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Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve Officially Opened

By Michael Dunn

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The Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve was officially opened and dedicated on Nov. 4, as close to 100 people watched the unveiling of a new sign on Rte. 161 in Niantic.



Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal kicked off the speakers' portion of the event, and spoke about the responsibility we all share as stewards of the environment. "We have a duty to leave the earth the same or better than we found it", he said. Blumenthal commended all the parties who worked to create the 400-plus-acre nature preserve, and he advocated for the preservation of the additional 230 acres of waterfront land abutting the nature preserve, which is currently owned by Landmark Development. Blumenthal vowed "to stand side by side with the town and fight in any court anywhere to prevent development endangering this fragile resource."

First Selectman Beth Hogan, State Senator Andrea Stillman, State Representative Ed Jutila, and State Representative Betsy Ritter all spoke about the importance of preserving open space and of the significance of officially opening the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve. Alicia Betty, project manager for the Trust for Public Land, credited the local political leadership, the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve, and others for creating a unique and powerful partnership with impressive results.

Marvin Schutt, president of the Friends, called the opening of the preserve a "dream come true." Denise Garofalo, capital campaign and membership chair of the Friends called each of the Friends' board members to stand and be recognized for their efforts and dedication.

The new sign marking Veterans Memorial Field and the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve was created and unveiled by John Wilson of Sign Craft. Following the ceremony the Friends provided guided hiking tours of varying lengths through the Hills.

Trail guides, which show more than five miles of marked trails, are now available in distribution boxes at trailside. The Trail Guide is also available online at the Town of East Lyme Web site, www.eltownhall.com, and at the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve Web site, www.oswhills.org.

Michael Dunn is the Vice President of the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve, Inc.