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Even the steady rain could not dampen the excitement in his voice. “Dad, come here!” yelled Brandon, my son.

As I walked through the heavy, wet underbrush along the Buckeye Trail in southeastern Ohio, it dawned on me. How lucky can I be? I have a 17-year-old son who so looked forward to our camping trip that he packed six days in advance. In teen time, that’s like six years.

He pointed to the ground as I approached. “Look,” he said. There, perfectly camouflaged among the leaves, dirt and sticks, was a box turtle. It looked a lot like Bullet, the box turtle Brandon once cared for as part of a Boy Scout project.

That seemed so long ago. More recently, it had been harder to make the father-son connections that once came easily. But in this moment, at this time and in this place, we found common ground. Minutes later, we were back on the trail, looking for the next tree with a blue blaze on it.

Brandon’s natural curiosity flourished in the soggy forest near Seneca Lake, which is part of the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District in southeast Ohio. My diminutive knowledge of plant life was severely tested as he asked me about May apples, skunk cabbage, ironwood trees, sassafras leaves and jack-in-the-pulpits. Brandon wanted more information.

“We should bring Pete,” he said, referring to my co-worker Pete McDonald, the Land Conservancy’s Director of Stewardship and a superb field biologist. Brandon had done a job-shadowing experience with Pete and came away amazed at his knowledge of our natural resources.

Brandon himself has excellent outdoor skills. It was a joy to watch him pitch a tent in 10 minutes, build a roaring fire, gather firewood and hike with an almost reckless bounce in his step. I like to keep that in mind when we pursue our mission at the Land Conservancy. Not every kid is hard-wired for “Survivor.” But every one of them deserves a chance to connect with nature. That is one reason why partnerships are so important when it comes to preserving land. It takes a village of conservationists – like those who support groups such as MWCD, Geauga Park District, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Cleveland Metroparks, Portage Park District and the Land Conservancy – to raise a child’s outdoor consciousness.

As I watched Seneca Lake slowly appear out of the morning darkness, the campfire took the chill out of the air. For once, everything seemed so simple. So connected. So right.

“We should come back here. It’s pretty nice,” Brandon said, scraping the mud from his hiking shoes.

I nodded. Yes, we were in a good place.

-Ken Wood

Not every kid is hard-wired for “Survivor.” But every one of them deserves a chance to connect with nature.
Hope springs eternal. On this day last year, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, a conventional barometer for the economic psychology of Americans, was at 8,212. And yet on that day daffodils and tulips were blooming. Grass was greening, dotted by beautiful yellow dandelions and purple clovers. Our oaks, maples, and beeches were leafing out, reaching hopefully for the sun in the sky. And slowly we traveled from that very low economic point through a hopeful spring and summer, a harvestful fall, a beautiful winter and here we arrive in the middle of another hopeful spring.

Happily, today the DJIA has risen by almost 40 percent and stands at approximately 11,200.

During that year, the Land Conservancy completed more than 40 transactions totaling more than 4,000 new acres of precious and beautiful land. We have increased our net assets by more than $1 million. We have completed our 15th consecutive year with a balanced budget. We have grown and matured through our recent merger with Grand River Partners, through the addition of some outstanding new trustees and through the hiring of some exceptional new employees. And while our roots are deep in the ex-urban and rural land conservation area, we have successfully expanded our program into exciting urban projects such as the Adam’s and Haley’s Run project in Akron and into an outstanding region-wide working lands program through which we have preserved 6,000 acres of farmland. We were even able to purchase an existing but unfinished subdivision, and we are in the process of converting some of it to additional conservation land.

The Emerald Necklace and the Cuyahoga Valley National Park are each modestly larger than 20,000 acres. At our current pace of land protection, we will create the acreage equivalent of these landmark preserves every seven years. But without the help of our conservation partners and supporters, we will not achieve our goal of permanently protecting 10 percent of the land in northern Ohio.

The Land Conservancy deeply values its partnerships with other conservation groups, government agencies, park districts, foundations and other organizations. Some of our collaborations are detailed in stories in this edition of Connections. We are also grateful to those who donate to the Land Conservancy. While we have reduced our reliance on annual donors for operating revenue from more than 90 percent to about 50 percent, we still depend a great deal on charitable gifts.

The Land Conservancy is helping our region by investing in one of our most cherished and most valuable assets, our extraordinary natural resources. Our partners and supporters are helping our region build a world-class network of parks and preserves, working lands and river and stream corridors that will distinguish us and serve us. It is a mission that inspires hope.

Cochran is the president and CEO of Western Reserve Land Conservancy.
Not long ago, I was out with several friends enjoying an early morning walk through a forest that was once again coming alive with the sights, sounds and smells of spring.

We were headed nowhere and anywhere. The binoculars around our necks were at the ready to spy kinglets, gnatcatchers and other early migrants who were headed north and whose visit to our forest would likely only be transitory. If someone had to ask why we were here, they wouldn’t have understood the answer. We could not have been happier. After a few minutes, one friend asked the other for ideas as to what she could get her adult son for his upcoming birthday; the big four zero. He had no hobbies or interests outside of his career and family. He was well stocked with the material things of life, both necessary and not. She mentioned that over the years he had gained some weight as his lifestyle became more sedentary. She wished he would become more active; maybe a home gym or treadmill?

We continued on through the soft light of the rising sun. A nearby chickadee sang out “spring’s here” and was answered in kind by another a little further ahead, both seemingly enjoying the morning as much as we were. Next there was the loud rapping of a woodpecker on a nearby tree. Our binoculars raised in unison to catch a glimpse of a pileated fleeing deeper into the woods. There were the raucous calls of a pair of blue jays in the distance, then the sight of a nuthatch scuttling head first down the beech tree to our right. Suddenly the forest was filled with birds.

“I regret that my son never got interested in birds,” my gift-seeking friend sighed.

If there was ever a pregnant moment, this was it. “It’s never too late,” we cried in unison.

