

### **Saving the Family Farm**

With great joy the Kenosha/Racine Land Trust announces its acceptance of a conservation easement on the Schmitz family farm in Village of Wind Point. The 19-acre parcel, located on the shore of Lake Michigan, is the last remaining farm in the Village and one of a quickly diminishing number of family farms in Racine County. Nicholas Schmitz purchased the land in 1858, and it is farmed to this day by his descendants.

The Land Trust Board salutes the Schmitz family for appreciating how the land supported their ancestors and for their determination to preserve it. Aldo Leopold said, "When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." The Schmitz family embodies the land ethic which Leopold described. The community they see dates back to 1858 and forward in perpetuity. By granting a conservation easement to K/RLT, they can rest assured their land will remain a loved and respected part of Wind Point. It is a wonderful gift to their heirs and to the community.

Similarly, K/RLT is working on easements to protect two other family farms dating back about 150 years. The current generation of owners has strong bonds to the land, just like their forefathers. They cannot imagine their descendants driving by a subdivision one day and saying "That is where grandpa's farm used to be." K/RLT encourages others interested in preserving their family farms to contact us. We will review your situation and explain the details of a conservation easement so you can determine if it is right for you.

### **What is a Conservation Easement?**

The mission of the Kenosha/Racine Land Trust is "to protect open space and natural areas in Kenosha and Racine Counties for the benefit of current and future generations." One of the main tools we use to protect land is a conservation easement. Although I have mentioned easements frequently in previous articles, people still often ask "What is a conservation easement?" So let me review the main features.

A conservation easement is a legal agreement that enables a land owner to sell or donate certain property rights to a land trust. These rights generally relate to activities which would significantly diminish the environmental value of the land. Typical examples include mining of gravel and clearing the land of vegetation to develop a subdivision or commercial venture.

Owners also typically permit specific land friendly activities, such as farming and maintaining wildlife habitat, in the easement.

Regardless of the provisions in an easement, the document is legally binding for all future owners, as well as for the person who grants the easement. Whether the land is passed on to an heir or sold to a stranger, the easement provisions apply, and it is the duty of the land trust holding the easement to ensure they are maintained. K/RLT maintains its easements by meeting with new owners to explain the easement, by inspecting the land annually for easement compliance, and by funding a legal defense endowment to defend an easement in the unlikely event that a violation cannot be resolved with the owner.

Today K/RLT holds easements on land in eight conservation subdivisions and on two privately owned parcels. Easements completed in the past twelve months permanently protect 83 acres, bringing the total land protected to 362 acres. We are also working on easements for several other conservation subdivisions and private properties totaling several hundred acres. I look forward to the not too distant future when we reach the 1000 acre milestone.

If you would like to help K/RLT protect open spaces and natural areas, please consider becoming a member. To obtain membership information, including our Fall/Winter Newsletter and brochure, write to the land trust at P.O. Box 085153, Racine, WI 53408-5153 or call us at 262-552-6861. Additional information is available on the web at [www.krlt.org](http://www.krlt.org).

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