



# GIANT NEWS

Newsletter of the Sleeping Giant Park Association  
Spring 2024 • Issue 132

## Commemorating 100 years in 2024! *A Brief History of How SGPA Became a Park*

—by Kari Vecchitto, *Giant News Editor*

### The Legend of Sleeping Giant

Connecticut is rich in Native American History. One Tribe, The Quinnipiac - The people of Long Water Land, was a group of indigenous people who inhabited the land in present-day New Haven County of Connecticut. I cannot tell the story of how SGPA began without telling you about the Quinnipiac people's legend of Sleeping Giant. After all, this is the true beginning of how our beloved park came to be.

Legend has it that a stone giant lived among the Quinnipiac people. His name was Hobbomock. He taught the people how to use the land respectfully, how to live harmoniously with nature and animals. He taught them to speak the same language. The legend describes how he was so pleased with how his teaching influenced the people to take care of the land that he sailed off to teach his ways to others. Hobbomock was gone for a long time, upon his return, he saw that the people were speaking different languages than the animals. The communication between them had broken down. He feared this loss of harmony would spread around the world. This broke his heart. The sadness turned to anger, and the stone giant threw a tantrum, stomping all over the land, so powerful that it would change the landscape forever. This behavior terrified the people. They feared he would destroy them all because he was so angry. The elders called on the spirit Keihtan to help them. So, Keihtan cast a sleeping spell on the oysters and fish that Hobbomock liked to eat from Long Island Sound. Before long, Hobbomock became tired. He wandered inland, stumbled, and fell to his knees where he sleeps today. His massive form became one with the earth. This land mass became known as Sleeping Giant.

### SGPA's First Days

Before it was Sleeping Giant State Park, it was the site of a quarry operation, which at that time was owned by Blakeslee Associates. According to the lease held by Blakeslee, "no rock shall be taken from... any point where the quarry face would show from Mt. Carmel Avenue". As time went on, blasting continued and the wounds on the Giant's head were becoming visible, infuriating the public.

On March 4th, 1924, a professor, and passionate advocate of public parks, James W. Toumey founded SGPA. He would become the first President of SGPA. It began with 100 members of the New Haven community.

Rewind to 1875, Arnold Dana then a 12-year-old boy, had survived a fall from the Giant's chin! You may have seen the plaque on the Tower Trail! Dana felt the Giant had spared his life. In return, he became an advocate for the Giant.

He played a vital role in the fight to end the quarrying by taking Blakeslee Associates to court in 1930. In 1932 after the passing of Toumey, Arnold Dana became the 2nd President of SGPA. In May of 1932, the courts ordered the cessation of quarrying on that portion of the land. In an attempt to sell the lease to SGPA, Blakeslee wanted \$106,000, SGPA offered a meek \$25,000.

1933, Helen Porter, an unsung hero of the park, early secretary and fundraiser of SGPA, entered one final offer of \$30,000 and Blakeslee said yes! It took Helen 3 months, but her tenacity prevailed and she raised the money and purchased the lease on July 29, 1933. This meant the Giant's head would be protected from any further quarrying.

—continued on page 2

*Commemorating 100 Years continued from page 1—*



Picture of the Sleeping Giant from the SGPA FB page in 2014  
—*photographer unknown*

By 1935, Russel T. Barker designed and began construction on the 4-story tower which was completed on October 15, 1939. During WWII, the tower served as a lookout point for enemy planes and was added to the National Register of Historical Places in 1986.

**FUN FACT!** Guess how much the picnic table on the 1st floor weighs? It's 600 lbs.!

The tower's structural integrity was enhanced in 1996, costing \$250,000. It was repointed in 2008 by Landmark Architects. An attestation to its strength, it kept one of our visitors safe in a tornado!

In May 2018, a 100-mph tornado took down thousands of trees and damaged countless others. This event would close the park and it was more than a year before it would re-open in June 2019. Thousands of hours of work, by volunteers, giving their time and physical strength selflessly. Efforts to complete the cleanup and restoration are still in effect today. Our goal is to leave the park even better than it was before the tornado.

