

# Conservation Chronicle

Aiken Land Conservancy Newsletter 2022 Vol. 1



## Our Treasured Trees are Thriving

Preserving South Boundary's iconic live oaks remains a vital part of this public/private initiative. Following the first half of proposed undergrounding, or ground boring, of power lines on South Boundary, the huge trees from Charleston to Williamsburg Streets were carefully pruned by Bartlett Tree Experts. Dacre Stoker, Aiken Streetscapes Executive Director, explains that the plan was for Dominion Energy to send a crew back to Aiken this spring to complete the ground boring from Williamsburg to Whiskey Roads. Although Dominion originally advised that they were so far behind, the project would have to wait until 2023, Dacre was pleasantly surprised to hear recently that Dominion advised the City that they were able to resume the project to bury the power lines this spring. Bartlett will complete their prescription pruning on the same stretch of trees during the optimum season, December through February.

Dacre reports on additional proactive pruning projects that began with what he refers to as the Colleton corridor. "Basically, it encompasses Colleton Avenue from Newberry in front of the Willcox all the way to Charleston Avenue, as well as the side streets between South Boundary and the railroad tracks," he clarifies. He notes that the work was done by a local company, Collins Tree Service, and adds, "We have had lots of positive comments about their work. Plus, we've experienced some strong windstorms and the debris was noticeably less in these areas of proactive pruning."

The next area slated for pruning is the downtown business and residential core. "The next phase will encompass all the parkways, Park Avenue, Richland, and Barnwell," Dacre says. The work has stopped temporarily as spring and summer are the growing season and not a good time to prune; the work will recommence in the fall and winter.

He emphasizes that, in urban areas, pruning has two important purposes. "Proactive pruning is important to the health of the tree as it doesn't leave broken branches that are openings for water, rot, and fungus that can damage and potentially kill the tree. And secondly, pruning trees is important for the safety of the people that live underneath them. We want to minimize the risk of branches falling on homes, cars, and people."

While he notes that to date, much of the group effort for Aiken's trees has been geared toward pruning and fertilizing trees, Dacre is excited about a new endeavor, the Legacy Project. Streetscapes donated additional funds to finish a greenhouse that will be used for propagation of grand trees in Aiken. "People hear about us pruning trees, but the Legacy Project will also put us in the business of helping re-grow trees from the grand trees of Aiken.

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*ALC, Aiken Streetscapes,  
and the City of Aiken  
continue to work collectively  
in a variety of ways to  
preserve and protect  
Aiken's beloved trees.*

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DEVELOPED WITH LOTS OF IMAGINATION  
AND PLENTY OF HORSE SENSE.



## BRIDLE CREEK

EQUESTRIAN COMMUNITY

From the developer of Three Runs Plantation comes another wonderful equestrian neighborhood in Aiken, South Carolina. Bridle Creek meanders across 600 wooded acres, featuring five-acre lots and larger. Amenities include a dressage arena, jump arena, X-Country Schooling area and an activity center with meeting, social and fitness space. All this plus miles of scenic trails. Phase One is already sold out, with more to come. Inquire today by calling 1-888-297-8881 or email [info@bridlecreekaiken.com](mailto:info@bridlecreekaiken.com)

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# President's Letter

Dear Friends,

An oft-repeated saying is that “if you’re lucky enough to live in Aiken, you’re lucky enough!” Perhaps more than any other season, spring reminds us of how fortunate we are to live here. In our woods and parkways and along our river edges, spring is announced by a profuse botanical awakening,

beginning with the seemingly inescapable yellow clouds of pine pollen, followed by the blossoming of native azaleas, dogwoods and, finally, the kalmia. By the time this reliable seasonal procession comes to a close, Aiken’s winter visitors are preparing to return north, while year-round residents plan gardens, cut hay, await the birth of foals, or otherwise make ready for summer.

At Aiken Land Conservancy, our work knows no season. Throughout the year, we work to protect the places you love and to expand our preservation footprint. Our work includes important partnerships. For example, you can read in this newsletter about our work with Aiken Streetscapes to preserve Aiken’s grand trees. We also proudly support the work of the City of Aiken and the Hitchcock Woods Foundation in mitigating stormwater erosion in Sand River.

But our most vital partnership is with you! ALC depends on your support, including your financial contributions, your donations of land and conservation easements, and your attendance at our special events and programs. It’s a fair question for every charitable organization: “What do you do with my contribution?” Read on for a brief answer.

