

# PRAIRIE'S EDGE

A NEWSLETTER FROM FRIENDS OF SHERBURNE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

WINTER 2019

## Celebrate the Present, Ensure the Future

By President Myrna Krueger

It's been a busy year with new board members, new projects, and new ways of working to support the refuge. We're pretty excited because for the first time, the Friends have contracted with a naturalist to sustain programs that provide great nature experiences for kids and adults.

In making this commitment, the Friends board realized the need for ongoing and substantial financial support. So Sustainability Committee members Matt Finn, Bill Kolbinger, Carol VanHeel, John Riebel, Mike Rajala, Sue Hix, and I dug in and began learning everything we could about legacy giving and new ways to give. It's been a journey! Two seminars, three webinars, and countless consultant newsletters later, we are ready to propose options that allow our members and donors to give in ways that fit their lives.

You've noticed that this newsletter features stories of passionate refuge volunteers and Friends who have donated in their **Continued on page 2**



Photo by Bruce Ellingson

Carol VanHeel, retired accountant and active poet, is Friends of Sherburne treasurer.

## CAROL VANHEEL

### "Refuge Brings Me Joy"

Carol VanHeel retired as a Twin Cities accountant in 2006 certain she was through with accounting. She and her husband Dan moved from the city to rural Sherburne County, Carol enrolled in a Master Gardener program, met Nancy Haugen, then Public Use Specialist at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, and volunteered to pick up trash on refuge trails.

When Carol and Dan re-located to fourteen wooded acres along the Mississippi River, their retirement and the sale of their home in the city left them with a need to identify tax deductions for taxable income. A life insurance policy with a nonprofit as beneficiary was one solution, suggested their financial advisor,

and Carol knew just the nonprofit she wished to gift.

An extended encounter with Sue Hix, then Friends of Sherburne president, at a Master Gardener outing in 2007 led Carol to join the Friends board of directors. And she has been the Friends treasurer ever since, using those career accounting skills to balance the books of one of her favorite

**Continued on page 7**



## Continued from page 1

own unique ways. We are proud to learn from these leaders and thank them for sharing their experiences.

We are also taking this opportunity to ask you to give to support the work of the refuge. You can give to annual programs and activities (annual fund) OR you can give for the future by donating to the Friends Legacy Fund, an endowment that will grow and support the refuge for years to come.

What do you want your legacy to be? My own experience was pretty easy. A few years ago when my husband and I were setting up a living trust (a recommendation from our financial planner), we included an end-of-life donation to the Friends. Of course, it's important to consider how you want your loved ones to be taken care of after you are gone and then decide on a gift for the refuge through the Friends. It's a great way to be remembered.

So let's get back to all those ways to give. Your accountant, financial planner, and/or attorney can guide you to the best vehicle and tax advantages that may be available. But first, think about your goals, **then consider how and when you'd like to give:**

- **Give now.** Ways to give include cash, check, credit card, appreciated stock, cars, real estate, IRA Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs), Donor-Advised Funds.
- **Give later.** Includes bequests, wills, remainder trusts, life insurance, beneficiary designations.
- **Give and receive.** Includes charitable remainder trusts, charitable gift annuities.

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**Our partner, the Initiative Foundation, will work with you to make your chosen giving option a reality. Your donation, large or small, is important to us, and we, as an all-volunteer organization, work hard to deliver the greatest impact for your gift. Would you like more details?**

**We would be pleased to share a detailed plan over coffee or on a phone call—just let us know. Whether you choose to support the annual fund or leave a legacy, we believe we can offer the right option for you. We sincerely thank you for your support.**

## FRIENDS OF SHERBURNE NWR 2019 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Myrna Krueger – President**  
**Steven Chesney – Vice President**  
**Mike Brubaker – Secretary**  
**Carol VanHeel – Treasurer**  
**Marilyn Danielson – Director**  
**Matt Finn – Director**  
**Lee T Johnson – Director**  
**Susan Julson – Director**  
**Bill Kolbinger – Director**  
**Emy Minzel – Director**  
**Debra Sorenson – Director**  
**Beth Thorson – Director**

## ADVISORS TO THE BOARD

**Steve Karel – Refuge Manager**  
**Alaina Larkin – Visitor Services**

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The Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization (EIN: 41-1763001) that supports refuge projects and educational programs. All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. The Prairie's Edge newsletter is published twice annually for members in cooperation with the refuge. Contact the Friends c/o Sherburne NWR, 17076 293rd Avenue NW, Zimmerman, MN 55398, or at [FriendsofSherburne@gmail.com](mailto:FriendsofSherburne@gmail.com).