A nearby blow-down became our bench as we sat and hatched the plan. My friend knew that merely buying her son a pair of binoculars would in itself never work. A kiss on the cheek, a “Thanks, Mom” and the occasional use of the binoculars at Browns’ games would be the predictable outcome. I recalled an article by Roger Tory Peterson, the famed artist, field guide producer and birdwatcher in which he mentioned the three necessary requirements of a birder: A pair of binoculars, a good field guide (perhaps a little self-serving, but nonetheless important), and a friend. The game was afoot, as Shakespeare intoned. She could enlist the entire family, his wife and the two kids, in the plan; her son was going to become a birdwatcher whether he wanted to or not. He would thank them eventually, of that she was positive.

Binoculars, that was easy. It would be her gift. The field guide could come from the 14-year-old daughter, but we all knew the “friend” was likely to be the linchpin that held it all together. The 17-year-old son was the perfect answer. It seems that where she thought she had failed to pass on the birding gene to her son, it in reality had merely skipped a generation. Her grandson was actually quite active and even more amazing for his age, not embarrassed to let his friends know of his passion. He had managed to even convince his sister to go along on several birding hikes during last year’s family vacation, although she confided that for her granddaughter it may have been more about watching boys than birds. An honest and heartfelt plea from his son to become his birding buddy could not be resisted.

But what about her daughter-in-law? While she was certain she would support the idea, what could she contribute?

“Go with her strength,” the friend advised her. “She loves clothes and fashion, so let her pick out his birding wardrobe. You’ve got to have Gortex raingear, shirts and pants with lots of pockets, and hats – you can never have too many hats.”

So there it was, the perfect plan for the perfect gift: the gift of birdwatching! As we rose from the log, I noticed a beautiful, serene smile on my friend’s face and I thought maybe ... a small tear in her eye. Or maybe the tear was in my eye; my memory is a little hazy on that point.

Stanley is the retired Chief of Natural Resources for Cleveland Metroparks and an original founder of the Russell Land Conservancy.

My friend knew that merely buying her son a pair of binoculars would in itself never work.
We cannot do it alone

*Partners play key role in preserving our region’s resources*

Land and conservation is a big job.

It is too big for any one organization to tackle. In northern Ohio, the Land Conservancy works with more than 50 organizations to permanently preserve the region’s scenic beauty, rural character and natural resources. Working with partners and private landowners, we have now protected the acreage equivalent of the [Cleveland Metroparks](#) system. These results could not be achieved without the help of our conservation partners.

We cannot do it alone.

“We have a strong belief in making connections, setting common goals and working together so that we can make our region everything we all dream it to be,” says Katie Outcalt, the Land Conservancy’s chief operating officer.

Here is a closer look at a few of the projects in which the Land Conservancy has successfully partnered with other organizations to permanently protect our natural resources.

**Fore-sight at Orchard Hills**

It is rare to see a golf course – in this case, a 237-acre tract at the Geauga-Lake County border – restored to its natural state. Today, the former Orchard Hills Golf Course in [Chester Township](#) and [Kirtland](#) is Orchard Hills Park, thanks to a collaborative effort that involved the [Geauga Park District](#), the Northeast [Ohio Regional Sewer District (NEORSD)](#), the [Clean Ohio Conservation Fund](#), the [Ohio Environmental Protection Agency’s Water Resource Restoration Sponsorship Program](#), the [Patterson family](#) and the Land Conservancy.

In 2007, the Land Conservancy purchased the property and held it until the park system could secure funding. A management agreement between the Land Conservancy and GPD allowed the park to remain open to the public while the Land Conservancy owned it. The two entities worked with a number of partners, including U.S. Rep. Steve LaTourette, U.S. Sen. George V. Voinovich and State Sen. Tim Grendell, to fund the acquisition. GPD took title to the property in 2010. GPD and the Land Conservancy are now working with NEORSD and the state EPA to restore streams on the property using funding from the EPA’s WRRSP and Section 319 programs. [Chagrin River Watershed Partners](#) also played a role in designing the restoration plan for the property.

Keith McClintock, GPD’s deputy director, has praised the cooperative effort to acquire and restore Orchard Hills, which he says “has rapidly become one of our most popular parks.”

**A centerpiece park for Portage County**

How does a county park system without dedicated funding acquire a 504-acre tract – one that is home to
several endangered species – at no cost to the district? The Portage Park District did it by enlisting the support of a host of conservation partners, including the Burton D. Morgan Foundation, the Margaret Clark Morgan Foundation, NEORSD, the Ohio EPA’s WRRSP, the Davey Resource Group, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and the Land Conservancy.

Christine Craycroft, the park system’s director, describes the partnership as “invaluable.” The Shalersville Township property, which was once the proposed site of an international freight airport, protects 8,000 linear feet of a tributary to the Upper Cuyahoga River and is expected to become the centerpiece of the county park system. The preserve has high-quality wetlands and forests. One of the rare species on the site is the yellow-bellied sapsucker.

Cooperation creates island preserve

For years, a 9-acre parcel at the eastern tip of South Bass Island was a prime target for residential development. And for years, island residents tried to find a way to preserve it. Two years ago, a coalition that included the Land Conservancy, the Lake Erie Islands Chapter of the Black Swamp Conservancy, the Put-in-Bay Township Park District, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Clean Ohio, the FirstEnergy Foundation, the Sandusky Eagles Foundation and U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur helped create the Scheeff East Point Nature Preserve.

Today, the township park, which is used by hikers, birdwatchers and anglers, is a welcome diversion from the summertime hubbub of downtown Put-in-Bay. The final piece of the funding puzzle was put in place by South Bass property owner Rose Scheeff of North Olmsted, who donated a gift to preserve the land as a tribute to her late husband, Bill, and the nearly 50 summers they spent together on the island. Rose passed away in January.

Preservation in Edison’s home town

In 2009, the Land Conservancy and Erie MetroParks worked together to preserve 61 acres along the Huron River in Milan, the birthplace of Thomas Edison. The land, which is owned by the Village of Milan, is located between the Huron River Greenway Trail and the river.

