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Sale of former Girl Scout camp a win-win

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Jack Krouse, 10, pours gravel into a wheelbarrow on Saturday as volunteers gather to rehabilitate buildings and grounds at Meadowbrook Preserve in Valparaiso. The event was organized by the Shirley Heinze Land Trust and gathered volunteers to work on the property.

LIBERTY TOWNSHIP | The purchase of the former Meadowbrook Girl Scout Camp in Liberty Township by Shirley Heinze Land Trust helps both organizations move forward.

The trust acquired the 74-acre property after the Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana retired the facility in 2011. Shirley Heinze Land Trust Executive Director Kris Krouse said the purchase helps the organization meet multiple needs and missions.

“We explored whether or not the land met our acquisition criteria and it did. The property includes portions of three headwater streams and it provides important wildlife habitat. Some of the property was used for agricultural use and is being converted back to a natural state, so we are looking forward to doing what we do best — restoring property back to what it was in pre-settlement times,” Krouse said.

Maria Wynne, CEO of Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana, said, “We are very pleased to have identified and secured the absolute best new owners for a well-loved property. Transferring ownership to the Shirley Heinze Land Trust is a winning outcome for our council, Shirley Heinze, and for the preservation of this precious natural resource.”

Krouse said the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation provided a loan to cover the entire cost of the purchase and The Indiana Bicentennial Nature Trust granted \$240,000 toward the purchase price and that the property will also serve an educational function.

“There are already well-established trails and some buildings on the site for field trips, activities, and outdoor research so it helps us to significantly advance our education component of the mission, to use a

natural area as an outdoor laboratory for students and adults. The property will allow us to do more of that and it is also well situated to expand our Mighty Acorns program,” Krouse said of the educational program that serves about 1,300 students a year in partnership with the Dunes Environmental Learning Center and Field Museum of Natural History.



Volunteer Phil Grenchik paints a room on Saturday as helpers gather to help fix up Meadowbrook Preserve in Valparaiso. The event was organized by the Shirley Heinze Land Trust and gathered volunteers to work on the property.

Krouse adds that the acquisition also provides much-needed office and meeting space for the organization, which had outgrown its two rooms in the Barker Mansion in Michigan City.

“In some ways it was happenstance that this opportunity arose right at the same time we were exploring new office facilities,” Krouse said. “It just so happens that Meadowbrook can adequately provide infrastructure for our administration and storage for our stewardship program.”

“This acquisition does four things for us: preserves the land, gives us the opportunity for restoration, allows us to better fulfill the education component of our mission, and we can function and operate in an efficient way. It all ties together nicely because that property is geographically situated in our center,” Krouse said.

Wynne said the Girl Scouts may continue to use the camp through the programs offered by the trust.

“We look forward to engaging Girl Scouts in the educational programs Shirley Heinze will offer, and we will continue to offer fun camp experiences for Northwest Indiana with expanded program opportunities at Camp Butternut Springs, our property located a short distance from the former Meadowbrook camp,” Wynne said.

The buildings on the Meadowbrook site also will be used to house the Wildlife Habitat Council and the NWI Paddling Association.

Krouse said the Shirley Heinze Land Trust plans to move offices to the site by March 1, but local unions and volunteers are working on preparing the building for occupation. If members of the public are interested in assisting with the work, Krouse invites them to help on Saturdays or Sundays in February from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.