



the Meadowlark

A PUBLICATION FROM BELWIN CONSERVANCY

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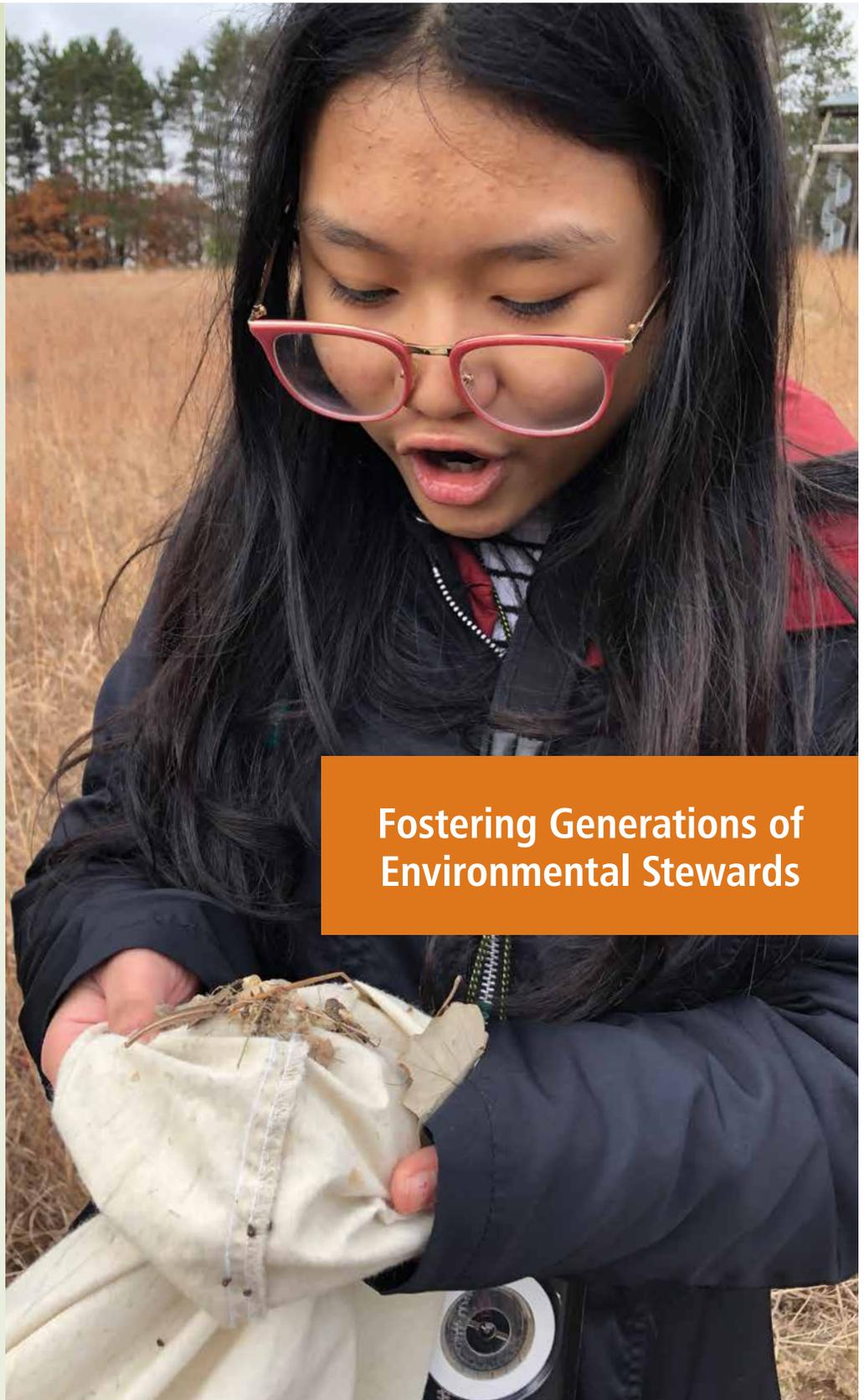


Fun Fact:

Goldenrod (*Solidago* sp.)
is nothing to sneeze at.
Beautiful yellow blooms bring color and texture to fall and winter prairies. As many as 34 different insect species pollinate it.
Ragweed, on the other hand, blooms at about the same time and produces tremendous amounts of wind-borne pollen, known to allergy sufferers everywhere.