The trail is an old railroad along the historic Milan Canal. A conservation easement on the property is co-held by the Land Conservancy and Erie MetroParks. The park system, the village and the Thomas Edison Birthplace Museum plan to construct some trails on the property, offer educational programs in the future and provide fishing access. The site is mainly a forested floodplain with an oxbow wetland.

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Working with smaller communities

The Land Conservancy has had many fruitful partnerships with townships and villages throughout the region, in part because we complement each other’s goals. The Chagrin River Land Conservancy – one of the eight organizations that merged in 2006 to form Western Reserve Land Conservancy – helped the Geauga County community of Munson Township secure state funding for what is now Munson Township Scenic River Retreat, a 93-acre park on Mayfield Road. The Land Conservancy holds a conservation easement on the property.

In Hinckley Township, we helped trustees identify a process to permanently protect township-owned land, worked with the Medina County Prosecutor’s Office to resolve legal issues and helped create River Woods Nature Preserve, the township’s first park. The new 30-acre park is at the corner of state Route 303 (Center Road) and River Road.

Teaming up to protect a gorge

Welton’s Gorge, the place some refer to as the “Little Grand Canyon of Geauga County,” is now part of a 114-acre, permanently protected tract in Burton Township. The Land Conservancy and Geauga Park District worked together to preserve this beautiful corner of Geauga County.

The Land Conservancy helped secure Clean Ohio funding for the 87-acre gorge property, which will become part of the county park system. In addition, we were able to find conservation-minded buyers for two other adjacent properties. The end result: There will be conservation easements, which permanently protect the land, on the entire 114-acre site.

“This is a case of two conservation organizations capitalizing on each other’s strengths to protect all, not just part, of a property,” says Brett Rodstrom, northeastern field director for the Land Conservancy.

Protecting the Grand River

One of the many benefits of the 2009 merger of the Land Conservancy and Grand River Partners was the acquisition of an additional 165 acres in Ashtabula County next to Ashcroft Woods, a 550-acre natural area previously owned by GRP. The project, which involves three parcels in Rome Township and Orwell, helps create a four-mile protected natural corridor along the Grand River and protects critical habitat for the federally listed Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake.

The Land Conservancy will be the long-term owner of the property. ODNR’s Division of Wildlife will co-hold a conservation easement on the land and help us manage it.

Cold water collaboration in Lake County

Farmland preservation and natural resources protection – two major focus areas for conservation organizations – came together in the same project in Lake County. Lake Soil and Water Conservation District and the Land Conservancy partnered to preserve the 67-acre Petkosek family property, which protects 1,200 feet of East Creek, a cold water stream.

LSWCD successfully wrote the application for the Petkosek family under the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Easement Purchase Program.
The Land Conservancy was able to provide the necessary cash match for the AEPP application. It was our first agricultural easement in Lake County.

College, Land Conservancy work together

In Portage County’s Hiram Township, the Land Conservancy and Hiram College are partnering to permanently protect 150 acres on state Route 82, across from the college’s field station. The Land Conservancy is in the process of securing funding for the land, which will be owned by the college.

The project will protect 1,600 linear feet of Silver Creek and 3,450 linear feet of Eagle Creek. It will reconnect the entrenched Eagle Creek with its floodplain, restoring nearly 2,200 linear feet of stream. The state EPA helped in designing a restoration plan for Eagle Creek, and Davey Resource Group will do the restoration work if funding is successful.

A new passive park in Solon

The city of Solon, the Maresh family and the Land Conservancy joined forces to permanently protect property along a high-quality headwaters stream with the potential to support breeding populations of brook trout. The Land Conservancy purchased the 14-acre site, which is on the west side of SOM Center Road in the headwaters of the South Branch of Sulphur Springs, from Valerie Maresh and immediately transferred the parcel to Solon, which will turn it into a passive park.

Sulphur Springs, which flows into the Chagrin River, is one of only a handful of Cuyahoga County streams with the prospect for native trout reintroduction. Funding for the acquisition of the parcel came through the Ohio EPA’s WRRSP program. “I think it’s going to be a great legacy for the future generations of Solonites to have some green space and see just how pretty this area really is,” says Maresh, whose family has owned the land since 1903.

Helping create a border preserve

The Land Conservancy was grateful to be involved in the Medina County Park District’s efforts to acquire a new park at the Medina-Wayne County border. The 232-acre Harrison property contains high-quality wetlands, more than 25 acres of deep quarry lakes and 260 different species of plants and animals.

The property was acquired through a combination of park district and Clean Ohio Conservation funds. The property spans two counties – one portion is in Medina County’s Westfield Township while the rest is in Wayne County’s Canaan Township – and those counties are in different Clean Ohio districts. The Land Conservancy helped research and prepare the application for the Wayne County portion of the funding request.
Together, land trusts accelerate conservation

Talk about immediate dividends. When the merger between Western Reserve Land Conservancy and Grand River Partners was announced last year, the organizations realized they were trying to preserve two adjacent Ashtabula County properties. Scott Hill, the Land Conservancy’s Eastern field director, had been working on the preservation of the Stracola property, while Brett Rodstrom of Grand River Partners had been working to protect the adjacent Claren parcel.

Just a few days later, the two had not only grouped the parcels together as one project but also convinced a third adjacent property owner to preserve his land. As a result, 165 acres of newly protected property was added to an existing 550-acre block of preserved land. The project completed the protection of a four-mile-long stretch of the Grand River.

“We know of no other organization in the area conducting three simultaneous transactions while bundling the three transactions into one project,” Hill says.

Not every collaboration between local land trusts produces such a spectacular result. But the Land Conservancy – an organization formed through the 2006 merger of eight land trusts and enlarged by the addition of GRP in 2009 – is cooperating with its conservation counterparts throughout the region to permanently preserve about 400,000 acres.

