Western Reserve Land Conservancy
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A Western Reserve Land Conservancy newsletter

LANDLINE

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Fall 2014

Richfield voters will decide camp's future

Voters in the village of Richfield and Richfield Township on Nov. 4 will decide the fate of two levies allowing for the purchase and operation of Crowell Hilaka, a 336-acre former Girl Scout camp.

The Richfield Joint Recreation District – an entity formed by the village and the township – has placed the issues on the general election ballot. They are a 1.25-mill levy to fund the acquisition of Crowell Hilaka and a 10-year, 0.5 mill property tax levy to fund operating costs for the property.



The 8.3-acre Lake Linnea is in the northern section of the Crowell Hilaka property.

The property, which is located in the Rocky River watershed, includes two lakes, several streams, a mature forest, wetlands and miles of hiking trails. Natural resource surveys have found rare orchids, wild turkeys, belted kingfishers, several species of ferns and a beautiful waterfall.

The nonprofit Land Conservancy has an agreement with the Girl Scouts of North East Ohio to purchase the property and, in turn, is seeking a permanent owner aligned with its conservation mission. The joint recreation district would become that owner if the issues are approved.

The Land Conservancy's primary land-protection tool is the conservation easement, a voluntary and legally binding agreement that prohibits or severely limits future development of a particular parcel. If the Land Conservancy is involved in the acquisition of Crowell Hilaka, it would seek a conservation easement preserving all or a portion of the property and help the recreation district with other potential public funding.

"The Land Conservancy is involved in this project because it recognizes the property's natural resources should be preserved," said Joe Leslie, the Land Conservancy's director of acquisitions. "We are representing the interests of conservation, and that is our ultimate goal for Crowell Hilaka."

The property, which was put up for sale in 2012, is known for its extraordinary natural resources and historic landmarks. It is the former estate of vacuum cleaner inventor James B. Kirby, who sold the land to the Cleveland Girl Scouts in 1937. For more than 70 years, thousands of girls camped at Crowell Hilaka. It was one of several camps put up for sale by GSNEO in 2012.

The Land Conservancy convened a coalition of community leaders, outdoor recreation advocates, the Friends of Crowell Hilaka group,

continued page 3

Brown's settlement plea energizes land bank conference

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown's announcement that he and fellow Sen. Rob Portman were urging Bank of America to set aside $100 million from its settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice to help Ohio's cities was met with vigorous applause from those attending the fourth annual Ohio Land Bank Conference in Columbus.

Brown said banks should not be allowed to dictate how settlement funds – paid to settle claims of widespread lending abuses – should be spent and applauded conference attendees for standing up for Ohio's cities.

"Thank you for your activism," said Brown, who was the keynote speaker on the final day of the conference. "I know a lot of you in this room are heroes unknown, in most cases."

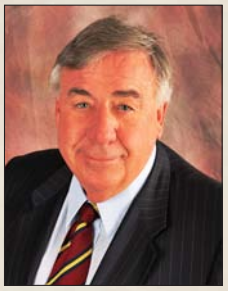
More than 200 people representing counties, cities, companies and nonprofit organizations throughout the state attended the Sept. 11-12 conference at The Westin in Columbus. The conference was sponsored by the Land Conservancy's Thriving Communities Institute and was designed to help community leaders effectively address the

continued page 3



U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown

Bettcher makes $500,000 gift to Land Conservancy



Laurence A. Bettcher

In one of the largest charitable gifts ever received by the Land Conservancy, Laurence A. Bettcher, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Birmingham, Ohio-based Bettcher Industries, Inc., has donated $500,010 of closely-held company stock to the nonprofit conservation organization.

Bettcher, who is a member of the Land Conservancy's board of trustees, said his investment in Bettcher Industries – a company started by his father – has "grown significantly" over the years. The firm, a developer and manufacturer of cutting tools used in food processing operations and industrial applications, has experienced tremendous growth and success under Bettcher's leadership.

"Our family is proud of the company's reputation and pleased that it will continue to bear our family name and reflect our values for years to come," Bettcher said. "Consistent with our family values, I now wish to share a portion of my good fortune with Western Reserve Land Conservancy."

