

Conservancy Notes

Four love stories. One vision.

In the first half of this year, four generous landowners permanently protected their land. Their stories are unique, and so are their properties. Yet they all share a love of their land and a vision of it continuing to provide habitat, sustenance, and beauty into the future.

Bringing the past and the future together

When Larry Jost decided to sell the property that he loved to climb and explore as a kid, he wondered how he could pass on the historic, geographic, and ecological value of the land, unchanged. When Alma's Mayor, Jim Wilkie, learned of Jost's interest in selling the landmark bluffland, he had the future of Alma in mind. A future that included preserving the historic bluff.

As steamboats in the 19th century headed south from Lake Pepin, their captains set their sights on that bluff towering above the town of Alma, Wisconsin.

Using both hindsight and insight, Jost and Wilkie brought the past and the future together with a conservation agreement through Mississippi Valley Conservancy.

That 15-acre bluffland is now permanently protected from future development. Thanks to a conservation agreement, the land will continue to provide crucial habitat for pollinators, woodpeckers, bald eagles, and red-tailed hawks. ♥



As a boy, Larry Jost loved climbing the bluff to "Lincoln's Cave" where he could imagine steamboats coming down the river. He cared enough to find a buyer who would protect that place.



Bill and Mary Ann bought their first farm before they had even seen it in the light of day. It became one of their greatest loves.

"Nature does a wonderful job if you give it the chance." ~ Bill Hein

J.W. "Bill" and Mary Ann Hein were buying a way of life when they shook hands on their farm purchase. They raised four children on the farm, inspiring a love and respect for nature in all of them and in their nine grandchildren. They all enjoy taking in the full beauty of the forests, cliffs, wetlands, and farmland (still in production), where they see abundant wildlife, including bears, bobcats and even fishers. The problem was how to protect the property in a way that prevents future development, mining, or any other kind of habitat destruction from damaging the land that has given them so much.

Remembering their son's past experience volunteering with Mississippi Valley Conservancy, the solution came to them: a conservation agreement with the Conservancy to protect it forever.

"It's good to know that the land we love will stay this way. Years from now, we want people to see what it was like," says Bill. ♥

Farming in the blood becomes love of land

Tom Sharratt bought his first farmland above the banks of Timber Coulee Creek in 1972. After a U.S. Army career in Germany and a teaching career in Des Moines, Iowa, Tom and his wife, Sharon, moved onto their farmland in 1985. Tom became a student of forestry, turning the land into a certified tree farm now called Timber Coulee Tree Farm.



The Sharratt's woodland has been enrolled in Wisconsin's Managed Forest Law program. Tom has planted walnut, oak, pine trees on the new land in recent years. Tom and Sharon (shown at left) have enjoyed sharing their land with their children, grandchildren, and school groups.



The Sharratts couldn't stand the idea of the property ever being subdivided, so they protected the 148-acre farm with a conservation agreement in 2016. They purchased another property in 1992, just down the road, and this April they protected it with a conservation easement, as well.

"We love our land and nature, and we have long been concerned about the loss of prime farmland and the subdivision of farms for smaller building plots," said Tom, "Mississippi Valley Conservancy has offered us the chance to ensure that our land will remain as it is now – wild and beautiful and healthy." ♥

Biology "nerds" in love with their land

Judy Kingsbury and Leslie Grossberg are self-described biology "nerds" whose deep attachment to the land dates to when they met on an organic farm in 1991.

They were drawn to the beauty of the Kickapoo Valley during their search for land where they could work on ecological restoration projects. The land they bought includes forested areas with a mix of red oak, shagbark hickory, bur oak, sugar maple, black cherry, and white ash.

They've worked on encouraging regrowth of forest that was once partly cleared for farming. They're watching the ridge top fields fill in with grasses, flowers and young trees, providing a

Leslie and Judy enjoy getting away from the city to work on their forest restoration project, high above the Kickapoo, where the showy orchis blooms in the shade (right).

rich habitat for songbirds, turkey, whitetail deer, bear, fox, and coyote. Their only worry: how to ensure their labor of love is protected if they ever decide to sell the land?

