



the Meadowlark

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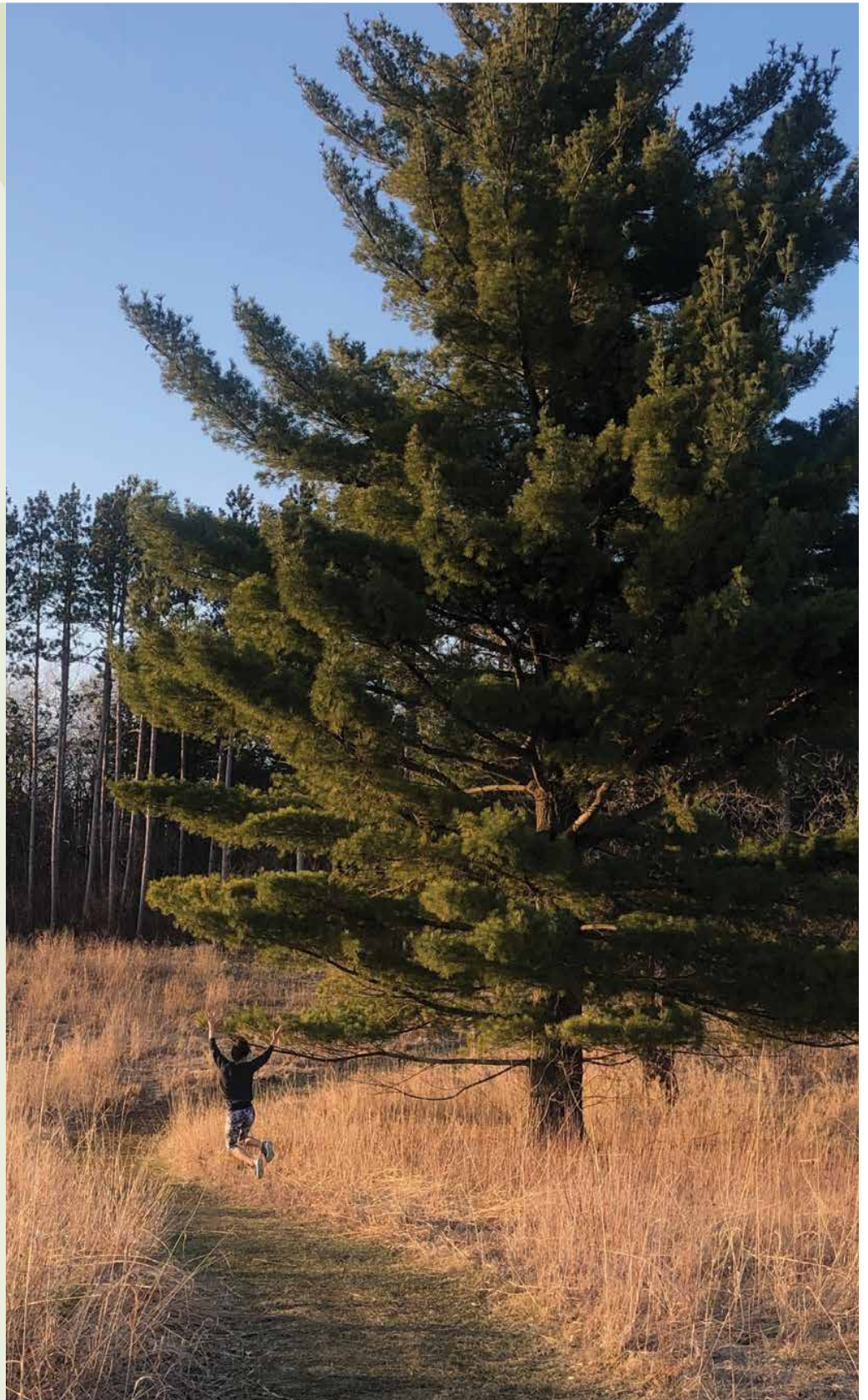
Fun Fact:

Insects in Winter?

Snow fleas (Hypogastrura sp.), also known as Springtails, are a teeny insect (2mm) that feed on decaying plant material. Find them on warm winter days on top of the snow, catapulting an inch or two by tucking and releasing their two furcula, or "tails," under their bellies.



**BELWIN
CONSERVANCY**
Inspiring through Nature





Feeding Our Roots, Stretching Our Branches

“ So this is what it looks like, feels like, to be open grown, limbs reaching in all directions toward abundant light, twisting as they may, not as they must”

– Laurie Allmann, “Savanna,” *An Hour from Now*

Laurie Allmann was a 2016 Belwin Artist in Residence.

