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Annual Vernal Fling Environmental Honorees Walk the Talk

Woodstock Land Conservancy's Vernal Fling Honors Kingston Mayor Steve Noble, Julie Noble and Ellen Kalish

Woodstock Land Conservancy's (WLC) seventh annual Vernal Fling honors three visionary environmentalists: Kingston Mayor Steve Noble, Julie Noble, Environmental Education & Sustainability Coordinator, Kingston Parks & Recreation, and Ellen Kalish, Raptor Rehabilitator/Educator and Founder, Ravensbeard Wildlife Sanctuary with the **William R. Ginsberg Stewardship Award**. Since 1988 WLC has helped conserve and provide public access to some of our most cherished local landscapes and natural resources, and offered year-round programming connecting people, especially children, to their natural surroundings. This year's Vernal Fling is on Saturday, May 27th from 5:30 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. at Byrdcliffe Barn.

Steve Noble and Julie Noble are recognized for their commitment to the environment as long-time environmental educators and sustainability advocates in the City of Kingston, for Steve's leadership role in co-founding the Kingston Land Trust, and Julie's service as Chair of the City's Conservation Advisory Council. Working with a diverse group of stakeholders, Steve and Julie have provided instrumental leadership supporting the re-envisioning and revitalization of Kingston including as a model of sustainability and inclusivity. They began their efforts working for the city's Parks & Recreation Department, building innovative programs for children and revitalizing the city's Forsyth Nature Center and more recently the Everette Hodge Community Center in Midtown Kingston. And their commitment to the health, wellbeing and education of all Kingston's children continues to be a hallmark of their work. From there they have expanded to move the city toward a broad-based environmental and economic sustainability path. Kingston has recently been recognized as a Bronze Certified Climate Smart Community, the highest rated in NY State, and recognized as the first Clean Energy Community in NY State. As first the co-founder of the Kingston Land Trust, and now the Mayor of Kingston, Steve has played a leadership role in supporting the development of the Kingston Greenline—a visionary network of urban rail trails, bike-paths, complete streets and linear parks within Kingston, and the product of a partnership between the Kingston Land Trust and the City of Kingston.

Besides working to develop a safer, healthier city for all, Steve and Julie walk their talk at their home, family and in their lifestyle; their house is powered by solar panels, their cars work off of electric, and they compost the majority of their food scraps. They inspire us with their spirit and zest for their joint mission.

Ellen Kalish, co-founder and director of the Ravensbeard Wildlife Center is the person that Woodstockers call when they find an injured bird -- especially when it's a big bird – an owl, hawk, falcon or eagle. Ellen is a longtime licensed wildlife rehabilitator, which spawned her interest in creating this Center in 2000. Growing up surrounded by animals of all kinds, Ellen got hooked early on bird-watching, but it wasn't till much later that she read a DEC article on rehabilitators, and knew she had found her calling.

Today Ravensbeard Wildlife Center answers thousands of calls every year, and cares for hundreds of animals. Their rate of birds released back to the wild is more than 60%, compared to a national average which is less than 50%. Whether it's an orphaned baby owl or a red-tail hawk with a broken wing and hypothermia, Ellen and other volunteers at the Center, working closely with local veterinarians, supply skilled care with the goal of enabling it to stay wild, and return to its natural habitat. As Ellen says, "I live for the release."

Ellen is equally beloved for the educational lectures she gives, accompanied by birds too injured to be released back to the wild. When Ellen appears at an elementary school, a senior citizen center, or a Woodstock Land Conservancy public program, attendees get to meet Nala the Barn Owl or Siena the Red Tailed Hawk, but they also learn about diminishing habitat or environmental stressors and what they can do to help more birds thrive in our neighborhoods. By introducing us to these majestic beings, she alerts all of us to our responsibility to protect the creatures whose home we all share.

"It is tremendously inspiring to be in the company of people who passionately care for our environment as do this year's honorees. These leaders remind us of the essential purpose of our mission, to protect the land, water and habitat in our community, and as educators they underscore the important role Woodstock Land Conservancy plays in our community, educating young and old alike to be good stewards here." said Patty Goodwin, President. Executive Director, Maxanne Resnick, added, "2017 brings real challenges and opportunities to us all as we address the changing climate conditions and their impacts. We aim to make a difference in mitigating effects, while supporting area efforts in conserving our natural assets; renewable energy; economic sustainability; green tourism; and active transportation. We are excited to join forces with the Town of Woodstock, City of Kingston, Ulster County and so many area organizations whose efforts have not gone unnoticed, as there are many environmental honors that have been given to this region."

The evening's festivities include celebratory beverages and signature hors d'oeuvres from Black-Eyed Susie's. Guests will dance to the tunes of the Time Machine.

A silent auction is featured with work from a variety of Woodstock artists, restaurant and local shopping gift cards, as well as a week's vacation rental in San Miguel, Mexico.

The Vernal Fling celebrates our honorees' contributions to the region's environment while highlighting WLC's mission to protect open lands, natural resources, scenic areas and historic sites in Woodstock and the surrounding eastern Catskills. www.woodstocklandconservancy.org www.vernalfling.com

Byrdcliffe Barn, 485 Upper Byrdcliffe Road, Woodstock

Photos Attached. Photo Credit Michael Nelson Photography

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