**BELWIN
CONSERVANCY**
Inspiring through Nature



**Fostering Generations of
Environmental Stewards**



Guided By Our Values

I SPENT A FORMATIVE PART OF MY ADOLESCENCE AT A CAMP ON THE EDGE OF THE BOUNDARY WATERS.

Surrounded by nature and a supportive camp “family,” I found self-confidence, leadership skills, and the first expressions of some of my core beliefs. Environmental stewardship, community kinship, and persistent progress are values that still shape my personal and professional life.

As I write this, Belwin is going through an organizational adolescence. We're in a time of transition, expanding programs and reach, while our community and supporters develop and grow with us.

As we approach our 50-year anniversary, we are refining our focus for Belwin's next stage, defining who we are and what we believe.

Last May, Belwin's staff and board gathered to discuss strategic direction and values. We identified six values that reflect Belwin's past and will continue to guide us forward.

Collaboration is at the core of everything Belwin does. We were founded through a partnership with Saint Paul Public Schools, hold conservation easements with the Minnesota Land Trust, and work with the Minnesota Astronomical Society to

share the wonders of the cosmos. Our commitment to **Immersion** — the idea that a person's connection to nature will be deepened by experiences in the outdoors — is central to these and our other partnerships.

In all of our programs and conservation work, we put **Ecological Integrity** at the forefront, believing biodiversity and natural functions are nature's greatest strengths. We commit to set the example for others through our restoration, protection, and environmental education decisions.

Belwin Outdoor Science is home to an adaptive program where all kids, regardless of ability, can participate in science and outdoor exploration. **Inclusion** and **Innovation** have impacted our origins and will be vital to our future. These values will help us grow as we seek out new partnerships and develop our arts and culture program.

Woven through all of these values is **Stewardship** for the land, our community, wildlife, and all people. We must foster the next generation of environmental stewards to care for the earth and value our natural world, from the smallest snow fleas to soaring eagles, and the complex web of life in between.

It's hard to believe that, at almost 50, Belwin might still be growing, but this is a positive sign that we're embracing change. We're like a teenager on the cusp of college or a career: excited for our future, open to possibility, yet still connected to our roots.

Clear values will guide our strategic direction and help us build a strong community of staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters. As Belwin matures, I'm excited to see what we accomplish together.



Katie Bloome

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Cover photo: Courtesy of Belwin Outdoor Science; Goldenrod by Greg Seitz. Photos: Property of Belwin Conservancy. Opposite: By Greg Seitz.