A conservation agreement now ensures that their labor of love will be protected forever. Now when they visit their bluff they can relax and enjoy watching the bees, butterflies and birds that have made the land their home. ♥



ANOTHER WAY TO PROTECT LAND

Make a tax-free distribution from your IRA.

If you are 70½ or older, you can make a tax-free distribution from your traditional or Roth IRA to Mississippi Valley Conservancy. You can donate up to \$100,000 each year without incurring income tax on your withdrawal - it's an efficient way to protect land, air, and water. For more information, call Carol Abrahamzon today at 608-784-3606 x 4.

Expanded reach for Acorns to Oaks

For a fifth consecutive year, "Acorns to Oaks," our outdoor education program, will be offered to K-12 students. Due to new funding we're expanding our reach to school districts throughout our nine-county area and utilizing even more of our nature preserves. The objective of the grant-funded program is to offer students opportunities to get outdoors to learn about the environment they live in and to experience nature firsthand. In 2017, the Conservancy connected 3,000 students with nature on lands you've helped protect.

7th graders from Lincoln Middle School enjoyed a morning of gathering seeds from native prairie species at New Amsterdam Grasslands – an annual activity that's always popular with students on sunny autumn days.



Sarge

Sarge probably doesn't know that he's threatened. And although he does have some scars, he's never been to war. Sarge is a wood turtle, a threatened species in Wisconsin. He was named by Jim Theler and Suzanne Harris who have come across Sarge four times in the last 11 years as they hike their property along the North Fork of the Bad Axe River in Vernon County. They have a special fondness for wood turtles and they name those they find more than once.

Wood turtles are distinctively marked on their undersides so Jim and Suzanne take a few minutes to photograph and measure their finds before putting them back in place. They maintain data on size and location of all of the wood turtles they find. Sarge is the only male they've come across. "Either Sarge is a very busy guy or the other males are very shy," Suzanne said. The two wood turtles found this year are Myrtle and Squirt, Squirt so named for being very small.

Daisy, the black lab, found Sarge in September last year, the last time they've seen him, usually on a mowed trail they maintain along the river. In addition to Sarge's distinctive markings, his shell has been damaged, probably hit by farm equipment, Jim believes. And his front feet have been gnawed off, probably by raccoons, he added, but "that doesn't seem to slow him down." Sarge is probably still out there, somewhere in the sedges and brush along the river.

But Jim and Suzanne wonder each year whether Sarge has survived the winter. Wood turtles, which can live as long as 50 years, overwinter in streams and rivers in deep holes or undercut banks where there is enough water flow to prevent freezing. The biggest threat to wood turtles, according to environmental agency websites, is fragmentation and destruction of habitat. So, although Sarge is listed as threatened, he has an important advantage. The property he roams is protected forever, thanks to Jim and Suzanne.



The Thelers measure and record the size and health of wood turtles that live on their protected land.

Facts about Sarge and other wood turtles:

- A key conservation goal is maintaining a buffer strip of natural vegetation (minimum of 100 feet) along the banks of streams and rivers to protect wood turtle habitat. That will also help improve the water quality of the stream.
- Not picky eaters. Will readily consume slugs, worms, tadpoles, insects, algae, wild fruits, leaves, grass, moss, and carrion.
- Winter under water, often tucked away below undercut riverbanks within exposed tree roots. Dissolved oxygen is extracted from the water, allowing the turtle to remain submerged entirely until the arrival of spring.
- Females deposit anywhere from 4 to 12 eggs into a nest dug out of soft soil in spring or early summer. The eggs hatch in late summer or fall. As soon as the young turtles hatch, they are on their own and receive no care from the adults.
- Adults weigh approximately 1.5 to 2.5 pounds and reach a length of 5 to 9 inches. Sarge measured about 8 inches from tip of nose to base of tail on Sept. 22, 2017.
- Keel carapace. The scientific name of the wood turtle, *Glyptemys insculpta*, refers to the deeply sculptured or chiseled pattern found on the carapace (top shell), which has a ridge or keel running front to back.