Bettcher, an outdoorsman, conservationist and civic activist who lives in Vermilion, said he hoped his gift to the Land Conservancy would prompt others to invest charitable dollars in conservation.

Bettcher has been a key supporter of farmland and coastal preservation projects in the Firelands region, which includes Lorain, Erie and Huron counties. He was instrumental in the preservation of the former Inland Seas Maritime Museum property in Vermilion and the recent launching of a citywide property survey in Sandusky, a project undertaken by our Thriving Communities Institute.

"We are so grateful to Larry for his thoughtful leadership and for his generous gift, "said Nancy McCann, chief development officer for the Land Conservancy. "Many changes have been taking place over the summer within the Land Conservancy, especially in the fundraising program. We now offer the full menu of giving options and are poised to accept gifts of all types, including closely-held stock. Larry has shown his confidence in the organization by making the first, of what we hope, many large gifts to the Land Conservancy that will help us further our mission. Thank you, Larry, for your generosity and kindness."



The Highland Hills wetlands are in the Mill Creek watershed.

Highland Hills, Land Conservancy partner to create 9.8-acre preserve

Seizing a rare opportunity to preserve wetlands and a forest in Cuyahoga County, the Land Conservancy and the Village of Highland Hills finalized the acquisition of a 9.8-acre property in the Cleveland suburb for a nature preserve that may also serve as an outdoor education laboratory.

The Village acquired the property, which is on the east side of Northfield Road south of Mill Creek, from Mt. Zion Fellowship Church with a federal grant secured by the Land Conservancy. The Great Lakes Area of Concern Land Acquisition Grant Program – developed by the federal National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and administered by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Office of Coastal Management – supports projects in the region that meet NOAA's mission to protect and restore coastal habitats. The project was supported by U.S. Rep. Marcia Fudge.

The Highland Hills wetlands are in the Mill Creek watershed, which drains into the Cuyahoga River.

Highland Hills will manage the property as a nature preserve and the Land Conservancy will hold a conservation easement on it. The preserve is expected to be open for passive recreation and be available for outdoor education programs involving the Warrensville Heights City School District and other organizations.

"We are happy to have had the opportunity to work with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy on this project, which will contribute to open space and environmental quality goals of the Village," Mayor Robert L. Nash said.

Sarah Ryzner, director of projects for the Land Conservancy's Thriving Communities Institute, said, "This is an important project for the Upper Mill Creek Watershed. The opportunity to preserve 10-acres of forested wetlands is rare in Cuyahoga County and the Village of Highland Hills is a great partner on this project."

The project is adjacent to Mill Creek corridor and will protect wetlands, upland forests and a small tributary to Mill Creek. An effort has recently begun to formalize a watershed group dedicated to Mill Creek, which will follow up on the previous work of the Mill Creek Watershed Initiative and update and implement the 2006 Watershed Action Plan. Ryzner said this project "is an important step that complements that effort."

In 2000, Mt. Zion Fellowship Church purchased approximately 20 acres in Highland Hills from the city of Cleveland. But the church later decided to sell the portion of the property that includes the wetlands.

The Land Conservancy's conservation easement permanently prohibits development of the property, which consists of marshes, vernal pools and a hardwood forest and is home to birds, amphibians and other wildlife.

Voters

continued from page 1

historians, residents and other partners in its search for an owner aligned with its preservation mission. In the wake of those deliberations, Village Council and township trustees agreed to form the Richfield Joint Recreation District. The township's board appointees are Bob Lucas, Floyd Ostrowski and Donna Skoda, while the village representatives are Ralph McNerney, Pat Norris and Bill Taylor. A seventh member, Kelly Clark, was chosen by the board.

Crowell Hilaka is mostly in the township, with a small portion in the village. It is located on the north side of Streetsboro Road (Ohio Route 303) and has frontage on Broadview, Oviatt and Streetsboro roads.

In addition to the Friends group, the Land Conservancy and GSNEO, others involved in the informal talks included representatives from Richfield Township, the Village of Richfield, Summit County Council, the Richfield Historical Society and the Buckeye Trail Association, as well as township and village residents.