## Today

A lone Colorado Spruce proudly stands in the picnic area. It survived undoubtedly due to the protection offered by larger trees surrounding it. Unfortunately, they weren't as lucky. This brave little tree is a testament to the resilience of nature. It was named by the Hamden Tree Commission "Notable Tree" for September 2018. This "Notable Tree" should be a reminder to us all as a good reason to give our time and strength. A GREAT reason to volunteer and make a difference!

## Mark your calendars!!

We are planning a special celebration on October 12, 2024, and we will need your help! This is an official call for volunteers to help create a spectacular commemoration for the 100 year milestone! Keep your eyes on the Facebook page (also celebrating 10,000 followers!!) for more information.

We couldn't have come this far without you. For that, we offer our most heartfelt gratitude and appreciation.

## *Happy 100th Birthday Sleeping Giant Park Association!*

*Sleeping Giant Park Association would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the very talented Hiroya Tsukamoto for returning to Hamden, CT to share a beautiful live music performance including his song "Hobbomock". Also to Best Video Film and Cultural Center for making this happen.*



# One Hike, One Burger & One Beer

—by Kari Vecchitto, *Giant News Editor*

It's a sunny Sunday morning. The birds are singing. I've eaten my breakfast, enjoyed a homemade cup of coffee, and I'm sitting at the table. Unusually quiet and rested, I noticed my busy schedule had a vacancy. What to do, what to do? I haven't heard of any hikes going on...maybe I'll accept the challenge that lies before me and enjoy a solo Sunday at Sleeping Giant State Park. I've got a few boxes left to check off on the Giant Master Log, so I commit. I'll go hiking, make some progress, and maybe stop for a burger and a beer on the way home: One hike, one burger, and one beer.

Once I arrived at the park, I contemplated the map and what I have yet to check off. I chose the red hexagon trail which runs North-South across the Giant's chest, hips, and knees, as opposed to the East-West trails that run the length of his peacefully sleeping body from head to toe. The red hexagon trail is rated "B", which indicates a steady ascent to the crest. At a modest 1.2 miles long, it seems to be a very attainable goal for the day. I couldn't locate the trailhead along Mt. Carmel Avenue, so I headed up the tower trail which eventually intersects with the red hexagon. Up I went along the easy-going switchbacks until I found the northbound section of the red hexagon. Then, I returned to the tower trail/red hexagon until it led to the last most northern portion of the trail. As I continued, the trail had lots of rocks but was mostly downhill. One of my favorite things to do, and why I love solo hiking, is that I can take my time and take pictures while on the lookout for animal tracks in the mud or snow. Thinking about the foxes, bobcats, and bears who crossed the trails before me always fills me with childlike excitement and wonder.

At the end of the red hexagon trail, I find myself on the red diamond, a sister trail also running north-south leading back towards the parking lot. Or, I could make my way to the tower trail again. If I add the blue/white connector, I can pick up the southern section of the red hexagon that I couldn't locate when I began my hike. So that's the plan: red diamond, cross over violet, pass the quarry, take lots of pictures, cross over blue, and hop on the white-blue connector. I hopped on white and proceeded to tie a virtual knot using Avenza as I navigated the orange trail area back (and forth) to the tower trail. I finally arrived at the southern section of the red hex. Feeling very accomplished, I took the last leg of my journey back to the car. Boy, was I getting hungry and

feeling very celebratory! Where to go? I'll tell you where: Mikro Depot! You cannot beat the view of the massive slumbering Giant, who I now consider a friend. If you didn't know, Hobbomock is his name.

As for the burger, I challenge you to find one that is more satisfying and delicious. The candied bacon, (yes, I said candied bacon) will check any other cravings you might have for a treat! Try one of the locally brewed craft beers for the "cherry on the cake". Mikro Depot hangs out along the Farmington Canal Heritage trail and is only a stone's throw from Sleeping Giant State Park. In my opinion, this afternoon was so wonderful that I might have to put another article in the next issue featuring a different trail, and another must-visit location for delicious food. Stay tuned, hike often, volunteer, and be well!

