

Everyone Has a Story: Buena Vista Township wildlife refuge getting greener

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Sarah Summerville has added almost 200 acres to the Unexpected Wildlife Refuge in Buena Vista Township since becoming the nonprofit's director in 2001. The acquisitions were funded by private contributions and state Green Acres grants.

Most recently Summerville, 47, got a \$28,000 grant to develop plans for a nature center and director's quarters to be built using environmentally advanced materials and methods.

"We'll have a composting toilet and be off the grid," she said, explaining that solar panels would be used to generate electricity.

The late author and animal activist **Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci** started the refuge in 1961 with her husband, metallurgist **Cavit Buyukmihci**, as a sanctuary for pinelands plants and animals - especially the beaver. It now extends over 767 acres, and is dotted with lakes and marshland that provide an excellent beaver habitat. Summerville, a former environmental scientist, lives in the Buyukmihcis' old cabin.

Summerville, who was chosen as caretaker in 2000, lived in a nearby cabin for the last year of Sawyer Buyukmihci's life, learning from her how to run the refuge and about pinelands flora and fauna.

Summerville had been working for an engineering firm, but did not enjoy the work since it often involved helping clients get permits to fill wetlands, she said.

As director, Summerville draws no salary but gets free room and board, she said. It costs only about \$30,000 per year to run the operation, "so anyone who makes a contribution knows it will go directly to the refuge."

For more information on Unexpected Wildlife Refuge, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, call 856-697-3541 or visit www.unexpectedwildliferefuge.org/