



# Geneva Lake Conservancy Connections

Spring 2020

Preserve and advocate for Walworth County waterways, natural areas, and working lands

## CONSERVANCY COMPLETES EASEMENTS ON GENEVA LAKE NORTH SHORE PROPERTIES

The scenic beauty of Geneva Lake received more protection recently when the Geneva Lake Conservancy completed conservation easements with two property owners on the lake's North Shore. The conservation easements, combined, protect 7 acres of environmentally sensitive land. The conservation easements are on properties that have remnant oak forests and are in Primary Environmental Corridors that provide important greenways for wildlife.

Conservation easements permanently protect land, while leaving the property in private ownership, by restricting the type and amount of future development and activities permitted on a property. The restrictions protect the property's scenic and conservation values as well as protect them from further subdivision.

"These two easements demonstrate the ability of an owner to forever steward the land they treasure," said Tom Nickols, Conservancy Vice-Chair.

Ted and Christine Brownstein are owners of one of the easement properties. "My husband and I hold the oak forest on our property close to our hearts, and we did not wish to see our property divided in the future, and the oak forest destroyed," said Christine Brownstein. "Our property was purchased by my father in 1951 and since then some of the landowners surrounding us have cut down their oak forests and we did not want that to happen on our property."

The other property owner also sought to protect a portion of the oak forest and restore a prairie landscape along the shore line that will filter stormwater runoff and enhance the environmental health of the lake.

"Both property owners understood the value of these conservation easements to the community and the health of the lake," said Janet Happ, Director of Development.

The Geneva Lake Conservancy now holds 20 conservation easements in the Geneva Lake watershed.



The beauty of this woodland scene was inspiration for the Brownsteins to permanently protect their property with a conservation easement.

**The coronavirus and the resulting quarantines have impacted all of our lives. The Conservancy's board and staff want to thank all of our supporters for their contributions to preserving the beauty and health of Walworth County that inspires us all during this crisis. We encourage you to visit our nature preserves to experience the renewing and healing powers of nature. More information on our nature preserves and activities you can do with your family are available on our Website at: [www.genevalakeconservancy.org](http://www.genevalakeconservancy.org).**

## CONSERVANCY COMPLETES 556-ACRE CONSERVATION EASEMENT

The Geneva Lake Conservancy has completed a 556-acre conservation easement in northwest Walworth County that will protect critical habitat for several endangered species and species of concern in Wisconsin, including the Blanding's Turtle.

The property is owned by Ron Piening, a retired Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) employee, who began purchasing the parcels in the Towns of Darien and Richmond in 1965. The land includes more than 270 acres of woodland, a dozen kettle ponds and 240 acres of prime agricultural land.

“Unlike buildings, a legacy of land lasts forever,” said Piening who has named the property the Holzinger Memorial Preserve after his father's family. “This conservation easement is a result of years of planning and will ensure that this land is preserved and restored for future generations.”



Blanding's Turtle

Over the last 55 years, Piening has managed the property by planting hundreds of native and adventive trees and removing invasive species. He also operated a Christmas tree plantation on part of the property for more than 30 years.

The land is open to the public under the DNR's Voluntary Access Program. It is located on County Road M and Town Line Road, approximately four miles northwest of Delavan.

Under the conservation easement agreement, Piening and staff of the Geneva Lake Conservancy will develop a management plan to continue his restoration and reforestation program.

“We are very grateful that Mr. Piening has protected this property with high conservation value for the benefit of the public,” said Kevin Brunner, Chairman of the Geneva Lake Conservancy. “The conservation easement will preserve critical wildlife habitat, protect unique glacial landscape and help conserve water quality in the Turtle Creek watershed.”

The property provides habitat for the Blanding's Turtle, which is a species of concern in Wisconsin. The turtle can grow up to 10 inches in length and lives for more than 70 years. It has a long neck and yellow chin and favors marshes, swamps and wet meadows. The Blanding's turtle overwinters in lakes and perennial ponds. Piening's property has been the subject of a Blanding's Turtle study by University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee faculty.

The property is also in the critical habitat area for the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake, a threatened species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and a State Endangered Species. The massasauga is a small thick-bodied rattlesnake that lives in shallow wetlands and adjacent uplands of the Midwest. It is extremely shy and often relies on its brown coloration to avoid being detected.

The Conservancy staff will work with volunteers to continue to upgrade the habitat for these rare species as well as continue restoration of the woodlands, which includes remnant oak forest identified by a recent Chicago Wilderness/Morton Arboretum study.

“We want to build on all of the restoration work Mr. Piening has completed,” said Karen Yancey, the Conservancy's Executive Director. “Mr. Piening's efforts to protect this important habitat is a gift to future generations and will help improve the ecological health of the area.”