## Supervisor's Maintenance and Park Update

—by Jill Scheibenpflug, *Park Superintendent*

I am happy to announce that we hired a new Maintainer 3 for the Sleeping Giant Unit. His name is Mike Guthrie, Mike came here from DOT where he worked road maintenance for a year. Prior to working for DOT Mike owned his own landscaping business, a good skill to have for a Park Maintainer. He is happy to be here, we are lucky to have him.

We are in the process of hiring our seasonal staff and getting ready for the park season. Visitors enjoyed watching the eclipse of the sun at the park, it was full to capacity.

We will install two new historical signs designed and written by Julie Hulten with the help of Al Levere, one of our outreach and education retirees and Danny Brass former Hiking Chair for the SGPA. The signs will provide the History of the Tower Trail and the Tower.

The site design work for the visitor's center is moving along. We have had meetings with DEEP engineering, MACCHI Engineering firm and Conestoga Log Cabins to ensure the design is moving in the right direction.

ENCON got the ok to ticket Quinnipiac students using our parking lot to go to class. This has been an ongoing issue for years. They have been taking up the entire front lot and visitors have been complaining that there are no parking spaces for park users.

We are looking forward to celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the park this year in October.

Hope we all have a great season!

**DOGS MUST BE ON A LEASH!!**

# Conquering the Sleeping Giant: A Casual Journey to Giant Mastery

—by Zachary Fisk, *Giant Master #541*

Alright folks, gather 'round for a tale of epic hikes and good times at Sleeping Giant State Park. We're talking about the quest to become Giant Masters, the folks who've tackled every single trail in this wild playground. So, grab your hiking boots, and let's dive into the adventure!

Let's start at the end, March 20, 2022. We kicked off the day with a crew of seven, but as the trails got tougher, we split into smaller groups. Let's brush over the fact that over two and half months Giant Days were comprised of different members who needed to piece together the puzzle differently. Now, let's talk stats of my last day, 12.5 miles and over 3,000 feet of elevation gain. Yeah, we crushed it! Sure, I had to catch my breath a few times and deal with a pesky blister, but nothing could stop us. Our route was a bit all over the place, from the green trails to the blue and violet ones. We even drove over to Red Triangle to wrap things up. And you know what? We got it done! Woot!

But let's rewind a bit to January 9, 2022. It was the kickoff of our Giant Master challenge, and I was ready to tackle those trails. The weather teased us with a bit of rain, but nothing we couldn't handle. We had some



—photo submitted by Zach Fisk

laughs, a sing-along, some medical talk (blame it on the nearby university), and even encountered the infamous green ghost.

Fast forward to February 6, 2022. Going off-script on this day we added extra miles along the blue trail. Because why not, right? We even tacked on another 1.5 miles post-hike just for kicks.

And finally, on March 12, 2022, the weather threw everything it had at us—rain, sleet, you name it. But did that stop us? Heck no! We powered through, chipping away at our quest one step at a time. Diamonds, hexes, and some squares teased us this day. Recall above that sing-along, in honor of our first hike, here are the lyrics to Laverne and Shirley which we sang on the south side of the mountain.

"Schlemiel! Schlimazel! Hasenpfeffer Incorporated!" Translated this sums it up well, we had some bungling along the way and challenges, but we persevered. We didn't have any misfortunes and unfortunately, it wasn't rabbit season. There was no stopping us, we did it our way.

So, there you have it, the tale of our journey to Giant Mastery in a nutshell. It wasn't always easy, but with good company and a whole lot of determination, we made it happen. Until next time, keep on hiking, friends!



