

Honoring Doug Smith, June 8, 2013, Cheney Hall, our **HOMETOWN HERO**

The plaque says: “With sincere appreciation for your many years of work to develop and maintain Manchester's greenways along the Hockanum River and Bigelow Brook, and your vision of the beautification and conservation of our community, we salute you, Doug Smith.”

Other communities besides Manchester could have had major linear parks, river-side trails, benches, and wood-duck houses, but other communities did not have Doug Smith, with his many skills and talents.

- Persistence. Here's an example of Doug's persistence: With the closing of the walking bridge over the Hockanum River at Oakland, Doug agitated for a new bridge. There were many obstacles in the way. But Doug persisted and after many revolutions of the moon and sun, a wonderful bridge was installed for pedestrians to use in crossing the river. Doug staged an opening ceremony and alerted the press.
- Business acumen: Here's an example of Doug's managerial skills: Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning, year round Doug leads a crew of trail workers on a work “party” to clean up trails, build bridges, plant trees, attack invasive plants, and (as a lure?) to have coffee and French Canadian breakfast treats at Chez Ben, an iconic diner in the North End of Manchester. He also gets donations of trail supplies, such as wood chips, and donations by many volunteers of time and effort: His “recruits” take photos, create and manage web sites, and wrestle framed artwork into exhibits at the Town Hall rotunda, Lincoln Center hallways, and other places. Doug's volunteer-recruitment skills include accosting hikers on the trails and people he meets at Chez Ben. Have you seen the photos in the Lincoln Center hallways – the theme is the Hockanum River.
- Organizational skills: Doug was a founding member of the Manchester Land Conservation Trust, now in its 41st year, and first and perpetual chair of the Hockanum River Linear Park Committee. He serves on the Conservation Commission and the Bigelow Brook Greenway Committee. He worked with nearby towns to organize a Hockanum River Watershed Association, and to help set up trails along the Hockanum in Vernon, Ellington, and East Hartford.
- Humor (dry) and story-telling: In addition to these skills, Doug is a great raconteur, telling the history of farmers, mill-operators, and land-owners along the Hockanum, and about the early days of the Conservation Commission and the beautification committee of the Chamber of Commerce, and about his education and career as a medical doctor. He sticks to the facts in these histories, conducting research in the land records, interviewing old timers, and keeping notes. But Doug can also spin a good yarn – here's an example: One day we were walking near the river with a group of hikers. It was hot, humid, and the air was loaded with bugs. “Doug,” I asked, “is this where they filmed *The African Queen* (a drama set along the Yubange River in Africa)?” “Right over here,” Doug pointed, “we see a crocodile sometimes. Keep back everyone.”

So, with humor, persistence, commitment, organization, creativity, vision, and dedication, Doug has accomplished a lot for the community of Manchester. He's truly a home-town hero.