

The History of the MacKay Wildlife Preserve by Barry Ganzhorn Sr.

Howdy folks. The object over the next few weeks is to bring you along with me on a journey to the birth of the MacKay Wildlife Preserve and the Richard D. Thomas Handicap Accessible overlook. A lot happened and I want to share it all with you. I plan to do just that over the next several issues.

Chapter One – Prelude to an Idea

It was in September 1999 that all of a sudden I was receiving more complaints about sick looking fox than I was comfortable with. With trapping season just around the corner, I felt that I should start an animal management plan. I asked for and received permission from the land owners on Spring Street to do the animal management program.

The results of the 1999 season proved that there indeed was a mange problem in the world of the Red Fox. Of the 19 Red Fox managed that season, 15 had mange and of those 15, 12 were females. This told me that the problem was in the dens where the females were raising their young. I went to the NYSDEC with my concern and they were interested but I was advised to let Mother Nature take care of the problem or continue my management program. I intended to do the latter.

The results of the management plan of 1999 gave me an idea of which way to go in 2000. I needed to explore the vacant lands of Spring Street in order to make sure that I had all of the problems in hand.

Chapter Two – A Setback in my Plans

With the 1999 results behind us and a need to figure which way to go in order to solve the Red Fox mange problem, I decided to explore the rest of the land on Spring Street. With the Spring of 2000 here, I was busy making plans to continue the management plan for the mange problem.

There was about 26 acres of land on Spring Street that I did not know the owner of. This was a piece of land that seemed to be of a virgin nature and very different in form. I went to visit Mr. Larry Munt, Caledonia's Code Enforcement Officer for my answers. After a lot of his time and expertise, I learned that the land belonged to the Village of Caledonia. My next step was to make a visit to the village board at its next meeting. I did and explained to Mayor Debbie Davis (at that time) and the village board of the problem that existed and without hesitation I was given permission to include the 26 acres of village land in my management program. I was excited about getting started and had everything ready to go in February 2000.

While doing some exploration on the 26 acres, I noticed that my left leg was going numb and I had pain in my lower back. After talking with my wife, Sharyn and Dr. Alagappan, I went in for an xray and found I had a tumor on my right kidney. That was a "fine how-do-you-do." Yes, cancer had

found me. How was I going to fit this in while taking care of my animal friends?

Chapter Three – Faith and Friends Made It Easy

Howdy folks. After I found that I was ill, I wondered what was going to become of the animal management program. My wife told me not to worry about it, get better and it will be waiting for you.

So away I went into the "get better mode." Doctors, an operation, recovery and home bound for at least a month. This was in the middle of March 2000. I was supposed to do nothing for two months ... yeah right.

I have been married to my wife, Sharyn, for about 44 years and I love her till death, but 24 hours a day, seven days a week got old quick. Then, as usual, she came up with a good idea. "Why don't you call Sally Santora and see if she needs an outdoor writer?" This I did and I have been writing ever since. Writing the column gave me something to do. I recovered very quickly and found myself back out in the woods again. Things were different this time; I did not have the strength as I did before and I tired very easily. Thus, it took me more time to do the job ahead of me.

I only did the animal program on a part time basis, doing just enough so that I could give the village board a report. The results from the 2000 season were starting to look better. Less sick animals and a lot more healthy ones.

Thanks to the good Lord above and his helpers below, I was really looking forward to the 2001 season!

Chapter Four "Blue Skies and Big Results"

Howdy folks. Now that I was getting my health back, I decided to look at the 26 acres on Spring St. a little closer. I was fascinated with the rock formation, fossils, so many different types of trees and the amount of wildlife that could be seen at any one time.

I started to do the management program at a full time pace. This year I wanted to see if we were going in the right direction. The reports of sick animals were not as bad as the last two years. In fact, people were starting to enjoy seeing healthy animals in their back yards.

All of a sudden I was getting reports from all parts of the town of sick looking Red Fox. I decided to go and see Town Supervisor Jim Layland and the town board and get permission to manage the land owned by the town. Again, I asked for and received permission to go to work. The results of the work on the town land were like the first year in the village, sick animals were everywhere. That meant that 2002 was going to be a very busy year.

