

## Harvard's Eagle Scout projects focus on trail repair, wildlife, and conservation

by Amanda LaRiviere

An Eagle Court will be held in late September to celebrate a tight-knit group of nearly a dozen Harvard young men who have earned the honor of becoming Eagle Scouts; it is one of the largest groups of Scouts in town history to attain Scouting's highest rank.

As part of its first installment of vignettes, the Press shares Eagle Scout projects completed by Matt Zobbi, Scott Patuto, John Zobbi, and Michael Bretz.

### Matt Zobbi improves trail navigation

After noticing a significant uptick in the number of people using conservation trails driven by pandemic isolation, Eagle Scout candidate and triplet Matt Zobbi dedicated his project to improving maps on Harvard's trails. In collaboration with the Land Stewardship Subcommittee, which helps the Conservation Commission maintain and mark trails, Zobbi designed, prototyped, built, and installed navigational signposts for three trailheads.

"I was very happy knowing that I did this," said Zobbi, who worked on the project for about 18 months.

Peter von Conta, a member of the Land Stewardship Subcommittee, said there weren't physical maps at the trailhead locations for town-owned land prior to Zobbi's project. While the Harvard Conservation Trust had always provided Harvard trail maps only in a booklet form, von Conta said this may have limited the number of people who were visiting the trails.

Now, Zobbi has installed signposts with detailed maps at Clapp-Scorgie, Bare Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, and Sprague trailheads. "I think the signs helped convince more people to walk on these trails, because now they know that they exist."

"This is a nice addition to trail access in a way that's inviting for people that might not have prior knowledge or reference to these trails," said von Conta, adding that subcommittee members are planning to install more signs around Harvard-owned trails. "I've seen people stopping at the signs and using them as a reference point for how to navigate."

Zobbi said when it came to installing



From left: Scott Patuto, Sawyer Madison, Colin Harte, Jacob Furmanick, and Jack Stahl at the newly constructed snowmobile bridge near Depot Road.

the navigational signs, the months he spent planning and designing them paid off. With the help of other Scouts, Zobbi cut wood and assembled the signposts. "I know that it doesn't just matter to me, it matters to a lot of other people," he said.

Scoutmaster Gary Madison said providing navigational aids to the community encapsulates Zobbi's character. "Matt is all about service to others," Madison said. "He wants to be helping the world one person at a time."

### Scott Patuto builds a bridge

Scott Patuto has been an active member of the Harvard Snowmobile Club for most of his life. When Marisa Steele, Bromfield's boys cross-country coach, mentioned that her team often ran over a decrepit bridge used also by snowmobilers, Patuto was inspired to help.

"I decided to take the bridge on because it's giving back to my community, and a lot of people use the trail that it goes through," said Patuto, "not just snowmobilers, but bikers, hikers, and the track team."

Mark Adams, president of the Harvard Snowmobile Club, said that club members help maintain about 26 miles of snowmobile trails that connect with portions of state, private, and town conservation land. There are many heavily trafficked bridges along these trails. For his Eagle Scout project, Patuto redesigned and rebuilt a bridge located near the Route 2 bridge on Depot Road.

Adams said the previous bridge had been on the trail for about 20 years. "Since it's wood, it deteriorates over time, so there were some rotten boards," Adams said. "He [Patuto] basically ended up ripping out the whole bridge and fully refurbished it." Patuto installed the bridge over the course of two days last fall, leading several other Scouts through the construction process. Adams commended the project and Patuto's leadership.



Above: Matt Zobbi stands beside an improved map display. Left: John Zobbi and his bat house. (Courtesy photos)



(Courtesy photos)

While Patuto said the project went smoothly due to his extensive planning, he said, "One of the biggest obstacles was having to make sure the bridge was going to be safe for the next 20 or so years." He said he is looking forward to dog walkers, runners, hikers, cross-country skiers, and of course snowmobilers, using the new bridge.

### John Zobbi provides new homes for bats

Bromfield cross-country runner and Eagle Scout candidate John Zobbi noticed that bugs are "not fun"—at least in the places where he runs. As he was continually bitten by mosquitoes during cross-country practices, he came up with an idea to create houses for bats near Harvard's playing fields.

"Bats eat mosquitoes," said Zobbi, who constructed six bat boxes that were distributed in November at Ann Lees and Depot fields and Harvard Park. "I wanted to put my boxes near places that would have the biggest impact on people."

Zobbi collaborated with the Parks and Recreation Commission and the stewardship subcommittee for his Eagle Scout project, since the boxes were to be installed near the edge of playing fields that abut conservation land.

"I've always been a runner and made avid use of the trails around town, so it felt good to give back in that way," said Zobbi.

Zobbi initially wanted to mount the boxes on trees. After consulting with stewardship subcommittee Chair Wendy Sisson, they realized this could put the bat population at risk. "It could encourage bats to rest in a box that is prey to raccoons that climb trees," said Sisson. "Our committee got involved in this project to make sure the boxes were installed on poles, and to help John think about where the placement should be."

The 10-to-12-foot poles that Zobbi

constructed now house Harvard's bats, which help control the mosquito population. "John's whole life mission is to help save some of these natural resources," said Scoutmaster Gary Madison. "He wanted to avoid imposing pesticides on the environment, so he built a sustainable solution for a biting problem."

### Michael Bretz constructs a new bridge

Michael Bretz, who earned the rank of Eagle Scout at a separate ceremony in June, built a new snowmobile bridge on one of Harvard's conservation trails. In discussing Eagle Scout project ideas with the Harvard Snowmobile Club, he realized the trails' bridges needed to be refurbished.

Bretz designed the new bridge, which required additional support structures, over the course of one year. He pre-cut many of his materials to ensure an efficient building process, and removed all of the decking from the old bridge.

"We ended up having a lot of help from the community," Bretz said, adding that two miniature tractors were provided on-site by volunteers. "We used the tractors to haul materials, like the heavy telephone poles that support the bridge."

Mark Adams, president of the Harvard Snowmobile Club, said the bridge is mainly used by people who are going into conservation land. "This bridge connects some trust lands to the back of one of the orchards, allowing snowmobilers and trail users access to that area," said Adams. Bretz's new bridge is located near the West Oak Trail.

People who use Harvard's trails might not be aware of the work that goes into maintaining them, Adams said. "People see the end result being a quality bridge that they can walk over, but it takes people like the Boy Scouts to care and have the opportunity to make them better."