In 2009, the Land Conservancy and the Little Beaver Creek Land Foundation teamed up to protect land in the Little Beaver Creek watershed. The two groups co-hold a conservation easement permanently preserving 135 acres in Columbiana County’s Elkrun Township.

Little Beaver Creek Land Foundation President Carol Bretz, whose organization has protected more than 4,300 acres, says her organization was gratified to work with the Land Conservancy on the easement. “The Land Conservancy has many resources that our small land trust does not. I believe this initial collaboration can lead to future shared endeavors and we look forward to a continued relationship with the Land Conservancy,” she says.

The Land Conservancy has also forged a partnership with the Wayne County-based Killbuck Watershed Land Trust, which has preserved more than 4,000 acres. The Land Conservancy and KWLT shared a display booth at the recent Scarlet, Gray and Green Fair at Ohio State University’s Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster.

Two years ago, a cooperative effort that included the Lake Erie Islands Chapter of the Black Swamp Conservancy helped create the 9-acre Scheeff East Point Nature Preserve on South Bass Island. The land was acquired and turned over to the Put-in-Bay Township Park District.

In addition, the Land Conservancy co-holds easements and works closely with the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. The museum’s Natural Areas Program now protects about 4,900 acres in northern Ohio.
Envirothon pushes teens to the outdoor limits

Sam Banasek’s knowledge of nature has been severely tested.

The Black River High School student admits that the questions posed at the recent Northeast Ohio Envirothon were challenging. But he says the benefits of competing against 71 other teams in the region in the areas of forestry, wildlife, aquatics, soils and groundwater went beyond how well he and his teammates performed at Camp Wise near Chardon.

“Anytime you get a chance to learn more about the environment, that’s a good thing,” he says.

Approximately 400 students from 15 counties competed in the Area 2 Envirothon, which was hosted by the Geauga and Trumbull Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The Land Conservancy was one of the major sponsors, along with Dominion, Waste Management, NEOLC, Giant Eagle, Aqua Doc, the Geauga Park District and Lake Metroparks.

The kids, who prepare for the event with the guidance of teachers and compete in teams, spend about 25 minutes at each of the “ecostations.” Tough questions make concentration a must.

“It is very exciting and refreshing to see such enthusiasm,” says Katie Nainiger, the conservation education coordinator for the Geauga Soil and Water Conservation District.

Amy Reeher, watershed coordinator for the Trumbull Soil and Water Conservation District, says the students get to test their environmental knowledge and work with the group of experts who operate each station. This year’s experts included Tim Morgan of the Ohio Army National Guard’s Ravenna Training and Logistics Site, Jamey Graham and Dan McMillan of the Ohio Division of Wildlife, Greg Orr of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, Robert Darner of the U.S. Geological Survey and Steve Prebonick of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources’ Division of Soil and Water.

Reeher says students in the Envirothon learn to work together.

“It is definitely a team effort,” she says.

The top four teams at the local event will compete in the Ohio Envirothon June 14-15 at Lake Erie College in Painesville. The top finisher was Chardon High School’s Red Team, followed by Chardon’s Black Team and two Columbiana County squads, Crestview High School and United FFA.
Crops, not houses, sprout on Newbury Twp. land

P.J. Cavanagh farms a 74-acre tract at the northwest corner of Bell Street and Ravenna Road in Newbury Township. His brother, Michael, taps the maple trees there to make syrup.

But there was a time when it appeared only houses would grow on the land.

In the early 1990s, preliminary plans were drawn for a residential subdivision on the land, which has been in the family since the 1960s. Mary Angela Cavanagh Lewis, P.J.’s father’s cousin, and her husband, Tom, eventually acquired the property and in 2009 permanently protected the land with a conservation easement held by the Land Conservancy.

The proposed housing development was never built.

“I’m very happy with the decision they made,” says Cavanagh, 47, a fourth-generation farmer who grows corn, hay and wheat on the land. “Mary and Tom are very environmentally conscious, and this fit right in with what they were doing. It’s a very good farm.”

Mary Angela Cavanagh Lewis, who now lives in New Jersey, says her family has had a deep love for rural Geauga County since the 1920s, when her grandfather, Patrick Cavanagh, purchased a farm on Route 44 in Auburn Township. In partnership with his sons, Ignatius and Vincent, this became a state-of-the-art Holstein dairy farm. Today, this 270-acre dairy farm is owned and operated by her first cousin, Bob Cavanagh and his family.

Lewis’ dad, Frank Cavanagh, as the youngest son of Patrick and Mary’s six children, had to leave the farm to work and raise a family in Cleveland. But he was always

Downings protect land in Upper Cuyahoga watershed

At the Land Conservancy, we are fortunate to be able to work with some of the nicest people you’ll meet anywhere – the landowners who choose to permanently protect their property.

Stanley and Josephine Downing are two such people.

The Downings have donated a conservation easement – one held by the Land Conservancy – on a 43-acre parcel in Geauga County. The wooded property is on Clay Street in Huntsburg Township contains a pond and is located within the Upper Cuyahoga River watershed.

We are so pleased to be able to help the Downings protect their land for future generations and also to help Geauga County retain its rural character. The Land Conservancy extends its gratitude to the Downings for having the vision to preserve their property.

‘Little Grand Canyon’ is preserved

Welton’s Gorge, a beautiful tract in Burton Township that a local paper called “The Little Grand Canyon of Geauga County,” has been permanently preserved by the Land Conservancy and the Geauga Park District.

The 114-acre tract that includes the Welton’s Gorge is now protected by conservation easements held by the Land Conservancy.

The easements cover the property that will be owned and managed by the park district and two additional
lots for which the Land Conservancy found conservation buyers. This is a great project.

**Easement covers Lake County farm, stream**

The Land Conservancy’s first agricultural easement in Lake County was a collaboration with the Lake Soil and Water Conservation District. We partnered with LSWCD to preserve the 67-acre Petkosek family property in Leroy Township. The project protects the farmland as well as about 1,200 feet of East Creek, which is a coldwater stream.

