools.

## FINDING BEAUTY IN THE WEEDS

The Art of Conservation returned in 2025 with a fresh theme, *Beauty in the Weeds*, and a record number of winning entries. Inspiration for the theme grew out of recent VCS initiatives, including the Plant Local collaboration with BiodiversityWorks, Polly Hill Arboretum, and the MV Commission, as well as our ongoing Vineyard Lawns campaign. In asking students to examine the idea of a "weed," we invited them to reflect on the plants that are routinely dismissed – and to consider why. Who defines perfection in our landscapes, and why do

those norms hold so much power? What happens when we challenge them? Through their art and writing, students explored these questions with insight and creativity, helping broaden not only their own perspectives but also those of everyone who viewed their work.

Congratulations to all the winners, and a heartfelt thanks to every student who contributed to one of our strongest collections yet. For visual arts, **Anina Garvin, Jackson Munson, Antonina Kaluzna, Tripp Arciaga** (see back cover), **Anthony Smith, Clara Rabeni** (front cover), **Tahirah Waite, Sophie Winters**, and **Shealyn Smyth** took home First Place prizes, **Oscar Flanders, Anthony Da Silva, Dejana Gentry, Chloe Cook, Bryan Fernandes, Tatiene Marcelino, Heitor deOliveira Vargas**, and **Lauren Sedlier** were awarded Special Distinctions, and **Tevin Araujo** and **Madeleine Coulter** were recognized as VCS Staff Picks. In addition, this year's contest saw many winners emerge from an extraordinary collection of writing entries. **Gabriela Cuadros-Preston, Hope Federowicz, Kellry Aredes**, and **Theo Harding** all took First Place honors, **Casey Webster, Charlotte Marshard**, and **Chloe**



Community Youth Ambassadors from VCS share DIY beach clean-up kits at a Beach Befrienders event

**Cook** received Special Distinction awards, and **Maria Xavier, Adriana Young, Jacoby Harris**, and **Rebeccak Deoliveira** were selected as VCS Staff Picks.

Special thanks are due to the many helping hands who made this year's contest a smashing success, especially contest judges **Linsey Lee, Ray Ewing**, and **Vicki Riskin** for visual arts, along with **Scarlet Johnson, Jeffrey Scheuer, Laura Wainwright**, and **Whit Griswold** for writing; MVRHS teachers **Chris Baer, Elsbeth Todd, Brendan Coogan, Christine Ferrone**, and **Tiffiney Shoquist**; guest mentor artists **Doug Allen** and **Tim Bolland**; and the VCS AoC committee, **Jeff Agnoli, Susan Feller, Joan Malkin**, and **Susie White**. A big round of applause also for **Featherstone Center for the Arts** for curating the show, and the **MV Film Society** for displaying the art and hosting the awards ceremony and reception as part of the *Nature as Inspiration* film festival. Thank you all!



The MV Film Center once again hosted the Art of Conservation awards ceremony and opening show. Above: Tahirah White with her First Place drawing, "Weeds Everywhere!" Below, Hope Federowicz, First Place winner for writing, joins Tevin Araujo in front of his VCS Staff Pick, "Entangled" (photo by Dena Porter for the MV Times)



## Reflections: My Time at VCS

by Rachel Salop

I began working at VCS as an intern the summer after my junior year of college as an inexperienced barely-twenty-year-old who knew nothing about the field — outside of the fact that I wanted, someday, to follow a lifelong calling to work towards protecting the planet. VCS seemed like the perfect opportunity to combine what I was learning at school with a deep-rooted appreciation for the beautiful island that I'd grown up on, as the unique experience of being raised on Martha's Vineyard has always fueled my desire to protect our natural spaces at home and across the planet.

My first summer at VCS was an amazing experience. I quickly learned how to create Beach Befriender Kits, stuff envelopes, and correspond with island characters over email about all sorts of environmental matters — all critical life skills, but ones that I'd had little exposure to in the past. I built experience working in my first real office environment and found role models in three fantastic women. I'll always admire Sam, Signe, and Zada for their leadership and creativity, and the kindness they showed me and wisdom they shared with me as I navigated my first real internship.