## CONSERVATION@HOME VISITS BEGIN IN MAY

With one short visit from two Geneva Lake Conservancy volunteers, you can learn how to make your property more environmentally friendly this summer and contribute to the ecological health of our watershed, and the planet.

The Conservancy's new Conservation@Home program includes two teams of volunteers with extensive gardening and conservation experience. One of these teams will visit your home and evaluate your property to determine if you have removed invasive species, planted native plants and trees, managed stormwater runoff and taken steps to eliminate phosphorus and chloride usage. If you meet the basic criteria of Conservation@Home, you will be recognized with an attractive sign for your yard, mailbox post or fence. If you do not meet the criteria, the team will offer suggestions on how to improve the ecological health of your property and return in a year to determine if your property now meets the requirements.

The Conservation@Home program was created by The Conservation Foundation in Naperville, Illinois, and has certified more than 1,000 properties in the Chicago area. The Conservancy is the first Wisconsin land trust to adopt the program.

A Conservation@Home visit is free for Conservancy members and \$25 for non-members. To make your Conservation@Home appointment visit our Website at [www.genevalakeconservancy.org](http://www.genevalakeconservancy.org) or call Community Outreach Specialist Shelby Best at 262-475-9822.

The Conservation@Home program is underwritten by Karl & Lucy Otzen  
and Otzen Family Foundation.



## CONSERVANCY EXPANDS COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Shelby Best will be continuing her journey in the conservation world at Geneva Lake Conservancy. A communications expert and project manager, Shelby brings a strategic knowledge of connecting and engaging with people to the Community Outreach Specialist role. Shelby comes to the Conservancy with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Loyola University of Chicago and a Master's degree in Environmental Technology from Imperial College London. Shelby has worked with other land trust organizations in the Midwest, including Gathering Waters and the Natural Land Institute in Illinois. When not working on engaging the community in our new Conservation@Home program, you can find Shelby exploring one of the many stunning nature preserves in the area.



**2019 Holly Ball, *Harmony is the Key Element*, Recognized Conservation Contributions and Raised Funds for the Conservancy to Accomplish its Mission to *Preserve and Advocate for Walworth County Waterways, Natural Areas and Working Lands*. Thank you to all who attended and supported our annual holiday event.**



Left, Carol Dinsmore and Ken Jacobsen. Right, Tom Nickols, Conservancy Vice Chair, presents the 2019 Conservation Stewardship award to Kenneth Jacobsen & the Stevens Family Land Trust in appreciation of their generosity, love of nature and community minded spirit. In the spring of 2018, the Conservancy received a generous donation of a 4.3 acre oak forest with 105 feet of shoreline on Lake Delavan from the Stevens Family Land Trust.



Kate Holland, left, presented the Honorary Land Steward award to the Lake Geneva Fishing Club (LGFC) for their involvement with the Helen Rohner Children's Fishing Park in Williams Bay. The park was purchased by GLC in 2017 through a generous donation by Kate's grandfather, Jack Rohner, and dedicated to his late wife. The LGFC has been involved in the park, organizing and giving free fishing lessons to children, more than 100 children received fishing lessons last summer. Bob Kantor, right, LGFC member, has given tirelessly of his time and talents.



**Many thank to the Holly Ball Committee!**

Cari Alberts, Marilyn Ames, Kate Berley, Kelly Clow, Grace Eckland, Ursula Grud, Karen Hirn, Kelly Hirn, Kim Hirn, Kate Holland, Kirsten Larsen, Mary Leaf, Tracy Lentz, Cindy Milojevic, Janet Nickols, Sharon O'Brien, JaNelle Powers, Suzette Rowe & Kathy Yih.

**Special thanks to our volunteers...**

Shelby Best, Kelley Happ, Larry Happ, Victoria McHugh, Monroe Melges, Julie Reynolds, Annie Rowe & Kevin Williams .

**Thank you to our Holly Ball Sponsors!**

— PRINCIPAL —



— Sustaining —

Carol Bernick

Wendy Perks Fisher

Molly & Jeff Keller

John K. Notz, Jr.

Patrick G. & Shirley W. Ryan Foundation



— Partner —

Daniels Foods    Ernie & Karen Hirn    Gordy's    Mercy Health  
 Matustik Builders    First National Bank and Trust    Barnes & Thornburg LLP  
 bella Pools and Spa    Dean and Rosemarie Buntrock    Egert Law, S.C.

**Photos by Victoria McHugh Photography LLC**



## BROMLEY WOODS WORK DAY

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater students from the classes of Professor Dale Splinter and Professor Jeff Olson's class participated in a work day at Bromley Woods on February 8 to remove buckthorn and honeysuckle that were harming native oak and hickory trees on the property. The Conservancy thanks all the volunteers who participated as well as the LaGrange General Store for donating coffee and hot chocolate.



