

“WHEN I TURNED 16, INSTEAD OF BUYING A CAR, I BOUGHT A TRACTOR”



Mike Jasper has had what he calls the “farming bug” for almost as long as he can remember. His grandfather was a farmer, and one day he took an 8 year-old Mike out into the fields with him on his tractor. “Right then, I was hooked,” he says.

Mike began his career in earnest less than a decade later in 1980, when friends of his grandmother rented him 25 acres to farm corn and soybeans in Sawyer. “They took a chance on a 17 year-old kid,” he says. “When I turned 16, instead of buying a car, I bought a tractor.”

Today, Mike farms more than 800 acres in southern Berrien County, growing corn, soybeans and grapes. Last year, he worked with Chikaming Open Lands to place a conservation easement on approximately 74 acres of his land. The easement extinguishes the development rights on the property and preserves this prime farmland for agricultural use in perpetuity.

Chikaming Open Lands received a federal grant which covered half of the acquisition cost, while the remainder was funded in part by a donation from Mike in the form of a price reduction, and in part by funds previously raised for land acquisitions from

a combination of individual donors and The Pokagon Fund.

Preserving agricultural land is as important as protecting woodland, prairie, and other natural areas. This is particularly true in this corner of Southwest Michigan, which is home to a unique microclimate that provides optimal conditions for growing fruits and vegetables. As a result, agriculture is a vital part of the economy here. Farmland also provides habitat for wildlife, including beneficial pollinators like bees and butterflies. And in this region, farms often include valuable wetlands that help control flooding and filter stormwater, improving water quality. Plus, protecting farmland helps preserve the rural character and scenic landscapes that define our community.

Mike’s reasons for preserving his agricultural lands are quite simple. “This land is too good to put houses on,” he says. He’s also thinking of the future: his son caught that farming bug too, at just about the same age Mike did, when he started showing animals at the Berrien County Youth Fair. Now 13, he’s told his dad he wants to farm too. “I want to be sure [this] land is available for him to do that.”

483 people attended our outreach events, including guided hikes, paddles, environmental film screenings, and educational seminars.



We have protected nearly 500 acres of wetlands in this area. Wetlands help filter chemicals from groundwater before it enters our streams and rivers, and eventually Lake Michigan.



One acre of wetland can hold and filter up to 330,000 gallons of water, so protecting these areas is critically important to maintaining good water quality.



We have preserved 360 acres of prime farmland in our community for agricultural use forever.

Michigan farmers cultivate more than 300 different kinds of commodities, making it the second most agriculturally diverse state in the country, behind only California.



300 local schoolchildren came out to Robinson Woods and Turtle Creek Preserves to explore, play, and care for the land through the Mighty Acorns program.



Our dedicated volunteers have given more than 575 hours to helping us manage our 12 nature preserves: creating trails, removing invasive plants, and taking inventories of the flora and fauna that call them home.



52 business partners supported our efforts in 2017, working together to make our community better.



Last year, more than 500 Chikaming Open Lands members supported conservation in our community, ensuring it remains a wonderful place to live, work, and play.



Chikaming Open Lands

269-405-1006

col@chikamingopenlands.org
12291 Red Arrow Hwy, Sawyer, MI 49125
www.chikamingopenlands.org



Chikaming Open Lands

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“WHEN THE KIDS GIVE BACK TO THE LAND IN THIS WAY, THEY DEVELOP A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT.”



It was a delight to see the big yellow school bus full of fifth graders trundle down East Road to meet us at Robinson Woods Preserve for our second year of Mighty Acorns field studies this fall. We'd met most of these children as fourth graders during our first year running this environmental education program, and we were excited to have them back here. They were excited too. "I can't WAIT to get back into the woods!" exclaimed one boy as he came off the bus.

But perhaps we should let Ava, a student in Sherrie Bender's fifth grade class at River Valley Elementary School, tell her version of their return to Robinson Woods. After their outing this past fall, Sherrie had her students write stories about the field study, from the perspective of a plant or animal that makes the preserve its home. Ava wrote hers from the point of view of an American beech tree—here's an excerpt:

"It was an incredible day at Robinson Woods. All the beautiful birds were chirping. Suddenly a yellow spaceship drove up with all these little two footed monsters! They were talking to these older monsters. I was wondering what they were talking about. Could they be talking

about me? I had the urge to go up there, but I'm a tree so how am I supposed to move?"

