

PRESERVING HUNTING'S FUTURE

MARTHA OLSON, JEWELL

Daughters honor father's conservation ethic with youth hunting area

These 210 acres of Winnebago County farmland have provided for the Holland family since the 1870s, and now the family is returning the favor. They enrolled the entire farm in the Wetland Reserve Program and partnered with the Winnebago County Conservation Board (CCB) to manage 140 acres as a youth hunting and education area. Herbert Holland lived on the farm northeast of Leland for more than 70 years, passing his conservation ethic on to his children, including Martha Olson of Jewell. "Father was always a very good steward of the land. Because the land provided for him, he wanted to protect the land the best he could," she says. That respect led him to preserve native oak savannas, plant all tilled areas to tall grasses 20 years ago, protect the stretch of the Winnebago River that flows through the farm and restore wetlands. "You can see the family has a real attachment to it and wants to see it preserved for future generations," says Winnebago CCB Director Robert Schwartz, who points out that the land is nice wildlife habitat, too. "The land has been resting and we've seen an influx of wildlife return, things we never saw as youth growing up," says Olson, who's observed deer, wild turkey, pheasant, Canada geese, waterfowl and eagles. That set up the opportunity for Olson and her sister, Diane Rickerl of South Dakota, to use the land for local youth, creating the Holland Prairie Conservation and Youth Hunting Area. "We thought there was a need for inexperienced young hunters to have safe hunt experiences and to have the land there as a teaching tool," she says. Only one group (including a mentor) is allowed to hunt at a time—visit winnebagoccb.com to apply for a hunting slot.



MONARCH MATRIARCH

DELORES MASER, OKOBOJI

Friend to migrating monarchs also promotes the outdoors and education to children

Delores Maser is northwest Iowa's official Butterfly Benefactor. She's the original founder of the Dickinson County Monarch Butterfly Festival. As initial attendance increased and the festival quickly outgrew its single tent facility, Maser donated the money for construction and development of the now popular Butterfly House which today holds a complete monarch nursery, microscopes for young scientists and other educational aids. According to current festival organizers, Maser was instrumental in establishing the site's permanent butterfly garden where monarchs come to lay eggs and caterpillars feed on a diet of milkweed leaves. She was key in developing the registered Monarch Way Station where late summer and fall migrants pause to refuel on their way to Mexico. "Environmental education is so very important," says Maser. "When I was young, kids were more aware of the natural world. We used to play in the dirt. Today, it's all plastic. Kids are losing touch with the world around them. People have worked hard and it's really been thrilling to watch the festival grow into what it is today," she adds. "To see all these children arrive here with their parents is very gratifying. We hope what they learn here will help kids become more aware of and sensitive to nature." —BY LOWELL WASHBURN

CREATING STEWARDS OF THE LAND

DICK JENSEN, ELGIN

Fayette County farmer buys land, creates programs to connect kids with nature

The famous Field of Dreams may be a couple of counties over, but the "if you build it, they will come" mantra is driving one Fayette County farmer to carve out his own piece of heaven. In 2000, Dick Jensen bought several miles of old railroad land, including three miles along a trout stream, in the hopes he could help kids and adults reconnect with the land. "Kids are burning more kilowatts than calories today. We have children who really haven't been outside—even playgrounds are synthetic," says Jensen. "I could provide a scenic hiking area, where young folks could have a meaningful immersion in nature." While hundreds of school kids from the county have traveled to his farm for field days for years, he founded Take A Kid Outdoors in 2006 to help kids become good stewards through programs. Each September, third graders learn about trout, forestry, erosion and more. He works with the Fish Iowa! program to take kids fishing. High school students make wren houses, job-shadow soil scientists, plant trees and learn to use Global Positioning Systems. "His drive to get people outdoors is never-ending. He practices what he preaches with how he has applied conservation to his own farms," says Jerry Muff, Fayette County District Conservationist. Jensen, a Fayette Soil and Water Conservation District commissioner, has worked on conservation issues, donating land for parks and developing the Echo Valley Educational Nature Trail along Otter Creek. www.takeakidoutdoors.org

