

# Land trust buys old Girl Scout camp

By Amy Lavalley Post-Tribune correspondent

The Shirley Heinze Land Trust has purchased a former Girl Scout camp north of Valparaiso, allowing the not-for-profit to expand its land holdings and the scouting council to realize its goal of seeing the land go to an organization that would preserve its natural beauty.

The sale of the Camp Meadowbrook, finalized Jan. 25, came after more than a year of negotiations between the two organizations, and was formally announced Friday. The 74-acre camp is located on County Road 700N in Liberty Township.

"We're delighted to have the Shirley Heinze Land Trust as the next owners and preservers of this beautiful piece of property, said Maria Wynne, chief executive officer for the Girl Scouts here.

From the beginning, the land trust was the best fit among the organizations that expressed interest in the camp, Wynne said, adding the trust will preserve both the land and its wildlife habitat.

"They were the partner that we wanted to work with," she said.

The purchase of the camp expands the trust's holdings to 15 parcels in Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties. The camp is the fourth-largest property in the trust's holdings, said Kris Krouse, the trust's executive director, adding the trust will move its offices from rented space in Michigan City to the camp by March 1.

"It gives us a real opportunity to have our own presence, and we are excited about being able to have our volunteers and the public come to a place that speaks about what we do," he said.

The trust will use the property as a natural area and a center for environmental education and outdoor recreation.

The former camp includes hiking trails and an outdoor amphitheater, and hosts a variety of habitats and natural communities, including upland forest, a deep ravine along a stream, and a forested wetland.

"There's plenty of opportunity to provide restoration and also education for students and adults as we do at our other properties," Krouse said. The trust has scheduled an August workday on the property.

Funding for the purchase came from a state Bicentennial Nature Trust grant of \$240,000, and a loan from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelly Foundation.

Other like-minded not-for-profits will have offices at the camp as well, including the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association, and the Meadowbrook property also provides the trust with much-needed storage, Krouse said.

The Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana announced in September 2011 that it was closing Camp Meadowbrook.

The move came as part of a consolidation of camp properties in the Chicago area, a few years after the Chicago and Northwest Indiana councils merged. Camps and programs held at Meadowbrook have been shifted to Camp Butternut Springs, a larger camp with more amenities that also is north of Valparaiso.

Camp Meadowbrook first opened in 1946 in Burns Harbor, near the former Bethlehem Steel and moved to its present location in 1963.