## NATURE IS ALWAYS OPEN—10 NATURE ACTIVITIES TO ENJOY WITH YOUR FAMILY ANYTIME THAT REDUCE STRESS

Richard Louv, author of ten books that focus on the benefits of enjoying nature, says getting outside will boost your families resilience during stressful times. Activities include:

- Pick a "sit spot"
- World-watching window to bring the outside in
- Hiking
- Camping
- Plant a tree
- Electronic wildlife watching
- Reading books that inspire outdoor adventure
- Tell nature stories
- Plant a Pollinator Garden
- Establish a dirt pile for kids to dig in

Source: [www.childrenandnaturenetwork.org](http://www.childrenandnaturenetwork.org), March 16, 2020.

## ANNUAL NATIVE PLANT SALE - PURCHASE A COMPLETE GARDEN!

For the past several years GLC has been selling milkweed and pollinator plants to provide habitat for the declining Monarch butterflies. This year we are joining the Conservation@Home movement to help promote and create wildlife-friendly yards and offering WILDFLOWER GARDEN KITS that includes a selection of five native wildflowers to plant in your yard.

You don't need a dedicated wildflower garden or large area to be successful in attracting and feeding a variety of songbirds, butterflies, bees and other beneficial wildlife. You can create spaces for environmentally-friendly plants around your house or in among your favorite annuals. These plants are seasonal, and many are tall, so they can fill in early spring bare spots, or add height and color to the back of your annual garden. Unlike your annuals, they will bloom again year after year and help contribute to the ecological health of our region. **All of these native plants need full or partial sun. Each plant will be 2 - 3 inched tall and ready to plant. Instructions will be included.**

**YES - PLEASE ORDER** the following kits for me at a cost of **\$15 per kit**.

\_\_\_\_ **KIT 1** includes one each of Columbine, Rudbeckia (black-eyed Susan), Monarda (bee balm), Pale Purple Coneflower and New England Aster

\_\_\_\_ **KIT 2** includes Wild Geranium, Penstemon (Foxglove Beardtongue ) Purple Prairie Clover, Golden Alexander and Prairie Coreopsis.

\_\_\_\_ **KIT 3 - for butterflies** includes 1 common milkweed, and 2 each of Swamp (rose) Milkweed and Butterfly weed

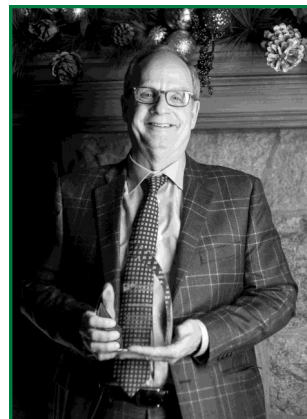
\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL COST** Please pay by check or bring your credit card when you pick up the boxes at the Mill House between May 18 and May 30. Return this form to GLC, 398 Mill Street, Box 588, Fontana, WI 53125. Online ordering available via the Conservancy website, [www.genevalakeconservancy.org](http://www.genevalakeconservancy.org).

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

## CHARLES COLMAN RETIRES FROM CONSERVANCY BOARD

At this year's Holly Ball, we honored 16-year Conservancy Board Member Charles Colman who retired from the board. Colman served as Chairman of the Geneva Lake Conservancy for two terms and, most recently served as Chairman of the Advocacy Committee. In addition to his work on the board, Colman and his wife, Dianna, placed a conservation easement in 2015 on their 28-acre oak forest near Cedar Point, protecting it in perpetuity. During his tenure, Colman led many Conservancy projects and served on the Conservancy's Accreditation Commission, assisting in its successful accreditation by the National Land Trust Alliance in 2018. The Conservancy board and staff thank Charles for his many years of service and contributions to the organization and will miss his wisdom and dedication to our mission.



## MARK BROMLEY JOINS CONSERVANCY BOARD

Mark Bromley joined the Conservancy board this February. A retired attorney, he served as the Deputy Unit Director of the Civil Litigation Unit of the Wisconsin Department of Justice. Before his appointment as Assistant Attorney General, he practiced commercial law in Southern Wisconsin from offices in Lancaster and Whitewater. He holds baccalaureate and law degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Mark was raised on a farm in LaGrange that his grandfather's grandfather homesteaded in 1844. He is married to Patricia Bromley. They have three grown children and nine grandchildren.



## AUDUBON SEMINAR HELPS GOLF COURSES REDUCE PHOSPHORUS

Golf course owners, managers and supporters gathered at Lake Lawn Lodge on February 21 for a seminar on the Audubon International Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses as part of the Conservancy's "Keeping It Blue" initiative to reduce phosphorus runoff.