I kept finding myself drawn back to that 26 acres on Spring Street. Every time I went into this fascinating place I would see something different. I could not understand why I was drawn to this place or by what force.

The results of the 2001 season were very encouraging, the sick animal population down from about 75% to about 10%. We were on the right path.

Chapter Five "2002 – 2003 The Start of Something"

Howdy folks. The 2002 season was a time of work and effort. With the village and town land to

manage I did not have time to do much exploring of the 26 acres on Spring St.

The animal health in the village was looking better than any year before. The mange problem was down to about 2% but I was not satisfied with that. It only takes one animal to start the whole problem over again.

The results in the town were progressing faster than in the village. We were finally getting the town and the village results pretty close when I went to the two boards with my findings and suggested that we give it one more year and see what the results were then.

The 2003 season was just a joy to complete. One hundred percent of the Red Fox managed were free of the sicknesses. That did not mean that the sicknesses were gone, but we can say that we did a lot to help keep it from spreading. With most of the hard work done, I decided to spend some more time on the 26 acres on Spring Street. Three problems came that I was very concerned about and I thought that the village board should know of them. I also had an idea that I wanted to present to the board.

Chapter Six "My Introduction to the Political World"

Something very strange came about when I did the 2004 management plan on Spring St. Fifty one opossum were managed on the south side of the 26 acres. This is about five opossum per acre. This was a very disturbing discovery. Opossum are attracted by such things as garbage, animal carcasses and an easy place to shelter. This 26 acres had all of the above. I found a lot of deer remains on the property. Was this the result of the automobile hits on Spring Street or illegal hunters on village property. Probably both were to blame.

Problem #2 was related to #1. I found nine deer stands in the 17 acres between the two railroad spurs – illegal hunting.

Problem #3 was that most all of the home owners that are on the north side of West Main have left some kind of debris on village property, thus giving the opossum a place to live. All of these problems needed attention before the problem got worse.

My visit to the village board was very productive. They were pleased with the fact that the animal sicknesses were under control but disturbed about my findings. They asked, "What can we do to fix these three problems?"

Chapter Seven: "My Idea Meets Opposition"

In answer to the board's question, "What can be done about the problems that exist on the 26 acres," I felt that it could be solved very easily. First, we could post the land against hunting, trapping or anything else that would be in violation of village code. Then, go in and clean up all of the foreign junk that has been deposited by non-caring people. After this was done, we should give the 26 acres the status of the "MacKay Wildlife Preserve and Nature Walk." We then should put in trails, benches, information signs and remove the deer hunting stands.

The first question asked was, "What will this cost the Caledonia taxpayers?" My answer was just plain nothing. I knew that people would step up and help me do this project. I knew that we could get dollars and labor if we asked the right people.

As the discussion went on, I could see that the board was split in their feelings about my idea. Three were interested in the project and two were not. One of the board members that was not

supportive of my idea said that there were plans in the near future to have the land logged off. My heart fell to the floor. Why would anyone want to spoil this virgin land by taking the trees off of it? What about the rock formations and the multitude of plants there? How about the springs that fed Spring Creek and all of its wonder?

I left that board meeting on that February 2004 evening with a sick and empty feeling in my gut. I felt that there was a way to stop the logging and I was going to find it! I postponed the work that I had set up to do the next day and I decided to start my campaign against the logging. The park idea needed to be brought to fruition.

Chapter Eight: "Sharpen the chainsaws, we have work to do"

Howdy folks. There was no way that I could go to work the next day after getting the okay from the village board to go ahead with the MacKay project. I was standing in front of the 17 acres between the two railroad beds trying to decide where to put the entrance to the park-to-be. I decided to put it at the north side where the land was fairly level.

