



# THE CHIKAMING LEGACY

Newsletter of Chikaming Open Lands

Fall 2015

## Community Building



*From L-R: Rob Gow, Berkshire Hathaway-KoenigRubloff Realty Group, Paul Dumke, Integrity Real Estate Professionals, Chris Thompson, COL Executive Director, Maureen Culp, RE/MAX Harbor Country, George Lucas, RE/MAX Harbor Country and COL Board President, Louis Price, Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage*

Here at Chikaming Open Lands (COL), it's a given that we are always on the lookout for land with high environmental value to protect as natural habitat, always asking "where is there opportunity to preserve open space?" But here's another question we are continually asking ourselves: "How can we bring new members into the fold?" Because without our supporters, when we do identify an open space that is under threat of development, we wouldn't be able to "strike while the iron is hot" and begin the lengthy, often complex work of acquiring that piece of land. We are always thinking about how to increase our visibility in the community. One group of dedicated supporters who have been indispensable to us in accomplishing that goal is our local real estate agents.

In a seasonal vacation community like ours where real estate is in high demand, it may seem counterintuitive for REALTORS to support an organization that actively works to reduce development in many of our natural areas. But really, it's not. COL is not against development; in fact we are in full support of **smart** development. It's a big part of what makes our community economically viable, after all. Our REALTOR friends recognize that, and they are strong allies and truly valuable advocates for COL. How? There are a number of ways our local agents support us.

Consider: a significant portion of our membership consists of second homeowners from Chicago. When they decide to invest their time and money into our community by purchasing a vacation home, who is often their first contact? Their REALTOR. Our local real estate agents have an enormous network of clients and former clients in the community, all of whom are potential supporters of COL. We can't emphasize enough how beneficial it is to have these folks spreading the word about what we do within that network.

We are fortunate to have a number of agents working with us as supporters, as members of committees and serving on our Board of Directors. All of them talk about Chikaming Open Lands with their clients, using our presence here as a sales tool. They highlight what we do, and explain how preserving open space increases property values and improves quality of life in the area. Some even discuss the practical aspects of donating land to the organization. It's an invaluable marketing tool, as many of these interactions result in generous supporters, dedicated volunteers, and indispensable community ambassadors.

Plus, all of the agents who have worked with Chikaming Open Lands become true believers in our work, *(continued on page 5)*

# Board President Letter



*Chikaming Open Lands is the local land conservancy dedicated to preserving the open spaces and natural rural character of southwest Berrien County.*

We protect and restore native plant and animal habitat in the area, improve water quality in our rivers, streams and in Lake Michigan, and permanently preserve ecologically significant forests, prairies and wetlands, as well as prime farmland and other open spaces in this community.

## Board of Directors

George Lucas, *President*  
Linda Puvogel, *Vice President*  
Bill Racine, *Treasurer*  
Steve Smith, *Secretary*  
David Eblen  
Ron Farina  
Vickie Herget  
Greg Kaiser  
Aaron Kaminski  
Clay Robinson  
Jean Smith  
Bob Tatina  
Peter Van Nice

## Staff

Chris Thompson,  
*Executive Director*  
Stacey LaRocco  
*Accounting & Program  
Coordinator*  
Ylana Padgett  
*Summer Intern*  
Ryan Postema  
*Land Protection Specialist*  
Jennifer Thompson  
*Development & Marketing  
Manager*

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Dear Chikaming Open Lands Members and Friends,

When I first interviewed for a Board position with Chikaming Open Lands, there was apprehension from some that a real estate agent wasn't qualified due to a perceived misalignment of interests regarding land use in our area. Judging from the increased involvement by REALTORS in our organization, I believe that this perception has changed.

In November, I will be honored by the National Association of REALTORS as a National Finalist for their annual Good Neighbor Award recognizing my involvement in COL, for which I will accept a \$2,500 grant for Chikaming Open Lands. This is the first time that a member of a land trust has ever been considered for this award.

REALTORS who are engaged in their community do make a difference, but credit also goes to all who have helped us to improve our community through their commitment to land conservation.

An article in this month's newsletter showcases REALTOR participation in Chikaming Open Lands, but it also illustrates the importance of engagement by local business owners in our organization. Land conservation is an important community-building activity. Builders, bankers, furniture makers and many other kinds of businesses all have a vested interest in improving the area where we live and trade, and I am pleased that preserving open spaces has been their activity of choice.

