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KISHWAUKETOE

NATURE CONSERVANCY

Signal the Drumbat of Your Soul at Kishwauketoe

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Signal The Drumbeat Of Your Soul At Kishwauketoe Nature Conservancy



by
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We must protect our forests for our children, grandchildren, and children yet to be born. We must protect the forests for those who cannot speak for themselves, such as the birds, animals, fish and trees.

Qwatsinas

Escape is closer than you think. In fact, it's quietly nestled within Williams Bay, WI, just off the busy shores of Geneva Lake. If you are approaching the beach, you will start to see wooden signs peeking out between tall blades of grass. Look closer and you will see the words Kishwauketoe Nature Conservancy, KNC for short. What is this place you ask? Well, just park the car or walk straight into one of the best-kept secrets in all of Southeast Wisconsin. Here, you can find so many relaxing ways to leave the world behind.

Enjoy the rolling creeks and calm ponds. Or marvel at lush vegetation that have fun names such as Wild Geranium, Angelica, Tall Meadow Rue, Jack-In-The-Pulpit, and May Apple. Stroll along a boardwalk that hovers above a wetland. Explore the oak woods, deciduous forest, and vast prairie. Walk, run, or simply meander through the property that spans 230 acres, and reinvent yourself in nature. Uncover the unexpected on one of the many trails taking you through various areas of mindfully planted species of Sedges, grasses, and hardwood trees. Indulge in bird or critter watching, as this area attracts over 28 different varieties of birds (most notably the impressive Turkey Vulture), along with deer, coyote, fox, raccoon, and opossum.

I had the good fortune of walking parts of this vast parcel of land with an incredible nature enthusiast and the most recognizable face of Kishwauketoe Nature Conservancy: Chairman, Harold Friestad.

Harold is also Vice President and General Manager of Geneva Lake

Cruise Line, employed with them for the past 53 years, literally having his office on a boat docked at The Riviera in downtown Lake Geneva.

"To be able to go out into Kishwauketoe is a totally different world, mentally you could not have a better balance. It's funny, most people here tend to look at the lake, I tend to look at Kishwauketoe because I've been on the water all day."

For countless years, Harold and his dedicated staff of volunteers have carefully cleared, planted, groomed, pulled, cleared, and planted again, countless native species of trees and varieties of plantings to create this one-of-a-kind oasis. Harold explained that this is the most important work that they can do for Kishwauketoe and it's future.

"Getting it totally restored, having it be the best nature center in Southeast Wisconsin, if not all of Wisconsin is my hope," stated Harold.

"We operate 100% on donations and volunteers, so we need people to get out there and see what a wonderful site it is...to have a conservancy right on the shores of Geneva Lake."

"Prescribed Burns" as they are called, are extremely necessary. One hundred fifty years ago, when Native Americans lived here, prairie, wetland, and woodland fires were quite common. They purposely were set to create better grazing grounds and to help with their hunting. Because of this, the ecosystems thrived within the intermittent fires. Burning encourages the regrowth of healthy species while keeping invasive and unwanted species, such as female box elder and buckthorn down. They also have to take into careful consideration what plants thrive, taking a cue from what would have grown on the land at the time the Potawatomi lived here. The staff also knows where and how to plant them so that they take hold for many years to come. In fact, talking about the future was a big part of my tour with Harold. He explained that it is

his hope that the dedication put in now will provide the conservancy with the longevity it needs to thrive for many generations to come, affirming, "I'm a person who believes parks should be used."

Noting that while it is important to have rules and regulations of decorum throughout the center, it is more important to respect the land, which in turn makes people appreciate it even more.

The land on which Kishwauketoe sits was purchased in 1989, and formerly dedicated as a protected conservancy on July 6th, 1990, "To The Children of Tomorrow."

It is steeped in Native American history as the Potawatomi people, also called "Keepers of the Sacred Fire or The True People", once inhabited the area.

The name Kishwauketoe was selected because of its Potawatomi origin, and is loosely translated as "Clear Water" or "Lake of the Sparkling Water." This is a perfect fit for a place that encompasses the beauty of Geneva Lake along with the lush and expansive pockets of nature.

One of the main goals of KNC is to provide habitat for wood duck, wading birds and a variety of amphibians. There is evidence to support that there is a global decline in amphibian populations which has become a noted environmental issue, and one that KNC acknowledges as a challenge to help reverse the process.

The staff has also taken into consideration the sheer logistics of making your way around the property safely and comfortably by building strong, wooden slat boardwalks that cover and protect marshy wetlands and eco systems while providing seamless walking and running trails, as well as creating spaces for gathering, such as a shelter with seating, or being able to just gaze onto the prairie atop a lookout tower. It has been through a steadfast vision and a strong work ethic that Kishwauketoe Nature

Conservancy has become the ecologic gem it is today.

A thriving program was put in place to offer high school and college students the opportunity to intern by helping to maintain the expansive property and learn as they go. And as well, community members lend a hand by also being a part of workdays and gatherings.

When Harold had previously been Williams Bay Village President, he formed two important committees. One was the "Conservancy Commission" which handles all of the restoration and overseeing of physical work, and the second committee was "Friends of Kishwauketoe", which is a fundraising group. The "Friends" are folks who donate \$1000.00 annually and also help to attain grants for future projects. Harold commented with a grin, "You can more easily get grants for restoration, but people have a harder time giving money for maintenance, which is equally important work. We are forever seeking more friends to continue the process, as nature abhors a void."

It isn't hard to see how the hard work continues to pay off. While walking the property, Harold pointed out just how many spots of interest there are, and I couldn't believe the magnitude of the area, and how gracefully it all winds around and eventually culminates back to the beginning.

It is important to note that trail maps are available at the entrance, as well as the ability to download PDF maps from their website. KNC also offers a hearty line up of things to do year round as well.

There is no excuse to say no to nature when the calendar says otherwise. You can either get out alone or with a friend to casually walk the trails, or seek various group activities or organized tours to see the place.

Upcoming events are Arbor Day festivities on April 26th, all season hikes, Kishwauketoe Kids Camp in the summer for ages 4 to 12, a 5k Run/Walk on July 6th, and a variety of specialty nature workshops too.

The Williams Bay Recreation Department has also been getting involved by pairing with KNC to provide other classes that take place throughout the summer. Be sure to watch for the upcoming dates as the weather takes us into the warmer months for the kids.

Weddings and events of all kinds are encouraged to take advantage of all that KNC has to offer. I couldn't think of a more beautiful sight for wedding photographs!

Located across from Williams Bay Beach, Kishwauketoe sits nestled within the corners of Hwy. 67 (also called Elkhorn Road) and Harris Road. There are two convenient entrances at both locations which provide four miles of trails offering an up close and personal look at all the conservancy has to offer.

Remember that there are many ways to get involved with KNC, for further information about this and future events, contact them on the web at: www.kncwb.org

It is certainly the hope of Harold, his staff, and the land of Kishwauketoe itself to keep the invitation open for all to visit. I know that I certainly felt the power of the outdoors as I stood on the lookout tower while gazing onto the prairie. I believe that nature signals the drumbeat of our souls, reminding us to acknowledge all that nature has to offer us in a deeper and more profound way. It is a gift we can give to ourselves by going out into the woods and holding our face to the sun, while being thankful for that which has been bestowed upon us through the experience of connecting to the earth, the streams, the rocks, and the trees...