After about an hour I had to front cleared of brush and could see a meadow and a clearing. In this clearing was an old foundation of what was the old MacKay barn foundation. It was overgrown and full of junk. I decided to address this problem at a later date. I wanted to get the trail entrance to the park started. I also wanted to get the exit/entrance on the other side of the trail started. This would give me an idea of where I was going. There is a creek that goes across the front of the whole piece of property. This meant we would have to build some kind of bridge or walk way in order to get across at both the entrance and exit. Another job to do later. This creek only has water in it in the spring of the year. I reached the creek with both the entrance and the exit trails that day.

I stopped working on the trails and decided to go and look at a pile of paint cans and other chemicals that I had found while exploring. I found them and marked their location and decided to call DEC Officer Richard Thomas and get his advice on how to handle this problem. We made a date for him to meet me at the park. After looking at the pile, he advised me on what to do and I took care of it right away. As we left the park, Dick told me it was quite an undertaking that we were going to do. He had no doubt that it would get done. He told me to contact the regional and state Forrester and have him look at the trees in the park. He could help us determine their age and health. He commented to me that it was a shame that the handicapped folks of Caledonia would not be able to enjoy the trails and that we should do something for them on the south side by the springs that feed Spring Creek. This was a wonderful idea but I said that we needed to get the trails done first. It would be a good project for next year.

Chapter Nine: "Help arrives, things start to happen"

Our first committee meeting was the icebreaker for things to happen. We planned to meet once a month and discuss our plan of attack.

The first thing that we did was remove the deer hunting stands that were in the park. Deer season was close and the park needed to be posted against hunting. I went to Hamilton's hardware and asked for a donation of temporary no hunting signs and they were glad to help us out. A bunch of us went out and put up the signs. We were now ready to see what we really had in this piece of land.

I called Region 8 headquarters and spoke to the regional Forrester. I told him about our project and he was very interested in helping us out. We would meet with him at a later date. I called SUNY Geneseo and talked to the senior geologist who was very interested in coming out to help us. I would also meet him at a later date.

Every time we went into the park we took a 5 gallon bucket with us. We had no problem in filling it up with old bottles and beer cans. Here it was the 15th of April, time for our second committee meeting. It was decided to clear out the barn foundation that next Sunday. It was a cool, rainy day but seven people showed up and did the job anyway. We got rid of all of the junk and restacked the rocks on to the wall. We cut back all of the brush and what a surprise we had. When we were done, there in front of us was a piece of MacKay history, reborn to be enjoyed again by all.

The next thing that needed to be done was to make a driveway so that workers could get off of Spring Street while working on the park. I asked the town DPW if we could get a few loads of gravel for the driveway and they offered to give us all that we needed. They delivered and spread it for us. All of a sudden we had a driveway at the park. I felt that this park was going to come to birth in developmental speed ... not in political speed.

Before I start, I have to clear up a matter that has arisen. I have not mentioned many names while telling you about the birth of the park. This is because a lot of folks helped make the park happen, some did a little and some did a lot. The only matter is that everyone did what they could. All those that did something, whether big or small, will be recognized at the end of the story.

Chapter Ten: "The Results of the Walk Through"

The day had finally come when we were to meet on the 26 acres on Spring Street to walk the property. I was a little surprised by the amount of folks that turned out, only two of the five board members, although three members of the community were interested enough to come along.

The walk through was interesting, the community folks thought that it was a place that should be developed with trails, etc. yet there was still thoughts of logging by others. That thought worried me and I needed to see that it didn't happen. One of the gentlemen from the community that came along with us had been recently released from the hospital with heart problems. He told me he hoped he would see this project completed in his lifetime. His comment is what I needed to get the ball rolling. I left with mixed feelings that day, but I was more determined than ever to make this happen!

Shortly after I received a phone call from Mrs. MacKay who had the good news I was waiting for. She received a copy of the land donation agreement that was as plain as could be. The land was to be left forever wild and for the enjoyment of the Caledonia people!! This meant that logging was not an option. With that information and the other papers that I had, I felt that I could go to the Village Board and win my case.