Conference

continued from page 1

challenges posed by the thousands of vacant and abandoned homes in Ohio.

Brown also praised the work of Thriving Communities' Jim Rokakis and Frank Ford, adding that Rokakis, a former Cuyahoga County Treasurer, "has been talking about (the foreclosure crisis) longer than any other elected official."

Rokakis, whose program has secured more than $182 million in demolition funding for Ohio's cities, opened the conference with a retrospective on the foreclosure crisis and it ongoing impact on the state. Co-keynote speaker Matt Lampke, mortgage foreclosure counsel for Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine, discussed the funding that has been allocated for demolition – including the $75 million set aside by DeWine from an earlier bank settlement – and the problems abandoned homes continue to pose in neighborhoods.

"In fact, the attorney general believes the real victims of the foreclosure crisis are those homeowners who struggled to pay their mortgage and stay in their home, yet saw their property values drop through no fault of their own," he said.

Thriving Communities Institute staff members also presented at several conference breakout sessions, including: "Vacant Housing Inventories – Quantifying the Need for Demolition and Rehabilitation" (Rokakis, Paul Boehnlein and East Cleveland's Trevelle Harp); "It Takes a Village to Raise a Neighborhood" (Jacqueline Gillon and Jay Westbrook); "Land Protection 101: Green Space and Land Banks" (Sarah Ryzner); "Renovate or Demolish? Innovative Approaches to Answering This Question" (Ford); and "VAPAC – A Model for Collaboration" (Ford, the Cuyahoga Land Bank's Gus Frangos and South Euclid's Sally Martin).



Conference sponsors were Port of Cleveland, Ohio Housing Finance Agency, Third Federal Savings & Loan, Hemp Chamber of Commerce, Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing, Key Bank, Hatha Communications, PNC, Ice Miller, Rustbelt Reclamation, Kurtz Bros. Inc., SecureView, Ocwen, Wells Fargo, Lightning Demolition & Excavating. STR Grants, LLC, SureSite Consulting, Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland and Cuyahoga Land Bank.

Land Conservancy helps preserve coastal property



The new park provides access to another 300 feet of Lake Erie shoreline.

The Land Conservancy helped the coastal city of Vermilion secure a $70,000 Land and Water Conservation Fund grant to preserve an historic lakeside property with a building that formerly showcased aquatic artifacts.

The funding, coupled with private donations and grants from Ohio Department of Natural Resources NatureWorks program and the state's Clean Ohio Conservation Fund, enabled the city to purchase the former Inland Seas Museum property on Lake Erie. The project creates a new public park for passive recreation and provides access to an additional 300 feet of Lake Erie shoreline.

The property is now permanently preserved with a conservation easement held by the Land Conservancy.

Future development of the site will be guided by feedback received in a 2013 community-wide public use survey. Community input will be ongoing. Current direction is to preserve existing sight lines and the historic nautical character of this beachfront jewel.

The lead gift of $200,000 was donated by Laurence Bettcher, a Land Conservancy trustee and owner of Bettcher Industries, and his wife Karen. Seventy-one percent of the private donations were of $1,000 or less. Other philanthropic funding for this project came from the Dorn Foundation, Erie County Community Foundation, Frost Parker Foundation, Mylander Foundation and the Nord Family Foundation.

Strong attachment to family land prompts man to permanently protect it



A pond on the property is home to a variety of fish and wildlife species.

During the Great Depression, John Kuchma's father bought a farm in Ashtabula County for the tidy sum of $664 – the back taxes due on the property. Such sales were not uncommon in those times.

Let's fast forward to 2014.

Kuchma, 76, now the owner of the farm, had been regularly approached by developers and logging firms seeking to buy or timber the property – and pay top dollar. But instead of accepting one of the offers, the Trumbull Township man decided to permanently preserve the 34-acre farm and natural area by donating a conservation easement to the nonprofit Land Conservancy.

"I did not want to see this beautiful property ravaged," Kuchma said. "I did not want to leave a legacy of having the timber stripped out or the lots sold off. I wanted to make sure it stays as it is."