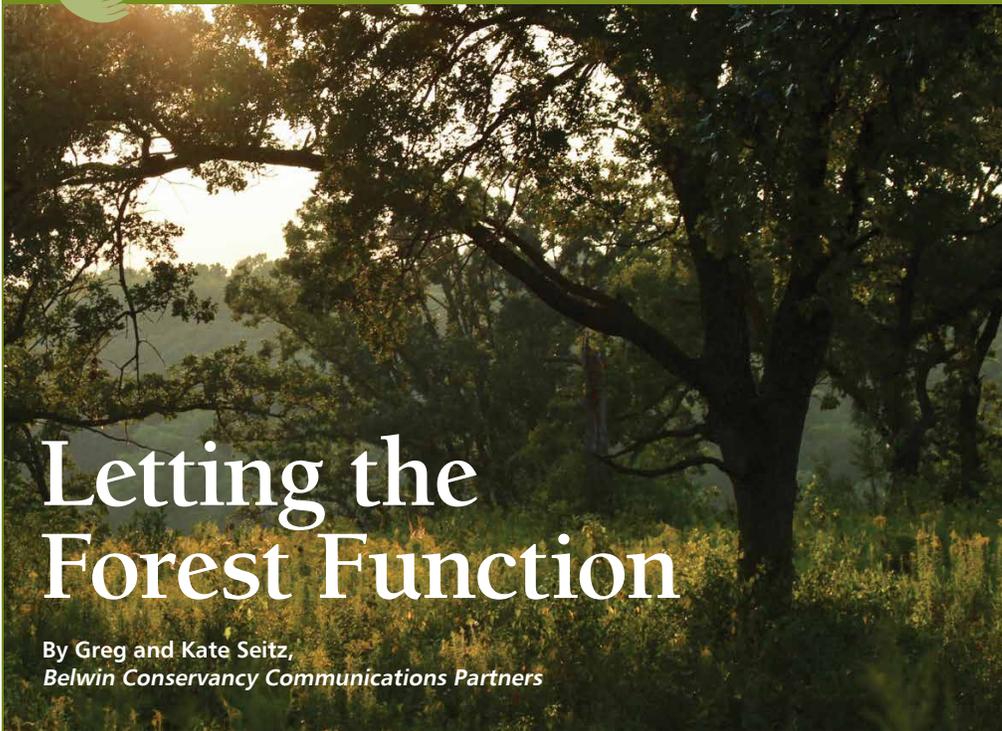
SPOTTED IN THE WILD

The Stillwater Trolley made a stop at the Bison Observation Platform last August as part of the first Art Trolley Adventure Tour, which was organized by Wahoo! Adventures and ArtReach St. Croix. Guests were treated to lunch, bison viewing, and guided haiku writing before heading to other unique St. Croix Valley destinations for behind-the-scenes tours and hands-on arts activities.



Two large honeysuckle shrub root balls were no match for Sherri Buss and Neil Soltis (pictured). Both are recently retired and were looking for somewhere to “work hard outside,” according to Sherri. Last summer, the pair cleared invasives next to the Creative Center building, removing the root balls along with nettle, prickly ash, and burdock.

Thank you, Sherri and Neil!



Letting the Forest Function

By Greg and Kate Seitz,
Belwin Conservancy Communications Partners

THREE YEARS AGO, the first member event at the Creative Center was held on a hot July night. About 75 people walked along a bluff where a patch of oak savanna had recently been cleared of buckthorn. The views eastward, down to Lake Edith and into Wisconsin, stunned the guests who didn't know the land contained such hidden gems.

Since 2003, the Belwin team has been working to clear the Creative Center's 239 acres of buckthorn and other invasives, all with the goal of restoring the land to pre-settlement oak savanna and welcoming the public in to enjoy it.

Now, a major new grant from the state of Minnesota will enable Belwin to complete the initial large-scale invasive removal work at the Creative Center. Over the next three years, with \$163,650 funded by the 2008 Legacy Amendment, Belwin will clear 130 wooded acres of buckthorn and other invasive plants. This will restore diversity and balance to the ecosystem, and the area will be left in a state that Belwin's staff can maintain far into the future.

"We're excited about finally getting to a stage in this project where we're turning from fighting invasives to having a conversation about how we're going to bring the public in to enjoy this space," says Justin Sykora, Belwin Conservancy Operations Director.

Interpretive Naturalist Lynette Anderson and Program Director Susan Haugh have already been developing special programming that celebrates the diverse landscape at the Creative Center. Bird hike attendees trek through the wetland and into the oak savanna; resident artist Rory Wakemup is using buckthorn to create his installation on the site; and Women Walking participants meander along mowed trails and sit beside a campfire in quiet contemplation.

Randy Thoreson, an Afton resident and retired National Park Service employee, recently visited the Creative Center for the first time. "It's stunningly beautiful. I was blown away by the beauty of the site and the variety of landscapes within it," he says.