ONE OF MY FAVORITE SPOTS AT BELWIN is an area of oak savanna that was restored from unhealthy forest about 10 years ago. After spending the first part of their lives devoted to quick upward growth, vying for the slightest bit of light in a dense forest, the young bur oaks have fallen to the side. The oaks had relied on the structure provided by the dense invasives to hold them upright. Now, with abundant light, they are beginning to strengthen their roots and grow the outward reaching branches iconic of the bur oak.

I like change. I like it best when it’s planned out and strategic. I also appreciate the clarity that comes when change is thrust upon us from outside forces. In times like that, the planning and thought give way to instincts and values.

Many of us have been responding to the pandemic and our country’s racial reckoning by moving toward safety and necessity. Sometimes that’s what we need. And after that need is fulfilled, we have the opportunity to reflect; then move with intention toward growth, health, and regeneration.

Amid intense uncertainty this year, Belwin is also adapting. We navigated the initial jolt of staff moving to home offices, new safety protocols for those still working on-site, and cancelled activities including school field trips and our annual Bison Festival. And then we paused. We reflected on what was essential and landed on three things vital to our mission: care for the land, access to nature, and meaningful relationships.

While some of Belwin’s programs continue to be on hold, we are focusing on fundamentals like public trails, land protection, technology upgrades, relationships with partners and supporters, and our work toward racial equity. Perhaps we did our own “lean over” as we adjusted to a new way of life, and now we’re feeding our roots and stretching our branches in ways central to who we are, and who we will become.

Katie Bloome

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Cover: Photo of Mitsi O’Neill by Alicia O’Neill.
This page: Property of Belwin Conservancy. Photo of volunteers courtesy of Younite.
Opposite: Property of Belwin Conservancy. Photo by Jennifer Otramba.

SPOTTED IN THE WILD



Dozens of volunteers joined forces with our staff on all Belwin lands last summer to help manage invasives like Grecian foxglove and spotted knapweed. Here, St. Croix Preparatory Academy and Younite volunteers, Belwin neighbors, and staff tackle spotted knapweed.



Jon Li, an accomplished musician and founder of St. Paul-based Rock It Man Entertainment, and his family visited Stagecoach Prairie last June. He performed an acoustic concert that was broadcast on Facebook. Check out [@rockitmanentertainment](https://www.facebook.com/rockitmanentertainment) on Facebook to watch his set!



Belwin Partners to Create Conservation Area Park in Afton

LAST JUNE, THE WASHINGTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS approved a Land and Water Legacy Program project that supports creation of a conservation area park with public hiking trails in the City of Afton.

Belwin Conservancy, the City of Afton, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the county reached an agreement on the concept, funding, and conservation easement partnership. The project required the purchase of a 31-acre parcel from a willing seller and the placement of a permanent conservation easement. Valley Creek flows southeasterly through the property for 750 feet, and the parcel contains wetlands, a pond, and forested uplands.



The land is adjacent to approximately 17 acres of Belwin Conservancy. As part of the overall project, approximately 5 acres of two of the City of Afton's adjacent parcels to the north will be protected by conservation easements and host a segment of trail. Portions of Belwin Conservancy to the south will also host public trails.



"Many people had a hand in making this complex acquisition work, and in the process we have built some meaningful partnerships with the City of Afton and Washington County," said Belwin Conservancy Executive Director Katie Bloome. "Over the next few years, we will work to create a 40-plus acre preserve open to the public less than a mile from downtown Afton."

Belwin contributed \$157,500 and now owns the 31-acre parcel. We will manage the natural resources and provide public access to a trail extending through 41 acres of land.

Read more online at belwin.org/news.



Sharing Your Belwin Adventures

We asked for fantastic photos showcasing people connecting with nature at Belwin and you delivered! We look forward to sharing the photos with everyone and appreciate your help building our photo catalog.

Want to share a photo? Reach out via info@belwin.org. Thank you!

Give to the Max!

Belwin relies on your support to protect land, restore habitat, and give everyone access to nature in all its splendor. Give to the Max Day is your chance to have a big impact on our work. An anonymous donor will match all gifts made from November 1 to 19, 2020.

Join, renew, or give an additional gift and see your dollars doubled to protect habitat and wildlife.