**Donate or join Friends online  
at [ExploreSherburne.org](http://ExploreSherburne.org)**



Mel Klein's Diamond K Percherons above, Puddles below, and "Animals Nobody Loves" bottom right.

# Thousand-plus Celebrate Wildlife

**By Alaina Larkin,  
Visitor Services Specialist**

Wildlife Festival celebrates fall and provides our neighboring communities with the opportunity to enjoy the refuge and wildlife up close and personal in a family-friendly and engaging way. Anywhere from 1,200 to 1,600 participants come out to the Oak Savanna Learning Center and surrounding trails to explore the booths and activities. On a larger scale, Sherburne joins refuges



across the country by celebrating National Wildlife Refuge Week this time of year!

The Friends support this annual event and provide enhancements such as the popular live animal booth and presentations, the horse-drawn wagon rides, and

the complimentary birthday cake. Thanks to members and donors like you, they are able to assist the refuge and fund these characteristic activities!

Planning this event begins with booking the live animal booth and presenter in November or December, once fall has faded. Following that, event planning really gears up in June or July, when staff contacts partners to gauge interest and availability. About a month before the event, I work to coordinate the 60-90 refuge volunteers that help with setup, parking, event information, and staffing the various refuge booths, even down to the secret volunteer inside

the "Puddles the Blue Goose" mascot costume. This event takes a village to pull together and facilitate and on any given year it takes between 100-125 volunteers, partners, and refuge staff to make it a success. It's the one day where I'm in charge of



everyone!

Thank you to everyone who attended and volunteered at this year's festival.

**Save the date for the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Wildlife Festival on September 26, 2020!**

**Wildlife Festival photos by David Halgrimson**



**For 2019 Wildlife Festival video go to:  
<https://youtu.be/jgxLa5tYIOM>**

# BRAD JOHNSON

## A Career Protecting “the wild”

Brad Johnson’s parents built a cabin in Big Lake in 1953 and thereafter, Brad spent his summers aboard his bike, exploring the countryside north of the lake, far into Sherburne County, as far as the farms and wetlands that would become Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. He became a Boy Scout, hiking the trails of the county, growing up in north-west Minneapolis but summering in Big Lake and Sherburne County.

These formative years and a career in conservation might explain why in 2014 Brad and his wife Su Johnson gave a gift of appreciated stock to the Be Wild Campaign of the Friends of Sherburne.

Protecting “the wild” has been Brad’s job since the 1960s, when he began working at the Bureau of Mines. He moved to the US Fish & Wildlife Service in 1994, retired in 2004 and began volunteering at the refuge. At the USFWS Brad’s job took him to refuges and wetlands in an eight-state region, working with public and private partners to ensure the conservation of the wildlife areas for future generations.

As refuge volunteers, Brad and Su immersed themselves in refuge and Friends responsibilities. Brad joined the board, served as vice president and then replaced Sue Hix as Friends president for two years as she managed the Be Wild fundraising campaign. Su Johnson served as board secretary, membership chair and board member. And she is a regular volunteer at Refuge Headquarters, answering phones and greeting visitors.

The USFWS built the federally funded Learning Center, which opened in 2016. However, Brad and Su knew—as insiders—that without



Photo by Bruce Ellingson

Brad Johnson, former Friends of Sherburne Board President.

significant donations the refuge would have a great building, but one without the equipment needed to support the educational programming envisioned by the Friends.