**STAFF and OFFICE:** We employ just two part-time staff. They coordinate our business and administrative affairs, ensure that our communications are timely and relevant, and generally keep us running on a daily basis. (Members of our Board and Advisory Council serve without compensation of any kind; they volunteer untold hours advancing our cause, pursuing easements, and monitoring our portfolio of protected properties.)

**EASEMENTS:** In this newsletter, you can read about the Houck Long Branch Preserve, one of our newest protected easements. The path to a completed conservation project is long and requires that we bring in many outside specialists, including appraisers, attorneys, ecologists, surveyors, foresters, wetlands and wildlife experts, etc. All of these professionals must be paid.

**ACCREDITATION, INSURANCE, and ACCOUNTING:** We use a cadre of outside reviewers to provide assurance of our solvency, transparency, and accounting practices. We diligently maintain our accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance and proudly display the stamp of an accredited land trust, signaling that we meet the highest standards for conservation excellence. As a result of this fastidious management and oversight, we have a perfect score of 100 at Charity Navigator.

*The mission of the Aiken Land Conservancy is to preserve Aiken’s unique character and natural and historic resources for present and future generations through advocacy and land protection.*

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*See President's Letter on page 15*

from *Mozart* 2022  
*Mozart* to  
**MOTOWN**  
an evening with russell joel brown



The concert was a high-energy, tour de force performance by Broadway actor Russell Joel Brown (Mufasa and Scar in Disney's *The Lion King*) and renowned organist Keith Shafer. Backed by a five-piece band, the performance featured ten different styles of music: classical, spirituals, Broadway, jazz, blues, country, African, R&B, rock and gospel. A fun time was had by all! Guests were literally dancing in the aisles of St. Thaddeus!

On March 18, Aiken Land Conservancy held an exciting fundraiser – From Mozart to Motown – a concert at the historic St. Thaddeus Episcopal Church, preceded by a cocktail reception. This event was the first of its kind for ALC, and it was a remarkable success, with a substantial portion of the net proceeds going toward ALC's Tree Initiative.





Photos courtesy of Ginny Southworth

We owe a debt of gratitude to our Co-Chairs, Kirk Henckels and Nancy Henze, who did a terrific job of bringing the vision to life. ALC would like to thank our Vice Chairs and Patrons, without whom we could not have achieved this success.



## Vice Chairs

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# Gateway Project Targeting Thanksgiving Completion

A drive past the intersection of South Boundary Avenue and Laurens Street confirms that the Hitchcock Gateway Project is well underway. This ambitious project is on track to deliver a new community asset while simultaneously addressing the long-standing soil erosion and sedimentation issues in Hitchcock Woods caused by uncontrolled stormwater runoff from the city. The project continues to be on budget and is expected to be completed prior to Thanksgiving.

The installation of stormwater vaults has been completed in the back section of the project (closer to the Woods) and that section has been covered with soil. The section closer to Laurens Street is now prepped for the installation of stormwater vaults which is slated for May and June. That section will then be covered with soil in June and July.

The project team recently completed one change order to the project which involved digging 20 holes measuring 30' in depth and 36" in diameter. These holes allow water held in this front section to better drain naturally through a layer of kaolin that was discovered at the level where the vaults were to be installed. Gravel was added to level the bottom of the site and the performance of the French drains is proving to be excellent; drainage rates are expected to be at least as good as planned for this project.

The project schedule in September and October calls for the installation and testing of the Opti Control system as well as landscaping work on the new greenspace that will create a more visible and accessible entrance to Hitchcock Woods. The Opti Control system is a series of smart valves will allow for the controlled release of stormwater held in the vaults prior to a major weather event.

The goal of the Gateway greenspace is to create a new community asset that enables more residents and visitors to learn about and experience the history and natural beauty of Hitchcock Woods. People will be able to walk to the Gateway from town as well as from the County Museum by pedestrian walkways.

The greenspace itself will be replanted with mature trees and native plants (including live oaks and magnolias) and will have a permeable walking path that routes visitors toward the Woods while offering educational kiosks as well as other points of interest (e.g., pollinator garden, rain garden) along the way. There will also be a bridle path for horses to better access the Woods.