Removing invasive species will do more than enhance the visitor experience. The Belwin team expects removing buckthorn and non-native grasses to reduce erosion, benefitting Valley Creek, Lake Edith, and wetlands downstream from the property.

After invasive species are removed, a forest understory of many different types of plants will have a root system that holds soil and water.

"We're working now to give native species a chance to acquire enough volume to out-compete the invasives," says Anderson. "Warm season grasses like big bluestem can

Give to the Max this November 14!

Belwin relies on your generous support to protect land, restore habitat, care for threatened species, and teach about the importance of nature. Give to the Max Day is your chance to have a big impact on our work.

Belwin's Board of Directors will match all gifts during Give to the Max, doubling the impact of your contribution. Join, renew, or give an additional gift and see your dollars protect habitat and wildlife.

give TO THE **MAX** 
NOV. 14, 2019

What	Give to the Max
When	All gifts made November 1–14 will count!
How	Donate online at belwin.org/support or mail a check to 1553 Stagecoach Trail S., Afton, MN 55001
Why	To help Belwin restore and preserve important habitat.
Bonus	Your donation will be matched, doubling your impact!

now grow a little higher than their invasive counterparts; they can start to crowd out cool-season invasives like foxtail."

—
Read an extended version of this article with more details about our plans online at belwin.org.

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Belwin would like to thank the Conservation Partners Legacy Grant Program of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for funding our restoration project at the Creative Center Management Area.





ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE:

Alumni in the Public Eye

By Susan Haugh, Program Director

ONE NEVER KNOWS WHAT WILL COME FROM AN ARTIST RESIDENCY. In the moment, a resident and their host may share a richness of dialogue and new perspectives, but no one can predict what will emerge. Like ecological processes, the creative process requires time.

2019 saw the impact of two previous Belwin residencies emerge in two very public ways: Tamsie Ringler's *Still Life* was exhibited at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) and Laurie Allmann's collection of poems, *An Hour from Now*, was published by Nodin Press.

In *Still Life*, Ringler says she "explores the duality of the still life, an art genre that celebrates pleasure even as it warns about the shortness of life." Ringler's compositions "place familiar objects [a car, a canoe, a table] alongside natural forms cast in iron, like the Mississippi watershed and the ground at Belwin, to form a sculptural still life in the gallery." Tamsie's residency at Belwin took place in the winter of 2016-2017.

Laurie Allmann was the first artist to have a residency at Belwin. Between the spring equinox and summer solstice of 2016, she immersed herself in the natural world at Belwin. The spring poems in *An Hour from Now* were written while at Belwin and the book features the cover art "Cormorant Chorus" by Vera Ming Wong (you may know of Wong from her bison design for Belwin's T-shirts).

We are excited to see what comes of this year's artist in residence, Rory Wakemup, a visual artist and ephemeral sculptor who is working with our region's tenacious invasive, buckthorn.

Belwin is a place where arts, culture, and ecology are nurtured and allowed to germinate over time.

As we continue to explore different forms of arts and culture, we look to our work on the land for inspiration and purpose.



Tamsie Ringler (second from right) gave the Belwin team a tour of her exhibit *Still Life* at Mia last winter.

Belwin Conservancy: What was important to you about your time at Belwin?

Tamsie Ringler: The realization that we think we have to work at nature, and spending time in nature — but we are nature.

Laurie Allmann: It was wonderful to have a dedicated period of time to devote my attention fully to the wild landscapes of Belwin. I was most often alone, and could be completely immersed in what I saw. Some days I'd walk for miles, other days I'd barely move, depending on what I encountered. It wasn't so much about

intentionally translating that experience into poetry but about the depth of the experience itself, which — for me — naturally expresses itself in poetry. Belwin made that possible.

BC: What would you like people to know about artist residencies?