*The Be Wild Campaign was an essential effort by the Friends to equip the Oak Savanna Learning Center.*

Brad’s involvement in audio/visual programming at his church gave him special insights into the communication needs of the center. And the couple donated stock toward those needs. Brad imagines it was their gift to the Be Wild Campaign that helped provide the funding and installation of the A/V system.

Brad and Su were elated by the classroom’s educational possibilities, and happy, too,

for the tax deduction permitted by the method they chose to support the campaign. Their tax deduction was for the market value of the stock when it was liquidated by the Initiative Foundation. However, the Johnsons paid no capital gains on the increased value of the stock because it was a gift to a non-profit.

“As any parent,” says Brad. “I love my kids and grandkids very much but in today’s society it’s so often their faces are in a phone or iPad. All of our children have been out here, all of our grandchildren have been out here. They’ve all volunteered and become part of it.”

And when these grandchildren drive with their grandparents along the Prairie’s Edge Wildlife Drive the most common exclamation is “Stop! Back Up!” says Brad. “Usually it’s something I’ve missed that they want to see better, a wildflower, an animal, the wonder of all the life out here on the refuge.”

## By Steve Karel, Project Leader

Hello, Friends. I am often asked about our water management activities on the refuge and why the water may be high in some pools and completely drained from others. I would guess that these observations do present a variety of questions for visitors. I'll take this opportunity to share a little about our water management program.

Sherburne NWR is fortunate to have the St. Francis River as a great water resource to provide a continuous flow of water throughout the year.

In the late 70's and early 80's, a massive project was implemented on the refuge to design and construct a series of dikes and water control structures to create 24 water impoundments, or pools.

The purpose of this project was to enable the refuge to manage the water resources by controlling water levels to provide breeding, nesting, and roosting habitat primarily for waterfowl and other migratory birds.

With water control structures, the refuge can raise and lower wetlands through a series of canals to provide open mud flats for shorebirds, shallow water for dabbling ducks and sandhill cranes, or deep water for diving ducks. Each fall, managers and biologists get together to develop a water management plan that guides how each pool will be managed the following year.

The St. Francis Pool is our most important impoundment and acts as a reservoir to hold water for distribution to other wetlands throughout the refuge. Management closely watches this reservoir to make sure water levels are adjusted after each rain event and to determine to which pools the water should be distributed. This pool is usually drawn down to shallow water in the fall to provide roosting and staging habitat for our sandhill crane population during their southward migration.

We use water for many purposes, and typically it is "icing on the cake" when management actions succeed. Often positive "side effects" occur due to our water management actions. An example was this past year's management of our Big Bluestem Pool along the refuge's Wildlife Drive. Water levels were drawn down in the



summer of 2018 to chemically treat the invasive hybrid cattails that were overtaking the pool but providing little value to migratory birds and waterfowl. In 2019, water levels there were left low in the spring to conduct a prescribed (RX) burn to remove cattail so other desirable wetland plants could replace it. As a safety measure, the refuge included the surrounding upland area of Big Bluestem Pool in the burn. A positive side effect of this management action was that the wild lupine population "exploded," resulting in one of our most successful wild lupine production years ever. Our management goal was also accomplished with 95% of what was formerly invasive cattail being replaced by an extraordinary wild rice population. We followed up by simply adding the water, and in 2019, Big Bluestem Pool became one of our top food production and bird use wetlands on the refuge!

## Stay Wild, My Friends!



Rainy weather has been a challenge, but the Welcome Station on the Wildlife Drive is taking shape from the ground up.

A concrete slab and walkway have been poured, boulders installed to replace the aging fence, and picnic tables and bike racks purchased ready to place in the spring. Weather permitting, the new kiosk will be constructed this fall. Project is funded by donations to the Friends, including Memorial Fund gifts, and a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant.

**FIND US ON YOUTUBE!**

To see our 2019 Wildlife

Festival video head to YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/jgxLa5tYIOM>

After six years of full-time RVing, Ken Brennen and his wife settled in Zimmerman, MN, to be near children and grandchildren and—much to his delight—also near nature. “I soon discovered the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge and began exploring it,” said Ken.

