

VINEYARD GAZETTE

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An Amphitheatre Grows in Felix Neck

By IVY ASHE



Jonathan Stoss and Adam Larson in midst of a sanctuary “dream project.”

The summer maintenance to-do list at Felix Neck Wildlife Sanctuary has become noticeably shorter this week, thanks to the efforts of an off-Island volunteer crew.

Ember Fleming, Kya Goldschlager, Adam Larson, Danny Riser-Espinoza and Jonathan Stoss arrived at the sanctuary last Sunday through a partnership between Mass Audubon, the parent organization of Felix Neck, and SCA Massachusetts, a division of the national Student Conservation Association group. The five are members of the SCA Conservation Corps, which places teams of college-age students with areas in need of restoration or other environmental service projects. Teams spend 10 days at a site (called a “hitch” in SCA lingo), generally putting in nine hours or more each day.



photo by Ivy Ashe

Gloves are off for Danny Riser-Espinoza.

“What’s amazing about them is they’re doing all the work that we would never have the time or the people power to do,” said Suzan Bellincampi, sanctuary director for Felix Neck. “They’re creating magic out there.”

Over the past five days, the group has kept busy laying mulch in the Felix Neck butterfly garden and clearing a thicket of brush and bittersweet around one of the stone foundations on the property. While the mulching project was a routine maintenance task that Felix Neck staff and volunteers work on each year, clearing the thicket marked the beginning of one of the sanctuary’s “dream projects” — building a natural amphitheatre around the long-hidden foundation.

“They’ve been talking about this for many, many years,” said Ms. Goldschlager, laughing as she described the amazed reactions of Felix Neck

regulars as the amphitheatre began to take shape.

The crew began work on the amphitheatre on Monday and has spent two days digging half-buried granite blocks — themselves remnants of the original foundation — from the forest floor and arranging them as benches in the new space.

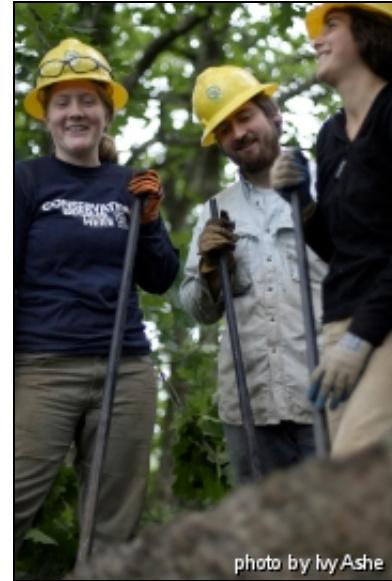
“This is probably the most creative

. . .”

“ . . . awesome . . .” interjected Mr. Larson.

“ . . . aesthetic project we’ve done,” continued Ms. Goldschlager.

The five volunteers have been working together since March, when they arrived for skills training in Leominster. Ms. Fleming, of Duxbury, is the only Massachusetts native in the group. Mr. Stoss hails from Kentucky, while Mr. Larson resides in Wisconsin. Ms. Goldschlager and Mr. Riser-Espinoza live in Connecticut and Maine, respectively. Despite their differences in background, the crew cites the strong sense of community within their group as one of the highlights of being part of SCA. Meeting and interacting with other communities, such as the Felix Neck staff, is another benefit.



Ember Fleming, Jonathan Stoss and Kya Goldschlager.

“We do feel like we walked in on a nice family,” said Ms. Fleming.

This is the first time on Martha’s Vineyard for all but Ms. Goldschlager, who has spent time here as a babysitter. Ms. Fleming noted that she appreciated being on the Island in a context other than vacation, with Ms. Goldschlager adding that it allowed the crew to see the Vineyard “through the work we do.”



Kya Goldschlager counts this as most creative work.

The busy schedule at the sanctuary has not prevented the group from visiting a few key sites, however. With the Aquinnah Cliffs and Long Point Wildlife Refuge already under their belts, they have plans to kayak at Felix Neck before their hitch comes to an end.

“It’s a beautiful place,” said Mr. Larson.