President’s Column
by J. Elizabeth Maas

Hello, my name is Liz Maas, and I am privileged to be your new president. A member of the board for the past four years and co-steward of Pappy Dickens Preserve and O’Mara-Newport Woods, I teach biology and environmental science and co-own a native landscape restoration business. I have witnessed JCHT receive accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, acquire two conservation easements, institute the Nancy Seiberling Circle, undertake a strategic planning process, and explore a name change. These watershed moments have done much to develop our organization into a more visible, more sophisticated nonprofit that will continue to protect and conserve the natural areas of eastern Iowa. I am honored to be part of the growth and progress of this long-standing organization.

In February, the board called a special membership meeting to discuss changing our name. After much deliberation during and after this meeting, the board decided to amend our bylaws and change our name to Bur Oak Land Trust. By the time this magazine arrives in your mailbox, I very much hope that our membership will have voted to amend our articles of incorporation, and our name change will be complete.

I too have undergone a name change. When I was nine years old, I decided to use my middle name, Elizabeth. Often confused with the four other Jessicas in my class, I had no way to stand out or be recognized as an individual. These are some of the reasons why our organization decided that the name Johnson County Heritage Trust was compromising our mission. We are a land trust, yet those words were not part of our name. Our new strategic plan directs us to consider protecting properties outside of Johnson County, but the words “Johnson County” limited our range. Being confused with a bank or a historical society or a funded county organization prevented us from operating effectively.

Even though I changed my name, I was still the same kid, and my family continued to help me grow. As we move forward as Bur Oak Land Trust, the spirit of our organization is the same: we will continue to protect, restore, and steward the land around us. I welcome your input and sincerely hope you are as excited about our future as I am.
Executive Director's Report
by Tammy Richardson

Greetings, JCHT members and friends! Spring has finally sprung after a very long winter. I didn't think it would ever get here. It is so exciting to see the properties come alive with spring activity and new life.

JCHT's open house, Prairie Preview xxxi (thank you, Lon Drake and Judy Joyce), and the annual meeting all were successful. Thank you to everyone who participated in these events, with a special thanks to the volunteers and sponsors who made them all happen. Family Day at Turkey Creek Preserve is just around the corner, May 18, from 1:00 to 3:00. And I am delighted to announce our first Concert on the Prairie, July 26 at Belgum Grove, featuring the soaring vocals and intricate instrumentations of Twin Cities--fave Furia. Music begins at 7:00; come early to hike and picnic.

The new office is just a joy; please stop by and visit when you're in the area. Thank you to all who contributed items for the new office and those who worked so hard to prepare the space. We are located very near the Village Inn in the southeast corner of the building that houses Kitchen and Bath Distributing and Mekong. Our signage is in the works, so you have to look for us.

I am very happy to welcome JCHT's new financial coordinator, Douglas Land, even as I am sad to say good-bye to Bonnie Willoughby, who has been wonderful to work with. We thank Bonnie for her over-the-top dedication and wish her the best of luck with her new responsibilities.

We extend our condolences to the family of Kenneth Lacina, especially his wife, Gloria, and daughters Dawn, Sandra, and Melody, with grateful appreciation for the memorial contributions that have been so thoughtfully made in his honor.

On behalf of the entire staff, I would like to thank you for making our jobs enjoyable and rewarding. We are on a journey of continuous improvement, not a destination. Thank you all for joining me and JCHT on our journey!

Introducing JCHT Board Member
Dick Schwab

Dick Schwab grew up on his family's farm in southern Minnesota. After a corporate career at Medtronic and NCS, he is now an angel investor, an active volunteer, a woodworker, and an outdoor enthusiast. Dick and his wife, Katherine, live on “130 acres of paradise in northern Johnson County.” Energetically engaged in conservation for many years and the recipient of JCHT's Conservation Award, he is returning to the board after serving from 2006 to 2012.

Introducing JCHT Board Member
Steve Schomberg

Iowa City resident Steve Schomberg oversees his family's farms in Muscatine County, where he is restoring and recreating woodlands and prairies. He retired in 2005 from the position of Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement and Institutional Relations at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He oversaw Robert Allerton Park and Conference Center, a significant natural area in Illinois, and was the lead negotiator with the Art Institute of Chicago to bring a 640-acre natural area under public ownership.

Introducing JCHT Board Member
Ken Lowder

Ken Lowder was a speech and hearing consultant for the University of Iowa from 1968 to 1981, when he founded Iowa Audiology and Hearing Aid Centers in Coralville. An avid birder with more than 4,500 species on his life list who is dedicated to preserving habitat, he is a member of the Property Stewardship Committee, helps manage Shimek Ravine, and fights invasive species on his 2.5-acre woodland.
Property Steward’s Report

by Jake Hart

Spring is here and there is plenty to see on the properties. Now is the time to get out and see the spring flowers before they are gone. Turkey Creek Preserve has a beautiful display of bluebells that everyone should see at least once in a lifetime.