It was March 16, 2004 I went to the Village Board meeting with all of my guns loaded, hoping that I could get permission to start this long overdue improvement. I explained to the board my findings and that logging was not an option. After some debate they wanted to know what it was going to cost the taxpayers. I told them it would not cost the taxpayers anything; that I could get the job done with volunteers and donations. I first wanted to post the land as per the village code and then clean it up of all the debris, put in the trails, benches, signs and what ever else it needed to attract the public. They finally agreed to let me go on with the plan and I was assigned a liaison and a committee was created to oversee the project. We met once a month and reported to the Village Board of the progress. I went out of that meeting thanking the board for their decision and wanting to get started as soon as possible.

Chapter Eleven: "Into the Unknown We Go"

With the entrance to the park roughed in, we started to cut the trails into the woods. We decided

to follow the trails that the deer herd of many years had made in their ventures in and out of the woods. It was rough going for the first 200 feet. Buckthorn was everywhere. This thorny bush was the protector of the woods and its wildlife.

It was on a warm, sunny afternoon and we had just finished cutting through the last of the Buckthorn, when for some reason I stopped and looked up into a small oak tree. There in front of me was the most beautiful, all scarlet bird that I had ever seen. It had brilliant red plumage with black wings and tail. This was the first time that I had ever seen an American Scarlet Tanager in the wild. It was not afraid of me being only four or feet away. It sat on the branch for some time and watched me go back to work. I stopped to get a drink of water and it was still on the same branch. I blinked my eyes and it was gone.

If you remember, in a previous chapter I said that some force kept drawing me back to these 26 acres of land. After we had finished the trails I told many people that I felt that Marianna MacKay Wilkins was with us all the way through. You don't suppose that there is a connection between the Scarlet Tanager and Marianna, do you?

It was getting late so we decided to do what we always do on our way out, fill up our five-gallon pail with bottles and old beer cans. Tomorrow was going to be a good day; we would get to the first bench location, "Neil's Rest."

Chapter Twelve: "Crossing the Creek at Both Ends"

In an earlier Chapter I mentioned that there is a creek that flows across the front of the 26 acres of the park. I needed to figure out what we were going to do to get the trail across the creek both at the entrance and exit. I did not have much to worry about at the entrance, after digging out the trail I found a natural culvert, under the trail, that let the water flow under it. This culvert was probably built by the MacKay's so they could accomplish the same thing that I wanted to do – cross the creek. We have dated this around the mid-1800's.

The exit was a different story. I figured if we put two pipes in the creek so the water could flow through them, we could fill in a path over them to make the trail. I went to Jason from the Village DPW with my idea, and he helped us out with the pipes and some advice.

With the pipes in place all I needed was to get fill dirt so that we could back fill and form the trail. I went to Mark of the Town DPW and he said we could have all the fill we needed. He delivered it to the park and with the help of Neil and his new "toy" tractor, the trail over the creek was completed. Now we had a way to get in and out of the park.

As I was leaving the park that night, I sat down on an old tree stump and thought of how far this vision had gone in such a short time. That is when I decided to keep a day to day log about the progress and all who helped in any way. I am so glad I did!

Chapter Thirteen: "The Mushroom Rock is Born"

There is an old Indian custom that the parents of a newborn do in order to name their child. They look out of the teepee and the first thing that they see is what they name their child. This is what I did when I saw this particular rock formation in the park. When I first looked at it, it reminded me of a mushroom, so that is what I named it.

The trail was half way to the fieldstone wall by now and another bench was needed at this spot. Due to the beauty of the mushroom rock and its warm location, I decided to dedicate this one to

Mrs. Betty MacKay. I felt they complimented each other.

It was now the seventh of May and I had just received a phone call from Jeffrey Over, geologist from SUNY Geneseo who wanted to bring two of his students to visit the park. I met them at the park and what an education I got from their visit. It turns out that we had a collection of different rock formations within the 26 acre park. Some dated back 380 million years ago and included a vast amount of fossils from the salt water era. We found graphite, limestone, karst, bedrock and Oatka Trail shale. Each of these formations had their own story. Dr. Over promised to return and identify each formation after the trails were complete. We planned to make up signs for the formations so the public could enjoy them.