*Scenes from the archaeological dig in the Woods that uncovered the remains of the original Charleston to Hamburg Railroad which is deemed to be one of the most important sites in early railroad history*



Plans for the Gateway continue to evolve, and several new features have been added including:

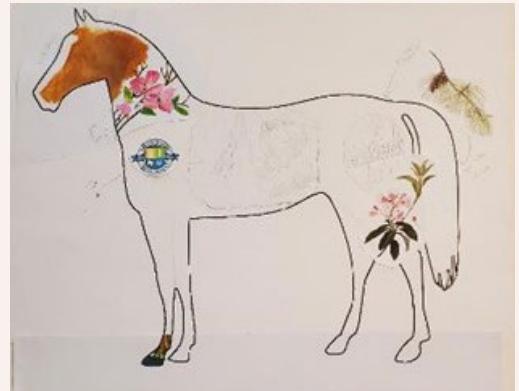
 **Painted Horse**: The city has commissioned a new painted horse to be named “Gateway” that will be placed near the entrance to the greenspace. The preliminary design of this horse highlights both environmental and equestrian features of the Woods (e.g., fox squirrels, red cockaded woodpeckers and longleaf pines, along with a rider jumping a horse).

 **Margaret Shealy Memorial**: The Aiken Garden Club is adding a tribute to Margaret that includes a bench and plaque near a white oak sapling that was grown from a Maid Marion tree acorn.

 **History of Aiken and the Railroad**: Plans are developing to use the Gateway to highlight the connection between Hitchcock Woods and the role of the railroad in Aiken’s history. The original route of the Best Friend railroad went through Hitchcock Woods very close to the Gateway. An archaeological dig conducted in 2017 identified artifacts from this early railroad history and supported this area being put on the National Register of Historic Places.

 **Educational Kiosks**: Plans are coming together for a series of educational kiosks that address various topics of interest. These topics include the flora and fauna of the Woods, the history of the Woods and the stormwater management work completed at this site. Kiosks will be designed to be a quick read (limited text with plenty of images) but will include a QR code that enables people to access more information if desired.

The Aiken Land Conservancy continues to be excited about the potential of this project to be a win-win for the community, addressing the long-standing environmental issues caused by stormwater while at the same time creating a new community asset. We are continuing to work closely with the city and the Hitchcock Woods Foundation to ensure this project delivers on this promise. 



Preliminary design of new painted horse featuring the Memorial Gate with longleaf pines, a horse & rider jumping and native plants & animals