As my term as Board President comes to a close, I am grateful for the overwhelming support that you have shown for Chikaming Open Lands. My award is your award, and I thank you for your strong interest, participation and financial support that has allowed us to successfully pursue our work.

Sincerely,

George S. Lucas  
Board President



*COL is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.*

# Saving the Woods of the Tower Hill Camp



*Bob Tatina, a member of the boards of COL and DCOSA, shows Tower Hill campers how to core a tree in the woodland area of the property.*

Deer Creek Open Space Association (DCOSA) Chikaming Open Lands (COL) and Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC) have partnered to place a conservation easement on 32 acres of high-quality forest that is a part of the Tower Hill Camp in Sawyer. More than 300 neighbors and community members participated in the *Save the Woods* Campaign, which was kicked off in the summer of 2013 to raise the funds needed to complete the purchase of the property and protect the open space in perpetuity.

Nested near the dunes along the lakefront, this beautiful woodland boasts upland forest dominated by red oak, maple and beech trees, and lowland forest featuring tulip poplars and paw paw trees. It is also part of an open space corridor stretching from Warren Dunes State Park to Cherry Beach Road, including COL's recently acquired Jens Jensen Preserve, located just to the south of Tower Hill. These corridors provide uninterrupted canopy for migratory bird flyways, allowing natural habitat for the birds to rest and feed during their journeys up and down the lakeshore in the spring and fall.

This past August, DCOSA successfully raised the necessary funds to purchase the conservation easement on the property, which is held by COL. Upon the launch of the fundraising campaign in July 2013, COL stepped forward as the lead donor on the project, pledging \$125,000. DCOSA's *Save the Woods* campaign raised more than \$530,000 from individual donors and grants from The Carls Foundation, Upton Foundation, Berrien Community Foundation, Donnelley Foundation and Heart of Cook.

"This has been a great opportunity to protect a large wooded parcel near Lake Michigan and to help our friends at the Tower Hill Camp," says DCOSA president Bob Beemer. "The community has been very supportive and we appreciate our partnership with COL and SWMLC.... with a conservation easement in place now, the Tower Hill Camp woods and trails will remain a natural woodland forever."

The Tower Hill Camp is owned by the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ. The 60-acre summer camp has been providing nature experiences for youth and families for 90 years. The land on which the camp is located was donated in 1923 by the E.K. Warren estate, whose generosity also created Warren Dunes State Park and Warren Woods State Park. The conservation easement is on the southern 32-acre natural area of the camp. Tower Hill Camp, DCOSA and COL are dedicated to maintaining the forest at Tower Hill Camp as an outdoor sanctuary in perpetuity.

In 2006, DCOSA approached the Illinois Conference with the idea of protecting the property. "We promoted the idea of a conservation easement to raise funds for the Tower Hill Camp, and to preserve an important part of their facility, this amazing back-dune woodland", says Beemer. After several years of meetings with the Conference board, they decided to move forward with DCOSA's plan, at which point DCOSA reached out to SWMLC and COL for additional assistance and support.

"The Illinois Conference and the Outdoor Ministry is deeply grateful to DCOSA and COL for their generosity and great work", says Illinois Conference minister Rev. Dr. Jorge L. Morales. "This will be a part of the legacy we leave—future generations; children; and people of all ages and races will benefit from this act of love."

## Standing Committees

### *Executive Committee*

George Lucas, *President*  
Linda Puvogel, *Vice President*  
Bill Racine, *Treasurer*  
Steve Smith, *Secretary*

### *Finance Committee*

Bill Racine, *Chair*  
Ron Farina  
Clay Robinson  
Steve Smith  
Peter Van Nice

### *Land Protection Committee*

Steve Smith, *Chair*  
Terry Hanover  
Aaron Kaminski  
Lauri Lindquist  
Joe Margol  
Louis Price  
Lee Strohl  
Peter Van Nice

### *Stewardship Committee*

Bob Tatina, *Chair*  
Nancy Baird  
Judith Brown  
Buffy Dunham  
Dave Eblen  
Pat Fisher  
Ellen Frankle  
Peggy McGrath  
Theresa Priest  
Bob Wagner  
Mike Wright