JOIN US
IN CELEBRATING THE

Driftless Harvest

TOGETHER, WE'LL
FUND THE FUTURE
AT MISSISSIPPI VALLEY
CONSERVANCY'S
21ST ANNUAL
FALL FUNDRAISER.

Mississippi Valley Conservancy Fall Fundraiser

Friday, November 2, 2018
5:30 p.m.

The Radisson Ballroom

*Conservancy Update • Conservation Cocktail
Wheel of Wine • Silent Auction • Live Auction
Driftless Harvest Menu with Local Ingredients*

Tickets \$50 in advance. \$60 at the door, if available
(We sold out in 2017!).

RSVP by October 26

info@mississippivalleyconservancy.org

or call 608-784-3606 ext. 1

Photo courtesy of Gayle O'Meara Nielsen

Special Thanks to Our Conservation Partners

DIAMOND

Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration
Gundersen Health System
J.F. Brennan Company
Mayo Clinic Health System
Organic Valley
Radisson Hotel La Crosse
Xcel Energy

GOLD

American Transmission Company
Associated Bank
Dahl Automotive
Fowler & Hammer General Contractors

SILVER

Dairyland Power Cooperative
First Supply La Crosse

CONSERVATION SUPPORTERS

Altra Federal Credit Union
Designing Jewelers
Dynamic Lifecycle Innovations
Fifth Avenue Awards
People's Food Cooperative
Prairie Moon Nursery
Robert W. Baird & Co.
Robertson Ryan & Associates
Trane
Trust Point
Verve Credit Union

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU.

What, in your opinion, is the most pressing conservation issue we face?

Together

A message from the Conservancy's Executive Director



Carol Abrahamzon

"How do you guys get so much done?" Together, that's how.

The phone rings:

"I was driving by this wetland area where I always see swans and cranes and this time I saw it being plowed up, can you do something?"

"I was wondering how I could get my students outside to make the forest habitat lessons I'm teaching more real, can you help?"

"Hey, Carol, I was just driving by De Soto and saw the bluff face there has a *for sale* sign. I got the phone number for you. If you don't buy it it's going to be developed, it's plotted for 5 lots."

The emails ding:

"Hello, we are interested in putting our land into a land trust. We want to preserve it as a farm and not have it divided up. Can you send me information and can I make an appointment?"

"I've been thinking about the information you sent me and have come to the conclusion that I would like to donate the land. Please let me know the next step."

"I have 80 acres of land we just finished a timber harvest on and wonder if you'd like to buy it."

"Help, my buckthorn is taking over."

And the week has just begun!

Staff gathers every Monday morning to discuss all of the opportunities we have. Board members meet to review and approve new projects. Volunteers gather, gloved hands wrapped around loppers. Families protect the future of their land.

And you send in your annual membership gift.

This typical week may seem daunting, but I know that we'll get it all done. Because we work together.

We find solutions, partners, and funding. We band together as a community and help each other. We work together to teach our children – our future.

By bringing our experiences and resources together, we create conservation solutions for all. Thank you for

allowing conservation to help and for being a part of the solution.

Together in conservation,

Carol Abrahamzon

*Thank you
for allowing
conservation
to help and
for being a part
of the solution.*



Your gift for the future.

Yes! I want to support our water, our wildlife, and our way of life with my gift today.

Gift Amount: \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1,000 Other _____

Name _____ Email _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

My check made payable to Mississippi Valley Conservancy is enclosed.

