

Shirley Heinze Land Trust buys former Girl Scout camp property in Liberty Twp



Shirley Heinze Land Trust, a local non-profit organization dedicated to protecting natural land in the southern Lake Michigan watershed, has purchased the former Meadowbrook Girl Scout Camp in Liberty Township, north of Valparaiso on CR 700 North.

The Trust will operate the 74-acre property as a natural area and a center for environmental education and outdoor recreation. Existing structures along CR 700N will house the organization's administrative offices and its stewardship and education arms.

"Meadowbrook represents a turning point in our organization's history," says Margaret Williford, President of the Shirley Heinze Land Trust Board of Directors. "It's a splendid addition to our holdings of natural land in Northwest Indiana, but it

also provides long-needed office and storage facilities to support our growing programs. The hiking trails and outdoor amphitheater at Meadowbrook are perfect for the Mighty Acorns educational program we administer for local elementary school students. After thirty years occupying cramped rental quarters, we are delighted to finally have our own home.”

Shirley Heinze Land Trust Executive Director Kris Krouse said preserving Meadowbrook will benefit air and water qualities in the area significantly.

The site, he said, has a number of habitats and natural communities such as an upland forest, a deep ravine along a stream, mixed-age woodlands reclaimed former crop land, shrub lands, scattered patches of evergreens, and a forested wetland. He said that the property also includes portions of three headwater streams which join in an unnamed tributary of Salt Creek which flows into the East Arm of the Little Calumet River and ultimately empties into Lake Michigan. The site also provides important wildlife habitats, as well as migratory, nesting, and wintering grounds for numerous bird species.

The acquisition comes after a year of negotiations with Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana, who retired the facility after completing a two-year, volunteer-led, long-range planning review of all its properties in late 2011. Krouse added that his organization’s success in closing the deal owes much to the contributions of many partners. He said The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation provided a loan to cover the entire cost of the purchase. The Indiana Bicentennial Nature Trust granted \$240,000 toward the purchase price.

Nearly twenty local non-profit, governmental, and educational entities submitted letters in support of the grant applications. Krouse said the Girl Scouts agreed to a reasonable price to ensure the property’s environmentally focused future.

“We are very grateful to all our friends for making this possible,” Krouse said. “We are proud to have worked with the Girl Scouts and our other partners to guarantee that this property will continue to be available to the Northwest Indiana community.”

To share in the happiness with supporters, Krouse said there will be an open house in the spring and a community hike later in the year.

Started in 1981, Shirley Heinze Land Trust now manages and permanently protects more than 1,300 acres. Five of its properties -- Cressmoor Seidner Dune & Swale, John Merle Coulter Preserve, Barker Woods, and Ambler Flatwoods -- have been dedicated to the people of Indiana as state nature preserves.

For more information on the work and programs of Shirley Heinze Land Trust, call 219-879-4725, or visit www.heinzetrust.org