### *Development Committee*

Jean Smith, *Chair*  
Rob Gow  
Vickie Herget  
Linda Puvogel  
Clay Robinson

### *Benefit Committee*

Karen Gear, *Chair*  
Maureen Culp  
Rob Gow  
Vickie Kaiser  
Dorothy Kern  
Jean Smith

# The Benefits of Nature

## Young or Old, Getting Outdoors is Essential for a Healthy Body and Mind

by Ylana Padgett, Chikaming Open Lands summer intern



*“Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better” – Albert Einstein.*

Some of the world’s greatest thinkers were nature’s greatest advocates. The famous essay *Walking* by Henry David Thoreau highlights the importance of this activity, and how people rarely find themselves meandering through the winding roads of mother nature’s palace, isolating themselves into the “boxes” of work, errands and other obligations, and how there is such value in walking through the woods and letting the mind wander.

Today, it seems many don’t find this as great a value as did Thoreau. In fact, many would categorize it not as a value at all, but as lollygagging, daydreaming or just wasting valuable time.

Despite this, we do need to incorporate nature into our lives, just as Einstein and Thoreau did. Why? Because whether we are seeking improved mental health, stress relief, better sleep, increased productivity, more creative thinking—or all of the above—immersion in the natural world may be the closest available thing to a panacea.

Recent studies have demonstrated that children who are exposed to the natural

world have a better working memory and longer attention span than those children who are not. Exposure to the outdoors can also amount to better mental health and mood as well as a boost in cognitive development. Kids who are immersed in nature are more likely to be happier, have greater levels of empathy and

interact better with their peers than those who spend their time in man-made environments. And children who learn in outdoor classrooms are more curious and retain more information from their studies.

As children become adolescents, they turn more and more to screens and technology for entertainment, but for teens, spending time outdoors is even more important. On average teens spend over 7.5 hours a day on some sort of screen, whether that be a phone, tablet, computer, or TV. Getting teens immersed in nature for even a small portion of that time will help build a more creative mind, improve their mood and encourage them to contemplate their place in the larger world, which in turn will give them a greater sense of purpose.

For adults, spending time outside is just as important as it is for children and adolescents. Studies have shown that levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, are lowered when we get outside and appreciate nature. Time taken to enjoy what nature has to offer is not time wasted. It is time spent improving concentration and creativity, lowering stress levels and building a better memory. As an added bonus, upon returning to work we will likely be

more focused and productive.

As we continue to age, the outdoors remains an important component of physical and mental well-being. Research comparing persons in their early seventies demonstrated that those who spend time outside complain less about aches and pains, have decreased chances of developing age related diseases like osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease and dementia, and are happier and healthier overall than their peers who spend the majority of their time indoors.

Whether taking 30 minutes out of our day for a lunch hour walk, or getting out in the garden to dig in the dirt, a daily dose of nature can be truly restorative, for children, teens and adults alike. COL strives to ensure that there is plenty of nature preserved in this community for you, your children, and many more future generations to enjoy. COL also hosts a number of activities to encourage outdoor enjoyment and exploration, including organic gardening and native landscaping seminars, guided hikes and paddles, outdoor education programs for children, cross-country ski outings and stewardship workdays in our preserves. Join us for one of them next year! Check in at our website to see what is coming up at: [chikamingopenlands.org/events](http://chikamingopenlands.org/events).



*Ylana Padgett is currently a senior at New Buffalo High School. She has applied to several colleges, where she hopes to study architecture.*

(continued from page 1)

and as such, become financial supporters as well. At our annual benefit this past September, nearly half of our sponsors were REALTORS. George Lucas, RE/MAX Harbor Country (also our Board President!), Karen Strohl, Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, and Rob Gow and Chris Pfauser, Berkshire Hathaway-KoenigRubloff Realty Group were Sustaining Sponsors; Maureen Culp, RE/MAX Harbor Country underwrote the bar; and our lead sponsor was Dan Coffey, RE/MAX Harbor Country at Union Pier and at New Buffalo.

