

EverGreen Legacy Voices: Deanna & Don Cullen



Deanna, with an easy laugh, and Don, always with a joke, are the sort of people a whole evening could go by without looking at a watch. Sitting down with them in their home in Matunuck, we took a moment to appreciate the beauty around us: the light salt breeze, the quiet solace you only get down by the water, and the buzz of native pollinators enjoying the garden as much as we were. Even in their home, they have opened the doors and welcomed the outdoors in.

Perhaps it is no surprise that they have made their home here. For both of them, a connection to the outdoors began long before South Kingstown became home.

For Deanna, that connection to Rhode Island goes back to childhood. ***"I spent a lot of my summers in Rhode Island on my dad's boat,"*** she says. ***"We'd come down Friday night after he got out of work and stay until Sunday night."*** There days were spent fishing, trips to Block Island, seaweed and sand everywhere, and evenings at the local clam shacks. I would use every excuse I could come up with to stay as long as possible.

"I just loved being here."

I remember being on the boat, looking at the shoreline dotted with houses and think to myself, ***'who gets to live here?'*** Now I can say ***"I do!"*** When they first built their home in South Kingstown, they thought of it as a summer place. But Rhode Island had other plans. Their sons attended nearby universities and fell in love with the area, too. Eventually, when Deanna and Don asked whether either son might want their house in Connecticut, the answer was a resounding no.

They weren't leaving Rhode Island. Neither were Deanna or Don.

"It's so many things in one postage-sized area," Deanna says. ***"The people, the landscape, the salt ponds, the fields, the trails. There is always something to do, somewhere to explore."*** That love of place eventually led them to the South Kingstown Land Trust. Driving down Route 1 and Matunuck Beach Road on the way to their home, they often wondered about the undeveloped land around them.

"Why is all this land undeveloped?" Deanna remembers wondering. ***"And what's going on in the barn over there? It looks like it's a party..."***

Once they discovered SKLT, they joined hikes and lectures, volunteered, visited the Grist Mill, and got to know the people behind the organization. Deanna became involved with the Development Committee and played an integral part in this year's

Great Outdoors Celebration. ***"It's not just an organization,"*** she says. ***"These are real people behind it that have a true love of the land."***

For Deanna, that connection to the land is about more than scenery ***"It means being able to breathe."***

She remembers driving back to South Kingstown after a week in Connecticut. As they passed the stone walls and open fields, she could feel herself relax. ***"I felt like I was holding my breath all week,"*** she says. ***"And then once we'd hit those stone walls and fields, I could breathe again. I was home."***

That feeling is part of why the Cullens chose to include SKLT in their estate plans. They saw in the Land Trust the things they value most: conservation, education, agriculture, recreation, and community.

"It was really a no-brainer for us," Don says.

They hope their gift will help keep these places here for generations to come.

As Don puts it, ***"You can't just take it for granted. It has to be actively pursued."***

And for anyone looking to begin that connection for themselves, Deanna has some simple and effective advice:

"First step is just get outside. Come to a lecture. Come to a hike. Walk the fields. Breathe."

– Tasha Sussman Moss, Development & Outreach Coordinator

Coming this Fall! Estate Planning 101 with Neil Anthes



Did you know that more than 60% of American adults do not have a will?

While estate planning isn't always easy to think about, having a will is an important way to make your wishes known and protect the people, assets, and places you care about most.

Financial Advisor **Neil Anthes** of **Raymond James in Westerly** will join SKLT this fall for a conversation covering all things wills and estate planning.

Keep an eye out for more information and registration details!