TR: Residencies are an opportunity to reconsider your humanity and the role of your artistic practice within the structure of a different system. Art is an inspirational practice that moves from within outwards and from the outside in. It is a breathing between self and others.

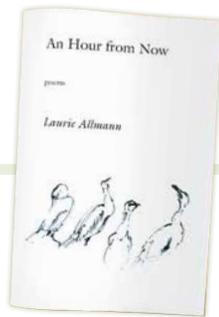
LA: Most residencies culminate in some kind of project. The best residencies, in my view, are open-ended like Belwin's, and don't require the artist/writer to be specific about what they intend to create. I once wrote a one-act play during a residency, which I hadn't planned or anticipated. A residency can be a genuine opportunity for creative growth, for new directions that are exciting for the artist but can also produce work that is compelling and meaningful for others. You can't measure the good that can come of an artist residency because it just keeps on coming, long after.

Equinox

From south to north, a vee of swans crosses a gray March sky, while more than 90 million miles out, our nearest star crosses the celestial plane of earth's equator imagined into space

(continued)

— By Laurie Allmann, from *An Hour From Now*



Members, You've Met Your Match!

We are grateful to the 48 members who have increased their annual gift this year. We are also happy to welcome 159 new members to the Belwin family this year. Together, you've contributed a total of over \$30,000 in new funds to Belwin in 2019, which are being matched by an anonymous donor. That's double the support for protecting wild spaces and connecting people to nature. We are truly grateful!

Interested in learning more about supporting Belwin's work? Please contact Angie Eckel at angie.eckel@belwin.org and (651) 435-0687.



To purchase a copy of *An Hour From Now*, visit laurieallmann.com



A Place to Call Home

By Kate Seitz, *Belwin Conservancy Communications Partner*

FIVE YEARS AGO, WHEN ERIN AND ELI VOGEN MOVED FROM ST. PAUL TO AFTON, they had never heard of Belwin Conservancy. Today, they're experienced in everything Belwin has to offer, from waving good morning to the bison herd to watching the sunset at Stagecoach Prairie.

Belwin Conservancy: Introduce us to your family.

Erin Vogen: I'm Erin, my husband is Eli, and we have Hasle, who's 10, Sawyer, who's 8, and Ole, who's 4. We also have a 9-month-old Llewellyn Setter named Pike and a colony of honey bees that the kids affectionately refer to as family as well.

How did you discover Belwin?

EV: We looked for the right property for years until a home directly adjacent to Belwin Conservancy went on the market. At the time, we didn't know much about Belwin but we were glad to have found a home next to some additional natural space. Since then, we have learned how truly lucky we and all our Afton neighbors are to have such an amazing steward of the environment and local community right outside our door.

How does Belwin's mission to inspire connections to nature resonate with you and your family?

EV: We moved to Afton specifically because we wanted to live in a place that allowed us to be more connected to nature. What we got was a life that incorporates nature into our daily activities more than we had ever hoped. We feel this is a direct result of the investments and efforts of Belwin.

On any given day, Eli or I will start by walking Pike on Belwin's mowed trails while the sun comes up. The kids wave to the bison on their way to school or camp. Throughout

the day, we glance at the birds on our bird feeder, seeing a vibrant and diverse array thanks to the healthy ecosystem that the conservancy supports. Then, like most other families with kids, it's the dinner rush and hustle off to activities like league sports, usually at the Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields — an experience made much more enjoyable by the nearby prairie and wildlife.

What is one of your favorite activities at Belwin?

EV: One of my absolute favorite things to do is to pack a bag, pick a scenic spot on the trails at Stagecoach Prairie to lay out a blanket, and watch the kids chase each other on the paths or explore the native plants and butterflies as the sun goes down. Those are the moments when you really feel in your bones how priceless it all is.

Do you or your family have a unique story about Belwin to share? Please contact info@belwin.org or (651) 436-5189.

