



## Piecing Together A CONSERVATION MOSAIC

DLC's retiring executive director reviews the joy of conservancy partnerships *By Dave Cable*

One of the greatest joys of my conservation career has been to partner with people who have a love of land and commitment to conservation—people with a long-term view, understanding we merely borrow nature so precious lands can be passed on, not exploited. The late Frank A. Chester Jr. had such a view and made his vision a reality last year by conserving 209 acres of his farm in perpetuity.

Like Frank Chester, the Bragg family shares a commitment and dedication to conservation. I first met Frank Bragg in 2004 when I joined Catawba Lands Conservancy and have since worked with him on many excellent conservation projects—all joyful experiences.

The Bragg family has been dedicated to and active in land conservation for over 25 years, spearheaded by Frank's leadership and vision. The Braggs and their neighbors have assembled a mosaic of over 800 acres of connected conservation land along McAuley Road and Route 73 in Huntersville, adjacent to and south of Davidson. This preserve of farm and forest land defines the northerly edge of the Ramah Creek Conservation Area, securing unmatched conservation quality for generations to come.

Last December, DLC was honored to work with Phillips and Leslie Bragg to put another piece of the mosaic in



*Leslie and Phillips Bragg conserved their Washam Farm South property, continuing a family commitment to preserving natural lands.*

place, with the conservation of their Washam Farm South property along the rapidly urbanizing Route 73 corridor. Now filling an important gap in the Ramah Creek conservation area, the project increases the Ramah Creek conservation area to 830 acres, most of which are protected by conservation easements held by Catawba Lands Conservancy, a sister and partnering agency with DLC. Washam Farm South, a beautiful 54-acre, mostly forested tract, offers wildlife habitat and water quality protection. The rolling land is partitioned by a tributary to Ramah Creek.

Phillips and Leslie are committed to managing the land for wildlife, envisioning farming and possible agri-tourism on adjacent land. In addition to protecting wildlife, this project preserves water quality of Ramah Creek, part of the Clarke Creek Watershed feeding the larger Yadkin River.

Conservationists understand stewardship and the power of permanent conservation as a deeply meaningful legacy. Phillips said, "My father says 'the only truly permanent thing I have accomplished is to conserve land.' We understand now what he means."



Davidson Lands Conservancy is a local land trust dedicated to conserving and stewarding land and to promoting a conservation ethic. DLC advances its mission with education and through programs of land conservation, trails and greenways, urban forestry, and preservation of wildlife habitat.

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- **Expand Greenways & Trails**
- **Preserve Wildlife Habitat**

**FROM THE BOARD**

**Thank You, Dave**



Soon after Dave Cable began to volunteer with DLC, his experience with and passion for the natural world became evident. Volunteers and professionals alike welcomed his informed vision for the Conservancy and convinced him to take its helm in 2020.

Dave took this good nonprofit gently by the scruff of the neck, clearly defined its mission, and engaged broad leadership to build a process for effective and sustainable outcomes. Key to safeguarding the quality of life in Davidson were the

health of our tree canopy, creating and stewarding trails, parks, and wildlife habitat, promoting environmental citizenship, and permanent conservation of land.

Along the way, Dave's determination and gift for collaborative engagement inspired a range of partners to join the DLC mission. Town and corporate leaders and Davidson College faculty, staff, and students joined in as volunteers in projects, events, daily operations, and on the board.

Knowing the importance of certifying DLC as a nationally accredited land trust, Dave took steps to make that happen. With kind tenacity and an affirming leadership style, he brought compatriots on board to help communicate the imperative of the Conservancy mission. With an educated board, updated website, and an informative newsletter, visibility and support increased significantly.

Understanding the necessity of resources to purchase land and manage administrative costs of such transactions, Dave initiated and ran a successful mini campaign to fund these expenses. In 2022, DLC launched Now & Forever, an ongoing major campaign that will secure the effectiveness and sustainability of today's thriving Conservancy.

With authenticity and good humor, Dave made friends. He visited potential donors and conservators, raising comfort levels and demystifying the details of protecting land. Scores of hours resulted in hundreds of permanently conserved acres—and those new friends.

Today, Dave can proudly hand over the keys to a maturing organization that reflects not only his grasp of conservancy values, but also his ability to rally the community in defense of Davidson's quality of life. We are inspired and grateful, and happy that he won't be a stranger.

Finally, we know this truly humble human will hate such a tribute. Sorry, Dave!



# The Year of the CITIZEN STEWARD

Harnessing the talents of DLC supporters

Dave Cable likes to say that DLC “punches above our weight,” because the organization advances conservation goals with a relatively small staff and budget. It’s true, largely thanks to our deep pool of skilled and dedicated supporters. Their contributions have made possible our significant growth in all areas of conservation. Because of this, we are launching the Year of the Citizen Steward. Through three programs, and more to come, we are encouraging supporters to become invested in both the science and service of conservation.

## Initial Citizen Stewardship offerings:

- **Citizen Science Stream Restoration:** This pilot program

is a partnership with Davidson College’s Environmental Studies program to study the effects of stream restoration projects occurring around the West Branch of Rocky River. Volunteer stewards will collect environmental data through a weekly survey program.

