

# Brattleboro Reformer

## Forestry business owner changes course

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Levine, of East Dummerston, recently sold her forestry consulting business, Forest Care, to Andrew Morrison, of Putney. After 41 years of drawing up forestry plans, planning timber sales and devising plans to counter invasive species, Levine is going to devote her time to playing the piano, writing more nature-themed books, and nature workshops. Her new business is Nature Connect; its logo shows a tree with whimsical curling branches, leaves and blossoms.

"I just kind of woke up one morning and said, 'I'm done,'" said Levine.

With the sale of Forest Care to Morrison comes the transfer of 150 clients, whose forests Levine has not just managed but nurtured. "Vermont Current Use is going strong," she said, referring to the state program that allows land to be taxed according to its agricultural or forestry use, not its market value.

"I plan on doing a lot more of those workshops. It's doing more of the aspect of teaching," said Levine, noting that her most recent book, "Identifying Ferns the Easy Way," had spawned a whole set of workshops. "I just absolutely loved doing them. People were writing me love letters about the fern book," she said, laughing.

In addition to her forestry consulting business, Levine has been conducting winter animal tracking workshops, which she will continue. She is also designing nature trails, including one recently at Living Memorial Park in Brattleboro.

"I don't want to be retired," said Levine. "But I have more space in my life" by selling the forestry business, she said. Some of that extra time is devoted to studying mosses, and playing the piano.

That musical experience is also showing up in her new children's book, "The Chord of Nature," a story about a little girl who plays the piano and copes with life's changes, including her parents' divorce. The book will be published by Levine's Heartwood Press.

Morrison, 35, has a degree in forestry and forest ecosystems from the State University of New York's Environmental Science and Forestry School in Syracuse. He came to the area to attend graduate school at Antioch University New England, where he studied forest resilience and the impacts of invasive species. Most recently, he worked for Land Stewardship Inc., working on ecological restoration projects.

Levine says she was the first female consulting forester in the Northeast, and she worked to make licensing a requirement for consulting foresters in Vermont, to follow New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

Levine sees the over-population of deer in Windham County as the biggest problem facing forest owners; the deer are eating young understory trees, affecting the health of the forest, as well as opening the door to a transition of species. Think more beech, and less maple, she said. Deer don't like beech, so it's taking over a lot of the forests she managed.

Another big threat to the health of the forest are invasive species, whether it is buckthorn, bittersweet, multi-floral rose or ticks. Mention buckthorn, and Levine is likely to shout in frustration. When she first became a consulting forester 40 years ago, no one knew what buckthorn was, she said.

Levine sees evidence of climate change in Vermont's forests, but she says the effect is slow. "It would be a long time before maple moves away, maybe 30 years," she said.

But, "give the forest 100 years, and we'll see incredible changes."

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