What	Give to the Max
When	November 1 – 19, 2020
How	Donate online at belwin.org/support or use the enclosed envelope to mail a check to 1553 Stagecoach Trail S., Afton, MN 55001
Why	To help Belwin restore, protect, and share important habitat.
Bonus	Your donation will be matched, doubling your impact!



Instilling Dreams in Native Youth

By Hope Flanagan, *Dream of Wild Health Community Outreach and Cultural Teacher*

Hope Flanagan is from the Turtle clan and is an elder who teaches about plants and wild plant gathering. She is also a Storyteller in the Native community, and has taught in an Ojibwe immersion classroom and in Minneapolis Public Schools.

In 2019, Dream of Wild Health began partnering with Anishinabe Academy in Minneapolis to bring fifth grade students to Belwin Conservancy. Since then, Hope has worked at Belwin with teachers and students, as well as 2019 Belwin Artist in Residence Rory Wakemup, to introduce Native youth to wild plants and more.

EVER SINCE I WAS LITTLE, my mom and sister and I would go and spend time outside in the woods, picking and gathering. My mom was the biggest influence in my life. She used to love to walk around Belwin in the 1970s and '80s, looking at plants and looking for birds.

As I got older, I would fetch specific plants for Native people asking for the plant in the language. In Ojibwe, every verb you use,



you have to know if you're talking about a being that's alive or not alive, and you consider a plant just as alive as you are.

In 2009, I started working with Dream of Wild Health (DWH). Our mission is to restore health and wellbeing in the Native community by recovering knowledge of and access to healthy Indigenous foods, medicines, and lifeways. We raise seeds and leaders. Part of my community relations piece is educating about Native culture. I teach about plants as well as crafts, language, history, birchbark baskets. I also am a Storyteller. Fifteen years ago, an elder from Ponemah, Red Lake, Minnesota, passed along her stories to me.

While at Belwin, we've done plant walks and other activities. We made cedar tea with those beautiful cedar trees right in front of the Creative Center. On a walkaround, we saw a lot of food plants like berry and cherry plants around the pond. We found Jack-in-the-pulpit, gooseberries and American red currant.

I'm excited that DWH, Anishinabe Academy and Belwin will be doing more outdoor learning to make that connection with the plants and the kids. Every single green plant has the gift of breath, and every single plant has the gift of food, utility, or medicine. It's up to us to find out what the gift is.

Virtual Field Trips

By Kate Seitz, *Belwin Conservancy Communications Partner*



A boy checks on monarch eggs and caterpillars.

LAST SPRING, WHEN SCHOOLS IN MINNESOTA SHUT DOWN due to COVID-19, Belwin Outdoor Science (BOS) Education Director Josh Leonard and the BOS teaching team created seven Virtual Field Trips (VFTs) as an alternative to in-person learning. They reached more than 3,000 third- and fifth-grade Saint Paul Public School (SPPS) students. (Every SPPS student has an iPad and internet connection in order to conduct schoolwork.)

“We learned a lot last spring, including that we could ask students to invite their family to join in their nature exploration,” says Josh. “Many of our students learn in more collective ways, versus the very individualized learning style that is more commonly represented in classrooms.”

As of this newsletter printing, VFTs—which include a bird class, a wetlands class, and an insects class—have replaced all physical field trips to BOS through the fall of 2020 as part of SPPS's Distance Learning 2.0.

While nothing can replace being immersed in nature, Josh says VFTs won't keep students glued to their devices. “We are asking students to step away from their screens to observe something in nature, through a window, or find household items for a nature-based activity. One activity asks students to look for and take pictures of bugs in their own homes!”

The decision regarding in-person field trips for the spring will be made at a later date.



Artistry On Board

Cindy Gehrig sees great potential for artists and creative work at Belwin

By Kate Seitz, Belwin Conservancy Communications Partner

Belwin's Board of Directors is growing! In the past 18 months, we have added three new Board members: Kris Hansen, Global Application Engineering Leader at 3M (featured in our Spring/Summer 2020 newsletter); Jessica Manivasager, Shareholder at Fredrikson & Byron P.A.; and Cindy Gehrig, retired President of the Jerome Foundation. We are excited to add these fresh perspectives, along with their breadth of experiences, to Belwin's governance team.

Belwin Conservancy: How did you first become acquainted with Belwin Conservancy?

