President’s Column
by Mark Madsen

It is appropriate to be thankful this time of year, and this is especially true for the Johnson County Heritage Trust as we review everything that we have accomplished in 2013. In addition to being awarded accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance, completing a five-year strategic plan (see the next page for a condensed version), and creating the Nancy Seiberling Circle, we have moved forward in our efforts to protect land. By the time this issue goes to press, we will have completed a conservation easement on forty acres of upland woods owned by Barbara Beaumont, who along with her husband, Kurt Hamann, is passionate about conserving this wonderful natural area. Other projects that will result in protecting even more land are at various stages, so watch future issues of Heritage to hear about our progress.

This is also the time of year when we review the 2013 income and expenses in order to plan the budget for 2014. Budgeting is a good way to understand the wide range of activities that JCHT engages in and the tremendous effort contributed by the staff, board members, property managers, committee members, and volunteers. There is not enough space in this column or even in this entire issue to list everything that gets done and certainly not enough space to appropriately thank everyone individually. It is clear to me, however, that each of them is happy for the opportunity to contribute time and energy to protect the precious natural areas that remain in eastern Iowa. All of us are grateful for the continued financial support from the Johnson County community that allows us to protect and increase the bank of conserved land.

In closing this column, I would like to point out another area that is crucial to our cause. There has been an organized and well-funded effort to undermine conservation efforts. One example of this is the effort, promoted unsuccessfully so far in several states, to remove the perpetuity requirement associated with conservation easements. Our community needs to be politically aware and to stand together to oppose these measures when they appear. We will keep you posted on these crucial legislative issues.

On behalf of the board of directors, we hope you had a safe, healthful, and happy holiday season.
Executive Director’s Report
by Tammy Richardson

The seventh annual “Under a Cider Moon . . . A Celebration of Autumn” is behind us. We had spectacular auction items, excellent cuisine, great weather, and generous sponsors and guests along with wonderful volunteers who pulled it all together without one flaw. Be sure to mark your calendar for Cider Moon 2014 on October 24.

Rally 2013: The National Land Conservation Conference in New Orleans was amazing, to say the least. The highlight for me was waving my accreditation pennant proudly while President Mark Madsen strutted across the stage. Mark and I attended various workshops focusing on everything from conservation easements to fundraising and media outreach strategies and much more. It’s always inspiring to talk with others from around the country about how they make conservation happen.

I am very happy to announce that JCHT now has a work-study student on staff, Jerica Skalinski. Please help me welcome Jerica, who hails from Burlington and is majoring in English with a certificate in museum studies.

The best holiday gift of all, as far as I am concerned, is the news that JCHT is moving to larger and brighter offices. We have long outgrown our current space, where at times the staff and volunteers crowded into my office must look like bees in a too-small hive. Please visit us at 5 Sturgis Corner Drive, Suite 1250, once our sign is up.

Upcoming Events

Visit www.jcht.org or call 319/338-7030 for up-to-date information about these and other events.

Prairie Preview XXXI Lon Drake and Judy Joyce, “Small Is Beautiful: The Value of Small Conservation Properties,” Parkview Church, Iowa City, Thursday, March 13

Annual meeting North Ridge Pavilion, Coralville, Friday, April 25

Family Day Turkey Creek Preserve, Sunday, May 18

Johnson County Heritage Trust Strategic Plan, 2013–2018

Focus Area: Land Protection
To increase the amount of land JCHT protects, we will organize a strategic conservation planning initiative, identify the most valuable lands to protect in focus areas, establish ongoing relationships with landowners of properties of interest, establish a collaborative relationship with the Johnson County Conservation Board, and expand beyond Johnson County.

Focus Area: Land Management
To manage 100% of the land owned by JCHT, we will increase volunteer opportunities for land management, continue to support the property steward position, and increase other resources allocated for land management. To increase public access to and utilization of JCHT land, we will incorporate relevant strategies into property management plans, finish identifying boundaries for all properties, and place a sign at all properties open to the public.

Focus Area: Development
To increase membership, we will gain a better understanding of our current market base and membership data. To have adequate financial resources to meet our capital and operational needs, we will revise the development plan, promote legacy giving and establish targets, increase sponsorships, recruit board members with fundraising capabilities, and increase the number of conservation easements and the amount of grant funding. We will increase the amount of volunteer and donated services and participation provided to JCHT.

