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Lawrence Couple Adds to Future City Nature Park With a Conservation Easement to KLT

By Laurie Ward

In 1990, Francis Kelly and Cheri Varvil bought 15 acres of "beauty, peace, and quiet." The Lawrence couple thought they might one day need to sell the land to help generate retirement income. They also dreamed of the land being saved as a nature preserve. Then, owing to efforts by Bob and Betty Lichtwardt and the City of Lawrence, they saw a golden opportunity they could not pass up. Their land lay in northwest Lawrence, near that of the Lichtwardts who had for years promoted preservation along with urban planning. "We have a lot of admiration for the Lichtwardts and what they have done," said Cheri. "They educated us," added Francis.

Following Bob and Betty's example, Francis and Cheri decided to donate a conservation easement to the Kansas Land Trust on 14 acres of their property. Subsequently, they sold that land--with its easement restrictions--to the City of Lawrence for a future park. Their easement prohibits development except for allowing a small parking lot, picnic tables, and trash barrels to serve visitors to the trail park.

Francis and Cheri retained ownership on a two-acre parcel which includes their residence, where they have lived since 1984. Francis writes under the name of Frank Lingo and delivers the *New York Times*; Cheri, a Licensed Specialist Clinical Social Worker, has worked as a social worker in the Topeka Public Schools for 22 years.

Francis explained that he and Cheri wanted to protect the land, because they believe there is a shortage of natural land and wildlife around the Lawrence area. He said he thinks it's important for people just to know it's there.

The field and steep, wooded slopes, now owned by the city, are home to deer, coyotes, snakes, bobcat, wild turkey, and other birds and animals, as well as regularly visited by flocks of migrating birds. Francis describes the Baldwin Creek cliffs as "Ozark-like" in appearance. He hopes those who will use the new public land will appreciate its fragility.

Francis and Cheri are sure Lawrence will grow around these recently set-aside wildlands. "It will be nice not to have to travel far to get out in nature," Francis said. They both have the highest praise for Lawrence city officials for being willing to pay for property with restricted use. They say it's not a matter of not trusting the people presently there, but many years hence, under different pressures, some might not act in the land's best interest, unless compelled by the conservation easement--now held by the KLT and to be watched over beyond the lifetime of every Lawrence citizen alive today.