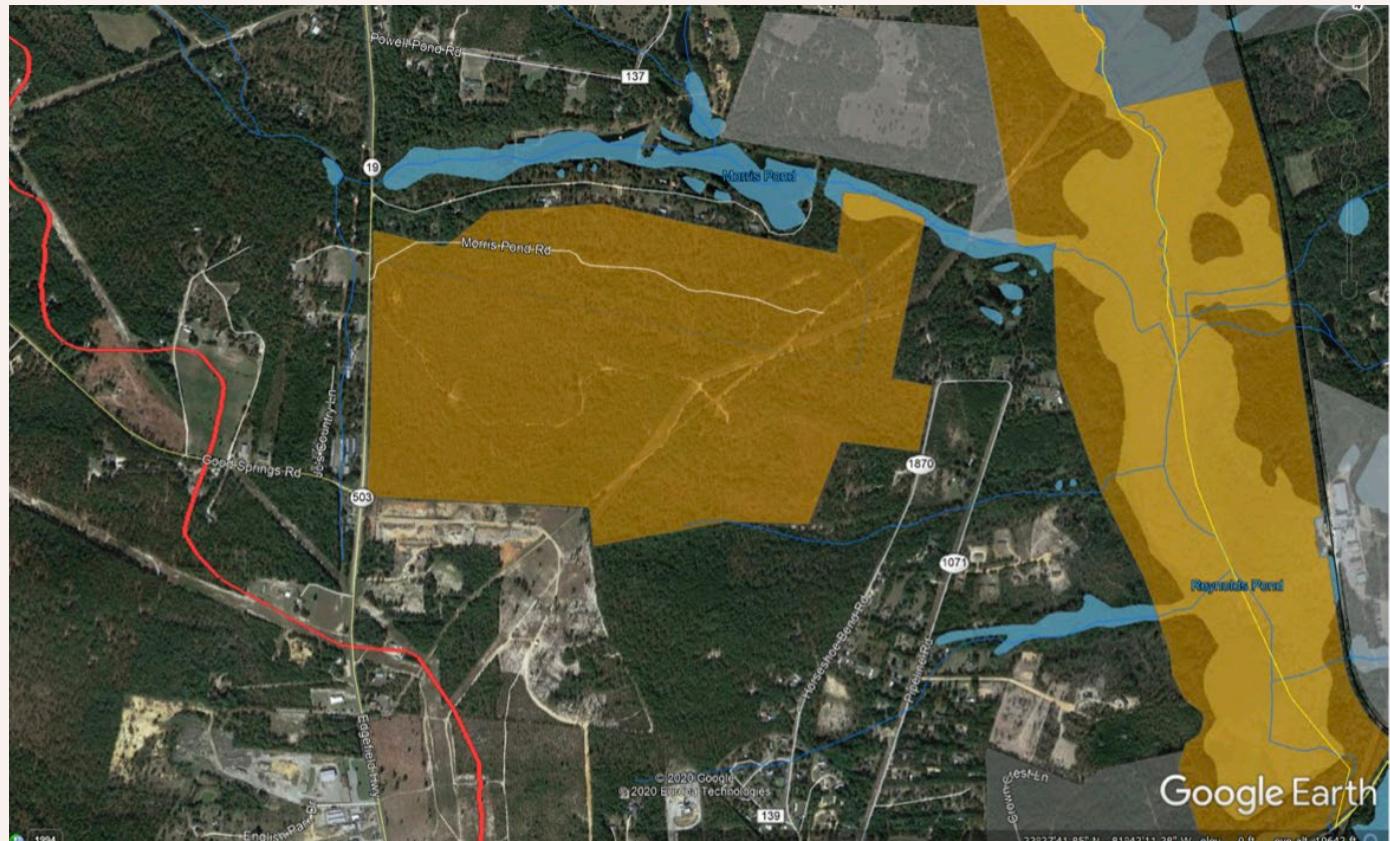


# ALC closes the first conservation easement in the City of Aiken's Upper Shaws Creek Voluntary Conservation Program

In 2019, ALC and other conservation stakeholders partnered with the City of Aiken to create protections for Upper Shaws Creek, a critical source of nearly 20% of Aiken's drinking water and sole source of municipal water for the citizens who reside in the northern reaches of the city. The City has invested greatly in this area: many years ago it purchased Mason's Branch Reservoir as a source of backup water for Shaws Creek, and in 2020 it purchased the 2500 acres of undeveloped land (called the Brunswick Tract) surrounding the reservoir. In addition, the City has authorized construction of a new water treatment plant (WTP) to replace the antiquated one that processes the water from Shaws Creek.

The City created the Upper Shaws Creek Voluntary Conservation Program as an effort to encourage upstream private landowners adjacent to Shaws Creek and its tributaries to donate conservation easements to either the Upper Savannah River Land Trust or ALC. As part of that effort, the City generated a list of the Top 100 Priority land parcels to be preserved.

Don Houck and his partners owned one of the properties identified in the priority list. Situated on Long Branch, a tributary that empties directly into Shaws Creek at the City-owned Reynolds Pond, a portion of the property flanks the tributary and its wetlands. To our delight, Houck, a long-term friend of ALC and a proponent of conservation measures, agreed to place