Focus Area: Build Brand Attention
To increase community awareness of JCHT as a leading conservator of land in the area, we will develop a sustained internship program, implement an integrated communications/marketing plan, and build partnerships with other conservation organizations. To increase public access to and utilization of JCHT’s properties, we will improve our website, send press releases about events and use of properties to the media, and promote the properties in Heritage.

Focus Area: Organizational Excellence
To enhance JCHT’s effectiveness, we will maintain accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, develop a five-year financial forecast, relocate and expand JCHT’s office space, increase committee membership, make the executive director a full-time position with appropriate benefits, hire part-time administrative support, and upgrade JCHT’s IT capacity.
An Interview with Wayne Petersen and Dan Black, Property Managers for Belgum Grove

How long have you been managing Belgum Grove, and how have you improved it?

Wayne: I started two or three years before Dan. At first I didn’t get much done, other than dream about what could and should be done. After Dan came on board with his skills and general know-how, things started to happen. We’ve been able to clean up downed wood, create access lanes to the oak slope—which we hope to start burning to see if a savanna ecosystem responds—reconstruct prairie, install a stream crossing and a parking area and road, build a pond, and create a wetland. This past June we installed a septic system, and last fall we put in a bathroom, so we’re set up to host more events.

Dan: I’ve been working at Belgum for about nine years. In the early years, accessibility problems were very important to overcome. Installing the cement crossing over Dirty Face Creek was the first step in gaining access to the property; this was a charge led nearly exclusively by Wayne. The next barrier was a badly degraded drainage ditch running into Dirty Face, an old grade stabilization structure that served as a bridge of sorts. The ultimate answer to this problem was the construction of a large pond. The toe of the dam provides access to the eastern side of the property, and the top of the structure provides ready access to the pond as well as points east. The timbered area on the east property line was the next problem. The first time I drove a tractor to the western side of the timber, I could not drive in. Only by bulldozing scrub trees and downed limbs out of the way could we gain access. Fifty or sixty yards in, the timber opened up into this beautiful apple orchard. Next we needed to reopen a road to access the northern portion of the timber adjacent to the creek. Plowing, pushing, and digging with a loader tractor eventually opened up this route.

Then we could get to work. Among many other projects, we’ve reconstructed prairie north and south of the creek and around the pond, built a parking area, redone piping and the pump on the well head, installed a well pit with water into the pony barn and an outside hydrant, poured concrete inside the barn, and torn out old fence and built new fence. We’ve planted paw paw trees in the pine stand, shrubs on the west side of the timber and fence line, oaks around the timber perimeter, and wetland species around the pond. We are always spraying invasives, mowing, and burning. This year, after years of patching it, we plan to replace the barn roof.

What do you do in a typical month?

Wayne: It varies. In 2012, we constructed an elevated roadbed for equipment access to the oak slope, and we pulled a log jam out of the creek. Some weekends were devoted to mowing or fence building or cleaning sediment out of the creek. We spent a number of weekends watering the paw paw planting during the drought. In winter, if there’s snow cover, we might spend a weekend burning brush piles. The septic system and toilet installation were big projects for 2013. We don’t spend every weekend there, but we put in time many weekends. We usually end by kicking back and enjoying the serenity of the place.

Dan: I do have plenty to do, but Belgum is a great piece of property and I am a true believer in the reconstruction of prairies. I also think that if the Belgums were generous and forward-thinking enough to donate this property to JCHT, the least I can do is donate time and effort to benefit it.
When Kathie Belgum and her husband, David, moved to Iowa City in 1964, they wanted to buy land in the country—something they hadn’t been able to have while living in Minneapolis. They did it a little backward, she remembers, buying the horses first and only later finding land for sale south of Iowa City. Over the course of the three years it took them to pay for it, the land increased in value, and it continued to increase over the twenty-seven years the Belgums owned it.

Since both Kathie and David were working full-time, they took care of the land and their growing herd of animals evenings and weekends. In addition to the three horses, they—or, as Kathie says dryly, David—soon acquired four heifers. The plan was to let them graze over the summer and sell them in the fall, so he wouldn’t have to pay to feed them during the winter. But this was in 1974, and the price for beef fell sharply between spring and fall. Unable to sell the cows, David had to care for them until spring, when he got a great surprise: all four cows produced calves. The neighbors snickered that the Belgums must have cut a hole in the fence so a bull could sneak in. At its height, their herd reached twenty-three head of black Angus.

