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Joshua's Trust officers and volunteers recently posed at Atwood Farm on Wormwood Hill Road in Mansfield Center. The trust is celebrating 50 years of land preservation. From the left is, Nancy Silander from Storrs, chairman of the Joshua's Trust 50th Anniversary Committee; Peggy Church from Chaplin, a local volunteer with the trust; Mona Anderson from Mansfield, who is chairman of the Atwood Committee; Gwen Haaland from Ashford, a Joshua's Trust trustee; Rudy Favretti from Mansfield, a Joshua's Trust trustee; and Michael Mhveem from Vernon, executive director of Joshua's Trust.

50 years and counting

Joshua's Trust has long history of preservation

By COREY SIPE
Chronicle Staff Writer

MANSFIELD — Whether it's a birthday or an anniversary, celebrating 50 years is always a cause for celebration.

This year has been just such a celebration for the Joshua's Trust Conservation and Historic Trust, which began to commemorate this anniversary back in March.

It concludes honoring a half century of land preservation with a special gala Saturday.

Members of Joshua's Trust gathered at their recently-acquired headquarters at the 67-acre Atwood Farm, located at 624 Wormwood Hill Road in Mansfield, as they looked back at the past and look forward to the future.

Joshua's Trust, northeastern Connecticut's larg-

est land trust, is a nonprofit organization named after Joshua Uncas, son of Sachem Uncas, of the Mohegan Tribe.

The organization was named after Sachem as its goal — as his — is to conserve land.

"It's amazing in 50 years that we oversee or own 4,000-plus acres and have around 200 volunteers that helped make things happen," said Mansfield resident Rudy Favretti, who has been a trustee for the past six years.

Additionally, he said "I've been involved with the trust more than 50 years. I've been involved with the (original) organization of it with many other people."

When it was originally founded, Favretti said it was unusual that it started as a regional organization

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Joshua's Trust to celebrate 50 years

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since, at the time, Connecticut's 169 towns liked to work independent of each other.

Residents of several surrounding towns worked with Mansfield residents as well as the Mansfield Historical Society and the Mansfield Conservation Commission in organizing and incorporating Joshua's Trust in 1966.

The trust currently has properties in 13 towns which include Andover, Ashford, Chaplin, Columbia, Coventry, Franklin, Hampton, Lebanon, Mansfield, Scotland, Tolland, Willington and Windham.

The organization's 50th anniversary began with Favretti, who started signing copies of his new book "50 Years of Trust: 1966-2016: The Story of Joshua's Trust Conservation and Historic Trust," this past April.

The book is available for sale at Atwood Farm offices, which are open Tuesdays and Thursdays from noon to 5 p.m. or folks can call for an appointment at (860) 429-9023.

Those involved with Joshua's Trust have spent much time and effort over the last couple years of making improvements to the Atwood Farm after the organization inherited the property from Isabelle Atwood when she passed away in August 2012.

Favretti said the farm was stuck in probate until late 2014, when the organization was finally able to start working to accomplish Atwood's dream of turning it into an 1800s farm museum.

More than 100 people came to the organization's first open house on the property in 2015 and saw the various farm and textile tools Atwood collected over the years.

Currently, the museum consists of a weaver's cottage, blacksmith shop, massive 19th century barn, wagon shed, carriage house, corn crib, ice house, pig sty and chicken house.

While Favretti has done extensive work in restoring the blacksmith shop, Peggy Church, a weaver from Chaplin, worked on restoring the weaver's cottage.

For the entire group, she said the mission to restore the farm "has been inspirational and it has given us energy."

As for the future, Church said,

"the next step is to have school groups, but we need it to be curriculum connected," adding school's would need to transport students to the farm.

Michael Mvheem, executive director of Joshua's Trust, is optimistic about the future as more folks volunteer their time and efforts to help the organization.

He said Kyle Dolce, an E.O. Smith High School senior, is working under the guidance of University of Connecticut professor Lauren Cisneros, of the university's natural resources conservation academy, which is part of the university's department of natural resources and the environment.

Dolce is developing an interactive map of properties for the Joshua's Trust website.

"It will provide layered information on the properties — such as bird habitats, wetlands and geological formation — information for subgroups that have specific interests," Mvheem said, adding some properties are geared more toward passive recreation, while other properties are mainly focused on conservation purposes due to extensive wetlands.

Folks are invited to take a trip with trust steward Peter Anderson through new trails installed on the trust's newest property, the Charles Roches Preserve, at 65 Blair Road in Willington, Saturday at 10 a.m.

Nancy Silander, chairman of the Joshua's Trust 50th Anniversary Committee, who has organized Saturday's gala and dinner at the Camp Horizons main dining hall in South Windham expressed much gratitude to the community.

"Without all the volunteers who have so freely given of their time and talent and economic resources, the trust would not be as successful as it is today," Silander said.

Mvheem said the original deadline to purchase gala tickets was extended since there are still a few empty spots.

Folks can visit <http://joshuas-trust.org/anniversary-gala-on-the-horizon-and-at-camp-horizons> to purchase \$35 tickets for the 6 p.m. gala and dinner on Saturday. More information on Joshua's Trust trails is available by visiting joshuustrust.org.