Outside of hands-on professional experience, I also finally began to understand the reach of organizations like VCS. Whether driving

across the island to install Vineyard Lawns signs or assisting in single-use plastic audits in the towns to evaluate whether local businesses were complying with the new bylaws, I realized that organizations like VCS, despite being relatively small in terms of staff, wear many very important hats.

I developed a foundation of understanding the work that environmental protectors and stewards do, the fight that must be fought on many different fronts, and the importance of versatility and perseverance in this work. Environmental protection and conservation is a long game, maybe the longest game, and what may feel like a few small gains at a time amount to considerable change in the long run. This was an imperative realization in the face of the climate-doom that many in my generation have grown up with, and it lit a fire under me to realize that as long as there are organizations like VCS fighting the important battles, all hope is not close to being lost.



Rachel at graduation from George Washington University



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## LAND CONSERVATION SOCIETY

### Why all the fuss about Wetlands?

Why the Vineyard Needs a Stronger Land Use Law

### Critical Land At Headwater Is Conserved

By RICHARD STRADLING  
The Martha's Vineyard Land Bank, in a cooperative effort with the Vineyard Conservation Society, will purchase an 18.4-acre tract of land in the headwaters of the Mill Brook in Chilmark.  
The purchase is part of an ongoing effort by conservation interests to protect the waters that flow into the Tisbury Great Pond, and marks the first time the land bank has worked with a private conservation group to secure a piece of property.



### LEGAL DEFENSE



Timeline of events:

- Frances Preserve
- Moshup Trail project begins
- Creation of Conservation Partnership
- Walking Trails of M.V. 1<sup>st</sup> Edition
- Southern Woodlands protected after four years of "Golf Wars"
- First "ponds in Peril" forum
- First Art of Conservation contest
- Supreme Judicial Court affirms protection of Moshup Trail lands
- Plastic bag ban passes in sixth Island town
- Artificial turf advocacy
- Big house bylaw in West Tisbury
- Leafblower bylaw
- Polly Hill Arboretum preserved
- Collaboration on Wild and Scenic North Shore District of Critical Planning Concern
- Vineyard Lawns initiative begins
- First annual Nature as Inspiration film festival
- Water bottle refill station initiative begins
- "Love it-Protect-it-MV" community art project
- High impact development advocacy ramps up at MVC



Forest Bike Paths 6/22/13  
Trails Are Extended to Parallel Two Highways  
Officials from state agencies, county commissions, town boards, and...

VCS Would Create Park  
The Vineyard Conservation Society would like to turn the former Convery property on... of the... may be... an...

...society Creates New Legal Fund for Conservation  
...move unprecedented on the Vineyard Conservation Society announced this week that it has had a legal defense fund aimed at bringing present and future conservation battles in the courts.  
...conservation society will use the fund for environmental and legal costs related to lawsuits involving conservation...

BRING YOUR OWN ONE ISLAND ONE OCEAN

GAZETTE  
Devoted to the interests of the six towns on the Island of Martha's Vineyard, viz.: Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, Tisbury, West Tisbury, Chilmark and Gay Head. These, with Gomoid, constitute Dukes County.

VEINEYARD, MASS., FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1988

Harris P. Frames Vineyard Views

Island in Troubled Water  
Public Believes Island Life Faltering; Citizens Blame Reckless Growth In Harris Opinion Poll Study

By JULIA WELLS  
Gazette senior writer

VAST MAJORITY of Martha's Vineyard residents — both seasonal and year-round — believe that life in this island community is being destroyed, broken, and irrevocably changed by development, according to a new Harris opinion poll study. By 82 to 16 per cent, a substantial majority of the 11



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Front cover: "Dancing Weeds" by Clara Rabeni | Below: "Dead River Full of Life" by Tripp Arciaga  
*Two First Place winners from the 2025 Art of Conservation: Beauty in the Weeds*

