

M.J. Rhymer Nature Preserve 2019 Annual Report

April 9, 2019 7 p.m. meeting

In accordance with the terms of the Resolution Delegating Responsibility for the M.J. Rhymer Family Dry Grove Nature Preserve (as approved by the Dry Grove Township Supervisor and Trustees on March 8, 2011), the Board of the M.J. Rhymer Family Dry Grove Nature Preserve presents this annual report to the Dry Grove Township Board and Electors.



History and overview of the Preserve. The Rhymer Nature Preserve, located at 3210 W. Northtown Road in Normal, Illinois, gifted to Dry Grove Township in 2006 from Ione Rhymer and Phillip Rhymer, two of M.J. Rhymer's children. The gift included 15 acres of land, the Rhymer home, a large metal shed, and about 60 species of mature trees and shrubs the Rhymer family planted around their house. The gift included \$100,000 for the start of the Preserve. In 2011, the Preserve became an Illinois not-for-profit corporation with a volunteer Board of Directors that led the management of operations of the Preserve. The Board, in partnership with individuals and groups in the community along with state and federal agencies, has continued to enhance and develop the Preserve in accordance with the vision of the Rhymer gift.

The Preserve Board meets at 5 p.m. on the first Thursday of the month (except in January) at the Workforce Development Center (WDC) and Industrial Technology Office of Heartland Community College. In better weather, Board meetings have been held at the Preserve. The Board meets at least 6 times per year.

The 2018-19 current Board of Directors and officers are: Hank Campbell (Chair), Randi Knoll (Vice Chair & Secretary), Bernie Knoll (Treasurer), and Directors Steve Bostic, Helen Claver and Kent Wurmnest. David Weth and Jordan Weth served three months of 2018 then chose to leave the Board.

The Preserve has been financially self-supporting. Dry Grove Township maintains liability insurance on its properties, so the Township assists the Preserve for such coverage. During past years, the Preserve property has been developed by

prudent stewardship by its Board without reliance on support from either Dry Grove Township or McLean County. Monthly rental income from the Rhymer residence has been beneficial. Of greater note were cash and in-kind donations for trees, shrubs, flowers, utility costs, benches, a shelter, parking area, trails and signs, memorial markers and legacy trees in the Children's and Elders Groves. Legacy trees are sponsored by \$175.00 donations to the Preserve for each tree. Grants from organizations, agencies, companies, schools and many work hours from individual volunteers added to the Preserve's development.

In 2013, with the approval of the Dry Grove Township Supervisor and Trustees, the Preserve Board established Fund accounts with the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation (IPCF) in Bloomington, IL. The Preserve's funds are a part of Illinois Prairie's professionally managed portfolio. The treasurer submits approved bills to the Foundation to be paid. All rent monies are sent directly to IPCF for deposit. The return on the funds since that time has been modest. Typically, yearly distributions on the Endowed account are reinvested back into the account. Because Illinois Prairie is a 501(c)(3) organization, donations made to the Rhymer Preserve are tax-deductible. Audits of the Rhymer accounts including deposits, donations and expenses are done by IPCF. In the spirit of open disclosure, the Rhymer Nature Preserve Funds at IPCF totaled \$108,360.00 as of 3-31-19 with all bills paid.

Since the inception of the Preserve substantial monies have been spent to develop the Preserve's tall-grass prairie, pond, extensive tree groves, grassy play area and parking lot and numerous special projects, while maintaining the house, shed and property.

There is little doubt that consistent focus has been on the Mission and Vision of the Rhymer Nature Preserve while being good stewards of resources. This has been to the credit of past Board members, many, many volunteers and supportive partnerships with the Preserve.

The current Board carried out the following Preserve improvements during the 2018 calendar year. Selected activities at the Preserve are also noted.

- A burning of the Dale Berkenholtz Tall Grass Prairie and surrounding cattails of the pond. Due to an unexpected wind, the fire jumped the bank of the

pond on the west side causing fire to spread into the bean stubble field of Dan Kelly. The Carlock Fire Protection group showed up controlled the spread and extinguished the creeping fire. They said they appreciated the 'practice' and a chance to check out the equipment. The Board forwarded a \$300 'Thank you' donation to the Carlock Fire Department.

- Cal Williams now records tree locations and tracks the labeling of dedicated trees in the C&E Groves. Eight new donors requested tree designations at the Preserve. Tree signage was updated throughout the Preserve. Corn Belt Electric Coop chose the Rhymer Preserve as the place to plant trees to honor retirees and families for their service.
- A tree and sign were dedicated as a tribute to Donna Taylor, a long-time employee at Illinois State University associated with the athletic department. Forty-five people attended a dedication ceremony.
- The exterior of the house was primed, painted and trimmed. Woodpecker holes were filled-in and damaged solid siding was repaired or replaced.
- Two dead trees and stumps were removed near the house. Selected shrubs were either removed or effectively trimmed around the house. Areas surrounding the house were designed and landscaped with washed rock over a liner and a mortared brick edge. Plants were planted and arranged in areas within the rocks surrounding the house.
- The driveway leading to the house and garage was graded and graveled. A walkway to the front door may be added.
- Improvements to the shed were approved by the Board including running power to the shed and picnic shelter. Also spreading gravel inside the shed to replace the dirt floor. This work may be accomplished by summer, 2019.
- After a 9 year stay, the tenants have moved from the house. Common maintenance issues were identified and will be completed before the house is leased and occupied.
- A contract for mowing areas of the Preserve is in place for the next 2 years. The areas of the C&E Groves are mowed about 3 times a season by volunteers and with their equipment. This helps to control the weeds and provides inviting access for visitors and C&E families and friends to visit their trees and walk the marked trails around the Preserve. The waterway and North and East field boundaries are mowed by a volunteer.

- Volunteers prune trees, spray for weeds and mulch around trees. Mulch has been donated by Flynn Tree Service.
- Boy Scout Troop 19 had a campout at the Preserve September 15-16, 2018 with tents erected among the C&E trees. The Story Circle with the rustic sundial was a good gathering place for the troop. Service projects completed were mulching the swing area, the old wagon area and a good number of C&E trees.
- Bernie Knoll, a printing professional and Board member, designed and printed attractive business cards identifying the Rhymer Nature Preserve and each Board member with their phone number and email address. Cards are available for each in attendance.

The M.J. Rhymer Family Nature Preserve a positive asset for all citizens of Dry Grove Township and throughout McLean County. The Board of the M.J. Rhymer Family Nature Preserve encourages all Dry Grove Township Supervisors to be supportive of your Nature Preserve and its future growth and development. Bring your friends and families for a visit. Relax, enjoy and appreciate this great gift!

Thank you for the time and opportunity to present our annual report.

Submitted by: M.J. Rhymer Family Nature Preserve Board

Hank Campbell, Chair of the Board