I went home that night very happy that the park was developing. My wife sensed that all was going well. After supper we sat down and while she did her needlework, we discussed the events of the day. Still something was wrong...our lives were about to change....

Chapter Fourteen: "Looking for Help from Above"

My wife suffered a stroke that night. She lost her vision for a short time and became very weak. She spent a week in the hospital while they tried to determine what caused the stroke. She was scheduled for an operation in June, put on medication and sent home. It was a very anxious time and I felt fear coming at me in all directions.

She told me to go back to my work in the park and not worry, that things would take care of themselves. Maybe I was being selfish, but I needed to be where I could find a reason for what happened to her. I have found a lot of answers by being with Mother Nature. I went back to work and found myself more determined than ever to get the park done so that we could walk it together.

The benches that I was building for the park came from the trees growing there naturally. I wanted everything to be related in some way. The park committee decided that the park should remain rustic in nature.

The Village Board had ordered park signs to be installed on Spring Street, giving the park an identity. I was almost to the fieldstone wall, a place that I could not believe. It was like a sea of round boulders covered with green moss. How was I going to get through this without harming the moss? This was a perfect place for the next bench. I built the bench and decided to go home and tell my wife what I had found.

Chapter Fifteen: "Finding the Way Through"

There was a sea of moss-covered boulders in front of me and I needed to find a way through them without doing damage to the moss that covered them. I could see the fieldstone wall on the west side of the boulders and was anxious to reach it. I sat down on the bench that I had just built and wondered for whom should I dedicate this one to? I decided it would be for Stacy Bazzett, our Village Trustee and liaison to the MacKay Park, because of the spot's beauty and variety of interest.

While I was sitting there, I noticed something coming across the railroad tracks right toward me. It was a coyote entering the woods just about 15 feet away from me. A female, about 50 pounds with a golden coat and a black tip on her tail, came within ten feet of me and then stopped in her tracks. Was this another connection like the scarlet tanager?

I got back to finding a way through the boulders and right in front of me was a trail of perfectly flat stones going straight to the fieldstone wall. Why hadn't I seen this before? It was completely

clear and was like a carpet of rock. I sat down and tried to figure this out. I got up and walked across the stone carpet and touched the fieldstone wall, the MacKay nature Trail was halfway done!

Chapter Sixteen: "Starting the Trip Back"

Howdy folks. I realized that the fieldstone wall needed to be rebuilt as a lot of the stones had fallen off during the years of Mother Nature's work. The mayor and police chief made arrangements for me to get some help from the county sheriffs department and it arrived the day next. A crew of about six workers and deputy showed up and were anxious to start work. I never saw six people work as fast and do as good of a job as these six did. Within three hours they had the wall rebuilt like I had pictures it to look. It was lunch time and they were treated to a pizza and soda lunch. After lunch they cut all of the weeds down around the barn foundation. What a sight it was to see the foundation come to life. I got to know these fellows pretty well that day. What I saw were six guys that made a mistake and wanted to get on with their lives. When they got ready to leave, they asked to come again if we needed any more help. I told them I would.

I had some time left that day so I went back to the fieldstone wall and decided to build another bench at that spot. It was a nice open and sunny spot so I decided to dedicate this bench to Marianna MacKay Wilkins. It was the highest point in the park and she could sit and see it all.

Chapter Seventeen: "Finding the Artifacts"

I wanted to go back to the mushroom rock and so some serious looking. For some reason, I needed to take some extra time at this location.

I had a surprise that day. A young fellow came up to me and asked if he could help. Without a hesitation, he and I started out search of the mushroom rock area. In about an hour of searching, we were rewarded with two finds. We found two glass "Ball" jar lids that were in perfect condition. They were dated in the 1931 era. We also found a lot of old golf balls. What was the story behind these? The mystery was solved when a Caledonia resident told me that he use to hit the golf balls from his back yard into the woods, never to see them again.

