Sprawling Success

The Peconic Bay Community Preservation Fund, and its roots in Nantucket

By KARL GROSSMAN

that has overtaken so much of the western portion of the island. It's the Peconic Bay Community eastern Long Island.

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

Preservation Fund (CPF) that began Island, knew that sprawl well. in 1999 and reached a stupendous \$1 billion mark earlier this year in not have kept pace with developfunds raised.

That money has gone to acquire Long Island as well as saving of CPF. farmland and for historic preser-

ernment for these purposes, CPF has made all the difference for

Long Islander, Bill Klein — who, raised in Syosset on western Long

"It's clear that conservation could ment here without the CPF," says New York State Assemblyman Fred open space and other environmen- W. Thiele Jr. of Sag Harbor, a leader tions of land or money to acquire tally sensitive land on eastern in the creation and implementation

I was unaware of CPF's links to

vation purposes. At a time of Nantucket and Bill Klein until a t has become key to saving east- declining or non-existent fiscal visit this summer to the island 30 ern Long Island from the sprawl support from other levels of gov- miles out in the Atlantic off Cape Cod. With our sailboat or, a good deal less adventurously, by ferry, I've been to most of the islands It is modeled after a 2 percent east of Long Island - Block buyer-paid real estate transfer tax Island, Fishers Island, Cuttyhunk, created on Nantucket by a native Plum Island, Martha's Vineyard. But I'd never been to Nantucket, and it is some beautiful place! And I was so impressed to hear on a bus tour that half of this exquisite island, three-and-half-by-14 miles in size, is preserved.

Much of that has to do with donaproperty to several private organizations, but much of it, too, is a result of the island's buyer-paid 2 percent real estate transfer tax earmarked for buying and saving open space.

Vaguely I recalled, the CPF on Long Island - also based on a buyer-paid 2 percent real estate transfer tax - had a Nantucket connection.

Yes, absolutely, confirmed Thiele. The Long Island program is directly based on the Nantucket program.

The connection starts with a visit by former East Hampton Town Supervisor Judith Hope to Nantucket in 1984. She had flown to Nantucket with her pilot husband Tom Twomey, both ardent environmentalists.

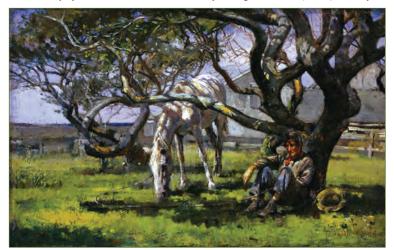
On Nantucket she read about "this wonderful concept of a 2 percent transfer tax to preserve open space. We were very impressed," recounts Hope. "I brought it to the town board." And she asked Thiele, the East Hampton Town Planning Board attorney as well as town attorney of adjoining Southampton Town, to look into its applicability to Long Island.

Meanwhile, then-East Hampton Councilman Randy Parsons had also read, independently, about the Nantucket program. The East Hampton town board authorized a visit to Nantucket by Parsons, East Hampton town planner Tom Thorsen and Peter Garnham, a real estate broker. Some real estate interests were uneasy about the 2 percent notion, although Garnham believed the fears unfounded. Three decades later, Garnham, of Amagansett, now a garden writer and farmer, says: "There was nothing for the real estate industry to be concerned about. And CPF fulfills a huge need."

They met on Nantucket with its planning director, Bill Klein — the



The 2 percent real estate transfer tax has saved 10.000 acres on the East End so far. Grossman notes. The concept was first applied in the 1980s on the island of Nantucket (depicted in Theodore Robinson's painting "Nantucket, 1882," below).



Long Island native who originated isn't working." the program.

Three decades later, Parsons, an East Hampton resident now with The Nature Conservancy of Long Island, comments: "Without the CPF and a dedicated fund for State. preservation, we would have had a different outcome. So thank you, Nantucket!"

Klein, now retired in Chicago also with a home on Nantucket, he happily relates — tells of first going Nantucket in 1974 to become its planner. "I was the first planner they Preservation Program. Begun in ever hired."

was very Long Island-motivated. He speaks of having grown up in Syosset in Nassau County in the 1950s and seeing that section of about that development: "This been emulated across the country.

He completed an internship at the County Planning Nassau Commission, and after graduating Colgate, received a master's degree in regional planning from Penn

Further informing his understanding of the need for preservation was his father's younger brother, John V.N. Klein, who as the environmentally-committed county executive of Suffolk County created the Suffolk County Farmland 1974, it's based on the purchase of His early interest in planning development rights from owners of farmland. They receive the difference between what their land is worth as farmland and suburban subdivision and in return it remains Long Island enveloped in sprawl in agriculture in perpetuity. It was a and coming to the conclusion first-in-the-nation concept and has

At a time of declining or non-existent fiscal support from other levels of government for these purposes, CPF has made all the difference for eastern Long Island.



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years as a planner in State "The statewide real estate lobby estate transfer tax set as a "local struggle," notes Hope. But in the option" and used for general gov- 1990s she became New York State ernment revenue purposes by Democratic chair and personally some Pennsylvania communities. interceded with longtime State

and what could be done to counter eastern Long Island." development sprawl. A central crazy things."