This winter was cold and long, as you sure know, but I was still able to get a good amount of work done on the properties. You may have noticed the structure that we added to the pond at Belgum Grove, which will provide habitat for fish to seek shelter from predators and reproduce. We used old Christmas trees as well as unwanted trees from the property. King’s Material donated bricks to weight down the structure, and Highland Hideaway Hunting donated pallets. This is a good start to adding habitat to the pond, and we hope to see a corresponding increase in size and reproduction in the current fish population.

I have a long wish list of things that would help us manage the properties better and allow us to put more volunteers to work at one time. Smaller things like a battery charger, trail camera, and trolling motor and larger things like a trailer to haul our tractor, cultipacker, brush-cutting saw, wood chipper, pull-behind seed stripper, hay rake, trailer and broadcast seeder for our ATV to pull plus a set of tires and rims, and a three-oldstyle/four-oldstyle ton truck (I can dream, can’t I?) would be wonderful. See our website for the entire list, and please get in touch with me if you have something to donate.

Again this summer we need to do a lot of work on invasive species removal. The good thing is that we are starting to see the fruits of our labor. Some of these areas need continued attention, but it’s nice to see results. I hope you will walk the properties and enjoy what makes our efforts worthwhile.

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 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.

Prairie violet. Photo by Dave Williams.

Upcoming Events

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

Family Day Turkey Creek Preserve, Sunday, May 18
Benefit Sundays Devotay, Sunday, June 1
Share the Profit Night Vesta, Sunday, June 15
Concert on the Prairie Belgum Grove, Saturday, July 26
Under a Cider Moon . . . A Celebration of Autumn Friday, October 24

Big Grove in summer. Photo by Lain Adkins.
An Interview with Don Bolin, Property Manager for Big Grove

How long have you been the property manager for Big Grove, and what have you been able to do to improve it? I've been property manager of Big Grove since 2006. Eradicating invasive species was my first management priority. Now, with 98 to 99 percent of these plants gone, I’ve expanded to other areas of management. I seeded the meadow with more than fifty species of native wildflowers plus native sedges and grasses, placed markers along the trails, and put a trail map at the entrance. Forest management will be a big part of future work; so far we've thinned a few acres of less desirable trees and planted white oaks and shagbark hickories.

Give us the important facts about Big Grove, and then tell us what you love about it. Big Grove is forty acres of deeply ravined woodland and a small meadow. What I particularly like is that, along with neighboring woodlands, we have one of the largest intact, continuous woods in Johnson County—very important habitat for deep woodland songbirds like scarlet tanagers, which are seen here in abundance. Big Grove contains the best showing of putty root orchids that I have seen, and it may be the only site in Johnson County where small-flowered leaf cup is found.

As property manager for Big Grove, what do you do in a typical month? I still spend many hours monitoring and pulling garlic mustard and lopping off multiflora rose. I also keep the trails clear of dead limbs, and I am starting to thin out trees to improve the health and regeneration of important trees like oaks.

What would help you manage this property better? I wish the USDA would authorize the release of a weevil from Europe that is a predator and controller of garlic mustard there. Researchers at the University of Minnesota have been studying this insect for ten years, and after many delays I hope that approval for release will occur soon. More modestly, I wish I could find half a dozen volunteers to adopt an acre each of Big Grove that they'd be willing to keep clear of garlic mustard.

You've got plenty of other things on your to-do list. What keeps you coming back to Big Grove? I’ve always believed in trying to leave the earth a better place; this just happens to be one of my little niches.

From Our Members

When we look around at the Iowa landscape, there is little to show us what the first settlers saw. As Aldo Leopold wrote, “One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds.” My wife, Deb, and I were fortunate to be able to retire to a place where a fair part was either little disturbed or could be managed in a way to restore natural communities. Our 130-acre property has a lovely variety of habitats: white oak savanna, mature deciduous forest, successional forest, reconstructed prairie, a stand of planted white pines, and four ponds with edges of wetlands. Our goal has been to maintain or create vegetation that was native to this area.

In 1999, when we moved to our acreage, the remnants of the savanna were overgrown with many fairly sizable trees that destroyed the understory and the open nature of the savanna. We removed many of these trees to create an open aspect, and we burn annually to encourage the open-ground herbaceous plants. As others who restore savanna have experienced, a number of typical savanna plants have reappeared in the understory.

There was no remnant of the original prairie, so we planted twenty-one acres with a mix of about sixty species of tallgrass grasses and forbs. To keep the woody plants out and to encourage the prairie species, we burn a different part of this reconstruction every year, which amounts to burning each part every three to four years. It is well established now, though it doesn't have the diversity of native prairie. One persistent chore that we spend a lot of time on is trying to control invasive species.

Before we planted it, we had dams built at the heads of three drainage basins. Thus we created prairie-pond-like wetlands that reduce erosion in drainage basins downstream. What sediment there is collects in large ponds that occupy old quarries; almost no sediment drains from our land into the adjacent Cedar River.