Cindy Gehrig: Belwin's Program Director, Susan Haugh, invited me to visit as part of her outreach to the cultural community to develop programming and introduce people to Belwin. My tour was exceptional. I thought the land was stunning, and recall the bur oak savanna as a visual memory that was especially distinctive. I had not previously visited Belwin and was amazed by the land, the commitment to conservation and restoration, and the potential for programming. The size was overwhelming, in a positive way, and I was impressed by the work done by a small, dedicated staff supported by a committed board.

BC: How have your work and life experiences prepared you to serve on Belwin's Board?

CG: As President of the Jerome Foundation, I worked closely with its board and understand the significance of board governance and leadership. I was blessed to work with outstanding board members over many years. I learned a great deal from them. I've also served on many nonprofit

boards, and have held officers' positions. I believe in the creative synergy that comes from an engaged board and a skilled staff working together.

BC: How does serving on Belwin's Board enable you to fulfill your passions and interests?

CG: Jerome Foundation is a supporter of artists and arts organizations. My career there and in prior positions, as well as my volunteer service over five decades, have focused on arts and culture. I was trained as a visual artist, art historian and arts administrator. My retirement has provided the opportunity to explore other passions, like horticulture and environmental stewardship. These come together at Belwin.

The potential for artists and creative work at Belwin is huge. I'm not speaking of enhancements or occasional events but rather artists whose visions are consistent with Belwin's purpose, artists who are inspired by Belwin's resources, and artists who will make and present extraordinary work that brings new perspectives and understanding to Belwin's mission.

Belwin Conservancy Board of Directors

- David Hartwell, President
- Doug Johnson, Vice President
- Jill Koosmann, Treasurer
- John Satorius, Secretary
- Jerry Allan
- Cindy Gehrig
- Kris Hansen
- Jessica Manivasager
- Irene Qualters

Positive Signs for Kestrels

From 1966 to 2013, American Kestrel populations in Minnesota declined, inspiring members of Saint Paul Audubon Society's Conservation Committee (SPASCC) to try and help. Members formed a committee that places nest boxes for kestrels in the East Metro.

Julian Sellers has been an SPASCC member for 25 years and took the lead role in the kestrel nest box project, installing several boxes at Belwin Conservancy with the help of other volunteers.

Last June, Julian was very pleased to find four nestlings in the box at Belwin, estimated to be 24 days old.

The SPASCC nest box project contributes data to a continent-wide research program conducted by the American Kestrel Partnership, which is a creation of The Peregrine Fund. Learn more about local efforts at saintpaulaudubon.org.





Responding to Change, Remaining True to Our Values



THIS YEAR HAS SHOWN US how drastic changes can happen quickly and how external events can greatly affect the operations of an organization. During times of change, whether planned or unexpected, we rely on our values and foundational framework to make decisions and move forward.

At Belwin, we've been honing our mission, strategic vision, and values so we are equipped with a foundation that will guide us. We're proud to share our work with you now.

MISSION

Inspire connection and engagement with the natural world.

VALUES

Environmental Stewardship

Inclusion

Collaboration

Innovation

STRATEGIC VISION

- Belwin models and inspires environmental responsibility. We balance human use in a way that is compatible with habitat restoration and ongoing care for the land. We are a key contributor to healthy habitat, air, and water in the St. Croix Valley.
- Belwin links people to the natural world in immersive ways, providing physical, emotional, and intellectual benefits. Education, arts and culture, and research programs at Belwin inspire new avenues of perception, understanding, engagement, and environmental stewardship.
- Belwin strives to make our spaces, partnerships, and programs inclusive, accessible, and equitable. It is an essential foundation of our work to engage more people in protecting the health of the living systems on which we depend.

THE GIFT OF LIFE: Blood Drives at Belwin

By Kate Seitz, *Belwin Conservancy Communications Partner*

WHILE THE EDUCATION CENTER WAS EMPTY LAST SPRING (see “Virtual Field Trips” article, page 4), Belwin partnered with the American Red Cross to host three blood drives. Each drive was incredibly successful, with 120 total units of blood collected, which helped approximately 270 people in need of blood transfusions.

The majority of donors and American Red Cross staff had never been to Belwin and were excited to be surrounded by nature’s sights, sounds, and smells. One staff member noted how relaxing it was to be there for the day, taking a walk around Kettlekamp Prairie, south of the building, and sitting on the porch during her break.

“We are thrilled to be partnering with Belwin Conservancy to host blood drives,” Pam Christopherson of the American Red Cross said. “Belwin’s Education Center offers a beautiful and serene environment for donors to give the gift of life. The support couldn’t come at a better time during the pandemic.”



