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SHIRLEY HEINZE LAND TRUST 6th Annual Evening Under the Stars

A record crowd of over 300 friends and supporters of Shirley Heinze Land Trust gathered at International Friendship Gardens recently to celebrate the organization's accomplishments over the past year with a French-themed celebration, "A Taste of Provence." Rachel Saxon, Board President of the Michigan City-based land trust, which protects and restores natural areas in Northwest Indiana, proclaimed the evening a glowing success. The evening featured a formal dinner, live and silent auction, and a paddle raiser.

NIPSCO, a corporate sponsor of the summer gala, presented a \$50,000 check to the Heinze Trust on behalf of the NiSource Charitable Foundation to help purchase a 30-acre parcel of land in Chesterton. The property is ecologically significant and uniquely positioned on the Little Calumet River, adjacent to Brummitt Elementary School in Chesterton, and will make paddling, hiking, and educational opportunities available to the public.

"We are grateful for NIPSCO's long standing commitment to land conservation in Northwest Indiana and the relationship we've developed with them over the years," said Kris Krouse, Executive Director, Shirley Heinze Land Trust. "This Little Calumet Wetlands Project sets a precedent for SHLT's land acquisition program by acquiring a parcel that has numerous recreational opportunities for residents in Northwest Indiana in addition to the natural value we strive to protect."

As the paddle raiser commenced, Don Babcock, NIPSCO's Economic Development Director, announced a dollar for dollar match up to \$25,000, in order to leverage additional financial support for Little Calumet Wetlands Project. Over seventy guests raised their paddles to make more than \$30,000 in financial contributions from the floor. With NIPSCO's total support of \$75,000 and paddle funds totaling over \$30,000, the Heinze Trust will be able to make the land acquisition a reality. In his speech, Mr. Babcock "stressed the importance of everyone working together for the benefit of the region when it comes to development and environmental issues." NIPSCO received a standing ovation for its support of the Little Calumet Wetland Project.

In his remarks, Executive Director Kris Krouse asked a group of individuals to stand and be recognized for their work in building valuable relationships to help advance the cause of preserving and restoring natural areas in Northwest Indiana. This select group included Lee Botts, prominent environmental activist; Pat Taylor of The Louise H. Landau Foundation; John Bacone, Director of Indiana DNR's Division of Nature Preserves; John Swanson, Executive Director of Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC); Leigh Morris, Chairman of the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority; and Howard Cohen, Chancellor of Purdue University Calumet.

Additional corporate sponsors included American Licorice Company, General Insurance Services, Horizon Bank, J.F. New and Associates, Inc., Lakeside Wealth Management, MonoSol LLC, Soil Solutions, and ArcelorMittal.

Guests were served champagne and Nature's Beer supplied by The Upland Brewing Company as they arrived and mingled, while local musicians from the South Shore Orchestra and LaPorte Symphony played French chamber music in the background. The reception was followed by a formal gourmet dinner starting with Salade Nicoise and featuring Coq Au Vin served by Sahara Restaurant of Michigan City. A red and white wine selection was served throughout the evening. French tarts and Napoleon pastries were savored by guests for dessert.

At the always popular silent auction, guests perused a variety of enticing items including nature-related *objets d'art*, paintings, and unique outings and expeditions. A Trail Creek kayaking expedition hosted by Dan Plath, Shirley Heinze Board Member and President of the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association, was featured, along with a "Behind the Scenes" tour of the Shedd Aquarium. The live portion of the auction, where guests could bid on "one of a kind" getaway and adventure packages, featured a ride in a '29 Packard and private tour of the Hesston Steam Museum, as well as a stay at the Fairmont Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal.

The annual benefit is a celebration of the accomplishments of Shirley Heinze Land Trust and serves as a key source of support for land acquisition and restoration programs. Since 1981, Shirley Heinze Land Trust has protected, preserved and restored ecologically significant and sensitive natural lands in Lake, LaPorte and Porter counties. To learn more about its properties and volunteer opportunities, visit www.heinzetrust.org, call (219) 879-4725, or e-mail land@heinzetrust.org

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Photos provided

Don Babcock, NIPSCO's Economic Development Director, presents \$50,000 grant award on behalf of the NiSource Charitable Foundation to Kris Krouse, Executive Director of Shirley Heinze Land Trust.

From left: Craig Nelson and wife, Kay Nelson, NWI Forum Environmental Affairs Director; Lee Botts, Environmental Activist; Vicky Plath and husband, Dan Plath NiSource employee and Shirley Heinze Land Trust Board Member; Bill Gregory, IUN and wife, Carolyn Saxton, Executive Director of Lubeznik Center for the Arts.