



## AT THE BAR

# Giving Back to the Future

Volunteering time and expertise is an important component in our vibrant community—and good business to boot

BY F. SYDNEY SMITHERS IV

**H**elping lead a great nonprofit organization is a privilege and an investment in our quality of life, personally and professionally. It's hard to say who gets more out of it.

Community service is a habit. Several years ago, when I lived in Windsor, Massachusetts, I served on the finance committee, Board of Selectmen, and Planning Board at various times. Those experiences and my work as a real-estate attorney have given me firsthand experience in the development pressures facing towns across the state. But more to the point, municipal service grounded me in my community and helped me understand the disconnect residents sometimes feel between a vibrant business community and our quality of life in the Berkshires.

A healthy economy, healthy people, and healthy communities are all inextricably linked, and my community service today is focused on the organization I chair, the Trustees of Reservations. Despite the odd nineteenth-century

name, the Trustees is very much an organization for today—and tomorrow—helping to preserve Massachusetts's landscapes and landmarks for everyone, forever. Being involved—offering my time and expertise—helps me hold onto the things I care about, and leave a legacy for the future.

## THE TRUSTEES OF RESERVATIONS

The Trustees of Reservations were founded in Boston in 1891 by open-space visionary Charles Eliot, a protégé of landscape architect and park designer Frederick Law Olmsted. Today, the Trustees own and manage one hundred reservations—25,000-plus acres in seventy-one communities across Massachusetts—all open to the public to enjoy. In addition, the Trustees have protected another 16,000 acres by holding perpetual conservation restrictions—more than any other conservation organization in Massachusetts—and have assisted in the protection of another 16,000 acres of open space in partnership with local, regional and state government, and other nonprofit organizations.

Over the past 117 years, the Trustees have made an enormous contribution

to the quality and texture of life across the Commonwealth. I've been privileged to play a part with the Trustees in conservation in western Massachusetts including: securing a key endowment for Notchview in Windsor; relocating the Appalachian Trail at Tyringham Cobble in Tyringham; defeating a proposed condominium project on the western slopes of Monument Mountain in Great Barrington, and doubling that property's conserved acreage; and helping acquire some wonderful properties, including Field Farm and Mountain Meadow Preserve in Williamstown, Goose Pond in Lee, Questing and Dry Hill in New Marlborough, and Ashintully in Tyringham. It's a fair bet to say that had these treasured properties not been preserved for public use and enjoyment, the Berkshires would lack much of its distinctive character, and the Commonwealth, much of its grace.

The Trustees have been best known for signature properties—museum houses like Naumkeag in Stockbridge, the Colonel John Ashley House in Ashley Falls, and the William Cullen Bryant Homestead in Cummington, and beautiful planned environments such as

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Naumkeag and Ashintully, as well as view-scapes such as Bartholomew's Cobble, a National Natural Landmark—but it has become so much more.

Over the past several years, through the intensive outreach efforts of the Trustees' Highlands Communities Initiative, we have helped thirty-three towns in eastern Berkshire County and western Pioneer Valley chart their future through planning grants, protect their open spaces and historical resources through the adoption of the Community Preservation Act, and sponsor community building with meetings, seminars,

and workshops. Our urban initiatives in Boston, Holyoke, and Fall River inspire youth to become the next generation of conservationists, programs soon to come to a city near you.

### WHY VOLUNTEER?

It's in the interest of the business community to have a good climate for our workers: clean streets and clean air, good schools and good hospitals, and places to refresh and recreate. Our nonprofits are key to that effort, in the Berkshires as elsewhere.

The work of a nonprofit is both like and unlike the work of business. In either case, committees aren't known for engaging the imagination, or offering significant rewards. The Trustees' Strategic Planning Task Force, on which I served in 2007, looked like any other—but we were inspired by a shared purpose that mattered intensely to us all. In charting the Trustees' next ten years, we knew we were not only shaping the future of an organization we love and admire; we were, in a very real sense, helping to define the quality of life in the Berkshires, and Massachusetts, for a long time to come.

Out of that work came a ten-year

strategic plan to mobilize and inspire a critical mass of people and partners who care about their communities and will work to protect their quality of life in hill towns, cities, and suburbs. In the next decade, the work we do—the work we *must* do—will matter even more. That's why I give my time.

As a state, we are devouring open land out of all proportion to the growth in our population. And as the climate continues its painful shifts, we face a future as unpredictable as the weather on an October afternoon. Within the business environment, good citizenship requires being part of the community and a supporter of all the things that make it worth living here. I'm convinced that the Trustees—and all our nonprofit organizations—can make a vital difference in all these areas, if we stand up to help. **BBQ**

*Attorney F. Sydney Smithers IV, a partner at Cain Hibbard & Myers, has more than thirty-five years of experience in real estate law, both residential and commercial. He is a member of the prestigious American College of Real Estate Lawyers. He is the chairman of the board of directors of the Trustees of Reservations, the largest and oldest land trust in Massachusetts.*