Audubon certification indicates that a golf course is using best management practices to create an environmentally healthy golf course that is supportive of birds and other wildlife. There are currently 13 golf courses in Wisconsin that are Audubon-certified, including Geneva National Golf Course.

Frank LaVardera, Director of Environmental Programs for Golf for Audubon International in Troy, New York, did an excellent job of detailing the value of certification for golf courses, including improved image and reputation, financial performance, worker safety, and reduced liability, and enhanced customer satisfaction.

Since the seminar, one golf club, which had representatives at the seminar, has announced it is moving forward to obtain Audubon certification. Golf course owners and managers interested in the program, should contact the Conservancy to learn more about scholarships available.

The "Keeping It Blue" program is underwritten by grants from the Richard H. Driehaus Charitable Lead Trust, Simms Family Foundation and Kikkoman Foods Foundation, Inc.



## **“KEEPING IT BLUE” AND GENEVA LAKE TASK FORCE AIMED AT SOLVING WATER ISSUES**

In 2019, the Geneva Lake Conservancy launched the “Keeping it Blue” program to address increased levels of phosphorus in our lakes and waterways, which can cause algae blooms. The program is a partnership with the Geneva Lake Environmental Agency and Walworth County Conservation Office.

In the fall of 2019, the Conservancy’s board and staff became increasingly concerned about the presence of Starry Stonewort and other invasive species in Geneva Lake as well as erosion problems from extreme storms in the last few years. Working with the Geneva Lake Environmental Agency, the Geneva Lake Association, Walworth County Conservation office and municipalities around the lake, they formed the Geneva Lake Task Force to provide a more rapid response to water quality and watershed issues of Geneva Lake.

Since then, the task force has formed three subcommittees to address Geneva Lake issues:

- \* A Phosphorus and Erosion subcommittee is working with the Southeast Wisconsin Regional Plan Commission (SEWRPC) and other groups to test tributaries flowing into the lake that are suspected of containing large amounts of total phosphorus and to develop plans to address these sources, such as eroding streambanks, gravel pits, steep unsecured slopes, construction and other sources.
- \* An Invasive Species subcommittee is examining proposed solutions to the Starry Stonewort problem as well as improved boat cleaning and monitoring at boat launches to prevent new invasive species from entering the lake.
- \* An Agriculture and Septic System subcommittee is examining farm fields in the watershed that spread cow manure and other fertilizers as well as inspecting septic systems in the Town of Linn that may not be filtering waste water efficiently.

In addition, the Conservancy will be implementing its Conservation@Home program to educate private property owners on the advantages of buffer strips, rain gardens and bioswales to filtering stormwater. The Conservancy will also work with lake associations to send a letter to all lakefront property owners on Geneva Lake and other county lakes this spring to inform them on how they can reduce phosphorus runoff from their property into the lake.

In addition, the Conservancy held a seminar in February for golf course owners and managers to encourage them to seek certification from Audubon International that helps ensure that their golf courses meet best management practices for water and wildlife health. Since then, several golf courses have expressed interest in seeking certification.

Finally, the Conservancy is partnering with three lake associations, including Buena Vista, Glenbrook Springs and Elgin Club to apply for DNR Healthy Lakes grant to help fund buffer strips that will prevent erosion and stormwater runoff from their lake shore properties. Several other lakefront property owners and homeowner’s associations also have expressed interest in participating in a second Healthy Lake grant in 2021. For more information on how homeowner’s associations or private property owners can participate in these grants, please contact Kiera Theys, Land Protection Specialist, at [ktheys@genevalakeconservancy.org](mailto:ktheys@genevalakeconservancy.org).

CONNECTIONS spring photo by Jim Frost. Special thanks to Jim for his assistance with photographs.





# Geneva Lake Conservancy

NONPROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
LAKE GENEVA, WI  
PERMIT #10

Our mission is to preserve and advocate for Walworth County waterways, natural areas and working lands.



### Board of Directors

- Kevin M. Brunner, Chairman
- Dean Bostrom
- F. Mark Bromley
- John D. Cobb
- Chris Danou
- Katherine J. Holland
- Dennis E. Jordan
- Joseph F. Madonia
- Thomas W. Nickols, Jr.
- Donald J. Parker, Jr.
- Christopher R. Todd

### Staff

- Karen Yancey  
Executive Director
- Janet Happ  
Director of Development
- Kiera Theys  
Land Protection Specialist
- Jodi Karow  
Accountant
- Shelby Best  
Community Outreach Specialist

**CONSERVATION@HOME**

The Conservation@Home program recognizes this property for its environmentally-friendly landscape.

Geneva Lake Conservancy  
262-275-5700  
A program of The Conservation Foundation

**Details on the Conservancy's new Conservation@Home program on page 3!**