

Hunt Hill Audubon Sanctuary

Cover note: A local couple is making a \$1-million matching contribution to Hunt Hill Audubon Sanctuary near Sarona. Sadly, a lot of people are not as familiar with Hunt Hill as we wish, hence this release attempts to introduce Hunt Hill, along with explaining this remarkable and generous local story.

Contacts: Nikki Janisin (715-635-6543, director@hunthill.org) Bill Stewart (715-558-1059, wwstewiii@gmail.com)

Head:

Million Dollar Match to Sustain Hunt Hill Audubon Sanctuary

Trees have little choice in where they are rooted. We know this because otherwise any and all that could stand the Wisconsin winters would be at Hunt Hill Audubon Nature Sanctuary a few mile east of Sarona. Life has been good there and it is getting better.

It has been good:

In 1954 Frances Andrews willed her property to National Audubon Society as a nature preserve in a remarkably prescient letter that included the observation "It is good to live with large and old trees." Thus it is nearly 600 acres in which -- except for the campus at the center -- trees live out a natural life. They grow old, they grow large and if they should fall, there they lay to become the earth and, perhaps, a tree again. In 1986 Ms. Andrews' original bequest appeared unsustainable to National Audubon and it was prepared to sell it.

That's when a local group, Friends of Hunt Hill Audubon Sanctuary (FOHHAS) formed to ask National Audubon, "wait, let us run it" and has done so successfully. There are another 30 rings of age on the large oaks and two generations of local school children who have gotten the opportunity to experience the beauty and importance of the woods in their own neighborhood. Adults and families too have attended programs ranging from an hour to a week-long on topics from bog plants to Spanish language immersion. Ms. Andrews asked that the camp foster both appreciation for the nature at hand and international relations.

It's getting better:

FOHHAS has succeeded in its mission but, as National Audubon concluded in 1986, Ms. Andrews original bequest did not give it quite the roots it needs for the twenty-first century. The trees cannot move, but David and Carolyn Cleveland can and did. They moved to nearby Long Lake in 2003 and when they discovered Hunt Hill, grew an immediate appreciation for the presence of such an important natural gem in their new community. Carolyn quickly became involved in the organization and has served on the FOHHAS board as its president in the past and again this year. They are, indeed, friends of Hunt Hill. They are offering to match up to \$1-million to create a \$2-million endowment for Hunt Hill. FOHHAS has until 2019 to raise \$1 million to be matched by the Clevelands. Once established, the \$2 million will be protected as principal and the interest off the earnings can be used by Hunt Hill. These funds will help secure FOHHAS's commitment to the community by allowing them to continue offering affordable programs, free hiking trails and hopefully look to expanding programming and updating facilities.

Executive Director Nikki Janisin said the board and volunteers of Hunt Hill are absolutely thrilled with this opportunity. "Hunt Hill offers a great variety of programs and this endowment will give us the ability to offer even more to the community." While much of the programming, including

all of the residential camps, takes place in the summer, she said, “there is something happening at the Hill every month.” For example, 44 people turned out for a soup-lunch social and a presentation on frog hibernation (did you know that some frogs freeze solid?) in early January. Nearly 70 came in February for a presentation on the local impact of climate change. In between were snowshoe hikes and a program on raptors, all well attended. Mrs. Janisin said this sustaining endowment of the million dollar match would boost Hunt Hill’s capacity for more year round programming for the community.

Bill Stewart of Spooner, is a board member who is helping FOHHAS raise funds to meet the matching challenge. “That people can give \$1 to Hunt Hill and have it become \$2 is a remarkable opportunity.” He noted that there are grants and awards available, “However, the point of those grants is to leverage their money to get Hunt Hill involved with their agenda.” Those are not, he said, necessarily bad ideas, “but what is important to see here is that the Cleveland’s are just the opposite of that. They are offering their support to do just what Hunt Hill has been doing so successfully. We reach out to the community and let them see what a beautiful place it is and how rich the nature is here. It really is a remarkable gift to this community. We very, very much want to find every penny we can to meet that challenge.”

Wayne Sabatke of Rice Lake, is another board member, working on meeting the challenge. “We are taking this appeal to everyone. As board members we can see the impact Hunt Hill has on the community, our natural resources and as a gathering place. Some people might not see this as the best time to be asking for pledges, but honestly, between now and the future, Hunt Hill will never have an opportunity like this.”

Janisin said the staff and volunteers are working on matching the grant as well as gearing up for the Hill’s biggest one-day event: Prairie Fling Festival, Saturday May 20. This is the fifth year for a very successful event that features artisans, musicians, community groups, top line educational programming and plenty of activities for kids. Hunt Hill members are admitted free. Non-members can join on the spot or contribute a modest entrance: adults \$7, children 5-12 \$5 and under 5 are free. A complete program guide, donation and membership information, Frances Andrews letter of bequest, and more, can be found at www.hunthill.org.

Other than during Prairie Fling, members and non-members are invited to visit Hunt Hill at no charge. They can pick up a trail map and walk among “large and old -- and now among the luckiest -- trees.”

To contribute to the Million Dollar Match or for more information, contact Janisin at director@hunthill.org or 715-635-6543. People can send donations directly to Hunt Hill Audubon Sanctuary at N2384 Hunt Hill Rd. Sarona, WI 54870 or donate online at www.hunthill.org. If sending a check, be sure to note that it is for the Match and make it out to Hunt Hill. **Every dollar donated will be doubled, giving greater impact to each donation.