MONDAY
AUGUST 29, 2016

WEATHER

Sunny today. Highs near 80; lows 50 to 55.

DETAILS, C6

Take the plunge

Manhattanite gets his dream (water) wings and learns to swim at age 75

CURRENTS, C1

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Watertown Daily Times

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JUSTIN SORENSEN ■ WATERTOWN DAILY TIMES

Edward M. Robertson, Indian River Lakes Conservancy executive director, speaks at a dedication of the Baker Woods Preserve, 354 acres of land donated by Doris Baker, center, on Sunday in the town of Diana.

Land donated to conservancy

INDIAN RIVER LAKES: Tract totals 354 acres

By CRAIG FOX
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DIANA — Doris N. Baker still remembers hopping on a large rock to get a better view of the meandering Indian River and a pine forest on a peaceful, undeveloped piece of land in the town of Diana shortly before she got married in 1975.

After owning some 354 acres for more than 40 years, Mrs. Baker, now 81, wants others to enjoy the tract of wilderness for generations to come.

Mrs. Baker has donated the pristine land to the Indian River Lakes Conservancy, formed in 1988 to preserve "critical lands" in the Indian River area of the north country.

"I know it's in the best possible hands," she said before a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Sunday to dedicate what is now Baker Woods Preserve.

For decades, Mrs. Baker and her husband, Norman, traveled from their cosmopolitan lives in Manhattan every summer and often during the winter to enjoy their second home. She was a doctor at Wild Cornell Medical College in Manhattan; he was an astrophysicist at Columbia University. He died in 2005 at the

See LAND A7

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People gather for a dedication of the 354-acre Baker Woods Preserve on Sunday in the town of Diana.

Land

From A1

age of 74.

Last year, she was looking to donate the land to a worthy organization and friend Gloria Sage approached Jerry Smith, a local ornithologist, who suggested the conservancy. A restored 1890s farmhouse that accompanies the property also has been gifted to the conservancy.

The seven-hour drive from New York City got to be too much for her, although she plans to visit her neighbors, Matthew Carney, his family and the pristine land, as often as she can.

Conservancy Executive Director Edward M. Robertson said that a $35,000 matching grant paid for preparing a survey, some other documents and help complete more than three miles of walking and cross country trails, which people can enjoy "without having bullets flying over their heads."

"It's quite a gift, a 354-acre strong gift," Mr. Robertson said. "It's a nice place for people to come out and walk."

He also thanked the town of Diana for agreeing to take the property off the tax rolls.

The Bakers first purchased 222 acres on the Natural Bridge side of the river and then added 132 acres on the other side in 1989. It spans the upper reaches of the Indian River and is the home of abundant wildlife, including black bear, trout, blue heron and an occasional passing moose. The land consists of extensive river and wetlands, a 90-acre red pine plantation planted in 1953 and native coniferous and hardwood forests.

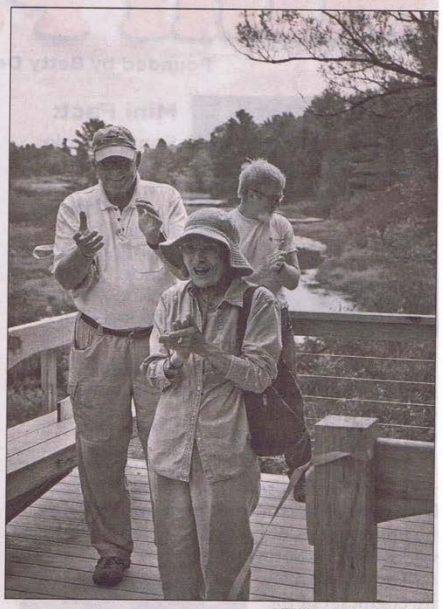
"It's so wonderful," Mrs. Baker said.

In recent months, Mr. Carney and a group of volunteers built the trails to get ready for the ribbon-cutting. Local contractors constructed a deck next to that rock that Mrs. Baker jumped on so many years ago and a stone pathway that leads to the natural grass trail. A kiosk, where a guest book already sits in a drawer, will greet people to sign and write notes about their walks.

The Baker Woods Conservancy will be the third large land donation that the conservancy has acquired since it formed 18 years ago. The organization is now the stewards of about 1,000 acres of land that will remain forever undeveloped, said Elliot "Sandy" Hillsback, president of the board.

The Bakers' long friendship with the Carneys has been a life-changing experience for his family, he said. His two children went off to college within five minutes of her Manhattan homes, "so you can see the impact they've had."

Mr. Carney, who's originally from the Adirondack Mountains, also said he's forever grateful that residents of Diana will never have to worry about what will happen to land in the years to come.



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Doris Baker applauds during a dedication of the Baker Woods Preserve Sunday in the town of Diana. To her left is Indian River Lakes Conservancy President Elliot 'Sandy' Hillsback.