

## EXPERIENCE

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# Walk in Teddy Roosevelt's footsteps

Sagamore Hill's 83-acre grounds are free and open

BY JOHN HANC

Special to Newsday

"Over, under or through?" Teddy Roosevelt re-enactor Joe Wiegand poses the question to a group of a half-dozen hikers on the trails of Sagamore Hill National Historic Site.

Looking out at a pool of ankle-deep water that has collected near the trail's entrance to the beach, the hikers could be forgiven for hesitating to answer. In fact, the real Teddy used to ask — or announce — this very same question to those accompanying him on his "Point to Point" hikes through the hills, swamps and woods of Sagamore Hill (then about twice the size of today's 83-acre site in Oyster Bay).

This event, organized Dec. 6 by the Friends of Sagamore Hill, is designed to mimic those treks that the 26th president used to do on an almost daily basis. But does following in TR's footsteps really mean having to slosh into freezing cold water? Wiegand responds for the hikers.

"The answer is 'through!' " he



DEBBIE EGAN-CHIN

**Roosevelt impersonator Joe Wiegand led a tour this month, but you can also find your own way around the woodlands, fields, beach and salt marsh at the Sagamore Hill National Historic Site in Oyster Bay.**

bellows, as he plunges ahead, while the other hikers come splashing behind.

"My shoes were totally soaked," said Brian Tadler, laughing. Tadler is vice president and event organizer for the Friends group.

Wiegand — who has interpreted TR at the White House, on the History Channel and in many other venues — will be

back at Sagamore Hill at some point in 2026, but the absence of a TR re-enactor needn't deter hikers from enjoying a walk around one of Long Island's most important historic treasures.

At Sagamore Hill, the Roosevelt Home is open for tours on weekends, by advance reservation only. But the property is open to walkers seven days a

week, from sunrise to sundown. Here, along a hilly, 2-mile, partially paved loop of the perimeter of the park, one can enjoy nature and history.

Take in the magnificent natural environment that is Sagamore Hill: The woodlands, open fields, beaches and salt marshes here provide for enormous ecological diversity — including more than 100

species of birds, and an abundance of animal life.

"For me it has always been an almost magical place," said Stephen Gilroy, an East Norwich resident who has been regularly walking the grounds for years. He attributes his love of Sagamore Hill to "my devotion to American history, and the Roosevelts in particular — and equally so from the peace and quiet and natural beauty of the location."

There's also a sense of discovery and excitement — especially when the Rooseveltian spirit was invoked by Wiegand. On the hike earlier this month, participants explored the main trail but also ventured into more obscure, colorfully named areas of the property, such as the Devil's Punch Bowl and the Rifle Pit.

There are giggles as the group reaches the dry sand along Cold Spring Harbor, their hiking boots having been thoroughly doused.

"All right, count that the silliest thing we've done today," cracks Wiegand, stepping out of character for just an instant, before bellowing TR's trademark expression of approval at the satisfaction of a day outdoors at Sagamore Hill.

"Bully!"

For more information, visit [friendsofsagamorehill.org](http://friendsofsagamorehill.org).