A conservation easement preserves land by limiting future development and generally protects the property from being divided into smaller parcels. While it is voluntarily granted by the landowner, the easement is permanent and runs with the land. In Kuchma's case, he explicitly stipulated that there will be no future commercial timbering on the property but the easement does allow for a single future building site and for the property to continue to be farmed as it always has been.

"I grew up here and I wanted to leave it natural, not ravaged," he said.

The property, located on Windsor-Mechanicsville Road, contains farmland, hardwood forests, fields and wetlands. It also has 1,750 linear feet of a headwater tributary to Trumbull Creek and a man-made pond.

Kuchma, who was born in the farmhouse where he lives today, said the property has a history as rich as its natural resources. It was once a stagecoach stop on the route between Ashtabula and Warren. In addition, one of the area's oldest cemeteries – one grave dates to 1778 – is next to his farm.

Kuchma said he was considering ways to preserve his land when he noticed a sign in front of a neighbor's property noting that it was protected by Western Reserve Land Conservancy easement. He contacted the Land Conservancy, which helped him craft an easement that met his conservation wishes.

"John has a strong attachment to his family land and had a very clear vision for the future of his property," said Brett Rodstrom, vice president of eastern field operations for the Land Conservancy. "We looked at several different options for protecting his property and, at the end of the day, the voluntary conservation easement was the tool that gave him the most flexibility with respect to his priorities. He essentially drew up the terms of his own easement."



Kister Mill has been operating for nearly 200 years.

Historic mill may be preserved

The Land Conservancy is working with conservation partners to help acquire, preserve, improve and operate Kister Mill, one of the nation's oldest working water-powered mills.

The mill, located in Wayne County's Plain Township, eight miles southwest of Wooster, was built in 1816 and is an iconic example of the county's oldest industry. In addition to the historic mill, the 20-acre property contains a fragile, rare wetland ecosystem that will provide outdoor education and recreation opportunities.

The Land Conservancy's goal is to acquire the property and make necessary capital improvements so that by the mill's 200th anniversary in 2016 it can be opened to the public as an operating history and education center. It is projected that the mill – a unique example of a spring-fed water mill (most are powered by streams and rivers) – could attract 20,000 visitors per year and 500 students annually for education programs.

The mill is on the National Register of Historic Places. The project would also include improved public access through trails and a parking area.

Bug-eater



A state botanist exploring a fen on the Kister Mill property in Wayne County discovered sundew, a carnivorous plant that uses a sticky gel to attract and trap insects. The insect is then digested, a slow process that can take up to two weeks. The Land Conservancy is working with partners to preserve the mill and surrounding land.

Conservation seen as critical to brook trout reintroduction

In most places, the stream is no more than two giant steps wide.

Yet its clear, 53-degree waters are home to a unique strain of fish once believed to have been extirpated from the state – the Native Ohio Brook Trout. It is a remarkable comeback story, and biologists from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife office in Akron and the Geauga Park District are sampling the Geauga County creek to determine whether the tiny, colorful fish are healthy and reproducing.

Using equipment that momentarily stuns the fish but does not harm them, ODNR Fisheries Biologist Curtis Wagner slogs upstream while waving what looks like an electronic wand in the water. Behind him, ODNR District 3 Fish Management Supervisor Phil Hillman and Paul Pira, director of the Geauga Park District's Natural Resource Management Department, net the temporarily immobilized trout and put them in a bucket.





Phil Hillman, left, Paul Pira and Curt Wagner use electrofishing equipment to momentarily stun Native Ohio Brook Trout, including this one.

The early returns are promising. One 15-meter-long pool yields 20 brook trout.

"It's the mother lode – it will be difficult to find a better stretch of water than this one," says Wagner, who now heads ODOW's Native Ohio Brook Trout reintroduction program.

Hillman pulls a spotted, orange-tinged 6-inch-long male trout out of the plastic bucket, places it on a wooden measuring board and pauses. "You'd be hard-pressed to find a prettier fish than that," he says.