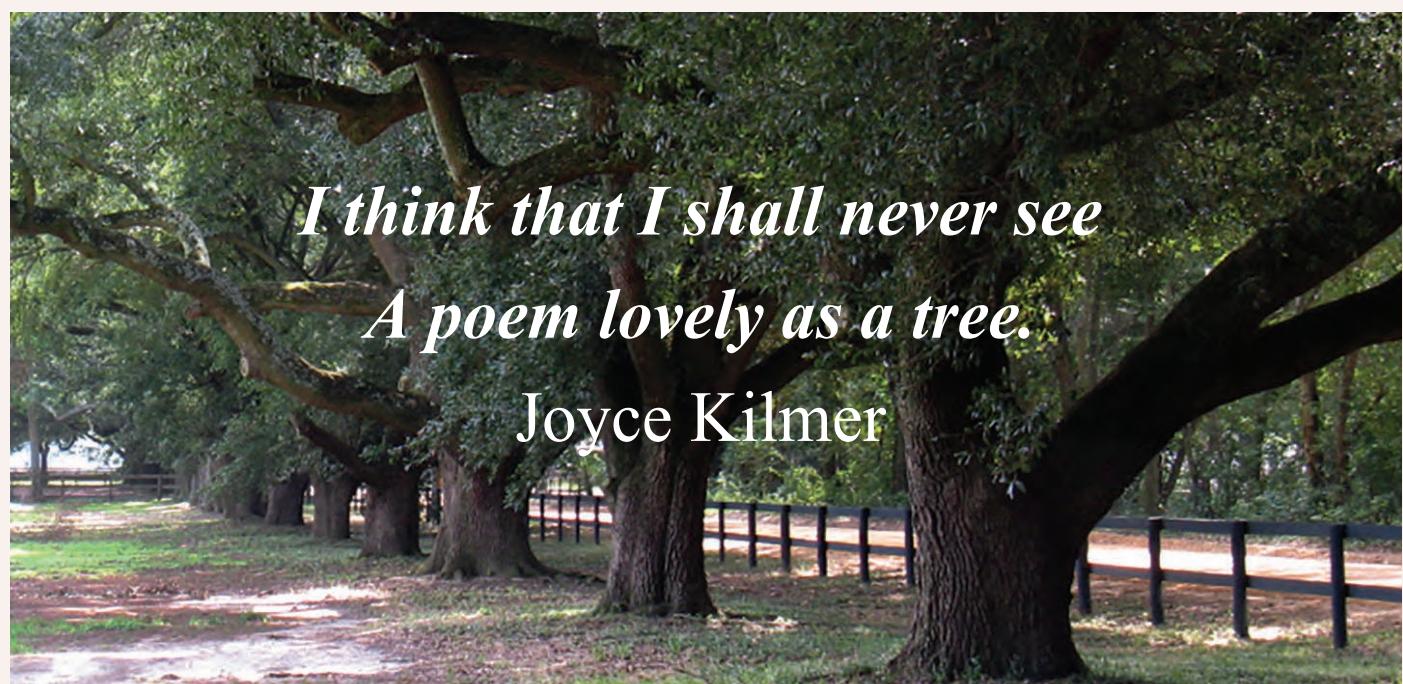
Approximately 45 acres of the northeast portion of the Houck property is protected by a conservation easement donated to ALC

a strict conservation easement on the portions of the property adjacent to, and draining into, Long Branch and its wetlands; indeed, it was the first voluntary easement to be consummated under the City's program.

The property as a whole has not been developed, and the only structures on the property are utility easements. The Houck Long Branch easement does not permit the construction of any structures or roads with pervious surfaces and calls for, among other things, Houck and ALC to work with the power companies to install erosion control mechanisms to protect the sensitive Long Branch wetlands. The donation of the conservation easement was completed in September of 2021, and efforts are underway to develop appropriate erosion controls with the power company.

It should be noted that the 2500-acre Brunswick Tract, the Houck Long Branch preserve, and other City-owned parcels like Reynolds Pond are only the beginning of the effort to create a corridor of green infrastructure along Upper Shaws Creek to protect the quality of the City's drinking water serviced by the Shaws Creek WTP. However; the protections offered by these conservation efforts extend beyond the users of water from Upper Shaws Creek. These properties also rest atop the overlapping recharge areas for the region's four major aquifers, providing critical protection for the quality of groundwater throughout the region.

Efforts continue to preserve additional tracts on the Upper Shaws Creek corridor. ALC is currently negotiating with owners of significant properties adjacent to the Brunswick Tract and Mason's Branch to establish conservation easements. Stay tuned! 🌱



# Planned Giving

The Aiken Land Conservancy (ALC) is grateful to all our supporters who so generously make annual donations in support of our mission. Annual giving, however, only partially funds our operations. Without the income from an endowment established in 2019 through the generous bequest of a donor, we could not sustain our level of activity. It is only through such planned giving that we can ensure our long-term ability to protect the natural and historic treasures that abound in Aiken.

When ALC was informed that we were the beneficiaries of a substantial unrestricted gift from the Herbruck estates, we moved to establish an Endowment Fund. The principal of the fund will remain largely untouched while the investment earnings will supplement annual gifts we receive. This ongoing cash flow has allowed us to set up an office and hire personnel. Another generous bequest from beloved board member Holly Houghton enabled us to establish a fund (together with some prior smaller bequests) that has given the ALC financial resources to pay for certain upfront costs for conservation easements that might otherwise be foregone because of the donor's own finances.

In both of these situations, individuals who believed in our mission chose to support ALC through long-term financial planning; in both cases, charitable gifts from their estates were designated for the ALC. Planned giving is something that can become part of your own personal financial planning. Your gift may be unrestricted or it may be designated for a particular purpose that is important to you, such as the Trees Project, maintenance of Winthrop Field, or funding land acquisition.

