

Award winners know how to bring nature home



PORTAGE | Two gardens were honored this month at the Bringing Nature Home Awards program hosted by the Friends of Shirley Heinze Land Trust. The ceremony took place during the luncheon part of the Heinze Trust's annual donor appreciation hike held at Coulter Nature Preserve in Portage.

The Bringing Nature Home Awards encourage all gardeners to use native plants in their landscaping to help bring back ecosystems that human development has greatly reduced. The ecosystems before European settlement were built on a foundation of native plants which provided food and shelter for butterflies, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and more.

Lorri and Kevin Cornett, of Valparaiso, received an award for the rain garden they installed with help from Save the Dunes and an IDEM grant. During heavy rain events, water had flowed from three directions and sped through their side yard, causing erosion, flooding, and polluted runoff.

After alteration of the soil and planting of native wetland and prairie plants, their yard can withstand a three-inch rain event before any water flows into the street. This drainage solution is disguised as a beautiful garden which attracts birds and butterflies.

Spencer Cortwright, also of Valparaiso, was honored for his yard, which has been largely converted to a native prairie. Besides being a continuously changing colorful landscape through the growing season, this planting is largely self-sustaining now.

After a few years of establishing the plants, Cortwright reports no mowing, no weeding, no watering, no herbicides, and no pesticides are needed for maintenance. The added benefit is to the local birds, butterflies, and other creatures depending on native plants.

Friends of Shirley Heinze is a group which supports the Heinze Trust's efforts at preservation of native ecosystems in its approximately 1,200 acres of natural land in Lake, Porter, and LaPorte counties.

To learn more, visit www.heinzetrust.org, call (219) 879-4725, or email land@heinzetrust.org.