Before coming to Nantucket, Island was getting approval from Bill Klein had worked for five the New York State Assembly. College, Pa. And there he learned had come out against it in full about the half-to-1 percent real force. It was a long and difficult With Nantucket on fire with Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver. development when he arrived, he well-known for his tight grip on asked: Could a similar transfer tax the movement of all legislation. "It be created for Nantucket but its pro- was the only thing I asked him for ceeds devoted to land preservation? in my life," recounts Hope. "I told He recalls many family dinners him it could be a great legacy for with his Uncle John at which "we'd you to be involved in saving thouchat about growth on Long Island" sands of acres of open space on the 2 percent transfer tax "has had

So the measure got to the point, he said, was that "if you are Assembly floor, with sponsors led really serious about preserving the by Assemblymen Thiele and Tom rural character and guiding growth DiNapoli of Great Neck Plaza, chair around existing villages, and stop- of the Assembly's Environmental ping it cold elsewhere, you would Conservation Committee (now state sions of the Nantucket plan have have to strike out and do wild and comptroller) - and it passed. It ear- been adopted in places including lier passed the State Senate with Martha's Vineyard, Block Island



profound and beneficial consequences for eastern Long Island." It's saved 10,000 acres so far.

lein notes that in addition to K lein notes that in addition to coming to Long Island, ver-

When Klein came to Nantucket ... and saw that 'there was really a kind of emergency going on' — a development explosion — he determined: 'We had to come up with a wild and crazy scheme.' This was a 2 percent real estate transfer tax with proceeds dedicated to acquiring and preserving land.

came to Nantucket as its first plan- Jefferson its sponsor. Successful ref- through the years he has given ner and saw that "there was really a erendums were then held in each of "talks around the United States" kind of emergency going on" — a the five East End towns of Suffolk. about the plan. But "getting their development explosion — he deterwild and crazy scheme." This was a 2 percent real estate transfer tax with proceeds dedicated to acquiring and preserving land.

For this to become a reality, however, was "a daunting task." A "consensus-building process" was embarked on that included, in 1982, a three-day symposium on how Nantucket was "going to look like in 20 years." Among those brought to Nantucket to speak at the symposium was his Uncle John V.N. Klein.

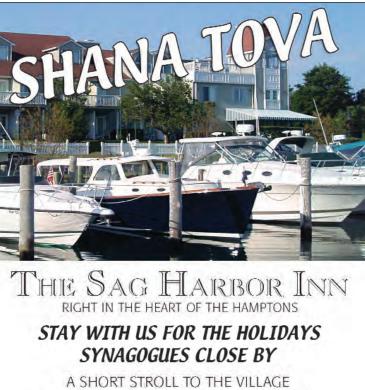
A "special act" had to be passed by the Massachusetts Legislature. "Mike Dukakis was governor and he was strongly in favor," recounted Klein. "One reason was that he and Kitty got married on Nantucket and he had a warm and fuzzy feeling about the island."

The tax was approved with "near unanimity" by folks on Nantucket, he went on, and took effect in 1984, the year that Hope, visiting Nantucket with Twomey, read about it and brought the concept back to Long Island.

A huge roadblock before it could become a reality on Long

mined: "We had to come up with a magic moment," says Hope. And cept was "mind-boggling." Still,

So when a 27-year-old Klein Senator Kenneth LaValle of Port and Little Compton, R.I. He said "All things came together at a legislators to commit" to the con-



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631-725-2949 WEST WATER ST. SAG HARBOR, NEW YORK I SAGHARBORINN.COM The 1990s measure creating a 2 percent real estate transfer tax for the East End was sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblymen Fred W. Thiele Jr. of Sag Harbor (left) and Thomas P. DiNapoli of Great Neck (now New York State comptroller, right).

where it "has had application, it's been dynamite."

Surely, it's a preservation initiative that should be adopted all over the U.S.

LaValle comments that "the Community Preservation is a mechanism that has enabled us to protect the East End's environmental treasures. The CPF has program has been "well-supported been a tremendous success in pre- over the years" by the people of tant for Long Island."

John V.N. Klein, Suffolk County executive between 1972 and 1979, now in retirement in Virginia, says his nephew, by originating the transfer tax, succeeding in getting it research and advisory services. approved by the Massachusetts Legislature and the people of Nantucket, and getting it implemented, is responsible for "quite an ners across the U.S. and headed achievement."

It sure has been a great and important achievement — for for eastern Long Island.

director of the Nantucket aired television program Enviro Conservation Foundation, says the Close-Up.



serving the lands and natural Nantucket. Through it, \$286 milresources that are critically impor- lion has been raised to save open space on Nantucket.

After 17 years as planning director on Nantucket, Klein joined the Chicago-based American Planning Association (APA) as its director of Until he retired in 2013, for 22 years he brought his brilliant perspective on planning to fellow planmany major APA research projects.

Karl Grossman is professor of Nantucket and beyond, including journalism at the State University of New York/College at Old On Nantucket, Jim Lentowski, Westbury and host of the nationally-

