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Gary mayor headlines Shirley Heinze Land Trust luncheon

SCHERERVILLE | Gary Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson was the keynote speaker at the Shirley Heinze Land Trust's annual Community Luncheon last month at Briar Ridge Country Club.

Freeman-Wilson, who has been supportive of efforts to knit together the parcels of land that make up Ivanhoe South Nature Preserve, spoke of the value of the preserve for the people of the City of Gary.

"The transformation of this property will add another element of beauty to our city while preserving the existence of a variety of species and plant life," Freeman-Wilson said.

Located within the city, Ivanhoe South Nature Preserve is made up of rare dune-and-swale landscape and is representative of the urban nature preserves in Northwest Indiana that the land trust and its partners seek to restore and maintain for the benefit of the environment and local communities.

Twenty-five years of restoration work at the preserve by the land trust and its partners - the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, the Legacy Foundation of Lake County, and NiSource - have resulted in a restored natural area that includes a hiking trail and interpretive signs. The preserve is open to the public year round.

"Recently, the City of Gary was added to that list of strategic partners. The City – with full support from Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson – came to our rescue by vacating the unimproved streets and alleys that crisscrossed the preserve," explained Kris Krouse, executive director of the land trust. "This made it possible for us to conclude an agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to undertake a major wetland restoration project that will help guarantee Ivanhoe South's protection for future generations to enjoy."

Also on the program, the Friends of Shirley Heinze presented Bringing Nature Home awards to five organizations. The Bringing Nature Home program encourages home gardeners and institutional landscapers in Northwest Indiana to incorporate native plants, shrubs, and trees into their gardens and landscaping.

This year's recipients are Friends of Robinson Lake in Hobart, Indiana Department of Transportation (LaPorte Region), Lake County MS4 Stormwater District, Valparaiso Parks Department, and Nathan Hale Elementary School in Whiting.

Shirley Heinze Land Trust President Margaret Williford reported on the group's acquisition of the former Meadowbrook Girl Scout Camp, north of Valparaiso, which has been reborn as Meadowbrook Conservation Center and Preserve. "The buildings house offices and equipment for Shirley Heinze Land Trust and other environmental organizations," she said. "The property also has hiking trails through moraine forest that are open to the public."

To learn more, visit www.heinzetrust.org or call (219) 242-8558.