As another example, we recently received a Place-making Grant from the Southwest Michigan Association of REALTORS and the National Association of REALTORS for recreational improvements at our new Jens Jensen Preserve. That connection was made by George Lucas, and he also was able to raise some additional funding for that project from the other agents in his office, Tom Hemingway, Mary Lou Johnson, Maureen and Dan.

Finally, who has a deeper understanding and knowledge of the local landscape, history, zoning and land use than a real estate agent? Our REALTORS' involvement in COL gives us access to a wealth of information that can be incredibly beneficial to what we do every day. Moreover, they bring to the table the ability to understand how to structure and negotiate a successful transaction, the experience to discern who is and who isn't a qualified agent for a land trust to partner with, the capacity to instantly analyze a project, and the talent to creatively navigate a multitude of complex land protection projects.

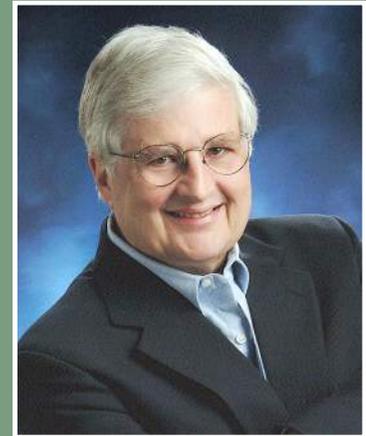
We take full advantage of our REALTORS' wisdom and know-how in our day-to-day work: as previously mentioned, George is our board president; we also have Louis Price, Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage on our Land Protection Committee, Rob Gow on our Development and Benefit Committees, and Maureen Culp on our Benefit Committee. They all bring so much knowledge to the table!

We have been able to forge several mutually beneficial partnerships with local REALTORS by getting them involved in a project we are working on. The acquisition of Jens Jensen Preserve early this year was accomplished by raising a significant portion of the purchase price from the community over four short months. It was an intense process, and the transaction was quite complex for a number of reasons. For a transaction like this one, we needed a third party buyer's agent to help us work through the transaction, and we chose to work with Paul Dumke, then with Core Real Estate, and currently of Integrity Real Estate Professionals. Over those ensuing four months, we established a great relationship with Paul and at the end of the process, he said that he was so impressed by what we do and how we operate that he donated his commission back to us in support of the acquisition.

We have been truly fortunate to have the support of all these folks in our work. They support us financially, and they provide us with invaluable expertise and access to their vast network of potential supporters. They really are the perfect partners: great connectors with virtually endless opportunities to spread the word about what we do and how that benefits the community.

And we like to think that we help them out too, because we are working to preserve the natural character that draws their clients to the area to buy homes in the first place. As Karen Strohl put it, "[I feel] a sense of accomplishment of trying to preserve what I love about the area - [it is] true country with working farms, nature preserves, and a haven for flora and wildlife. There is a sense of satisfaction in protecting nature."

**We'd like to use this platform to thank every REALTOR mentioned here for all they do for us, and for the community.** The next time you see any of them out and about, you should too!



**“What is truly wonderful about Chikaming Open Lands is that they have a keen sensitivity to private property values and rights. They understand that it is important for a conservation area to contribute to the value of the private properties around the conservation area as well as maintain the ecology of the area.**

**That creates a ‘win-win’ every time.”**

*—Dan Coffey, RE/MAX Harbor Country at Union Pier and New Buffalo*

# The Sixth Annual Barn Benefit



*A view of the Higginbottom property*

## An Amazingly Beautiful and Incredibly Successful Evening!

On September 19, 2015, Chikaming Open Lands held its Sixth Annual Barn Benefit at the stunning farm of Deborah and Elzie Higginbottom in Three Oaks.

This year's Benefit was once again a huge success, **bringing in the most money we've ever raised, more than \$100,000!** We would like to thank everyone who attended and who gave so generously in the live and silent auctions. Thanks also to the donors of our fabulous auction items: Jackie Shen, Kevin Mize, Greenbush Brewery, The Shedd Aquarium, Granor Farm, P&E Mullins Local, RE/MAX, New Buffalo Sailing Excursions, Bentwood Tavern, Mesa Luna, The Red Arrow Roadhouse, Sawyer Garden Center, Love Creek Nature Center, and Peter and Jeanie Van Nice.

