

Buzz Worthy

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Gigging It

Ellen C. Wells



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Here's a little secret I've been keeping: for the past four months—since September—I have worked a part-time job as a seasonal land steward for the nation's oldest and largest statewide land conservation organization. For 32 hours each week I weed whacked centuries-old stone walls, maintained woodland trails and mowed fields (one with two resident donkeys). I drove zero-turn mowers, Ford F-250s, dump trucks and snow plows and I maneuvered a "billy goat" with finesse. And when I was done with my eight hours per day, I'd prep my house for Airbnb rental, teach yoga and, of course, put on my editor's cap to write my usual monthly workload of newsletters and articles. I was gigging the gig economy to the max.

Needless to say, I was a little busy this fall. So, why did I do this to myself? I had a few reasons. For the last 15 years I've been working from my home

office. I really missed interacting with people. I missed working with my hands. And I really wanted to learn something completely different. I sure did check all those boxes. I went into the job knowing it would be a four-month stint. Was I up for the challenge? Could I keep up with my younger, stronger and taller co-workers? I did indeed, and I'm proud of the physical work I accomplished and the mental fortitude it took to keep all of these plates spinning.

I wanted to share a few insights I picked up during my four-month work fest:

- I couldn't have made ends meet if I had been working just the stewardship job. The \$13 an hour job certainly couldn't pay a mortgage and all the bills. The short-term house rental helped, but that slowed considerably in November.
- Unexpected medical bills threw a wrench into a well-planned budget. Again, had I only been working one job I'd have been digging myself out of medical debt.
- I'm in the best physical shape I've ever been in. Working that weed whacker has given me shoulders of steel! And there is nothing like working a billy goat five to six hours a day to tone the abdominals. Who needs CrossFit when there is field work to do?
- Tick infestations and Lyme disease are no joke. I've been bitten twice this year (once just prior to starting the job). Last winter's mildish New England weather meant more ticks survived to increase populations this year. Let's hope for a cold winter to freeze them dead.

- I had a Millennial-aged boss. If he is representative of the leadership style of that generation, American organizations are in good hands. I'm shocked I said that, but it's totally true.
- Microplastics in the oceans are a problem, for sure. But have you ever thought about where all that plastic trim line in a weed whacker goes? It's disturbing to consider.
- Open spaces, whether it's a public garden, a hiking trail system or managed woodlots and hayfields, are eagerly used and appreciated for what they provide a community—but only if they are provided! Passing on open spaces to organizations whose mission it is to protect them for public access is such an important thing.
- Want to impress a landscape crew at a gas station? Have your gas tank accessible only by lifting up your dump truck bed.
- It's amazing how much one can accomplish when the alarm is set for 5 a.m. and the television remains off at night.

What I found most valuable about the four-month experience is that I now know I can do so much more with my time. Some folks hit the reset button in their lives by going on a spiritual retreat or a long vacation. Me? I put the pedal to the metal for as long as I could and raced toward the finish line. And then I took a nice big sigh of relief.

Now what will I do with all this free time on my hands?

I just adopted a puppy. **GP**