- **Chronologs:** DLC recently installed five Chronolog stations at Fisher Farm Park to chronicle changes in the river. The Chronologs allow anyone with a cell phone to take a photo of the river and submit it to be included in a time lapse that illustrates changes in the river.
- **Trail Stewards:** Ensuring well-built and sustainable local trails is a vital part of conservation



efforts. Doing this work takes a network of Trail Stewards who can lead volunteer groups for projects at properties like Fisher Farm Park and Beaty Park.

If you are interested in participating in these programs, please contact Carly at [carly@davidsonlands.org](mailto:carly@davidsonlands.org).



## STERLING MARTIN

### A Lifetime of Achievement in Conservation

At the 2024 Conservation Celebration, DLC presented Sterling Martin with its first ever Lifetime Achievement award in recognition of his profound impact on conservation. Sterling helped advance almost every aspect of the

DLC mission. Each of the Four Pillars has been strengthened through his humble determination and commitment to excellence.

Sterling’s involvement with DLC began in 2002 when he joined the Board of Directors, becoming board president in 2007. He spent years as an integral part of the Land Acquisition committee and is responsible, along with Roy Alexander, in preserving the West Branch Wetland.

He was also instrumental in establishing the Lake Davidson Nature Preserve. His leadership and commitment to archery paved the way for the new archery range at Fisher Farm Park.

One of Sterling’s greatest contributions to DLC is the intersection of his passion and profession as a track coach, where he helped establish and manage Run For Green. You can find him out on the course on race day, long before the sun rises, setting up water stops and hammering in signs. He is there at the start and stays on course, cheering the last runners as they cross the finish line.

Sterling Martin is an outstanding contributor, leader, and dear friend to conservation and to DLC. Though the last to accept credit, Sterling is a strong, steady voice, reminding us of the vital importance of conservation and the selfless, dedicated effort it requires.

# Collaboration Powers WILDLIFE & RESTORATION

Restoring nature from years of assault is complicated business *By Dave Cable*



Before English settlers arrived on our continent, the Catawba Nation had practiced sustainable stewardship in our region for 10,000 years, using fire to manage the land and habitat. Early explorers commented on large, open prairies with wildlife and grazing bison. European farming techniques introduced in the 1700s were unsuited for the highly erodible soils of the Piedmont. Land clearing and farming, massive forest cutting, conversion of prairies to farmland, and the introduction of invasive plants and animals with no native predators upset nature's delicate checks and balances.

DLC now leads a partnership to restore Fisher Farm and Abersham Park for wildlife and biodiversity. The engine is the Wildlife Enhancement Collaborative (WEC), fueled by experts from the Town, Davidson College, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Mecklenburg County, and the community.

WEC's vision is to advance and demonstrate sustainable uses for the land, permanently conserve and manage these parks, and increase ecological diversity while balancing conservation with human enjoyment. Over the last year, WEC developed a science-based management plan for the parks, designed not only to improve habitat for biodiversity but also to model ecological stewardship for the public.

Here are just some of their recent advances:

- Management of invasive plants in targeted areas
- Treatment of a fescue field toward restoring a native prairie
- Researching the West Branch Rocky River and forest biodiversity
- Expanding milkweed cultivation areas
- Enhancing hiking trails for sustainability
- Quantifying pollinators and other insects for baseline data
- Signage about the WEC's work and its importance.

Davidson faculty and students will be involved in the research. Biology Department Chair Kevin Smith said, "My research students have always loved getting to know local biodiversity and collecting and analyzing data, but working with DLC and WEC brought their engagement to a new level. They feel they are doing something that matters, because it positively affects the local environment and community."

## Wildlife Enhancement Collaborative

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The work of Davidson Lands Conservancy is only possible because of strong community support and partnerships. Through monetary gifts and volunteer efforts, you have profoundly advanced conservation and DLC's mission. Thank you!

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*The traditional indigenous practice of intercropping beans, corn and squash.*

# Forging **NEW PATHS**

## A Budding Partnership between DLC and the Catawba Nation

By Ty Cryan, Davidson College Environmental Science '24

The three sisters, the indigenous practice of intercropping corn, beans, and squash, thrive in partnership. Beans fix nitrogen into the soil allowing the stalk of the corn to grow to support its weight while the leafy squash suppresses weeds and retains soil moisture. These sisters sustained the Americas' Indigenous peoples for thousands of years, balancing reciprocity with each other and the earth.

Davidson Lands Conservancy and the Catawba Nation have recently established the foundation of a mutually beneficial partnership. While still

in the early stages, there are plans for shared land access, sustainable harvest of traditional resources, and educational programs related to the land and its history. Land trusts, such as DLC, are now trusted by the public to conserve and steward land historically stolen from Indigenous people. DLC is committed to supporting and listening to Indigenous voices to enhance our mission of conserving and stewarding the land.