Annual gifts, if made with appreciated assets such as stock, are tax advantaged. Low-basis stock may be donated to ALC and the current value of the low-basis stock will be recognized as a charitable gift, BUT the capital appreciation of the stock will not be subject to capital gains tax to the donor or the ALC.

In addition to your annual gifts, there are several other financial techniques that can both ensure that your own

charitable priorities are recognized and that may also provide certain tax advantages to you over the long term.

One form of planned giving is through a bequest in your will or trust that is set up during your lifetime as part of your estate planning. You may also name the ALC as a beneficiary of assets such as life insurance or bank and investment accounts which may pass independently of a will. Such gifts may be unrestricted or you may designate specifically how you would like your gift to be used. And you can modify your gift at any time. Currently there is no limit on the estate tax deduction for charitable bequests.

Your IRA, 401(k) or other retirement plan is another excellent vehicle for making Tax Advantaged planned gifts. As of 2022, after age 72, you are required to take an annual Required Minimum

*Please talk with  
your financial  
and/or tax advisor  
before making a  
gift to Aiken Land  
Conservancy.*

Distribution (RMD) from your IRA. A Qualified Charitable Donation (QCD) from your IRA can satisfy your RMD.

\* Generally, distributions from your IRA are treated as taxable income. A QCD is not included in your adjusted gross income.

\* A QCD is not eligible for a federal income-tax charitable deduction, and therefore is not subject to the percentage limitations on charitable deductions.

\* If you do not itemize deductions on your federal income-tax return, donating to ALC via the QCD provides a tax benefit similar to claiming a charitable contribution deduction.

\* The QCD is not reported as income, therefore will not impact Social Security benefits or Medicare Part B premiums.

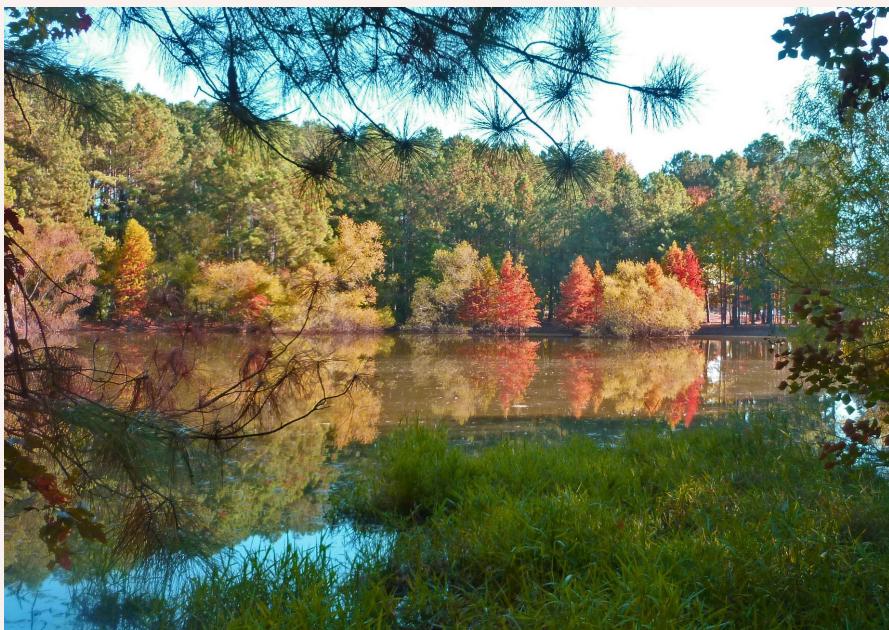
Yet another vehicle for planned giving is the Charitable Remainder Unitrust (CRUT). A CRUT can be structured to provide an income stream until termination of the CRUT, at which time the remainder passes to the ALC. A CRUT funded with appreciated assets avoids immediate capital gains tax and provides an immediate income tax deduction for a portion of your contribution.

# SAVE THE DATE – OCTOBER 9

## Presentation on Carolina Bays

Do you know what a Carolina Bay is? Some people think they were formed by meteorites, others have no idea how they came to be and still others don't even know they exist. There is a Carolina Bay open to the public right in the City of Aiken.