In 1972, Dr. Andrew White of John Carroll University found two reproducing populations of Native Ohio Brook Trout in the headwaters of the Chagrin River in Geauga County. At the time, it was believed that this species, which can survive in only the coldest and cleanest water, had died off due to pollution and development. Subsequent DNA testing confirmed that these fish were indeed the remnants of the original brook trout that lived in Ohio's streams and rivers after the glaciers retreated some 10,000 years ago.

"They were genetically tested and they are a unique population, a strain found only here in Ohio," Pira says.

No additional populations were found when the state surveyed streams in the Chagrin, Grand and Rocky River watersheds. But the study found 15 suitable sites for reintroduction of brook trout – very small, spring-fed streams that are completely forested. From 1996 to 2004, Native Ohio Brook Trout – raised first in a private hatchery at University School and then at a state-operated one in Castalia – were reintroduced to those creeks.

Today, seven of the streams – six in the Chagrin River watershed, the other in a creek feeding Rocky River – still have reproducing brook trout populations. In nearly each case, the properties containing the streams have been protected by county park districts and by organizations such as the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and Western Reserve Land Conservancy.

The goal of the brook trout reintroduction program is to return a habitat-sensitive, native fish to its former range, not to produce a sport fishery. In fact, Native Ohio Brook Trout are listed as a threatened species. The project has reinforced the need for collaboration and land-protection in conservation efforts.

Every few hundred feet or so, the crew pauses to measure the fish, record the findings and return the trout to the same part of the stream from which they were removed. In addition, the water temperature is recorded. At the end of the day, the results are promising. The crew has collected and released 168 Native Ohio Brook Trout, ranging in length from two to nine inches. That indicates ages of less than one year to more than five.

> *`You'd be hard-pressed to find a prettier fish than that.'*
>
> PHIL HILLMAN

"The stream is looking good and the populations are persisting on their own," Wagner says. "So that's good news."

Watch our video on the Native Ohio Brook Trout project on our YouTube channel, wrlcvideo.

GIVING

Outright gifts take many forms

By Nancy McCann

Philanthropic giving should be joyful, fulfilling and uncomplicated. You can choose what to give, how to give, and how your gift will be used. By making a charitable gift to the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, you enrich our community and create a lasting legacy.



Nancy McCann

You may be surprised to learn that there are different ways in which to make an outright charitable gift. Gifts of cash are the most common and recognizable. However, you may not know that you also can make a gift with an asset that you no longer want or need.

In addition to cash, you can make a gift of stock, mutual funds, real estate, art and jewelry, life insurance and IRA/retirement assets. Any of these easily may be transferred to the Land Conservancy, and you will be allowed a charitable income tax deduction in the year in which the gift is given. Several options may provide even greater tax benefits:

- Do you have vacation property that you no longer use, or own a farm or other property that has become a burden to maintain? If so, consider making an outright gift of the property to the Land Conservancy. As with a gift of stock, you will enjoy a double tax benefit. If your property has appreciated in value, you will avoid any capital gains tax. And your tax deduction will be for the appraised fair market value as of the date of the gift, which is the date that the Land Conservancy receives the fully executed deed for the property.
- Do you have a life insurance policy that no longer serves your needs? If so, you may use it to make a charitable gift. The simplest way to make a charitable gift of life insurance, in any amount, is to name the Land Conservancy as the beneficiary of your policy. The "Change of Beneficiary" form is generally available online through your provider's website, or directly from your insurance agent.
- Alternatively, you can transfer ownership of a fully paid-up policy, in any amount, to the Land Conservancy. By giving up all rights of ownership, you will receive an immediate charitable income tax deduction for the lesser of the policy's fair market value or the net premiums that you already have paid.

Giving to the Land Conservancy is easy!
For more information, please contact me at 440.528.4153 or nmccann@wrlandconservancy.org.

McCann is the Chief Development Officer for the Land Conservancy.

EVENTS



Gold panning on the Vermilion River

Our popular annual event in Lorain County drew dozens of prospectors. Grant Thompson, right, of our Firelands Chapter volunteered his time to help the gold-panners.