—photo submitted by Zach Fisk



# CAN'T STOP, WON'T STOP

—by Marge Mullen, *Giant Master #542*



—photo submitted by Marge Mullen

Something we all struggled with during the pandemic was finding things to do. For me personally, staying in the house was not an option. My children were grown, and I had my freedom to roam - so that is what I did. I loved hiking when I was younger and thought, "What a wonderful way to get outside!" So I found a group of hikers through Facebook who I now refer to as my "Tramily." My trail family. One of the Tramily members, Peggy, had enticed me into hiking the one and only Blue Trail at Sleeping Giant. Excited for an outdoor activity and challenge, I was up for it! Or so I thought. The hike began on the Violet trail and connected with Blue, which runs along the Mill River. My first challenge would be the descent down a large

crevice in the rocks. I needed to lower myself down with my arms because some areas were unreachable with my feet. I said to myself, "No problem, I got this." As I continued along the blue trail, looming before me was a giant slab of rock that gave way to a steep quarry below. Knowing I didn't want to disappoint Peggy, I took a deep breath, and with very shaky legs beneath me, I started the ascent. Did I mention the trail was covered in snow and ice? Thankfully, I was prepared and wearing microspikes. I stayed to the far right of the trail and hung onto trees and rocks for dear life, crawling on all fours at times. To my embarrassment, some younger hikers enthusiastically scrambled by me, but hey, I was doing this! There were a few spots where there were no handholds, and I just took a leap of faith, hoping these spikes would hold me. It took me about half an hour to climb this small section, but I finished! I did it! I'll admit I was feeling very proud of myself! I was told this was good training to hike the White Mountains in New Hampshire (I later found out what that meant and that it was true). I finished the hike unscathed and later went on to hike all 32 sprawling miles of trails, thereby earning my Giant Master patch, which is proudly sewn onto my backpack. Satisfied with my accomplishment, I thought I had done it all... but I heard there is a Dead Man's Cave, so, who knows...



—photo submitted by Marge Mullen





Quarry—photo submitted by Kari Vecchitto

# SGPA 2024 GUIDED HIKE SCHEDULE

Join SGPA on these exciting guided hikes this year! There will be a limited number of spots so make sure you pre-register! These hikes will require comfortable, supportive, shoes with good traction. Snacks, water, and sunscreen are all essentials! Please check the website for registration details and hike-specific information. Please arrive 15 minutes early.

*Out of consideration for our other participants, dogs are not permitted on the guided hikes.*

Early Bird Watchers Hike	5/5/24	8 am-10 am
Invasive Plant Removal Workday	5/19/24	9:30 am-11:30
Hike-A-Giant 2024	6/2/24	1 pm-3 pm

Invasive Plant Removal Workday	6/23/24	9:30 am-11:30
Insect Life Hike	6/23/24	1pm-3 pm
Invasive Plant Removal Workday	7/21/24	9:30 am-11:30
Invasive Plant Removal Workday	8/18/24	9:30am-11:30
Geology Hike	9/15/24	1 pm-3 pm
Invasive Plant Removal Workday	9/22/24	9:30 am-11:30
Biodiversity Hike	9/29/24	1 pm-3 pm
Fall Introductory Hike	10/6/24	1 pm-3 pm
Invasive Plant Removal Workday	10/20/24	9:30 am11:30
Fall Foliage Hike	10/27/24	1 pm-3 pm
Fall Forest Bathing - Shinrin Yoku	11/3/24	1 pm-3 pm
Fall Hiker's Hike	11/10/24	11 am-2:30 pm
Holiday Hike and Social	12/8/24	12 pm-5 pm

## Giant Master Program

—by Manju Prabhu, *Giant Master Coordinator*

### Congratulations to New Giant Masters:

#586 Diane Burbank	#594 Emily McGinn
#588 Ann M. Oldakowski	#595 Justin Taylor
#589 Dennis Oldakowski	#596 Scott Jezierny
#590 Rose Elliott	#597 Thornton Lockwood
#591 John Elliott	#598 Darron Vigliotti
#592 Joseph Race	#599 Leo Vigliotti
#593 Jamie Strohl	#600 Karen Orpilla