ALC, in partnership with the City of Aiken, is presenting a talk by a specialist on these unusual landforms. Naturalist author Tom Poland will give a talk on Carolina Bays at Odell Weeks on October 9 and then lead the group on a short walk from Odell Weeks to the bay on Price Avenue. Please join us for this free event. More details to come.



In anticipation of this event you can preview photographs of Bays all over the South in the book *Carolina Bays: Wild, Mysterious, and Majestic Landforms* which Mr. Poland co-authored with photographer Robert C. Clark. (<https://www.amazon.com/Carolina-Bays-Mysterious-Majestic-Landforms/dp/1643360566>)

### Trees continued from page 1.....

When a tree comes down, we are committed to re-plant three in its place," he says. "If we can use cuttings and acorns to grow them in the greenhouse, maybe in two years or so we can put them in the ground, and it would be part of the same tree, like a child of that tree!"

It is hoped that the Legacy Project will be an outlet for the entire community to contribute by way of smaller donations. The Executive Committee of ALC, along with Dacre representing Aiken Streetscapes, will work with the City of Aiken Public Works department to develop a mutually beneficial outreach program for the propagation of legacy trees. This is another example of a public/private initiative to benefit our trees in Aiken.

We all love our Tree City USA and want to minimize utility cuts as much as possible. Residents, too, can help by being responsible property and tree owners. "We are always here to educate residents about their own trees -- especially what types of trees or shrubs are or are not appropriate to plant near power lines. Avoid the pitfalls of utility cuts," Dacre encourages. 



# CLAYS FOR CONSERVATION

After a one-year hiatus due to Covid, Clays for Conservation was held on Thanksgiving weekend, a new time of year for the event. It was a beautiful day and we had over 110 attendees, including 28 beginners who received professional instruction from the Palmetto Shooting Complex staff. After the shooting competition, a delicious BBQ lunch was provided by Park Row Market No. 1, with homemade desserts from ALC. A great time was had by all, and the funds raised went toward our mission of protecting land, trees and water in Aiken County.



Cissie Sullivan (Meybohm Sponsor) group

## *Congratulations to all the winners!*

### Top Men's Team:

BARTLETT TEAM  
Bobby Fralix  
Sam Gallagher  
Teddy Hoel  
Steven Highsmith

### Top Women's Team:

Ann Mitchell  
Candy Moore  
Kathy Modesitt  
Susan Danne

### Best Senior Man:

Derrick Boddy

### Best Senior Woman:

(Tie )

Ann Mitchell  
Candy Moore

### Best Beginner Man:

Locklin Anderson

Susan Parry

### Best Junior: (Tie)

Savannah and Emily

### Clay Conservationist Man:

Larry Comegys

### Clay Conservationist Woman:

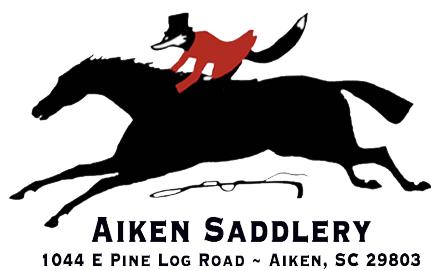
Amanda Silver



*Best Men's Team — Bartlett Team*



*Best Women's Team*

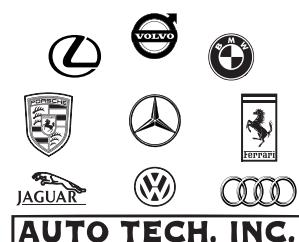


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*Best Beginner Man*



*Best Beginner Woman*

# Collins Tree and Stump Service

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*President's Letter, continued from page 3*

**MESSAGING, FUNDRAISING, and EVENTS:** Once or twice a year, we organize a fundraising event. You may remember good times at previous fundraisers, including Derby Dreamin' at New Bridge Polo Club, Katydid CDE Signature Brunch, and The Mane Event at Bruce's Field. Our current annual fundraising event is Clays for Conservation at the Palmetto Shooting Complex in Edgefield. This year, we also added the recent – and wildly successful – From Mozart to Motown concert by Russell Joel Brown and Keith Shafer. Look for photo essays on these two events in this newsletter.



I hope these details will inspire you to confidently support our mission -- by attending our fundraisers, by making a financial contribution, or by donating an easement on your ecologically or historically important land. To discuss whether a conservation easement may be right for you,

please get in touch through our website. Please also take a moment to read the article on planned giving in this newsletter; it describes several methods by which you can include ALC in your legacy and estate planning.