The cows, the horses, and the cats, along with a large vegetable garden and eventually an apple orchard with forty-four trees, brought the Belgums great pleasure over the years. (This year Pete Flynn and Shanti Sellz of Muddy Miss Farms picked Belgum apples for their CSA boxes.) They had friends and David’s West Branch congregation over for picnics. But the land and the livestock also required a lot of work. Eventually, with their children living far away and the labor getting to be too much to handle, they began to think about selling. They didn’t want to see the land developed for housing, though, and the price had gone up so much that a sale would have entailed a considerable tax payment. So they decided to donate the land to an organization that would preserve it as open space.

Giving it away turned out to be more difficult than they had expected. The Department of Natural Resources turned them down, and the University of Iowa would accept the land only if it came with an endowment to pay for maintenance. Then a friend, Bob Sayre, suggested that they give it to the Johnson County Heritage Trust. In 1998, they did so, and under the leadership of Wayne Petersen and Dan Black, the trust began restoring the land to tallgrass prairie.

Kathie says it gives her great satisfaction to see the land returning to its natural state. She often comes out to walk around the acres now known as Belgum Grove, and she hopes more people will do the same.
How to Support JCHT

Johnson County Heritage Trust fulfills its mission solely through the generosity of its members and donors. We appreciate and respect every gift. Please think of giving to JCHT for today and for tomorrow, for your children and for your community, for the well-being of the land and of its citizens.

JCHT members receive the Heritage magazine three times a year as well as invitations to special events and information about volunteer opportunities. Annual memberships are tailored to fit every budget: student member $10, regular member $30, family member $50, sustaining member $100, benefactor $250, heritage keeper $500 or more.

You can give to JCHT in many ways: one-time donations, gifts through your employer’s matching-gift program, testamentary and planned giving, and memorial and honorary gifts. Members of the Nancy Seiberling Circle contribute $1,000 per year or more to further our mission. Bur Oak Legacy Society members create lasting legacies through a variety of estate-planning tools. Recurring donations in the form of a monthly pledge give us the stable base that we need to work effectively.

Executive Director Tammy Richardson would be happy to talk with you about any of these options; contact her at 319/338-7030 or info@jcht.org.

Property Steward’s Report

by Jake Hart

The last few months have been especially busy. We accomplished quite a bit on the properties and added another conservation easement to our list of protected properties. The Beaumont easement, a beautiful piece of property between Coralville and North Liberty, has many mature oak and hickory trees, and Muddy Creek runs through it. Barbara Beaumont and Kurt Hamm have protected a portion of their property from development. It is definitely worth protecting for future generations to enjoy and for the abundance of wildlife that use it.

We held several successful work days on the properties and also hosted some groups. One group in particular stands out: the volunteers from United Natural Foods. This was their second year with us as part of their annual corporate volunteer program. We were very grateful that they chose to help us again. They worked at Pappy Dickens Preserve and once again did not disappoint; they cleared and chipped brush and laid the chips on the trail we cleared. There is now a wonderful walking path adjoining Hickory Hill Park. It was cold and windy that day, but they all pushed through it and got an amazing amount of work done. In addition they gave us a very generous donation.

Conservation Corps Iowa was able to come for a week, thanks to a grant from the Community Foundation of Johnson County. Six crew members worked at Turkey Creek Preserve, Shimek Ravine, Hora Woods, and O’Mara-Newport Woods. Their main objective was to assist us in clearing brush to help us complete our Environmental Quality Incentives Program contracts. They were able to complete a large majority of the work. They were a lot of fun to work with, and it looks like we will be getting them back in 2014 thanks again to the Community Foundation of Johnson County.

As you may remember, we received a Restore Iowa! grant from the Iowa Native Plant Society earlier this year. We used the money to buy tools, chemicals, and safety gear for our work days at Pappy Dickens. Our main goal was to clear out invasive plants on a portion of the property with desirable young and old oak trees. Historically, some of this property was most likely savanna or open woodland. We were able to have Boy Scouts and high school and college students volunteer on the property. As part of the grant, we taught them about the plant community and the reasons why the property was protected and why we were restoring it. We plan to continue to use that property to educate young volunteers about the natural environment. Thanks again to the Iowa Native Plant Society for choosing JCHT for this grant.