We decided to go down to the old car and see if we could find anything of artifact nature. After digging around, we found two tail light assemblies belonging to a 1953 Chevrolet automobile. These sure brought back old memories.

We decided to head for the fieldstone wall and start the trail back. It was open ground and the trail blazing was fairly easy. It was getting late and we decided to call it a day.

I came back alone the next day and decided to look into the mossy rock area. I had made the comment to my wife that I had seen almost every animal at one time or another while working in the park. The only one that I had not seen was an elephant. While looking in the mossy rock area, I not believe what I found? I found a rock formation that was a perfect image of the elephant head, eye, ears and trunk. Why were these things happening to me? What else did the piece of land have in store for me?

I took the ball lids, tail lights, elephant rock and two types of fossils to the Big Springs Museum and asked if they would display them. They accepted them and they are there for all to see and enjoy.

Chapter Eighteen: "What Awaits Us?"

We made the turn back towards Spring Street late yesterday afternoon. As I mentioned, it was fairly easy at this point. This was the highest part in the park and it was all down hill from here. I came upon a large rock that got my attention. It had a lot of fossils in it and a flat rock on top of it. What a surprise I had when I lifted up the flat rock. Underneath was a small salamander (newt) that was black in color with pink spots all over it. I carefully put the flat rock back down, as this was the roof to the salamander's home. I decided to keep this finding a secret for the time being.

As I was clearing more trails, another young fellow came to me and asked if he could help. What a surprise he turned out to be. I had to slow him down as he was making me work too hard! He said that he wanted to be with me when we connected the trails. We got to the "gully" that day, and we sat down and discussed how we should get through this part of the park. Should we build a bridge across or should we just do down into it and back out using steps? We decided to go the step idea.

The next day I had four visitors with me while clearing more trail. A doe and three newborn fawns were making the park their home. They stayed about 25 yards away from me all the time I was working. What a sight it was to see the three fawns running and jumping and the mother trying to hide them from me. This went on for about a week, when I noticed one of the fawns had a broken rear leg. It's hard to say what caused this; it could be a number of things. This was not a good situation as they were coyotes on the prowl. After another week or so, there were only two fawns left to be seen. The broken-legged fawn must have met its destiny that Mother Nature had planned for it.

Chapter Nineteen: Getting Close

Howdy folks. My helper came back today and we got right to work. We were coming to the spot that I wanted to connect the north and south trail with an inner, shorter trail for those that could not walk the longer trail. This was at the mushroom rock. WE came upon a formation of four rocks that looked like they were one at some time in the past. Later we found out that they were one rock.

We were coming out of the hardwoods and back into the buckthorn. Our easy work was done. What we had ahead of us was not going to be easy. There is a smaller fieldstone wall that separates the hardwoods from the buckthorn and this is where animals were put to pasture when the farm was active.

I took my helper on ahead and showed him where the trail would connect and that we would probably make the connection the next day. He said that he couldn't return then and suggested we get it done that very day. I could not believe his ambition. On we went, all tools a blazing, sweat flowing, hearts pounding, full speed ahead. All of a sudden I heard a yell! "We made it, we are there!" I sat down on my ATV and we had a cold drink of water while staring at the trail connection. I got my daily log out and entered, "All the trails done, July 15, 2004, 4:32 p.m."

The way into the park and the way out of the park was done. I thanked my helper for being with me and helping me create this wonderful place. He said he would be back. A lot of work was done, but a lot more lie ahead. I wanted this place to be perfect for all to enjoy.

Chapter Twenty: Trimming Out the Park

Howdy folks. With all of the trails now connected, we needed to start giving the park some character. The town delivered a couple loads of wood chips and Neil and I put them down at the entrance to the creek and at the exit to the creek. The Village DPW delivered four large rocks for the entrance to the park. The town DPW delivered four loads of bank-run gravel for the parking lot and spread it for us. A local sign painter made us a temporary sign and a local lumber yard donated materials to build the sign. Now, with the sign and display case built and installed, we needed an

American flag to fly. A local hardware donated the flag and it flies today.

