



Woodstock Land Conservancy

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Release Date

Immediate Release

Woodstock Land Conservancy Acquires more than 54 Acres

Israel Wittman Sanctuary Expands Beyond 210 Acres

Dan and Jan Marazita literally stumbled onto an undeveloped part of Saugerties in 1982, and they were determined to own it. In August of that year, they were able to purchase all 86.34 acres of land, although they intended to keep the overwhelming majority of it wild. Thanks to a recent acquisition by the Woodstock Land Conservancy, more than 54 of those acres will remain wild for generations to come.

Jan, now 80, loves to tell the story of falling in love – at first sight – with the property but being unsure of whether she and Dan could purchase it. They first had to pass an interview with the owner. He'd been interviewing other prospective buyers, including Elizabeth Taylor's daughter, who wanted to use it as a horse farm. The Marazitas had very different plans. They wanted to build a modest home on a small parcel but primarily "let nature do its thing," as Jan tells it, not touching the beauty of the surroundings. The owner was taken with the Marazitas' adoration of his land, so he turned down the horse farm idea and all of the other prospective buyers. The property was theirs.

For more than four decades the Marazitas loved their land and the memories they made. They stewarded the land as well, with Dan even writing federal grants to get necessary funds for upkeep and other projects. They camped on the land, hiked up its many inclines and leisurely watched the turtles and the beavers enjoy its water features. The property includes wetlands, historic sites, vernal pools and a large pond.

In November 2021, Dan passed away. Jan had to make some difficult decisions. She decided to keep about 15 acres that included her home. She sold small parcels to two of her neighbors. When she decided to sell more than 54 acres, she once again turned to a neighbor. This time it was the Woodstock Land Conservancy.

www.WoodstockLandConservancy.org

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“WLC has shown a long-term commitment to the area Jan calls home,” Andy Mossey, executive director, said. “We worked diligently to purchase the land that is now the Israel Wittman Sanctuary. It’s our largest preserve, and its unique ecosystem and miles of trails make it a welcoming place to encourage people to spend time outdoors.”

WLC has stewarded the more than 150 acres that make up the sanctuary since it received two donations from Elaine Chaback, the initial one in 2016 and an additional donation of land in 2020. As Land Acquisition and Stewardship Manager Melissa Peterson explained, the ability to add to the sanctuary with the Marazita property will allow the Conservancy to eventually construct a fourth public trail. “It’s an important addition to the mixed hardwood and coniferous forest that engages visitors who walk the existing trails,” Peterson said. The sanctuary’s captivating features include bluestone quarries and rock walls.

Thanks to supporters, WLC was able to purchase the Marazita property. This ensures Jan maintains the ability to pay taxes and other upkeep on the acreage she retained while protecting the majority of the property from development in perpetuity. “It’s a rare win-win situation,” Mossey said. “Really, it’s a win-win-win, because the community will get to enjoy this beautiful area when we make part of it public through the addition of a trail.”

The Marazita property acquisition closed in late April. It was publicly announced for the first time WLC’s 12th annual Vernal Fling event May 11.

Just as the previous owner appreciated the Marazitas’ respect for the land and its inherent beauty, Jan knows WLC respects the land and its unique attributes. She’s happy to have sold it to her neighbor, she said, adding, “Dan will be very happy, too.”

About WLC

The Woodstock Land Conservancy is committed to the protection and preservation of the open lands, forests, water resources, scenic areas and historic sites in Woodstock and the surrounding area. Accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, the Conservancy protects and stewards more than 1,000 acres of land in the eastern Catskills area. Learn more at <https://www.woodstocklandconservancy.org/>.

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