“We talked about it then, and I think that got things moving,” Cavanagh says. At the end of 2009, the Lewises granted the conservation easement. Such an easement permanently protects the natural, agricultural and scenic resources of the land while allowing the grantor to retain ownership.

P.J. Cavanagh, who is an Auburn Township trustee, farms the acreage around his home, which is about a mile south of the permanently protected property in Newbury. Cavanagh says he is glad the farmland in Newbury will remain in production and that his brother will be able to make syrup from the more than 1,500 taps on the property.

“I like what has been done. I think it is good for the larger community,” he says.

“I remember (my dad’s) words: ‘Do whatever you can to preserve this land in its native state.’ In his honor, we made this donation of the conservation easement. He would be thrilled that the land will be preserved for farming and the wooded area will remain as a natural habitat for birds, native animals and vegetation.”

– Mary Angela Cavanagh Lewis

**Orchard Hills now owned by GPD**

In April, the Geauga Park District took title to the Orchard Hills property, the Chester Township tract it had been leasing from the Land Conservancy. Since July 2007, when GPD and the Land Conservancy entered into agreements with the Patterson family to purchase the former golf course, the two organizations have been working to fund the purchase of the 237-acre property.

With the assistance of numerous funding partners (see related story in this issue), the park district was able to secure the money needed to purchase the site. An agreement between the Land Conservancy and GPD had allowed the park to be opened to the public while we held title to it.
Joyce and Wilbur Browand’s land is steeped in history.

Joyce’s great great grandfather, Hugh Mosher, who served as the model for the fife player in Archibald Willard’s famous “Spirit of ’76” painting, was born and raised on the Lorain County farm, which has been in the family for five generations. The Brighton Township tract has also been designated a Century Farm by the Ohio Department of Agriculture.

But the Browands’ decision to permanently preserve 176 acres of the 182-acre farm with a conservation easement was done more with an eye to the future than a nod to the past.

“We wanted it to always be a farm, and this was the only way to ensure that,” Joyce, 80, says.

Wilbur, 85, who until this year has been farming the property himself, looks out over the freshly tilled soil with reverence. “I couldn’t imagine houses being built all over here,” he says.

The property will continue to be used for farming, thanks to the conservation easement held by Western Reserve Land Conservancy. In late 2009, the Browands donated the easement, which runs with the property and ensures that the land will not be developed.

“Our thanks go out to these wonderful people who are not only preserving this beautiful property for future generations but are also preserving the rich history of Lorain County. It is truly an honor to help protect these farms,” says Land Conservancy Western Field Director Andy McDowell, who worked closely with the Browands to protect the farm.

Five-generation farm preserved in Lorain County

I am happy to report that a fifth-generation farm family has permanently protected its Lorain County property with a conservation easement held by the Land Conservancy.

Current owner Rhea Cowie, 91, and her family permanently preserved 208 acres of the 220-acre farm in Rochester Township. Her son, Gerald Cowie, is a Rochester Township trustee and has worked for about 20 years with Jarvis Babcock, whose family permanently preserved more than 1,000 acres in 2008.

The Cowie farm, which has been in the family for five generations, has transitioned over the years from dairy to beef to hogs and currently to grain. The farm also contains three tributaries to the West Branch of the Black River.

Island project completed

A group of property owners and the Land Conservancy have permanently preserved about one-sixth of Johnson’s Island, the site of a prisoner-of-war camp for Confederate soldiers captured by Union forces during the Civil War.

A conservation easement has been placed on about 44 acres owned by the Johnson’s Island Investment Group. The property is located in the center of Johnson’s Island. The investment group, which is made up of island homeowners, purchased the land from a developer who slated the property for high-density residential development.

This was the Land Conservancy’s first completed project in Ottawa County.

We applaud the property owners for taking the steps necessary to preserve this important piece of land. The island was the only location to have a Union prison exclusively for southern officers. The prison housed as many as 3,200 prisoners at one time, with over 15,000 having been there over the course of the war.
The Browands, who have been married for 60 years and have five children, purchased the farm in 1959. Wilbur grew soy beans and wheat on the farm until recently, when he decided to rent the land to a group of farmers who will probably add corn to the crop list.

Family icon Hugh Mosher served in the Civil War and was considered the finest fifer in Ohio. Willard, a well-known Cleveland-area artist who had moved to nearby Wellington after the war, reportedly was inspired to paint his most important work after seeing a parade pass through Wellington. Mosher was truly a model for the painting, not just an inspiration.

“My mother said she remembered (Mosher) going many, many times up to Cleveland to model for the painting,” Joyce says. “He and the others apparently put a lot of time into it. And they played music the whole time, because Willard thought it was more authentic.”

While Mosher owned many fifes, the “original” – the one portrayed in Willard’s masterpiece – is still in the family, according to Joyce. It is protected by a hand-crafted wooden case given to Joyce as a thank-you gift for her participation in a 1976 bicentennial celebration in the city of Independence. The painting itself hangs in Abbot Hall in Marblehead, Mass.

Joyce Browand says she and her husband are “extremely happy” that they chose to protect their property with the Land Conservancy. She says she cannot imagine living anywhere else.

“I just love the place. I wouldn’t part with it for the world,” she says.

**Huron Co. farms preserved**

An additional 665 acres of farmland and natural areas in Huron County have been permanently preserved by property owners working with the Land Conservancy.

Nearly 400 of those acres belong to the Smith family. Four easements covering about 252 acres of farmland and woodlots in Fairfield and Greenwich Townships were granted by Brian and Denise Smith, who are fifth-generation farm owners. The protected lands include nearly ½ mile along the East Branch of the Huron River.

In addition, a 143-acre conservation easement was granted by Chris and Clark Smith, Brian Smith’s brothers, in Fairfield Township. The land is used mostly for agriculture but also has a nice 50-acre woodlot. The land adjoins some of the land preserved by Brian and Denise Smith and also protects a segment of the East Branch of the Huron River.