These blood drives would not be possible without a large group of Belwin volunteers, led by Connie Hess. Thank you all for supporting this important new partnership at Belwin!

Additional blood drives will be held at the Education Center. Please watch for the dates and consider donating. Call Susan Haugh with any questions: 651-425-1147.



Rooted in Giving

By Tom Youngblood, Belwin Conservancy Legacy Donor

Tom Youngblood has been a friend and neighbor to Belwin since the 1980s. In 2008, Tom and his fellow astronomers convinced Belwin to partner with the Minnesota Astronomical Society in hosting an observatory on the Education Center property. We asked Tom to share a bit about stargazing, Fox Terriers, and why he's decided to include a gift to Belwin in his estate plans.

MY WIFE AND I BUILT OUR DREAM HOUSE 35 YEARS AGO on a 12-acre woodlot close to Lake Edith and adjacent to Fr. George Metcalf and his wife Mary's home on Indian Trail. We'd moved from the Minneapolis suburbs and sought privacy to raise some Fox Terriers as a hobby kennel operation.

We learned of our proximity to Belwin and attended a presentation by Duane Warner on the "Introduction of Wild Turkey" and whether or not they could survive our winters. (The experiment worked!)

After seeing night-time observers set up their telescopes on the Metcalf site across from my property, I became a member of the Minnesota Astronomical Society (MAS). Fast forward to about 2008. Several of my MAS compatriots and I approached then director Steve Hobbs about observing on Belwin's property. Steve was very much interested in the possibility of

locating an observatory on Belwin land. It was a natural to blend the visions of the two entities, both of which shared interests in protecting natural resources (i.e., a dark sky) and sharing them.



The aspirations and philosophy of Belwin cross my "star trails" in a very nice manner, as their thinking overlaps with mine. Their interaction with community is consistent with their being relevant, which can then incorporate change and different ways of thinking. But our young people also need nature's fundamentals etched into their brains so they can understand why we need these resources preserved. Belwin includes that along with the creative element of our citizenry too, especially how it can blend with our environment. All of this is a wonderful "combo platter"—something I can get financially behind. That's why I'm leaving a gift to Belwin in my estate plan.

I like Belwin's savviness: on matters germane to our planet including those involving social responsibility and fairness along with stewardship of our natural resources. And I like that they begin their mission with our children—our future.



A Legacy for the Land

We envision a world where every child knows what an oak leaf looks like, and each of us believes in our ability to contribute to a brighter future.

Making a planned gift to Belwin can be an affordable and flexible way to build that legacy. Planned gifts are a meaningful way to contribute to the lasting integrity of the land and the collective health of our region. These gifts can be made through wills and trusts, but also include real estate gifts, charitable annuities, or making Belwin the beneficiary of a life insurance policy or retirement plan.

By planting the seed today, you can create long-term support for Belwin. We encourage you to talk to your tax professional or visit belwin.org/support/plannedgiving to learn more.



BELWIN CONSERVANCY

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Inspiring through Nature

The mission of Belwin Conservancy is to inspire connection and engagement with the natural world.

Generosity in Extraordinary Times



Nearly 300 Belwin donors have joined or renewed their support so far in 2020. Thank you!

The bedrock of your support has kept our work on track in an otherwise uncertain time.

As we continue to adjust priorities and reimagine the ways we share Belwin with you, your generosity is vital to our work on the land. The coming weeks will bring several opportunities to make a year-end gift in support of our prairies and woodlands, **including Give to the Max from November 1 to 19, when all gifts will be matched.**

Did you know? This year, those who take the standard deduction can deduct cash gifts up to \$300 per taxpayer from their taxable income. (Those who itemize can deduct up to 100% of their AGI in 2020.) Please consider renewing your support or giving an additional gift this year.

We are moved at your generosity in this extraordinary time. Thank you for investing in the health of our natural spaces.

Questions? Contact Angie Eckel: 651-435-0687 or angie.eckel@belwin.org.

BELWIN TURNS 50!

2021 marks Belwin's 50th anniversary. Join us in kicking off the year with our **Anniversary Show at The Phipps Center for the Arts** in Hudson, Wis. Learn Belwin's history, experience the present, and imagine our future in the St. Croix Valley.

January 15 – February 12, 2021

Visit belwin.org for information closer to the event date.



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BELWIN CONSERVANCY

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