The little monsters started walking, the older split them up into three groups. The first group I saw were picking up the invasive plants. I was so glad they were doing that for Robinson Woods. It made me so happy!!!!"

Sherrie says that this creative writing exercise helps the students reflect on their field study, and look at what they saw and learned differently. "They're looking at nature from nature's point of view," she says. "It also gets them thinking about human impact on the environment."

We love to see the Mighty Acorns kids grow more and more engaged with nature and knowledgeable about their local ecosystems. "Their science lessons are much more meaningful when they learn in the field," says Sherrie. Best of all, the students' stewardship work creates a connection to the land they are caring for. "When the kids give back to the land in this way, they develop a sense of responsibility for it," she says. "You can tell that they feel like it's 'their place', in a way." And it's that connection to the land that helps ensure a bright future for conservation in our community.



Dear Members and Friends of Chikaming Open Lands,

The staff and board of Chikaming Open Lands are pleased to share with you this Annual Report for 2017. This is our opportunity to let you know how we're doing and to thank you for your generosity over the year. As you will see, we have much to be excited about and we have many to thank.

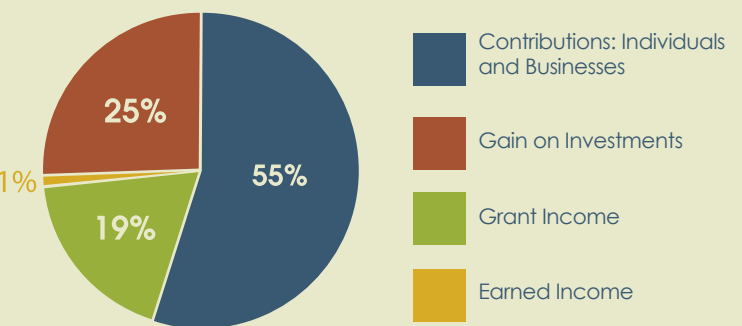
One accomplishment that spans beyond last year is the growing number of properties your generosity has helped Chikaming Open Lands protect and make available to the public. Last year we added the 35-acre Merritt Family Preserve in Chikaming Township and the year before that, the 12-acre Turtle Creek Preserve in New Buffalo. Both of these properties are comprised of beautiful, high quality woods and wetlands. Additionally, Turtle Creek features significant hiking trails, and a trail system is being developed for the Merritt Family Preserve.

Another preserve added in recent years is Flynn Woods – a 35-acre parcel that will be enhanced during 2018 with the addition of a picnic shelter, parking lot, potable water, and repair station for bicycles. With its proximity to our 80-acre Robinson Woods, this will soon become a veritable outdoor classroom supporting our Mighty Acorns program – and a haven for bicyclists and hikers.

I invite you to visit our preserves. Take a friend, take your family – or enjoy the solitude of a beautiful nature walk by yourself. These places are there for all to enjoy, and your continuing support makes that possible. Thank you!

Linda Puvogel
President, Board of Directors

Chikaming Open Lands 2017 Income



2017 Inome

Contributions: Individuals & Businesses	\$401,527
Grant Income:	\$136,170
Earned Income:	\$7,121
Gain on Investments:	\$186,999
TOTAL	\$731,817

2017 Expenses*

Program Services:	\$360,961
Management and General:	\$141,528
Fundraising:	\$73,130
TOTAL	\$575,619

* Salaries are distributed between categories in relation to areas of responsibility

Assets

Nature Preserves:	\$2,032,424
Unrestricted Funds:	\$260,406
Depreciable Fixed Assets:	\$258,795
Restricted to Land Protection, Stewardship, and Outreach Activities:	\$827,507
Board Designated Endowment Fund:	\$1,396,141
Dec. 31, 2016 Net Assets	\$4,622,464
Dec. 31, 2017 Net Assets	\$4,775,274
Change in Net Assets	\$152,810

Figures are under audit at time of press. Audited 2017 financial statements will be available for review upon request once complete.

2017 Donor Listings

Chikaming Open Lands wishes to acknowledge the following individuals and organizations for their generous support and assistance. Gifts listed were received January 1, 2017 through December 31, 2017. Note that in the event of multiple gifts, they have been totaled within the related sections. Please accept our sincere apologies for any unintentional errors or omissions and let us know by calling (269) 405-1006 or emailing us at COL@chikamingopenlands.org so that we may correct future listings.

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