The other Huron County projects:

- In fulfilling the wishes of his late brother Allen, Wayne Cherry preserved the 60-acre family farm in Ridgefield Township. The preserved farm includes active agricultural land and a section of Seymour Creek, a tributary to the Huron River.
- Just down the road from the Cherry property, Don Gerber preserved his 80-acre family farm. Having transitioned from hogs and dairy, the Gerber farm is now devoted to grain crops and also contains Seymour Creek as it flows through a steep, wooded ravine.
- In Hartland Township, Charles and Jennie Kinnel preserved 95 acres of their family farm, which contains a nearly 1/2-mile stretch of the Vermilion River. In addition to active agricultural land and the Vermilion River, the property also contains Indian Creek, a scenic tributary to the Vermilion.
- In Fairfield Township, Gene and Janice DaGiau’s nature preserve – a former gravel quarry that later became a church camp – will always be a preserve, thanks to a conservation easement. The 35-acre property is adjacent to 16 acres of wetlands preserved in 2008.
A special place is permanently preserved in Hinckley Township

Carole Sue Divoky knew where to find the wayward cows.

She would head to the tree- and shrub-filled south side of her family's Hinckley Township farm. There, the young girl would invariably find the cattle lounging in the shade. As a result of those roundups, Carole Sue developed a fondness for this part of the farm, one that grew even stronger after she married and returned home to live on the State Road property.

“She just loved the area. It was special to her,” says Charles Gibson, who would later become her husband.

Gibson, 73, honored the memory of his wife, who died in 2004, by teaming up with Western Reserve Land Conservancy to permanently preserve the 22-acre portion of the old Hinckley Ridge farm where Carole Sue used to track down the wandering cows. Gibson says he and Carole Sue shared a genuine love of the land and always wanted to preserve it.

He did so by placing a conservation easement on a portion of his property, which is south of Center Road (state Route 303) and north of the Cleveland Metroparks' Hinckley Reservation.

Bill Jordan, associate field director at the Land Conservancy’s Medina Field Office, says the property contains old-field and forest wildlife habitat areas, which provide shelter, food and nesting areas for birds, mammals and other wildlife. The vegetated natural areas control runoff, prevent erosion and mitigate flooding to downstream properties, thus helping to improve water quality in the Rocky River watershed.

The Divoky family came to the United States from Czechoslovakia in the late 1800s and originally settled in Richfield. In the 1920s, Carole Sue’s father acquired about 140 acres in Hinckley for farming and moved the family there. The Divokys farmed about 70-80 acres of the property, growing soy beans, corn and wheat, Gibson says.

“My wife was a tomboy, and she enjoyed working around the farm,” Gibson says.

One unusual aspect of the property is the presence of solid sandstone about seven feet under the ground.

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Park buys land at Medina-Wayne border

The Land Conservancy was pleased to play a role in an important project that was 10 years in the making.

The Medina County Park District, one of our conservation partners, has completed the acquisition of the 232-acre Harrison property in southern Medina County and northern Wayne County, a project that had been on the drawing board for about a decade.

The fact that the property spans two counties – one portion is in Medina County’s Westfield Township, while the rest is in Wayne County’s Canaan Township – is unusual and complicated the funding process.

The property was acquired through a combination of the park district’s land acquisition funds and money from the Clean Ohio Fund. Wayne and Medina counties are in two different Clean Ohio funding districts, and the Land Conservancy helped research and prepare the application for the Wayne County portion of the request.

The natural features of the property itself made the extra effort worthwhile.

They include floodplains of the Killbuck Creek, category 3 wetlands and more than 25 acres of deep quarry lakes. The property sits on top of a highly productive aquifer that supplies water for residents in both counties. And a natural resources survey by the Cleveland Museum of Natural History identified 260 species of plants and animals on the property.

The Harrisons enjoy a life estate on the property. In the future, the park district plans to provide public access to the many recreational opportunities that exist on this outstanding natural resource.

Hinckley girl, 9, chooses park name

The new 30-acre Hinckley Township park at the corner of state Route 303 and River Road has a name. River Woods Nature Preserve, the
The farm sits on the same ridge that includes the Metroparks’ Whipps Ledges.

Gibson, who served as a U.S. Army quartermaster at Fort Lee, Va., worked at Cleveland’s Republic Steel before joining General Motors Co.’s marketing division in Detroit in 1966. After three heart operations, Gibson retired at age 55, and he and Carole Sue moved back to Ohio. Over a two-year period between 1997 and 1999, they constructed a replica of an 1840s Greek Revival-style home on what was once the Divoky farm.

One of Gibson’s hobbies is collecting motor vehicle license plates. He says he has about 15,000 plates from all over the world.

Gibson, who has endowed a garden at Colonial Williamsburg in memory of Carole Sue, says he is happy that he could permanently protect a piece of land in Hinckley that meant so much to his late wife. He says he and his wife both treasured open spaces.

“The deer wander through here all the time,” he says with a smile, “and I’m just fine with that.”

“(My wife) just loved the area. It was special to her.”
– Charles Gibson

name submitted by third-grader Kristin Curran in a contest at Hinckley Elementary School, was chosen by township trustees.

Kristin, 9, regularly rides her horse in the Cleveland Metroparks’ Hinckley Reservation, which is located between her home and the new park along the banks of the East Branch of Rocky River. Trustees received about 30 submissions from pupils at the school.

Kristin is the daughter of Janet and Philip Curran of Hinckley Township.

Township Trustee Martha Catherwood said every year trustees hold a meeting at the elementary school to provide the third-graders a first-hand look at how local government operates. Past trustees have asked children for input on such subjects as a township flag design and motto. This year, trustees decided to challenge the pupils with an idea for a township project.

Trustees told the children about the park, which was jointly created by the township and the Land Conservancy, and showed them photos of it. Kids were asked only to include the word “river” in the name.

We applaud the township for involving the children in a community project that preserves natural areas. Trustee Martha Catherwood, who was instrumental in helping create the park, said it best: “We feel that it is one of our responsibilities as trustees to assure the ongoing conservation of the township’s precious natural places. What better way to assure an ongoing commitment than by involving our youngest members in the process?”