The Winter Garden: A New Perspective

By Lynette Anderson, *Belwin Conservancy Interpretive Naturalist*

This year, pledge to be a messy gardener. As fall moves to winter, resist the urge to clean up the standing vegetation or bag up the leaves.

Why? Pollinators need our help. Not just in the spring and summer, but in the fall and winter too. Our gardens and yards continue to provide much needed habitat for our pollinator friends. Many

insects lay eggs in the leaf litter. Moth and butterfly caterpillars spend the winter months burrowed underneath leaves or rotting logs. Some insects hibernate in the hollow stems of plants.

Nature is messy. Let's join her! Stress less about your gardens, ditch the rake and enjoy a lazy weekend morning. The insects will thank you.





One Secretive Sparrow

By Lynette Anderson, *Belwin Conservancy Interpretive Naturalist*

BELWIN CONSERVANCY IS HOME TO MANY NATIVE PLANTS AND ANIMALS. Some are flashy and easy to see, others are inconspicuous and take some time to search out. The Henslow's sparrow is one such animal.

This small, secretive bird is a habitat specialist, which means it has very specific habitat requirements to survive and thrive. Henslow's sparrows can be found only in large grassland areas of 75 to 100 acres. They need tall, dense grass, a well-developed litter layer, some standing dead vegetation for song perches, and sparse woody vegetation. Unfortunately, with such specific requirements, these birds are threatened or endangered in much of their range.

Ten years ago, bird surveys showed evidence of one or two Henslow's sparrows at one specific site within the Belwin preserve. As of spring 2019, we have multiple nesting pairs on three different sites. Belwin's work to restore prairie habitats has successfully created a place once again for this special and endearing little bird.

Upcoming Events at Belwin

EDUCATION CENTER THIRD SATURDAYS

Every third Saturday of the month, the Belwin Education Center and its trails are free and open to the public 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Hour-long guided experiences are at 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., and are free to members, \$10 per family for non-members.

NOVEMBER

- 8 Statewide Star Party
- 16 Education Center Third Saturday

DECEMBER

- 20 Winter Solstice Bonfire
- 21 Education Center Third Saturday
- 21 Women Walking
- 22 Women Walking

JANUARY

- 17 Owl Prowl
- 18 Owl Prowl
- 18 Education Center Third Saturday

FEBRUARY

- 8 Annual Open House
- 15 Education Center Third Saturday

MARCH

- 5 Outside Voices: Global Citizen's Project
- 13 Women Walking
- 14 Women Walking
- 21 Education Center Third Saturday

APRIL

- 18 Education Center Third Saturday
- 28 Frog Walk

MAY

- 5 Twilight Hike at Creative Center
- 7 Frog Walk
- 10 Mother's Day Bird Hike
- 16 Belwin Bison Festival

Visit belwin.org/events for complete info.

ALWAYS FREE AND OPEN

These Belwin lands are open 365 days/year!

Stagecoach Prairie features 4.5 miles of ungroomed trails great for hiking, bird watching, snowshoeing and cross country skiing. Parking is available at the Stagecoach Trail S. and 11th St. entrances.

2.5 miles of prairie trails at **Lucy Winton Bell Athletic Fields** are teeming with life. Park at the Bison Observation Platform and cross the road to the prairie trail entrance. Visit belwin.org for more info.



A FORCE FOR GOOD:

Chuck & Hope Lea

IN 1992, CHUCK AND HOPE LEA WERE A MARRIED COUPLE ENTERING RETIREMENT, looking for a place where they could volunteer together.

Hope, an elementary school principal with Saint Paul Public Schools, suggested they volunteer at Belwin, which she knew from accompanying class trips to Belwin Outdoor Science. Chuck, an engineer with 3M, was less enthusiastic about working with young people but agreed to try it once.

The rest, as the saying goes, is history. Twenty-seven years later, the Leas have given more than 11,000 hours of their time to Belwin, monitoring bird activity, recording weather data, documenting wild flowers, and connecting kids with the natural world.