I called the forrester and the geologist and told them we were ready for their help. They both set up dates to visit us and help identify what we had in the park. A local resident offered to build wood signs to identify the trees and rocks, which we accepted.

I got a call from a newspaper that wanted to get an interview on the park. Our local newspaper came out and took pictures and interviews. Our sign and flag were recognized in Dick Thomas' "By Dawns Early Light," a look at what was happening to Marianna-Willkins' dream.

The most important thing that happened to me and the park was that on September 12, 2004 I got my wish fulfilled. After recovering from her stroke, I got to walk the MacKay Wildlife Preserve with my wife, Sharyn.

Chapter Twenty-One: The Community Blessing

Howdy folks. I felt that a lot of things that happened during the birth of the MacKay Park were related to "the Man above," so I thought that a community clergy blessing would be a nice event to invite the public to. On November 7, 2004 the Good Lord saw fit to give us a sunny day and a beautiful service. A lot of folks came and enjoyed the service. We had a bench and a picnic table donated to the park that will get a lot of use.

The second graders at Cal-Mum came in for a tour. It looks like that will be an annual activity. The Boy Scouts came in and helped with the grooming of the park and Girl Scouts built bird houses for the birds that live in the park.

The park went through its first winter without a problem. Skiers were using it and hikers ventured through the snow. Donations started to come in. I went to the Village Board to get an account set up for the donations. If you recall way back when, Dick Thomas came up with the idea of building a handicap accessible overlook for those who cannot walk the trail. Now that the trail project was holding its own, Dick and I went to the VB on April 4, 2005 and presented our plans for the overlook and asked permission to proceed. The VB was very gracious and we were given the green light.

Chapter Twenty-Two: Here We Go Again

With the fact that the overlook project was on the banks of Spring Creek, we needed to look into the possibility of needing permits from the D.E.C. and the NY State Fish Hatchery. Again, thanks to Dick Thomas, we found that with only a little care, we were okay to go ahead with the project.

This project was a little different than the MacKay Preserve in that we were going to need cash flow along with the labor help. Thanks to a lot of letter writing and visits, we were able to find both. It was decided by the MacKay Committee to break up the project into three parts. First, the 20 X 20 foot concrete deck. Second, pave the driveway and third, pouring a concrete sidewalk to connect the two. We completed the parts as money and help was made available. I went to a local construction company for help and was greeted with open arms. They supplied us with the labor and a discount on materials that created the large concrete pad. This part was paid for in full. What a start. I next went to see a paver who was doing work in the area. We discussed the off-road parking and after some good old fashioned haggling, we came to a price. Thanks to the community donations, this part was also paid for. Now all we had to do was connect the pad and parking lot with a sidewalk. The only problem was that we did not have enough money to finish the project. We all wanted the project to be completed that year.

Chapter Twenty-Three: "The Unexplained Happens Again"

Howdy folks. It was decided that before we could open the handicap overlook we would have to put a railing up around three sides of the deck. We knew of a blacksmith that might be able to help us. He gave us a good price but now we had to find the funding.

I received a call from the two local banks that they wanted to help us out with our project. This was unbelievable. I could not believe it was happening again. One of the banks wanted to make a cash donation and the other wanted to do a fundraiser at the MacKay Park. Between the two banks' efforts, we were able to order and install the needed railings for the overlook deck.

All we needed now was the walkway and the project would be done. We wanted to dedicate this project this year, even if we did not have the walkway done. The next day I received a call from a local furniture company wanting to help out. They told us to come and pick out whatever we needed for the overlook. A member of the committee went and picked out two benches and a table. We now had the overlook complete except for the walkway. I was out looking for help on the walkway and for some reason I decided to go by the park. I could not believe my eyes; the Village DPW was doing the work needed to install the new walkway. The concrete company donated the materials. Another unexplained happening had happened to the MacKay Wildlife Preserve.