The seasons are definitely changing, and so is the work that needs to be done. We hope to get even more accomplished this year than last. Please look for upcoming volunteer days on our website. And if anyone has a picnic table to donate, we could really use it out at Belgum Grove. Thanks for all your support!

Golden plover. Photo by Joe Richard.
The Emerald Ash Borer Is Coming. Are You Ready?  Mark Vitosh, district forester for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources’ Forestry Bureau, tells Catherine Cocks what we need to know.

**When did the emerald ash borer (EAB) show up in Iowa, and is it present throughout the state?** EAB was first found in northeast Iowa in 2010 along the Mississippi River in Allamakee County. In the summer of 2013, this pest was found in Burlington and Fairfield in southeast Iowa and, just recently, in Mechanicsville in Cedar County.

**Are all species of ash affected? How much damage has the beetle already done?** Four species of ash are native to Iowa—green, white, black, and blue—and EAB threatens all of them. Since being identified in 2002, this pest has killed tens of millions of trees in the northeast portion of the United States and caused the loss of tens of millions of dollars. In Iowa, about 52 million woodland ash trees and 3 million urban ash trees will be threatened by this pest.

**How are local and state governments in Iowa dealing with the problem?** Currently a state quarantine bans the movement of regulated ash material and hardwood firewood outside of twenty-five eastern Iowa counties. In the near future, we will most likely see a federal quarantine in these same counties.

Over the last three years, the Forestry Bureau has completed about two hundred inventories for smaller eastern Iowa communities to help them understand how many ash trees they have on public property and develop a long-term management plan. Some larger communities have decided to proactively remove a minimum number of public ash trees on an annual basis to spread the total cost of removal out. These communities are targeting stressed and hazardous ash trees first and also replanting a diversity of new tree species. Other communities have decided to wait until EAB arrives and then remove ash trees as they become infested and die.

**What can I do to help?** The first thing you can do is notify local government personnel if there are any potential EAB-infested trees in your area. The second thing you can do is not move firewood out of your local area. If you are going to travel away from home, don’t take firewood with you but instead buy it locally. The quickest way that this pest moves across the country and the state is in infested firewood. The third thing you can do is plant a diversity of tree species when you plant new trees, and do not plant ash.

**Dutch elm disease killed so many American elms, formerly one of the most common and lovely trees in our communities. Are ash trees destined to disappear?** It is true that millions of elm trees have been killed in the U.S. since the 1950s, but it is important to understand that not all elms were killed—some survived. Also, after many years of research, scientists have found a population of American elms that tolerate the fungus that causes Dutch elm disease. For that reason, communities are now starting to replant American elms within their landscapes. The bottom line with ash is there has been and will continue to be a tremendous loss of trees across the U.S. in the near future, but as research continues there is hope that not all ash trees will be lost.

**If I have an ash tree in my yard, is there anything I can do to protect it?** You can potentially reduce the impact of EAB attack to your ash tree by utilizing registered insecticides, but no treatments at this point have shown 100% effectiveness, and there is no guarantee that these treatments will work in areas of heavy EAB infestation. Trees must be healthy, vigorously growing, and valuable to your landscape to merit treatment. It is critical to understand that this pest will not go away in the near future, so if you decide to treat, you will need to do it on a regular basis. The state of Iowa does not recommend preventive treatments until a confirmed EAB site is identified within fifteen miles.

When using chemicals there is always a risk of harming yourself, others, or the environment, so it is critical that you read the label before selecting or using a chemical. It is important that you do your own research to understand the potential risk of using any of these materials. Also, many of the available insecticides have use limits that restrict how many trees on a given acre of land can be treated on an annual basis. You need to evaluate your situation to see if the benefit of attempting to protect a tree outweighs the cost of treatment.

**Where can I get more information about EAB?** Iowa State University’s Extension and Outreach program has a number of excellent publications, maps, webcasts, and visual aids on EAB about everything from identification to prevention to management. The Emerald Ash Borer site and the Iowa Department of Agriculture’s Iowa Tree Pest site also have excellent information; the latter will tell you which officials to contact if you find suspect trees.

**White and green ash resemble one another in summer, but their fall color is quite different—purple in white ash and yellow in green ash. Photo by Don Farrar.**
Happy New Year from your friends at JCHT!

Protect, preserve, restore . . .

it’s all about the trust.