Charles Gibson at his property in Hinckley Township.
A father-son legacy is preserved

In 1979, Massillon was looking for a physician and Dr. Tim Drake – then finishing his residency in Cleveland – was looking for a farm like the ones where he grew up.

Both searches ended when Drake visited a rolling tract in rural Stark County.

“I thought, ‘This is really nice. This is perfect,’” he says.

Drake, an OB/GYN, started a private medical practice in Massillon and made the “perfect” tract in Tuscarawas Township his home. Drake, who had grown up in rural Ashtabula County, soon asked his father to live on the property and work on the farm. For more than 15 years, they rebuilt barns, raised Angus cows, did carpentry and handled the chores.

Drake’s father died three years ago, but the land he farmed with his son has been preserved forever. That’s because in late 2009, Drake donated a 95-acre conservation easement to the Land Conservancy, one that permanently prevents the farmland from being developed.

“I feel very good about it,” says Drake, who practiced for 23 years in Massillon, mostly at Massillon Community Hospital, before joining Summa Health System at Akron City Hospital eight years ago. “I don’t regret it. It was perfect for me, and it was the right thing to do.”

Retired judge makes case for conservation

Retired Summit County Common Pleas Judge Mary Spicer learned about the Land Conservancy’s work at one of our events last summer in Bath Township. Now she has made her own mark in land conservation.

Spicer, who retired in 2008 after a 24-year career on the bench, has permanently protected 60 acres of forested land on Hemphill Road in Copley Township and Norton in Summit County. The land has been in Spicer’s family since 1850. She preserved the land with a donated conservation easement, one that will be held by the Land Conservancy.

Judge Spicer said: “I feel most fortunate to own the only remaining acreage of the once Spicer Farm. I love the land, the beauty of the woods and the wildlife. I am determined to preserve it in its natural state for posterity. This easement with Western Reserve Land Conservancy has made that possible.”

Judge Spicer approached us about a conservation easement after attending “An Evening at the Historic Firestone Farm” in August. The event was sponsored by the Land Conservancy and held at Oak Hill Farm, which was formerly part of the Firestone estate.

We are honored to be able to help Judge Spicer permanently preserve her beautiful property for future generations. She has done a wonderful thing for her family and our region.

Akron greenway moving forward

We are pleased to inform you there is progress in the efforts to create an important urban greenway system in southeast Akron, one with projected links to the Ohio and Erie Canal Towpath Trail and to the Springfield Lake area. In cooperation with our conservation partners, we plan to create greenways along two tributaries of the Little Cuyahoga River, Haley’s Run and Adam’s Run. The land along both these nearby creeks is targeted for conservation on the Summit County Trail & Greenway Plan.

The Land Conservancy owns a small nature preserve along Adam’s Run, southeast of the former
Drake learned about the Land Conservancy several years ago when he received a flier advertising a landowner meeting in Smithville. Drake and his wife Susan, who teaches at both the University of Akron’s Wayne College and Malone College, discussed putting a conservation easement on the property but were not ready to rush into making a decision.

“I thought about it for a long time,” Drake says with a smile.

Bill Jordan, associate field director at the Land Conservancy’s Medina field office, says Drake’s “genuine love of the land is the reason why he chose to preserve it. We applaud him for making the decision to protect his family farm for future generations.”

Today, Drake is leasing most of the property to a neighbor, a dairy farmer who plans to grow corn, soy beans and hay. Four years ago, the Drakes built a Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired home on the property, with Tim doing virtually all of the fine carpentry work.

“My dad was a carpenter, and I worked with him for years,” he says.

Drake used wood from his own property to hand-craft beautiful cabinets, doors and trim. He has a wood shop in the same barn where he keeps about eight tractors and a road grader.

Drake says his own grown children – he has a son who lives in Ohio and two daughters who reside in the state of Washington – are not interested in living on the property, and he wanted to ensure that it would never be carved up like so many other area farms.

“I didn’t want it broken up. I did not want to see that happen,” he says.

Drake says he has always been intrigued by the foresight of those who preserve things. “I think it is really cool, the vision those people have. They think about things that other people don’t,” he says.

You can count Dr. Tim Drake as one of those visionaries.

Goodyear Test Track property and south of the planned redevelopment area that will include the new Goodyear Tire & Rubber world headquarters. We are working to preserve more land along that stream. In addition, we have partnered with Lockheed Martin to complete the acquisition of a substantial greenway along Haley’s Run. Our goal is to create the two greenways, link them together and eventually connect them to other protected corridors in downtown Akron and in the Springfield-Lakemore region.

Last year, Lockheed Martin cleaned up soil contaminated by polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in Haley’s Run. The PCBs were carried with rainwater from the Airdock, a facility built by the Goodyear-Zeppelin Corporation in 1929 for the manufacture of the company’s blimps. A fire-retardant substance containing PCBs was used to build the structure. As the material eroded over time, dust particles fell to the ground and entered the storm drainage system and were deposited on the land along the stream.

Instead of restoring the property to minimum standards, Lockheed is creating a lasting project that will provide a true public benefit.

In April, more than 40 people participated in the Land Conservancy’s annual cleanup of Adam’s Run. Our heartfelt thanks to Peg Bobel, Andrea Irland and their crew of dedicated volunteers for keeping the waterway clean.

“It was perfect for me, and it was the right thing to do.”

– Dr. Tim Drake
William G. Abell Jr.’s first teaching job was halfway around the world, in a school system outside Melbourne, Australia. He also taught at an Indian reservation in Montana.

Yet another adventure took him to Antarctica.

But Abell always returned to his roots in Ohio. And each time he did so with a greater appreciation of his family’s 220-acre property in Ashtabula County. He found himself spending most of his free time at the farm, growing vegetables, doing chores and fixing things.

“This property was really my love,” says Abell, 65, who is now retired and lives in Warren. “I was starting to do things to improve it. I wanted to be at the farm as often as I could.”