### Congratulations to New Giant Master Marathoners!!

#24 Caitlin Hale, #570, June 19, 2023
#25 Peter Tu, #571, June 19, 2023



### Looking for a Challenge?

Hike all 32 miles of blazed trails at the park and become SGPA's next

## GIANT MASTER

Complete the challenge to receive a certificate, Giant Master cap and be eligible to participate in the Advanced Programs, including:

- 4-Season GM:** Hike all of the blazed trails in each of the four seasons
- 12-Month GM:** Hike all of the blazed trails in each month of a year
- Marathon GM:** Hike all of the blazed trails in a single day



To learn more and complete the required registration, visit [SGPA.org/giant-master](https://SGPA.org/giant-master)







Barbara Beitch  
Mar. 2, 1939 - Nov. 24, 2023



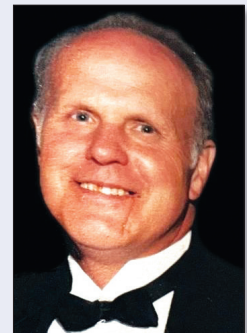
Johanna Kramer Becker  
Feb. 8, 1939 - Jan. 8, 2024

In light of this Centennial Milestone SGPA would like to honor the members of the Board who have recently passed. We recognize them for their selfless contributions, friendship, stewardship and tenacity while serving Sleeping Giant State Park.

*It “takes a village” filled with Giant hearts working in unison.*



Dagobert “Dag” Pfeiffer  
Mar. 5, 1923 - Nov. 1, 2022



Otto “Bob” Marenholz  
Apr. 20, 1934 - July 16, 2023

# Skunk Cabbage

—from the SGPA FB page March 21, 2024

**A Pungent Bloom** - Skunk Cabbage may not be known for a pleasant fragrance, reminiscent of its namesake, but its early flowering is a fascinating adaptation to the still-chilly environment: Thermogenic Marvel: Skunk Cabbage generates its own heat, which can melt surrounding snow and attract early pollinators searching for warmth. Spring’s Forerunner: Often one of the first plants to bloom, its presence signals the awakening of the park’s diverse flora.

**Indigenous Recognition** - Skunk Cabbage has been recognized by Indigenous peoples for its medicinal properties: Used cautiously, parts of the plant were traditionally employed for a range of treatments, from respiratory ailments to headaches. Its distinct odor was also noted as a means to deter pests and wild animals.

**Summer Transformation** - The plant we see here, with its mottled purple hood, known as a spathe, enveloping a spadix, will transform as the seasons progress: The spathe shelters the flower cluster, which will provide early-season pollen to pollinators, then mature and fade as summer approaches. What follows is the growth of the large, lush green leaves that many recognize in wetland areas, creating a dense canopy on the forest floor.

**A Wetland Indicator** - Skunk Cabbage is not only a sign of spring but also an indicator of wetland health, thriving in moist, nutrient-rich soils throughout the season.

**Capturing Transformation** - This photograph invites us to appreciate the less-celebrated members of our ecosystem that play vital roles in the heralding of spring and the health of our wetlands.



With spring’s arrival, the earth awakens and reveals its first whispers of renewal. This photo from Sleeping Giant State Park captures the curious bloom of the Skunk Cabbage, *Symplocarpus foetidus*, an early herald of the season’s shift.

*-photo submitted by Tom Granucci*





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found on the Giant  
—photo submitted by Kari Vecchitto

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The *Giant News* is published three times a year by the Sleeping Giant Park Association, a nonprofit volunteer organization dedicated to the preservation, maintenance, and expansion of Sleeping Giant State Park.



Be sure to check our SGPA Facebook page or our SGPA website for updates on the Park's status. Feedback on the *Giant News* can be sent to [giantnews@spga.org](mailto:giantnews@spga.org).



found on the Giant  
—photo submitted by Kari Vecchitto