



CREA Board President Ellen Bennett's Comments at June 28, 2021 Annual Meeting

Good afternoon everyone and welcome! I hope you've had a chance to enjoy and engage in the displays that our amazing staff have brought together for all of you. In addition, great thanks go to Board Member Rick Dedek for providing the microphone and easels, and to all our board members and volunteers for helping to get everything set up here.

We are delighted that you are here for CREA's annual meeting, and to celebrate CREA's many accomplishments this past year – in spite of the long, strange and challenging times we've all experienced.

Our bylaws require us to hold an annual meeting for all of our members during which you will hear about the work that our Board, staff and volunteers have been engaged in, receive a snap-shot of the health and programming of our organization, as well as participate in giving approval for meeting minutes, Officers, and new members of the Board of Directors. You should have received a link to relevant material for this meeting via our website. After we conduct our business, I hope that many of you will be able to continue our celebration at The Flight Deck. And with that, I call this meeting to order.

Our first item of business is to approve the minutes of CREA's 2020 annual meeting. Please indicate your approval of the minutes by raising your hand.

Our next item of business is to approve the officers of the Board of Directors for the coming year.

We are delighted to welcome four new board members onto our team: Alex Gates is a student at Bowdoin and was our CREA intern last summer. He is passionate about environmental stewardship and was eager to join the Board. As is Matt Nixon, who not only has been eager to become more involved with CREA, but is also active with the Town of Topsham. Sue Reed began as a volunteer on our Programs Committee, and many of you may remember Andrea Stevens as a CREA staff member and interim Executive Director some years ago. All evidence that once this small but mighty organization gets under your skin, it stays there! May I have approval for these candidates?

I want to take a moment to express tremendous gratitude to our Executive Director, Caroline Eliot, and



our staff: Sarah Rodgers, Carey Truebe, and Jenny Mueller. Part-time CREA educators, full-time mothers, and over-time workers... What these individuals have been able to do this past year has been, simply, amazing. Supported by a team of volunteers on our Programs Committee, as you can see from our annual report, CREA has continued to run a wide variety of programming for the community, and for our colleagues in the schools, who had such a difficult and challenging time this year. Please join me in expressing our deep, deep appreciation for all they have done.

One person, among the many that comprise Team CREA, stands out for special recognition this afternoon - Ron Strand. Our team would like to share just some of the work Ron has spearheaded on behalf of CREA and its membership.

Ron is a constant presence at the Ecology Center and Preserve and in all seasons, often several times a day. His ongoing activities include:

1. He mows and weed whacks the area around the EC and the entrance stairs.
2. He walks the trails to monitor for blowdowns which he'll clear himself with handsaw and loppers if he able to do so.
3. He monitors condition of bog bridges and repairs/replaces as necessary.
4. He ensures that handwashing barrels used for summer camp are filled and hauls water from his house when necessary.
5. He ensures the Ecology Center is open for volunteers to work in and that it is locked up afterwards and the alarm system is activated.
6. He maintains the solar panel system to sure power for the EC which is totally off the grid.
7. He maintains the wood pellet stove and often gets it started, sometimes quite early, when Sarah and Carey are hosting classes there on cold days.
8. He repairs and maintains Rensenbrink Way, including finding gravel and moving it to the site.
9. He warmly greets visitors to the EC and trails often becoming the "face" of CREA for visitors.

He also manages "Special Projects". For example, in 2019:



- He replaced numerous wooden steps from parking area to Rensenbrink Way, often requiring hours to work on a single step leading to CREA finding funding for the new granite steps.
- He built 6 of the original StoryWalk storyboards.
- He coordinated and participated in building the bridge adjacent to vernal pool.
- In 2020:
 - He built steps to the shed.
 - He built drainage ditches along Rensenbrink Way and Barnes Leap Trail to facilitate passage by visitor,
 - He moved the entire contents of the EC to storage do floor could be refinished and moved all back when refinishing done
 - He disassembled bulky wooden shelving and repurposed as outdoor display tables.
 - He found and hauled gravel to create a smooth path from the base of the new steps to Rensenbrink Way
 - He cleared shrubs adjacent to EC to create 2 parking spaces for special use as needed.
 - He organized volunteers and participated in the painting of the exterior of the EC.
- In 2021:
 - He built and installed structures for summer camper backpacks.
 - He did a full inventory of the Ecology Center equipment (and there's a LOT in the Ecology Center).
 - He solicited and coordinated volunteers to help build storyboards for the new Storywalk at the Ecology Center.
 - He cleared a large area near the start of Barnes Leap trail of brambles and other debris for use by summer campers.
 - ...and that's just so far this year...



Ron, I have been communicating with Carla and John Rensenbrink who send their very best. Carla visited the Ecology Center for the first time in awhile recently and she said was amazed by all the improvements. They are so pleased to honor you with the Founders' Award in 2021.

We are giving you this certificate, suitable for framing, which reads, "The Founders' Award to Ron Strand for his dedication to CREA and its mission, his tireless efforts to ensure the community has a wonderful on-site experience by maintaining the Ecology Center and its trails in pristine condition, and for warmly welcoming all who visit."

Ron will be the first to tell you that he didn't do all of this alone – and he didn't. Joann Strand has been a tireless volunteer, along with David Vaughn and Bob Perry. I know there are others.... Thank you ALL. And if you haven't been down to the EC in a while, please go and marvel at our steps from the parking area, the kiosk, and the beautiful building – inside and out.

Now, I'm going to turn the mic over to Caroline who will give you a fuller, richer picture of CREA and its work this past year.

In closing, CREA is not simply 235 acres of protected Cathance River watershed, but what happens on and around that watershed, and springs forth from that watershed into our schools and community.

CREA is about education. The transformative power of education in and about our natural world. The importance of this work is, I believe, more essential to people today than ever. CREA connects people to nature for the benefit of both. As Henry David Thoreau wrote: "In wildness is the preservation of the world."

And I will end with one of my favorite quotes from D. Elton Trueblood, noted Quaker author. It speaks to why we support and believe in CREA: "A man has made at least a start on discovering the meaning of human life when he plants shade trees under which he knows full well he will never sit."

And CREA is 21 years old! Our plan to have a 20th birthday celebration bash was scuttled, like so much last year, so let's enjoy being 21 this afternoon and head to the Flight Deck to continue to enjoy the day.