

NWI Post-Tribune Sunday, February 17, 2013

# Volunteers help Shirley Heinze Land Trust prepare new headquarters

By John Robbins Post-Tribune correspondent



Volunteers Jason Chontos of Westville (left) and Chris Jones of Valparaiso shovel gravel for the floor of a maintenance barn during a volunteer cleanup day at the newest property of the Shirley Heinze Land Trust in Valparaiso, Ind. Saturday February 16, 2013. The property is the 74-acre former site of the Meadowbrook Girl Scout Camp. | Stephanie Dowell-Sun-Times Media

The walls quickly took on their final coat of tan paint, thanks to the numerous volunteers who had turned out on a gray, chilly morning on Saturday to help the Shirley Heinze Land Trust prepare to move into its new, permanent headquarters on March 1.

The headquarters are at the former 74-acre Girl Scout Camp Meadowbrook, now renamed as Meadowbrook Preserve, at 107 W. County Road 700N in Liberty Township, acquired by the trust earlier this year.

Shirley Heinze Land Trust, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to protect Indiana Dunes ecosystems, has been renting space in Michigan City from the Save the Dunes organization since the mid-'90s, when the land trust hired its first permanent staff, according to Kristopher Krouse, executive director of the trust.

"It's a big step for us," Krouse said. "It's one of the most exciting land acquisitions for our organization. There are innumerable benefits that serve all aspects of our mission and allow us to better manage our lands."

The new space will also make more room available for interns and workshops and "allows us to more adequately maintain our mission," Krouse said of the headquarters now more centrally located.

Shirley Heinze Land Trust has nearly 1,200 acres of protected land in Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties.

Volunteers have transformed the split-level home formerly used as sleeping space for visiting Girl Scouts into the trust's new headquarters.

Members of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 531, based in LaPorte, have inspected the wiring and installed new light switches, electrical outlets and ceiling fans. "We're real close to completion," electrical worker Bruce Britton said. "Union members donated the time and Shirley Heinze bought the material. We're involved with the community because we're a part of the community," he said.

Britton serves on the board of the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association, a group that will also benefit from the new space by renting an office from the trust.

Dan Plath, president of the paddling group, was covered in dust Saturday from smoothing the new walls in the kitchen area, which is getting new insulation, cabinets and sink.

Plath is a member of the NIPSCO Environmental Action Team — NEAT, which had several other members present helping out.

Kelly Carmichael, NEAT founder and director of environmental policy for Northern Indiana Public Service Co., worked alongside his 8-year-old daughter, Anne, to paint a closet on Saturday. "This is a pretty amazing project here," Carmichael said.



Volunteer Steve Sass (left) and staff member Danny Robertson, carrying ladder, head to clean out a maintenance barn during a volunteer clean up day at the newest property of the Shirley Heinze Land Trust in Valparaiso, Ind. Saturday February 16, 2013. The property is the 74-acre former site of the Meadowbrook Girl Scout Camp. | Stephanie Dowell-Sun-Times Media