Finally we owe an enormous amount of gratitude to our hosts, Deborah and Elzie Higginbottom, who were so gracious in welcoming us to their beautiful estate.

Thank you to the 2015 Barn Benefit Sponsors:



**RE/MAX** harbor country @ Union Pier  
**RE/MAX** harbor country @ New Buffalo



Julia & Errett Van Nice



**Karen Strohl**



*Top to bottom: Entering the party; Chris Corley & Sue Flynn; Nancy Baird, Bob Tatina & Ron Farina; Deborah & Elzie Higginbottom; Le Percolateur performs; Michelle & Kevin Mize, Errett Van Nice, Alan Berkshire; the fabulous food of Froehlich's; spirited bidding during the live auction. —Photos by Beth Hewitt and David Johnson*

# 2015 Events



Pat Underwood gives Sally Bogert and Sandy & George Soper a closer look at the flora during the Wildflower Walk in May (left).



Donnie and Brendan Flynn unveil the new preserve sign with Chris Thompson at the dedication ceremony of Flynn Woods in May (left).



Participants in the Native Landscaping (far left) and Organic Gardening sessions of the Sustainable Living Series at the Van Nice restored prairie and Granor Farm, respectively.



Board member Bob Tatina leads a group through Jens Jensen Preserve at the opening celebration in June (left).



Ragen Gadsby with her Earth Art creation, which won the “Most Beautifully Organic” award at the Nature Explorers! outing at Robinson Woods in July (far left).

Another example of Earth Art found in Robinson Woods (near left).

Vaughn & Maureen Culp, Rich and Eileen Kochanny, Tom Hemingway and Jim Natsis enjoy the Give-Back Dinner at Bentwood Tavern (right).



Film posters from the first “Green Screens: An Environmental Film Festival, co-hosted with Fernwood (left).

## Massasauga Research Project Update Meet Marvin!



“Marvin” the massasauga rattlesnake

Meet “Marvin” the massasauga, pictured above! Marvin, as he was named by COL land protection specialist Ryan Postema, is an adult male massasauga that Ryan and Daniel Gonzalez, Ph.D. of Andrews University found in one of their traps on a COL nature preserve. This is an exciting development, because if Marvin is on site, that means at least two other massasaugas were also there previously, and there at the same time (you know, to conceive Marvin). So it would seem that there is at least a small population

You may remember we highlighted our massasauga rattlesnake research project in the Spring issue of this newsletter. So how did it go? Pretty well in fact. In early May, we found one!

of this “Species of Special Concern,” as they are designated by MDNR.

That’s important, because as Ryan noted in the Spring Newsletter, massasaugas are candidates for a federal listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as an endangered species. This means COL may be eligible for federal funding for restoration of the preserve, and for placing neighboring properties under conservation.

While we only found the one this summer, next year we plan to expand our research to include a population study and habitat analysis. Hopefully we will also find a “Margaret” next spring! Stay tuned.

Dr. Daniel Gonzalez with “Marvin” shortly before he was released





## Saving Land for 15 Years

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## A Note from the Executive Director



*Executive Director Chris Thompson at the Flynn Woods Preserve Dedication Ceremony in May 2015  
—Photo by Dave Johnson*

*Once upon a time, 15 years ago, there were four volunteers with big ideas –*

Now move forward to year 2015... over 1,600 acres are forever protected, a professional staff of four, thirteen dedicated board members, dozens of experienced committee members and volunteers, and well over 500 committed household members, wow!

Happy Fifteenth Anniversary Chikaming Open Lands! I'd bet I can pick out fifteen new initiatives that we have cooking for 2016 – but I will preview just three here:

- We are launching an initiative to bring kids outdoors to COL nature preserves as a part of their science curriculum by partnering with local schools through the Mighty Acorns Program.
- We now have a project pipeline that is

set to protect an additional 200 acres of beech maple forest, prime agricultural soils, and pristine dune and lakeshore.

- We will continue our fabulous programs that showcase your favorite nature walks, the best environmental films of the year, and demonstrations on how to live more simply and sustainably.

There are many more exciting new developments in store for 2016 as we continue to grow. But none of this success would be possible without you and the support that you show for our work, and for this very special corner of Southwest Michigan. Thank you for your kindness and generosity.

Best Regards,  
Chris Thompson  
Executive Director