

# Whimsical walk is an inviting place

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**Old Lyme** - In a forest preserve overlooking an area of salt marshes and osprey nests stands a whimsical walk.

Red and gold painted rocks along a trail direct visitors to a grove of miniature houses and make-believe fairy gardens within the four-acre Belton Copp Preserve on Smith Neck Road.

Earlier this month, a group of children and adults gathered with a local artist to build the houses out of seashells, rocks and bamboo. Now the area features creations, such as a ship made out of a basket and wind chimes hanging from trees.

"It's just a spot of wonderment," said Andrea Fenton, an organizer of the event.

The organizers are now hoping the make-believe fairy garden will highlight the town's trails and encourage others to contribute to the efforts.

The idea to create the faery walk originated when Fred Fenton, a board member of the Old Lyme Land Trust, sat in a meeting one day looking at a map of the trust's land parcels. He became curious about a parcel down the road from Smith Neck: the Belton Copp Preserve.

After learning more about the land, Fred Fenton started clearing an overgrown area of the preserve into a path. A work party from the land trust joined him later to create a circular path of scenic trails within the preserve. As he and the trust's other members worked, a shaded grove in the preserve sparked his interest.

"I thought what a nice spot," he recalled.

Fred Fenton and his wife, Andrea Fenton, collaborated on the project with Pat Lee, whose daughter, Amy Lee, and fellow Girl Scout, Allyson McCarthy, created a "Whimsey Walk" at the Watch Rock Preserve years ago. The Girl Scouts had created a trail complete with brightly colored miniature houses and a stone ring for the imaginary fairies to dance and sing.

Later storms damaged the Watch Rock trail, but the project inspired the event organizers to continue the tradition and create a new fairy walk at the Belton Copp Preserve.

"It's magical," said Lee. "It just kind of creates a curiosity."

Belton Copp, a conservationist, lawyer, World War II veteran and Smith Neck Road resident, had donated the land for the preserve about 20 years ago. His wife, Genie Copp, dedicated a granite bench to honor his memory beneath a large cedar tree at the start of the preserve.

To educate the public about the preserve and celebrate National Trails Day in early June, artist Melanie Gross of Chester, guided the children in the grove as they created tiny houses from thimbles, moss and other "broken treasures," said Andrea Fenton.

Fred Fenton said he hopes the whimsical walk will interest people in nature and teach the younger generation to enjoy the outdoors.

"I hope it's fun and it's an inducement to get people and children out of doors and into the woods and an inducement for them to use their own creativity and just be excited to be outside," said Fred Fenton.