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### **Conservation Pioneers Preserve Douglas County Woodland and Savannah**

By Sondra McCoy and Laurie Ward

In late 2001, Bob and Betty Lichtwardt, Lawrence, donated a conservation easement to the Kansas Land Trust on 37 of their 40 acres of rugged, heavily forested Douglas County land and then made a donation of the entire 40 acres to the City of Lawrence for a future park.

This story actually began unfolding much earlier--in 1957, the year the Lichtwardts moved from Iowa to Lawrence for Bob, a mycologist, to accept a position of assistant professor of botany at the University of Kansas. The Lichtwardts bought the rural property in 1958, a time when the only nearby natural areas open to the public were Lone Star Lake and Douglas County Lake. Bob and Betty decided to purchase their own natural area--the 40 acres now owned by the city--for hiking and opportunities to be outdoors. In addition to mycology, over the years at KU Bob taught courses in general botany and biology until his retirement as professor in 1995.

Betty, also with a background in biology, and a concern for conservation, found urban planning to be a logical interest and has worked as a "citizen activist" since the early 1960s, primarily with land-use committees of the League of Women Voters. Four decades ago, the city was developing a comprehensive plan which gave Betty an "initial education" in planning.

"Because of this woodlot," said Betty, "we made an immediate connection between urban planning and preservation. We knew the land could be destroyed due to the intense development pressure that was bound to come as the city grew."

Betty said she has learned that it is essential to coordinate environmental goals with urban planning. "Environmentalists need to look at the whole picture rather than concentrate on separate issues which come and go; urban planning is ongoing. It brings all of the issues together and provides solutions for public benefit, provided the public is involved."

Betty would like to see a division of environmental planning in local government land use planning departments, and regional planning that avoids urban sprawl. "We should keep our growth compact but at the same time plan our city to preserve fragile land and natural areas. Once such land is destroyed, it's gone forever."

The completion of the conservation easement and the transference of the land to the city culminates more than ten years of association between the Lichtwardts and the Kansas Land Trust. From the date of its founding in 1990 until 1992, volunteers with KLT worked to pass the Uniform Conservation Easement Act in Kansas, and Bob and Betty assisted in the effort by contacting legislators in support of the bill. In making their case, they explained that they had spent many years considering how to preserve their own tract of land perpetually in its natural state and concluded that the provisions in the conservation easement bill appeared to offer the best answer.

Once the bill became law, Bob and Betty began studying the process of donating a conservation easement with KLT representatives. Pledging to donate their 40 acres to the city, they also encouraged city officials to acquire additional adjacent land as a buffer,

never imagining that the city would be so successful or so lucky (see related articles). "We really owe a lot to Fred DeVictor (director of Lawrence's Parks and Recreation Department) and Mike Wildgen (city manager) for pulling this off, and to the city commissions involved during this time," Betty said.

"Bob and Betty Lichtwardt are land conservation pioneers in Kansas," said donna luckey, president of the KLT Board of Directors. "They were among the first to join the Kansas Land Trust as members and to contact us as landowners offering to protect their property with a conservation easement in perpetuity."

The Lichtwardts did not touch the land in terms of development nor did they alter it in any way, except for a dam repair, in the 44 years they owned it. The land features steep contours, limestone outcroppings, and a wide variety of trees--including oak, hickory, and redbud. Abundant species of native grasses and plants grow in the woods and savannah, the latter ecosystem rare for Douglas County. As well, a large number of mammalian and bird species rely on the woodland for habitat.

The Lichtwardts' easement promotes the health of the Baldwin Creek watershed by restricting all development on the property except for unpaved trails. Because of rapid runoff on the land which can lead to erosion, no vehicles of any kind, including bicycles, are allowed. The unique, future trail park promises to be a wonderful place to walk in nature, away from city roads and sidewalks.

The Lichtwardts hope that everyone will appreciate the land's "ecological value to the community" as well as enjoy the wooded open space. "It's a sign of the times that the city is participating in land preservation," said Betty. "We are very grateful that the city is willing to do this," she said. "They thank us, but we really thank them.

"Our primary goal ever since we moved here was to preserve this land," noted Betty. "I can't tell you how grateful we are that the Kansas Land Trust exists. It takes the responsibility off of us for monitoring the property. After we're gone, KLT will still be here."