He also wanted the land, which has been in the family since the late 1800s, to remain a farm forever. In 2007, Abell donated a conservation easement that permanently protects the mile-deep property in Morgan Township near Rock Creek. The easement is co-held by the Land Conservancy and the Ashtabula Soil and Water Conservation District.

“I wanted to leave a legacy,” Abell says. “I have no relatives to pass the land onto, and I wanted to make sure it stayed a farm after I was gone. It was a natural action to take.”

Abell is also a member of the Land Conservancy’s White Oak Legacy Society (see page 23), a group for those who make a permanent commitment to land protection through wills, trusts and other estate-planning tools. In his will, Abell is leaving the farm and other assets to the Land Conservancy.

“We are so grateful for Bill’s passion for the land and for his generosity,” says Jean Gokorsch, who coordinates

Newton Falls farm permanently preserved

It was an honor to help Richard and Trudy Houk preserve their 87-acre farm along Kale Creek in Newton Falls. The Houks permanently protected their Trumbull County property with a conservation easement, one that will be held by the Land Conservancy.

The conservation easement will permanently preserve the farm and help protect the creek, which is in the Mahoning River watershed. Richard Houk has long been active in land conservation as a member of the Western Reserve Resource Conservation and Development board and the Trumbull County Soil and Water Conservation District board and the Western Reserve RC&D.

It has been very rewarding working with Richard and Trudy to protect their farm. We are truly honored to have been able to help them preserve this land for future generations.

Grand River gem acquired by Land Conservancy

The Land Conservancy is adding 165 acres of protected property to a natural corridor along the Grand River in Ashtabula County. This project, which involves three parcels in Rome Township and Orwell, is adjacent to property previously acquired by the Land Conservancy.

The Ashcroft Woods Phase II property contains beautiful wetlands
the White Oak Legacy Society program for the Land Conservancy.

Abell’s paternal grandmother was from Rock Creek and her family, the Grahams, had a general store there. The old Pennsylvania Railroad line was at the very end of their property, with the trains hauling ore, coal and limestone. Today, the old rail line is the Western Reserve Greenway, a hike and bike trail that will eventually link Lake Erie and the Ohio River through four counties.

Abell, who was a reading specialist in the Lordstown Local School District for 15 years, has fond memories of working on the property with his father, William Abell Sr., who died in 1999. He now leases a portion of the land to local farmers while maintaining both the farmhouse and a cabin that his father built in the 1930s. Near the cabin is a picturesque lake.

Abell says he was looking at ways to permanently preserve the property when he was introduced to representatives of Grand River Partners, a local land trust that is now part of the Land Conservancy. The conservation easement ensures the land will not be developed.

“As I got older, I realized I should not put off having the easement created until it is too late,” he says. “I think that is advice people should consider.”

“I wanted to make sure it stayed a farm after I was gone.”
– William Abell Jr.

and habitat for seven rare species, including the globally rare West Virginia White butterfly and the federally listed Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake. This project was awarded $399,999 in Clean Ohio funding and ranked number one in District 7, which covers Geauga, Ashtabula, Lake and Portage counties. We will be the long-term owner of the property, and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife will help us manage it.

**A first in Columbiana County**

The Land Conservancy and the Little Beaver Creek Land Foundation teamed up to protect land in the Little Beaver Creek watershed. The two groups will co-hold a conservation easement permanently preserving 135 acres in Columbiana County’s Elkrun Township. Bruce and Debbi MacLellan granted the conservation easement and will retain ownership of the property.

This was Western Reserve Land Conservancy’s first project in Columbiana County. The MacLellans have a deep love of their land and want to see this beautiful property preserved in perpetuity.

The heavily forested property, which is on the northern edge of “unglaciated Ohio,” is in the county current agricultural use value (CAUV) program for property taxes. The conservation easement drafted by the Land Conservancy permanently preserves the quality managed forests on the property and will help protect Little Beaver Creek.
Land Conservancy has protected more than 21,500 acres

The total acreage protected by the Land Conservancy to date is equal to that of the entire Cleveland Metroparks system and about 50 percent larger than the borough of Manhattan.

The Land Conservancy has protected 341 properties and 21,553 acres through May 1, according to Director of Stewardship Pete McDonald. We have permanently preserved land in 15 northern Ohio counties. The top county acreage totals are in Geauga (6,904), Ashtabula (3,365) and Lorain (2,563).

The eight land trusts that merged to form the Land Conservancy in 2006 together protected about 8,000 acres over two decades. In the four years since the merger, the Land Conservancy has already preserved 13,553 acres – a 169-percent increase over a 20-year total.

Welcome to our team
The newest addition to the Land Conservancy staff is legal assistant Diane Madison. A native of Pennsylvania, Diane in 1977 relocated to Ohio, where she has worked in the administrative/legal field for the past 30 years. During that time, she has raised two sons, Michael and William, and is the grandmother of six. She enjoys motorcycle riding, gardening and the laughs and smiles of her grandchildren. She is an avid pet lover, with three dogs and a cat.

Thank you, Pattersons
The Land Conservancy would like to extend a special thanks to the Patterson family and Patterson Fruit Farm for their help in making our annual Triple Tap event a success. The Pattersons not only provided the location for the March 13 event but also showed attendees how maple syrup is produced, every step of the way. Thank you!

Pescatore authors children’s book
“A Bell for Justin,” the first children’s book by longtime Land Conservancy supporter Faith Pescatore of Russell Township, is now on sale at local stores and online. A portion of the proceeds from each sale will benefit the Humane Society of the United States.

The book is based on the true tales of real-life horses at Castlewood Farm, which Pescatore established in 2001. Justin, an old unwanted horse, is rescued and comes to live in luxury at the farm. Justin longs for a friend, but finds many obstacles in his way.

In addition to being part of the Land Conservancy family, Faith is a supporter of Rescue Village, Happy Trails Farm Animal Sanctuary and the Elephant Sanctuary.
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