Chapter Twenty-Four: "A Dedication and Completion"

During the course of the construction of the overlook, it was brought to my attention that there was a lady that would like to be the first one to use the overlook deck. She lived across the street from the overlook and had to use a wheelchair to get about. This is what the overlook was all about. We also had Dick Thomas, the author of the overlook idea, Mrs. Betty MacKay of the MacKay family and Mayor Dean Manley of the Village of Caledonia, all out to cut the ribbon at the dedication. There were a number of folks who had some part in the project that were there also. The dedication took place on August 16, 2005, just about 480 days after that first village board meeting that I went to for permission to save the 26 acres on Spring Street.

Neil and I took a rest for a while, but still meeting at the preserve most every morning. We would discuss what else needed to be done. We decided that the island at the overlook needed to be cleared off so that folks could see the wildlife as it came to the springs. It proved to be too much of a job for us so I went to my inmate helpers again. One phone call and they were there to help us do the job. The Village DPW took all the brush away. We now had finished the Richard Thomas handicap accessible overlook at the MacKay Wildlife Preserve and Nature Walk.

Chapter Twenty-Five: "Some Unfinished Business"

The MacKay Committee had its last meeting on August 8, 2005. We would not meet again unless something came up that we needed to talk about.

Neil and I decided to take Mrs. Betty MacKay for a tour of the preserve in his golf cart. She had a back operation about three months prior but said she wanted to go anyway. It was quite an experience. Neil and his wife planted a bunch of daylilies that were donated by a local grower. It will look nice in the spring. Neil and I escorted a Brownie Troop through the park on August 11, 2005. Those young girls had him in heaven. I never saw him have so much fun!

On December 6, 2005 Neil and I went to the Village Board meeting to discuss a couple of things that were bothering us. The first thing was the fact that there was a lot work to be done in the park every year, just to keep it up and safe. We wanted to make sure that after we are gone that it would

not be neglected. They put it into the record that it will be taken care of. The other thing was the condition of the Matthews Trail and that we would like to upgrade it and join it to the MacKay Trail. Seeing as the Village owns all lands between the two parks, this is possible to do. We were given permission to go ahead. Another project!

Three more benches need to be built, one dedicated to Jake Davis for his sign work, one to Richard Wilkins for his help in the research department and one for Joe Rychlicki for his devotion and legal aid. There will always be things to do in the park to keep it safe and make sure it is a nice place to go. Now that it is here and completed, let's take care of it.

Chapter Twenty-Six: "Thanks to the Community"

The park and the overlook are complete now. Maybe we will upgrade things at a later date, but for now it is complete. With that all said and done, I need to recognize a few folks that made this project become what it is today.

The first person is Neil Alhart, the vine man. Neil came on board with me from the start. He shed his share of sweat right along with me. Both of us had just about the same thoughts as to what we wanted the park to be. We often discussed things and then made our decisions together. I learned a lot about Caledonia while working alongside Neil. He has become a great friend and I care about him a lot.

The second person is Stacy Bazzett. Words cannot describe what I feel for her. She also was alongside Neil and myself while the park was being born. The hours that she put into the paperwork were unbelievable. The phone calls and tie on the computer was tremendous. Being our liaison to the Village Board was the connecting link to the success of the park. How she managed to fit the park work into her day is beyond me. Stacy and her family have become my very close friends.

The third person is Sally Santora, my press editor. Sally has given us a lot of exposure with her photos and articles. She has let me print almost anything in my articles. Like Stacy, she knows when to raise an eyebrow and slow me down. I caught myself asking for more than I should have, but she always helped us out.

The last person that I need to thank is my wife Sharyn. Only her and I know what we went through while I was away creating the park. I often wondered if all this time away was worth it. I found a lot of answers in those 480 days, and I feel richer for them.

The names of all those that helped in any way whatsoever, with either project, are on the donor sheets displayed at the park and overlook. So, I thank the Caledonia community for answering my call. This shows what can be accomplished when we put our differences aside for something good that we all can enjoy – in this case it was the MacKay Wildlife Preserve and Nature Walk, the Richard D. Thomas Handicap Accessible Overlook.

May God Bless All Of You!
Barry Ganzhorn, SR.