What brings the Leas back, year after year, however, is the bluebirds, chickadees and tree swallows. Each spring, Chuck and Hope set up 45 bluebird nesting boxes across 250 acres at Belwin.

Twice a week, until the birds fledge sometime in August, they visit each box and record the activity taking place within, including nests being built, eggs laid, birds hatched and fledged.

Josh Leonard, education director for Belwin Outdoor Science (BOS), has worked with Chuck and Hope as volunteers with BOS and in a citizen scientist capacity.

“Thanks to Chuck and Hope, we continue to share the mystery of real, live bluebird, chickadee, and tree swallow nests,” says Leonard. “Children see nest building from the first strands of grass to the completed nests, the first egg laid, the first hatchlings, to fully fledged juvenile bluebirds. Students learn the impressive values of stewardship, citizen science and staying active into old age.”



In this photo, Chuck shows a young Odin Leonard how to check bluebird nesting boxes. In the summer of 2019, inspired by Chuck and Hope, Josh Leonard and his sons started their own bluebird trail on Stagecoach Prairie in collaboration with Belwin Naturalist Lynette Anderson.

education for urban kids,” says Leonard. “The world is better with Chuck and Hope. To say we are forever fortunate and thankful for Chuck and Hope is a profound understatement.”

If you are interested in volunteering at Belwin, please contact Connie Hess: volunteers@belwin.org.



Chuck and Hope Lea have been volunteers at Belwin Conservancy for 27 years.

Over the course of their time at Belwin, Leonard estimates that the Leas have witnessed the fledging of nearly 2,000 cavity nesting birds (900 bluebirds, 700 tree swallows, and 300 chickadees).

“Bluebirds are so beautiful to see,” says Hope. “They’re not destructive. They really like to take the bugs that we as humans don’t like.”

“For nearly three decades, children of Saint Paul Public Schools have been inspired to connect with nature, with each other, and with their elder generation by Chuck and Hope’s reliable dedication to the land, the birds and to outdoor

You Keep Belwin Trucking!

Back in June, we asked you to help us replace some aging equipment and access \$20,000 in matching funds by donating to the Belwin Machinery Fund. Wow, did you deliver!

We are happy to report that by July, we paid off our new skidsteer, which spent much of the summer clearing invasives from Belwin’s prairies. By September, you helped us reach our goal of \$40,000, enabling us to purchase a new pick-up truck. Because of your generosity, our crew is anticipating a productive and cozy winter of work inside the cabs of these machines. Thank you!



If you still want to make a donation to support woodland and prairie restoration, please visit belwin.org/support

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BELWIN CONSERVANCY

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Inspiring through Nature

The mission of Belwin Conservancy is inspiring our connection to the natural world.

Don't miss these major events at Belwin!

WINTER SOLSTICE BONFIRE

Friday, December 20, 2019, 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Belwin Education Center Wetlands Classroom

Special guests Ikidowin Youth Theater will treat you to storytelling by firelight. Evening includes night hikes, hot cider, and cookies. Please carpool and bring a chair. *Family event. \$5/car.*

ANNUAL OPEN HOUSE

Saturday, February 8, 2020, 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Belwin Education Center

Our kid-friendly open house will include night hikes, warm drinks and s'mores by the campfire. A naturalist from Carpenter Nature Center will bring their red-tailed hawk and hognose snake. Minnesota Audubon will also share fun owl activities. *Family event.*

OUTSIDE VOICES SERIES

Thursday, March 5, 2020, 7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Belwin Education Center

Enjoy a presentation on the recovery of Turkey's wetlands with global citizen Hatice Bilgic Lim and Advisor Jerry Allan. *\$10/suggested donation.*



Get complete event information online at belwin.org/events or by calling (651) 436-5189.



BELWIN CONSERVANCY

Stay connected with Belwin online!