It is such a joy to live surrounded by the natural beauty of our land. It seems appropriate to end this essay with the title of the 2014 Prairie Preview: “Small Is Beautiful: The Value of Small Conservation Properties.”

—Dick Baker, professor emeritus of geology, University of Iowa

Dick Baker on his twenty-one-acre prairie.
In 1983, when Barbara Beaumont moved onto former pastureland near North Liberty, she relished the opportunities for cross-country skiing, hiking, birdwatching, and gardening outside her front door. When she and Kurt Hamann married in 1998, she moved to Minnesota, but they planned to return to Iowa. After Kurt retired in 2003 and they moved back to Barbara’s home, she immediately noticed a strange plant in her ravine: garlic mustard had invaded in her absence. Bittersweet, multiflora rose, barberry, honeysuckle, and autumn olive had also colonized her acres. Muddy Creek, which crosses the middle acres, was even muddier after a rainfall. And the rapid development in Coralville and North Liberty was disturbing. Barbara had always thought that her land took care of itself. She was no stranger to conservation issues—she’d led backpacking trips for the Sierra Club for more than twenty years, she’d been on the Johnson County Conservation Board and the Olmstead County Parks Board, and she knew a lot about the plants and animals on her property—but the idea of actively managing her land had not occurred to her. Now, seeing these changes with fresh eyes, Barbara and Kurt realized that it was time to think about perpetuity.

Kurt’s experience with land management had been limited to push mowers, but he knew how to organize construction projects, and he fell in love with Barbara’s classic Massey Ferguson. By giving her a chain saw for her birthday, he committed himself to what he calls entertainment and what anyone else would call hard work. Starting with the invasives, he got to work.

In 2007, district forester Mark Vitosh surveyed the property. Assuming the answer was no, Barbara asked him whether her land was worth preserving; his positive response added new energy to their efforts. Mark gave Barbara and Kurt information about various conservation programs, and in December 2013 forty of their acres became JCHT’s thirteenth conservation easement.

The Beaumont easement is well worth protecting. Home to many mature white, red, and bur oaks and hickories, this type of woodland is declining in Iowa. Muddy Creek’s watershed and floodplain, especially vulnerable to development, will receive welcome protection. Neighbors on both sides provide two hundred acres of contiguous undeveloped land. Ornate box turtles live on the property along with more than one hundred species of birds. Mark Vitosh has developed a forest stewardship plan to open up the canopy, and Kurt intends to carry it out while maintaining his active battle against invasives.

Thanks to Kurt and Barbara’s generosity and Kurt’s conversion to the joys of chain sawing, the Beaumont easement will provide permanent protection of an irreplaceable woodland.

Top: Look no further to see the value of conservation: recent development next to the Beaumont easement. Photo by Mark Madsen. Right: Barbara Beaumont and Kurt Hamann.

### Book Review by Alan F. Nagel

In his beautifully illustrated new book, Fire Island Past, Present, and Future: The Environmental History of a Barrier Beach, former JCHT President Robert Sayre offers a case study across centuries of the extensive beach off New York’s Long Island. Some of the island has been relatively stable for a thousand years, while specific contours have steadily shifted, ruptured, and disappeared. Humans brought about most of the surface changes by settlement, fire, agriculture, and the building first of necessities for a fishing and shell-fishing economy and then of a tourist economy and second homes.

Just as he has commended JCHT for its efforts to “work with change, so that change can make us better stewards of our land and natural heritage,” Sayre focuses upon what Fire Island’s residents can do to contribute to the island’s survival: decrease the invasive species that bring many new vulnerabilities, think before moving sand to protect properties, respect and avoid interfering with the natural cycles of change. True for the Atlantic seaboard, the mountains, the deserts, and Iowa’s remaining prairies and woodlands.
We are immensely grateful to the following individuals and organizations who gave to JCHT in 2013. Due to your generosity, we can continue to protect the land you love.

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Sharyn and John Reitz
Luann Reynolds and David Parsons
Riverside Casino and Golf Resort
Riverside Theatre
Tom Rosburg
Robert and Hutha Sayre
Linda and Robert Scarth
Steve Scheckel and Pamela Terrill
Russell and Cyndie Schmieser
George and Alliene Schrimper
Starbucks Coffee
Mark Tade
Tallgrass Business Resources
Tanger Outlet Mall
Theisen's
University of Iowa Museum of Natural History
University of Iowa Press
John and Jean Van Rybroek
Village Inn
Walmart
Marcia Wegman
Mary Westbrook
Wilderness Studio
Bonnie Willoughby
Wilson's Orchard
Woofables
World of Bikes
Marcia Wunder
Yummy's Gourmet Cakes
Zio Johno's Spaghetti House

Many thanks to all of you from JCHT
President Liz Maas,
Executive Director
Tammy Richardson, and the board of directors!

Drawings of sedge wren, monkey flower, damselfly, mink, red milkweed, green heron, hop sedge, red-winged blackbird, rose mallow, and gray treefrog by Mark Müller.
Protect, preserve, restore . . . it’s all about the trust.

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