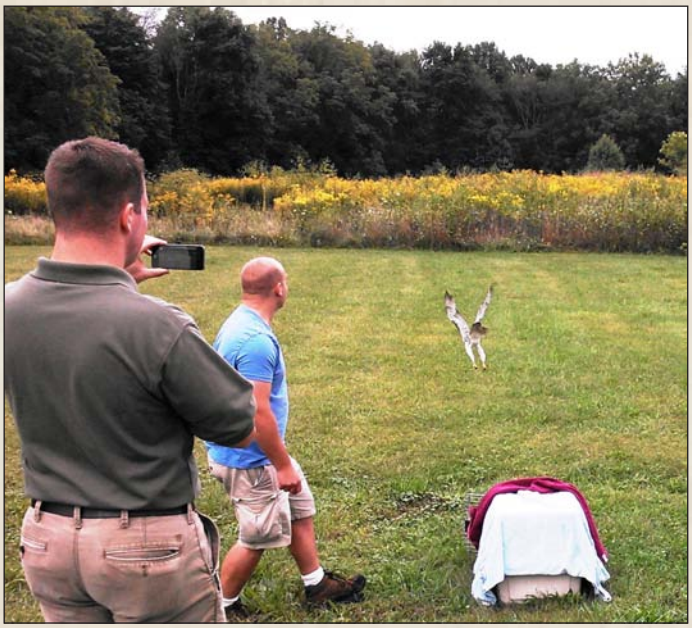
Crowell Hilaka open houses

The 336-acre former Girl Scout camp in Richfield was open for a series of public tours in September and October, and hundreds showed up to tour the property.

Vibrant Places

This year-long series included stops at Kelleys Island, below; Medina County, center, where a hawk rehabilitated at the Medina Raptor Center was released at the Land Conservancy-protected Gray's Creek property; and Cleveland, bottom, where attendees got a look at the work of our Thriving Communities Institute.









Kids in the Creek

A soggy morning did not deter families from exploring the natural wonders of a Geauga County stream. Naturalist Dan Best of the Geauga Park District helped our attendees identify the critters they found in the creek.



Ohio Land Bank Conference

The fourth annual conference, sponsored by our Thriving Communities Institute, featured a series of breakout sessions and networking opportunities.





A session on property surveys was presented by Jacquie Gillon, left, Jim Rokakis, Trevelle Harp and Paul Boehnlein, all of whom worked on our East Cleveland survey.

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Reforest City initiative is branching out

Our tree program is, well, growing.

Reforest City, the urban reforestation program launched by the Land Conservancy's Thriving Communities Institute and its partners, is taking root in Cleveland and is expected to eventually spread to cities across Ohio. The initiative involves collaboration with a number of partners, including, but not limited to, the City of Cleveland, Cleveland Neighborhood Progress, Davey Resource Group, Holden Arboretum/ Cleveland Botanical Gardens and others.



We kicked off our program last fall in Cleveland's Central Neighborhood.

In addition, the Land Conservancy has hired Colby Sattler to the newly created position of Urban Forestry & Natural Resources Project Manager. Sattler, who holds a bachelor's degree in natural resources ecology and conservation biology from the University of Idaho and was most recently an urban forester and biologist at Davey Resource Group, primarily will be responsible for advancing Reforest City.

Sattler and Sarah Ryzner, director of projects for Thriving Communities Institute, will also be on the City of Cleveland's Master Tree Plan Steering Committee. It has been two decades since the tree plan was updated.

"We are very excited about the opportunity to work with so many partners to restore Cleveland's tree canopy and to be able to lend these resources to other Ohio communities looking at reforestation," Ryzner said.

Reforest City was launched in 2013 after Cleveland and a number of civic and nonprofit groups recognized the need to restore the city's tree canopy, which studies show is now one of the smallest, percentage-wise, in Cuyahoga County. Since then, groups have been exploring the best ways to educate residents on the environmental and economic benefits, and the importance of planting and caring for trees.

Thriving Communities Institute, Cleveland Neighborhood Progress and Holden Arboretum recently held fall tree-care workshops at two neighborhood orchards in the City of Cleveland. The free workshops were open to everyone from landscape contractors to neighborhood green space enthusiasts. The Land Conservancy is also participating in a regional forestry summit.

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