As surely as summer follows spring, our work to protect the places you love is more important than ever. We are grateful for your support! 

A handwritten signature of the name "Laura".

*Laura Bagwell*  
President, Board of Trustees

p.s. When you finish reading your newsletter, please pass it along to a friend.

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# *A Life Well Lived*

## Margaret Shealy, Honorary Trustee

With the passing of Margaret Shealy, ALC and Aiken lost one of their most dedicated conservationists. Margaret's involvement with ALC began when her husband Harry and Iris Freeman first conceived of the idea of a land trust. In 1991, she agreed to serve as secretary and continued in that role for 25 years. "Margaret was just as passionate about conservation and preserving open space as I am," Harry emphasizes and notes, "Margaret is really the one responsible for creating awareness of Aiken's magnificent trees." It was through her efforts to save the 300-year-old white oak known as Maid Marion that so many of Aiken's residents came to understand the rarity of our magnificent trees. While Maid Marion was, unfortunately could not be saved, Margaret's campaign led to awareness and helped save historic trees at Winthrop Field, the Green Boundary Club, and South Boundary's iconic live oaks.

Harry was never surprised at what Margaret could accomplish. "She was a woman who knew what she wanted and how to get it done," he says with a grin. Harry and Margaret met in invertebrate zoology class at USC's Columbia campus. "It was the first day of class in January of 1964 when Margaret walked in and sat next to me. She started flirting with me, which kind of scared me because she was so pretty and popular and I didn't want to have my heart broken," he recalls. Years later, Margaret admitted to Harry that she had a checklist of what she wanted in a husband. "Apparently, when she looked at me, she started checking off things. I was neatly dressed, I had nice teeth, and most importantly, I had blue eyes," he laughs.

The couple married a year and a half later, a week after Harry graduated. Although her family had roots in Barnwell County, as the daughter of an army officer, Margaret had lived in numerous states and several other countries. After spending the early days of their marriage in Winnipeg, she was thrilled when Harry accepted a position at USC Aiken.

When their two children, Beth and John, were quite young, Margaret finished getting her credentials and embarked on a teaching career that would span 40 years at several schools in Aiken and North Augusta. She predominantly taught

middle school English and many past students remember her as one of their best and most influential teachers.



*"Without Margaret, Spring in Aiken is somehow dimmer, darker, less exuberant. Nothing pushes forward to replace that now-missing wit, that elegance, that relentless though polished spark. How lucky we are to have known her."*

- Wilkins Byrd, ALC Vice President

Margaret was an active member of the Aiken Garden Club for decades and was instrumental in the club becoming inducted into the prestigious Garden Club of America. She was renowned for her ability to arrange flowers, making her a consistent winner at flower shows. Margaret often arranged flowers for Saint Thaddeus Episcopal Church's altar on Sundays. Harry says, "After the service, a volunteer would disassemble the arrangements to disperse the flowers for others to enjoy. She said she could always tell if Margaret had done the flowers that week as her arrangements were so special."

Margaret was always involved in Saint Thaddeus; she also taught Sunday school for a time and served on numerous committees. She was inspired to join Daughters of the American Revolution after seeing the movie, *The Patriot*. Another of her favorite groups was the Student Club of Aiken where she held every office. Founded by women over 100 years ago, the club's goal is to keep their minds stimulated through presentations on a variety of topics.

As her husband of more than 56 years, Harry thoroughly knew and appreciated Margaret's gusto. "She was passionate about conservation, teaching, her family, and Aiken. And when she got on a cause, she was on it!"

The Aiken Garden Club is currently planning a fitting memorial to Margaret. When the Hitchcock Gateway stormwater project is complete, the club will plant a memorial garden with its centerpiece being a white oak sapling that was raised from a Maid Marion acorn. "The tree lives on," Harry says joyously.

*"Two personal events, each important but for different reasons, come to my mind when I think of what Margaret means to me, a caring woman always helping people and the community she so loved. First, when our daughter was married at St Thaddeus ten years ago, her calm direction and sense of humor behind the scenes made the wedding day go smoothly, keeping the bride and bridesmaids relaxed and ready, right up to the processional! Second, when I was ALC president she calmly, but persistently, introduced me to Maid Marion (the oak tree). She made sure I "got religion" for a cause, the trees of Aiken, a cause that she was rightfully passionate about, and one that all of us needed to embrace."*

- LARRY COMEGYS, Past ALC President



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