To inform best practices, the Davidson College Biology and Environmental Studies departments

and the Catawba Nation collaborated to assess the biodiversity of the Catawba Wildlife Preserve. The report emphasized future stewardship to address invasive species and foster habitat for hunting and gathering. The project contributes to the Catawba Nation's efforts to become a food sovereign nation—producing, distributing, and consuming their food, rather than engaging with the corporate food system. While DLC values land for recreation and its healthy ecosystem, it shares with the Catawba Nation the desire to protect the land to support a sustainable future.

The first step in forging a partnership is the adoption of a Land Acknowledgement Statement, or a written statement acknowledging the past, present, and future stewardship of land by Indigenous peoples. As a community-focused, environmental land trust that emphasizes a holistic approach to conservation, improving the life of our community is at the forefront of the DLC mission.

DLC programs benefit all members of the greater community. Now, in partnership with the Catawba Nation, DLC has the opportunity to help rectify past injustice and move forward together.

### **VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR**

DLC recognized **Ty Cryan** as 2023 Volunteer of the Year for his contributions to the Conservancy's mission. A board member since 2021, Ty led our DEI efforts and drafted our Land Acknowledgement Statement. He has been a tireless ambassador for Davidson Lands whose impact will be felt for years to come. We congratulate Ty on his graduation from Davidson College in May, though he will be greatly missed.



# Mark Your CALENDARS

DLC NatureFest is coming and it's better than ever

By *Cindy McIntosh, DLC Board member*

Snakes and lizards, owls and hawks, bees, and butterflies are just some of the critters who plan to attend the DLC Spring NatureFest, an event children and families look forward to each year. Our third annual celebration of wildlife and conservation will be held at Davidson's Town Green on Saturday, May 18, from 10 am to noon.

Local conservation partners, Davidson College scientists, Woodlawn's STEAMfest, World of Wonder, and native-plant experts will gather on the Green to share their knowledge of wildlife and native habitats. Nature-themed crafts, games, live animals, interactive displays of animal skeletons and fur pelts, insects, trees, and monarch butterflies will thrill kids of all ages.

This free event is a great way to explore the natural world as it awakens for spring. From beekeepers to riverkeepers, raptors to backyard birds, there will be plenty of fun activities to engage the whole family. Area schools' science programs have

also been invited to join the fun with conservation-minded projects.

And come hungry—we have invited food trucks to participate! Rain date: Sunday, May 19, from 1 to 3 pm.



*A budding conservationist enjoys NatureFest 2023.*



## UPDATE

### Now & Forever Campaign

DLC Board member John Griffith chairs the Now & Forever campaign to raise \$1,750,000 to advance the Conservancy's mission and ensure the land we conserve in our region today will forever be open and wild.

"As of March 1, thanks to our generous supporters, we've recorded gifts and pledges of \$1,350,000 toward our ambitious goal," said Griffith. "Resources from Now & Forever will allow DLC to conserve more land, add greenways and tree canopy, protect our wildlife habitat, and connect more residents and families to nature. Additional community support will get us to the mountain top."

## NEWSLETTER: OPT TO DIGITAL

Spreading the good word about conservation can be a tricky pursuit. While it is vital to keep our supporters informed and educated, it is equally important to have minimal impact on natural resources. For years we have blended these two goals with a monthly, digital email and a bi-annual hardcopy newsletter. Some supporters have indicated they want to receive both communications digitally, so we offer you a choice.

If you would like to continue to receive our bi-annual newsletter by mail, do nothing—we'll gladly continue to send it to you. However, if you'd rather receive this newsletter digitally, simply follow this QR code to a simple form with the option to receive it via email going forward.



To participate or learn more about Now & Forever, visit [DavidsonLands.org](https://DavidsonLands.org).

# DAVIDSON LANDS CONSERVANCY



P.O. Box 1952  
Davidson, NC 28036

## Welcome, Beth Wytiaz!

In March, DLC announced the appointment of Beth Wytiaz as its new executive director, formally beginning her role in late April. Living in Davidson's River Run neighborhood with her husband, Jay, and three rescue pets—pups Indie and Justice and Liberty the cat—Beth looks forward to her purposeful involvement in their community.

**"It's a tremendous honor to step into leading this organization."**

Her love of the outdoors began in Southern California, camping with her family and spending summers at her grandparents' Oregon farm. While pursuing her master's in environmental studies, she was inspired by nature writers like Henry David Thoreau and Annie Dillard. Working the last 14 years in corporate sustainability with Bank of America, she developed environmental strategies and education programs for employees and supported the development of new wind and solar projects across the U.S., including here in North Carolina.

"It's a tremendous honor to step into leading this organization," she says, "and I'm grateful to Dave Cable for his mentoring through the transition. While I've had extensive environmental experience, the work of DLC will challenge me as I expand my knowledge of native flora and fauna and focus on the details of conserving and stewarding land, our urban forest and native habitat."

"DLC is fortunate to be in Beth's creative and experienced hands," said Dave. "She's passionate about our mission, a consummate pro, and a delightful human being."



PHOTO BY HOLLY PARKER PHOTOGRAPHY

Read DLC's full announcement of Beth Wytiaz's appointment on [davidsonlands.org](https://www.davidsonlands.org).