

Shirley Heinze Land Trust turns 30

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By Lauri Harvey Keagle

Indiana Sen. Jim Arnold, D-LaPorte, center, presents a proclamation from Gov. Mitch Daniels proclaiming Friday Northwest Indiana Preservation Day to Shirley Heinze Land Trust Executive Director Kris Krouse, right, while board president Dale Enquist, left, looks on.

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MICHIGAN CITY | Dale Enquist may be president of the Shirley Heinze Land Trust's Board of Directors, but insists he is not the leader.

"I have a terrible time keeping up with the people that are associated with this organization," he said. "They are the leaders. They are the doers."

The trust celebrated its 30th anniversary Friday with a luncheon at the Pottawattomie Country Club in Michigan City.

Indiana Sen. Jim Arnold, D-LaPorte, presented a proclamation signed by Gov. Mitch Daniels to Enquist and the trust's executive director, Kris Krouse, proclaiming Friday "Northwest Indiana Preservation Day" in honor of the milestone.

"I'm proud of folks like you who have taken up the challenge to make sure our ecology is preserved," Arnold said.

Erin Heskett, national services director for the Land Trust Alliance, a national consortium of land trust organizations headquartered in Washington D.C., said it is important when celebrating milestones to reflect on the past.

"I don't think Shirley Heinze would be here today if not for the charitable gift made by the Seidners," Heskett said.

The land trust was formed in 1981 through an endowment from Robert and Bette Lou Seidner in memory of Shirley Heinze, an Ogden Dunes resident, University of Illinois at Chicago psychologist and an advocate for the preservation of the Indiana dunes.

Heskett said he sees the future of the organization in Krouse, describing him a "one of the stronger young leaders in the land preservation field."

"He's doubled the number of acres protected by the Shirley Heinze Land Trust since he started," Heskett said. "That's a remarkable achievement in five years."

The local trend toward preserving more land, Heskett said, is following national trends, with the volunteer base for land trusts rising 70 percent and budgets growing by 36 percent in the last five years.

"I think people are investing in the things that matter to them," he said. "(Land trusts) teach generosity, humility, patience and gratitude. It can give us places where it reminds us what it means to be truly human."