The refuge Wildlife Drive attracts volunteers as well as visitors and, like many before and since him, Ken became a roving interpreter in 2007. He also joined the wildflower seed collecting team and led various kinds of hikes. Soon Ken was on the Friends board of directors and his duties resulted in a trip to Washington, D.C., to lobby with Friends from across the country on behalf of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Ken began representing the refuge and Friends at local fairs and events. “This is important because the refuge does not have a budget for promotional activities,” he noted.

*“Without public outreach by the Friends, the refuge would be a relatively unknown place.”*

Today, Ken lives in Florida, where he reminisces with joy about his days of roving. “First, I loved being out on the Wildlife Drive, just watching what was happening with the changing seasons. Secondly, it really felt good to meet visitors from all over the country, talk to them, share pieces of nature with them, and see their smiles. That always made me feel good,” says Ken. “And I harvested a lot of wonderful memories of dedicated Friends.”

After moving to Florida, these memories prompted Ken to give Friends a financial gift. Ken knows that public outreach requires both time and money. “I donated as much time as I could while I was living nearby and I made periodic financial gifts to the Friends.

“After moving to Florida I had a chance to make a legacy gift. I suddenly had a significant chunk of money subject to income tax. I decided I’d rather give it to the Friends via a deductible charitable gift annuity than to just hand it over to the IRS.”

Ken’s charitable gift annuity offered a tax deduction when the annuity was donated to the Friends, and the annuity produces a monthly interest payment for him. “You get a lifetime income plus when you die, the organization—the Friends in this case—will get the principle,” says Ken.

“I like the idea that some aspect of my having been here will extend into the future when I am gone,” he notes. And Ken also believes that “nature is disappearing from our lives and it’s really important to do whatever we can to keep nature available to the public.”



Ken Brennen refuge photo by Mary ‘Karlie’ Carlson

## THANKS TO COMMUNITY SUPPORTERS!

### **Sandhill Crane \$1,000 - \$4,999**

Crystal Cabinets  
D & V Commercial Repair

### **Blanding’s Turtle \$500 - \$999**

Elk River Lions Club  
The Bank of Elk River

### **Monarch \$100 - \$499**

Bolt Hoffer Boyd Law  
Sherburne State Bank  
Diamond City Bread  
Ace Solid Waste  
Minzel Massage  
Norwegian Wood Retreat  
Phillips Distilling  
Big Lake Lions Club  
Papa’s Italian  
Slims Painting  
J T Construction  
Stoneworks Architectural Precast

### **Bluebird \$50 - \$99**

Becker True Value Hardware,  
Princeton Floral, Firehouse BBQ  
P & A Liquor, Uptown Offsale, Prai-  
rie Restorations, Inc, Bailey Ray’s,  
Chili Lime, Cub Foods, K-Bob Café,  
Thai1on Kitchen, Reynolds Balloon  
& Party, Rocks and Things

## Continued from page 1

nonprofits. In addition to keeping trails clean, Carol has collected and cleaned wildflower seeds and routinely staffs Friends events such as the fall Wildlife Festival, and she is the board's membership chair.

Carol loves the out-of-doors, feeds red squirrels from her hand, and writes poetry celebrating the refuge. Her wish to seek refuge in nature probably began with a moment that is her favorite childhood memory, watching the sun set with her mother from their dock on Lake Minnetonka. With no children of their own, Carol and Dan took their financial advisor's advice and wrote a life insurance policy with the Friends of Sherburne as beneficiary. They took a tax deduction for the initial premium and deductions for each annual premium thereafter.

But Carol admitted, laughingly, during a recent interview, "I'm not in any hurry for them to get this! My husband and I have to pass away before they get any benefit, and I'm envisioning a good chunk will go into the endowment fund, which means the Friends can get some return on the investment." And with a smile she adds, "they might name a trail after me, I don't know. But it's not up to me how the money is used because the gift is not restricted."

