

Mary Margaret Johnson trail
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There's music in Walt Johnson's voice when he mentions his favorite name: Mary Margaret.

"She charmed me," says Walt.

Now you can share the charm and Mary Margaret's love for Crystal Lake. A new trail honoring Mary Margaret will be part of Railroad Point Natural Area.

Sweethearts for more than 50 years, Walt and Mary Margaret met in high school. Their first date was senior prom. Since it was a Catholic school, plenty of girls shared the name Mary, so Mary always went by Mary Margaret. They married in 1958.

It was Mary Margaret who introduced Walt to Crystal Lake. Their two children "shot the tube" at Crystal Lake's Outlet Creek—whizzing through culverts under Mollineaux Road. Together they explored Railroad Point and bought a cottage nearby.

For years, Walt and Mary Margaret set out on a mid-morning walk. They followed the shoreline to Railroad Point, turned inland at the Outlet Creek, and circled back home in a three-mile loop.

"Everyone needs some kind of connection to the land," says Walt. "If you cut people off, you impoverish them. Access is so important. Access to beautiful land."

When it came time to honor Mary Margaret, who died in 2006, Walt thought of the Conservancy. He was already an active volunteer – planting trees, working at the shop, leading field trips and acting as preserve steward for Fruithaven Forest Preserve. One day while the volunteer shop crew and Conservancy staff were assessing the

boardwalks at Trapp Farm Nature Preserve he spied a sign dedicating the nature trail to Nancy Brickman. Could he do that for Mary Margaret? What would it take to name a trail?

The Mary Margaret Johnson trail will create stunning new access to the bluff overlooking Crystal Lake. In the past, hikers followed old logging roads. The new trail will be a sustainable one, designed to showcase the full beauty of the natural area and follow Railroad Point's natural contours.

To Walt, giving is natural. "I believe in the Conservancy. I'm a big admirer of Glen. I've always been outdoorsy," he says. Plus volunteering offers good fellowship, fresh air and a sense of accomplishment.

Walking beside Walt en route to the bluff, you catch a glimpse of his love story. Mary Margaret is always in his mind as he hikes. Why Railroad Point? "Her essence is there."