

A Walk in the Woods – Bremen Style

By Cheryl Ferrara

Nestled in the heart of Bremen is the 47-acre Town Forest and Hilton O'Connor Trail. This well-maintained, 1.5-mile hiking trail traverses a landscape, replete with stone walls, saltwater marshes, freshwater creeks, old and new growth forests and flora and fauna unique to Mid-coast Maine.

Since the late nineteenth century, New England towns have sought to preserve local woods by placing them under public stewardship. Nearly a century later, Bremen purchased the wooded acreage and the Bremen Conservation Commission planned the Town's first public trail, designed and executed by Steve Laurich, thereby connecting Bremen's Town Forest to that New England tradition.

The Conservation Commission dedicated the trail in memory of Diane Hilton O'Connor during a ceremony at the Town House and trailhead on October 28, 2012, inviting the public to explore the 1.5 miles of marked trails complete with footbridges for easier access.

In dedicating the trail, the Conservation Commission honored Diane as the founder and first chairperson of the Conservation Commission. A Bremen native, Diane was born in 1941 to one of the oldest families in the town. After graduating from Colby College, she spent her next 34 years in Washington, D.C.

In 1966 she joined the Information Office of the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. She remained in that department for 21 years including 12 years as its press officer. Later, she worked as Deputy Chief of the News Division for the USDA's Office of Public Affairs. Among her many recognitions, Mrs. O'Connor received the Office's highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award.

Diane and her husband, Leo J. O'Connor, returned to Bremen in 1996 where they lived in Diane's family home, the Hilton Homestead. She became an active leader on many Town boards including the Budget Committee; the Planning Board where she was the chairperson for two years; and the Ordinance Review Committee. She also volunteered for the Bremen Conservation Commission, the Bremen Historical Society, and the Patriotic Club.

Diane's earlier work in Washington, D.C. honed her concept of forest preservation and environmental protection of recreation areas. She led the Bremen Town Forest trail project, fulfilling her vision for making woodland access enjoyable for current and future generations.

In 2010, Diane was appointed to be a member of the Maine Association of Conservation Commissions. She remained active in many of her capacities until her death on November 30, 2011.