

Town of Lake Mills properties given to Land Trust Network

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LAKE MILLS — The Land Trust Network, a nonprofit land conservation organization originating in Jefferson County, has received two separate donations to protect lands in the Town of Lake Mills.

One property consists of 10 acres along the north side of Rock Lake, donated to the Land Trust Network by Peter Jordan and Margot Peters, both Lake Mills residents. The other is a 19-acre farm at the corner of Highways B and V in Lake Mills owned by Marilyn Nelson.

Jordan moved to Lake Mills from Summit, N.J., in 1981, shortly before he and Peters, a Lake Mills resident since 1973, were married. They live in an 1888 Victorian home in the City of Lake Mills, but also had purchased the 10-acre property at the north end of Rock Lake because "it was a beautiful tract of woodland with fine views of Rock Lake and 400 feet of DNR-protected shoreline," Peters said.

For many years, they enjoyed hiking, picnicking and exercising their collies on this Rock Lake property, but for the past few years, they found themselves using the property less.

They said that as they thought of selling the land, they were discouraged when the only prospective buyers were developers who wanted to turn the property into condominiums land. Wanting to have this beautiful place protected, they decided to dedicate the hillside and shoreline to something better and more enduring, thus donating the entire 10 acres to the Land Trust Network for its protection.

Born in Wausau, Margot Peters has lived in Wisconsin all her life, earning bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, then teaching Victorian literature, linguistics and women's studies at UW-Whitewater until 1991. She is the author of 10 books, most recently "Design for Living: Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne," "Summers: A True Love Story," and "Lorine Niedecker: A Poet's Life."

Peters served on the L.D. Fargo Public Library Board in Lake Mills for many years and is a board member of the Arts Alliance of Greater Lake Mills and the Friends of Lorine Niedecker. At her home in the City of Lake Mills, her large perennial garden is a passion, as are collies and Persian cats, reading and, above all, her family: son Marc Peters, daughter Claire Peters, and granddaughter Violet.

Peter Jordan grew up in Short Hills, N.J., attended Harvard University and the University of Denver, and for many years followed his family's customary profession: independent securities speculation.

"There weren't many other options," said Peter.

In the 1970s, Peter began to collect early books printed before 1700. Six years ago, wanting to provide for the future safekeeping of his library, he arranged with two Grinnell College librarians to donate all his books to the college in installments over a period of years.

The Land Trust Network's second protected property is a 19-acre farm located on the corner of County Highways B and V in Lake Mills owned by Marilyn Nelson, and is protected in perpetuity by the Land Trust Network with a conservation easement.

Seeing the rapid growth of Lake Mills along Interstate 94, Nelson said, she realized that she needed to protect her farm from future development and placed a conservation easement on her property in 2013.

This century-old farm now is protected from residential, commercial and industrial development. Nelson still owns the land, but has donated her right to develop it, so this farm will remain a farm for future generations to enjoy.

Her mother was the last of the Sander children whose family had owned the farm since the early 1900s. Nelson is the third generation of Sanders to own the farm, which was deeded to her by her mother in 1990. Nelson began restoration of the house in 1993.

She grew up in Lake Mills, but lived in Oconto Falls for more than 30 years. There, she raised her three children and worked as a school psychologist and special education administrator.

Nelson said that in 2010, when she moved back to her family's farm in Lake Mills, she was saddened to see the deterioration of the farmland and outbuildings and decided to use her own savings to repair the property. It was her dream since a child to live on the family farm and she said she hopes that those who own the farm after her will appreciate the beauty and history of the land and buildings.

Nelson received help in restoring the land and buildings from local residents, including Brad Hering, Steve Tilton, Marvin and Steve Homann, Jerry Sawyer, Don Jaeger, Schuman Construction, Bruce Kopp and Steve Kube, all of whom share Nelson's love of her farm.

In addition, Nelson was encouraged with the farm's restoration by the many passersby who stopped to say hello and to tell her how beautiful the buildings looked.

"The Land Trust Network is honored to be able to help these landowners preserve the natural resources in Lake Mills, which benefits everyone," stated Martine Koeppel, a certified public accountant, a Lake Mills High School graduate and chairwoman of the Land Trust Network.

The Land Trust Network currently holds 25 conservation easements that are held in public trust and monitored by the land trust, which permanently protects more than 4,000 acres of Wisconsin's natural resources in eight counties.

Donations of land and conservation easements made to the Land Trust Network allows landowners to receive tax deductions for their donations.

For information on the Land Trust Network's land protection programs and to read about their completed land conservation projects, visit www.landtrustnetwork.org.

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