

Dear Friends,

Thank you for joining our email listserv, which, with your help and my Princeton team's assistance, will replace our old post list. Up in the Kingdom, the leaves have long fallen and balsam and cedar wreath making is well underway.

The purpose of this letter is to let you know that we will be opening the farmstand at the Village Shopper on what has become our traditional start day, Friday, November 29th, the day after Thanksgiving. You may see me getting things organized a week before with Bonnie, Suzy, Nick, Jim, and Chuck's help.

As this season will be our first one selling trees, wreaths, garlands, and maple syrup under the name Clyde River Farm and Forest, my other purpose is to briefly trace the origins of our holiday market in the Princeton area. I hope to help you and I both understand this change, and, in a more roundabout way, why I've gone from Sterling College to the Vermont Leadership Center to embracing the life of a full-time farmer.

I also hope to distinguish more clearly between our work on the land and our continuing work in the arts and environmental education. The latter will come under The Vermont Leadership Center for the Arts, Agriculture and the Environment, a new non-profit founded in 2012.

In northern Vermont, change is not only a rich subject for conversation and humor at the country store, but a historical fact of an ecosystem balanced between farm and forestland. For me, Clyde River Farm and Forest is the latest stop along the same continuum of change that took me from Sterling College to the Vermont Leadership Center. To work the land and make it function as an economic system has long been a dream of mine as far back as I can remember.

When I was hired as President of Sterling I was a green kid of 27, learning mostly from hands-on experience and my colleagues. We changed the curriculum from a traditional prep school to a college that regarded character molded by the rugged elements of northern New England as an important attribute of education. Hence our Sterling mission way back when: "Working Hands, Working Minds." Sterling's public purpose and focus on community outreach would become integral to the mission of the Vermont Leadership Center, founded in 1989.

Early on, the Center developed a Citizen's Network to bring landowners, conservationists, and local citizens together to find common ground as paper companies began to unload land to the highest bidder. Three years of meetings and get-togethers resulted in an unprecedented inventory of the region's assets and issues, from biological diversity to recreational resources. This gave us the opportunity to play a role in a new approach to economic development and conservation--one based on people working together to steward fields, forests, and communities.

The inventory of these uncharted waters and the need to connect with traditional values became the foundation of our curricula in many local schools. Under the "northern forest challenge," educators were trained to facilitate adventure and the Kingdom Corps was born. Today, the Kingdom Corps employs hundreds of youth, helping them develop their own land ethic by undertaking conservation work.

For me, working to help others find their bearings on the land has enabled me to set my own roots along a sloping hillside in the Clyde River Valley. On the agriculture side, we are growing hay and a full scope of organic vegetables, both in the fields and in our new 30x72 greenhouse. Farming in Northern Vermont has its challenges, but we benefit from generations of farmers before us who picked rocks, dug springs, and built up the organic matter we use today.

We are also developing an arts nonprofit at an old historic round barn site on our property adjacent to the Northwoods Stewardship Center. Inspired by my daughter Alison's undergraduate thesis, The Vermont Center for the Arts, Agriculture, and Environment was co-founded by Alison and me as a way to bring the performing arts to rural New England. We aim to schedule our first performances and outreach programs for Summer and Fall 2014, and hope to bring in performers and educators from New York and the greater New England area.

With your help over the years, we've managed to grow from humble beginnings at a little farm stand in Lawrenceville to our present site at the Village shopper in Skillman. Your support and dedication has bolstered the development of two nonprofits, and inspired the creation of an organic vegetable farm on rocky Vermont hillside.

I have been able to take a giant step forward this year with the help of Alexandra Leston from Brooklyn. Although we have had contributions from many talented interns over the years, Alex came to me to work on the land as a WWOOFer. She is still here, taking on important responsibilities as farm manager, including the development of our new website.

Many of you will remember son Bret and daughter Alison, who have worked off and on over the years since they could walk. Alison is now manager of The Yard, a non-profit on Marthas Vineyard, and a professional dancer in New York City. Bret has just returned from an exciting research project in Ecuador and is working in the Dartmouth College Evolutionary Biology Lab as a research assistant.

But many of you do not know the creative genius behind the wreaths and holiday decorations that grace the walls of the Christmas Tree Stand. I marvel at the products my wife, Pat Moyer, along with her talented team, craft from cedar, balsam, and pine every season. In response to your enthusiasm we are making more mixed wreaths and garlands and we have added a mail order option through the website.

Finally, I can't help but close with a tribute to Faith Ziesing who not only inspired my work at Sterling College and the Center, but also helped me find my first site. Some, like Faith and her husband Hibben, Dick Poole, and Pat and Dick Paynter have left us, but their work is carried on by a very talented crew both at the Christmas tree stand and in the Northeast Kingdom.

If you get the time, please check out our website www.vermontleadershippartnerships.com and come by and see me in a few weeks.

Yours Truly,

Bill