Charge my gift to: Visa MasterCard Discover

Card Number _____ Expiration Date _____ 3-Digit Security Code _____

Signature _____

Please include this form with your gift to:
Mississippi Valley Conservancy
P.O. Box 2611, La Crosse, WI
54602-2611

– OR –

Donate online at:
www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org

*Mississippi Valley Conservancy is a 501c(3) Non-Profit Organization.
Contributions are tax-deductible as provided by law.*





1309 Norplex Drive, Suite 9
 La Crosse, WI 54601
 608.784.3606
 MississippiValleyConservancy.org
 info@mississippivalleyconservancy.org

Like us on Facebook!

Mississippi Valley Conservancy is a regional, non-profit land trust based in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The Conservancy permanently conserved 20,055 acres of bluffslands, prairies, wetlands, and streams in and around the Mississippi, Kickapoo, and Wisconsin River since our founding in 1997. Over 4,000 acres are open to the public for hiking, bird watching, hunting, fishing, photography, and snowshoeing.

Board of Directors

- Rob Tyser, *President*
- Sue Dillenbeck, *Vice President*
- David Morrison, *Treasurer*
- Bob Fisher, *Secretary*
- David Bange
- Allan Beatty
- Andrea Benco
- Gretchen Benjamin
- Pat Caffrey
- James Czajkowski
- Sue Dillenbeck
- Sister Helen Elsbernd
- Barbara Frank (*Emeritus*)
- Don Frank (*Emeritus*)
- Philip Gelatt (*Emeritus*)
- Drake Hokanson
- Tim Johnson
- Maureen Kinney
- Dave Lange
- Mandy Nogle
- Mike O'Brien
- Marc Schultz
- Dave Skoloda
- David Vetrano

Staff

- Carol Abrahamzon, *Executive Director*
- Abbie Church, *Conservation Director*
- Levi Plath, *Land Manager*
- Nancy Larson, *Financial & Operations Mgr*
- Kathy Frise, *Outreach Coordinator*
- Megen Kabele, *Conservation Specialist*
- Sarah Bratnobar, *Communications Director*
- Mary Dresser, *Conservation Assistant*

Non-Profit
 Organization
 U.S. Postage
PAID
 Permit No. 372
 La Crosse, WI

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PARTNER

Gundersen Health System

Gundersen Health System is proud to sponsor Mississippi Valley Conservancy's efforts to protect area habitats and farmland. Through its support of the Conservancy, programs like *Seasons in the Coulee Region* – an annual series of four guided hikes that celebrate winter, spring, summer and fall – Gundersen and its environmental stewardship program Envision® have strengthened their mission of creating a more inheritable world for future generations and sharing it with those in the Coulee Region.

In October 2014, Gundersen became the first healthcare system in the country to produce more energy than it consumes and become energy independent. It was an achievement made possible in part by the work of Envision, which is dedicated to improving the health of our communities and controlling rising energy costs through the creation of cleaner, more efficient forms of energy. To date, Gundersen has installed various forms of green energy on its campuses and throughout the Tri-state area, reducing its carbon footprint to

safeguard the environment and the air we breathe. These clean energy forms include biogas, biomass, geothermal, solar and wind. To learn more about Gundersen's sustainability programs that are attracting an international audience, visit gundersenenvision.org.

Earth Day hikers enjoy the vista from Miller Bluff as part of the Seasons in the Coulee Region hike series sponsored by Gundersen Health System.



Join Us For These Upcoming Events!

- Nov. 2 **21st Annual Fall Fundraiser** – RSVP at 608.784.3606 ext. 1
- Nov. 3 **Pathway to Spirituality Hike** – a *Linked To The Land* event sponsored by Mayo Clinic Health System
- Nov. 17 **For the Wild: Saturday Crew** at Holland Sand Prairie
- Dec. 8 **Tree Farm Hike** – a *Linked To The Land* event sponsored by Mayo Clinic Health System

Details for all these events and more at mississippivalleyconservancy.org