Why gift the Friends of Sherburne? Relationships she has with Friends members and refuge volunteers are precious to her. As are the USFWS staffers, whom she teases as she stops by refuge headquarters to check the treasurer's mailbox for income. She finds the commitment shown by volunteers and staffers is contagious. "I need the refuge," says Carol, "and so do other people. It's 30,000 acres and that's a big deal! And it needs support. The refuge staff are not allowed to fundraise, or to do advocacy with government officials. The Friends do that."

And there are also the sunsets. One of her favorite moments to be on the refuge is just before sunset. "I'll go up by the Oak Savanna Learning Center, and I can see forever," says Carol, "and I'll write poetry about the refuge."

Carol shared one of her refuge

poems with the Prairie's Edge newsletter. She submitted the poem below untitled, but we think she might have titled the poem **It Brings Me Joy**.

**Just because we are not there  
Does not mean the refuge is bare  
The wildlife will still hunt and roam  
Across the land that they call home  
The critters underneath the snow  
Were never told, they do not know  
The resting plants will still rebound  
Even with no folks around  
An eagle floats across the sky  
No one below, does he wonder why?  
But I would rather be out there  
To walk around without a care  
To see what nature is about  
It brings me joy, there is no doubt**

**Carol VanHeel**



Photo by Sherry Winter

More than 450 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>-graders and their teachers made their first of three visits to the refuge for the school year. Perfect fall weather made exploring the oak savanna, prairie, and wetland habitats an adventure. Students recorded data, listed findings, and sketched in their journals. They will be back again for a winter visit in February.

**Friends of Sherburne Annual Meeting is Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2020**

Oak Savanna Learning Center  
16797 289th Ave NW

**Schedule for the Evening**

6:15 PM – Dessert Bar and Social Time

- Activities & Prize Drawings!
- The Eagle’s Nest Nature Store will be open!

**7 PM – Business Meeting**

- 2019 Friends Accomplishments & Other Reports
- What’s Coming in 2020
- Vote to Approve 2020 Budget
- Refuge Update
- Election of Board Members

*The complete 2020 Meeting Agenda and the unapproved minutes from the 2019*

*Annual Meeting are available at Refuge Headquarters, 17076 293rd Ave NW, Zimmerman, MN 55398, and online at ExploreSherburne.org.*

**Friends’ 2020 Goal Statements**

**The Friends will partner with Sherburne NWR to support refuge conservation goals as well as to provide financial assistance to sustain nature education and experiences for adults and youth. This support includes contracting with a part-time naturalist to sustain the use of the Oak Savanna Learning Center and the Wildlife Drive for nature education and interpretation.**

**Financial support for current programs includes nature education and teacher training, busing, refuge brochures, expos, Wildlife Festival, other refuge events, and projects like the viewing blind and Wildlife Drive Welcome Station.**

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**Eagle’s Nest Nature Store Open for Holiday Shopping:**

- Saturdays, December 7 & 14, 11 am – 2 pm, Oak Savanna Learning Center

**Afternoon Snowshoe/Hike:**

- Saturday, Feb. 22, 1 – 4 pm, Oak Savanna Learning Center (event to be cancelled if inadequate snow). Snowshoes provided

**NOTE:** Snowshoe check-out at Refuge Headquarters, weekdays during business hours

**Friends Read, Thursday, April 23, 6:30 – 8 pm, Oak Savanna Learning Center**

- Book is *The Hidden Life of Trees* by Peter Wohlleben

**Bird Tours:**

- Saturday, May 9, 8 -10 am, Mahnomen Trail
- Saturday, May 16, 8 -10 am, Blue Hill Trail

**Spring Celebration & Friends Plant Sale:**

- Saturday, May 16, 10 am – 1 pm, Oak Savanna Learning Center

**Photography Opportunities:**

- Youth Photography Contest for K-12 Students
- Entries due Friday, Oct. 9, 2020. Awards Ceremony Nov. 18

**Wildflower Tour:**

- Saturday, June 13, 10 am – 12 pm, meet at Refuge Headquarters

**Wildlife Festival, Saturday, Sept. 26, 10 am – 3 pm, Oak Savanna Learning Center**

**Friends website: ExploreSherburne.org. Refuge website: fws.gov/refuge/Sherburne/**