

Office of Lt. Governor Pat Quinn

2006 Environmental Heroes

The late **Carl Becker**, of Petersburg, was a champion of conservation throughout his life. He served as the first Executive Director of the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board, and pushed for establishment of the Wildlife Preservation Fund check-off. After retiring from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, he worked as Director of Conservation Programs at The Nature Conservancy.

Joyce Blumenshine, of Peoria, is a cheerful and tireless volunteer for the Sierra Club. For three decades, she has dedicated herself to a number of important local issues, including creation of the Rock Island Trail and the Banner Marsh Wildlife Area. She currently acts as Conservation Chair for the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Heart of Illinois Sierra Club group.

Joe Cosgrove, of Wilmington, Cynthia Sauer, formerly of Minooka, and Curt Leinweber, of Custer Park, whose concerns about water pollution by leaks at Exelon Corp. nuclear power plants led to the belated discovery of radioactive leaks at the Braidwood, Dresden and Byron plants.

The Center for Neighborhood Technology, in Chicago, has championed sustainable urban communities since 1978. Through its work on the Energy-Smart Pricing Plan, a pilot real-time electricity pricing program, CNT is helping to create new incentives for consumers to conserve during peak hours and reduce their overall energy usage, thereby saving money while helping the environment.

Mike Clifford, of Momence, serves as conservation director and executive board member for the Illinois Smallmouth Alliance, a statewide angling and conservation group that advocates for the smallmouth bass and its habitat. Clifford also launched "Rods for Kids," a program that provides fishing rods for children of military families, and also organizes fishing derbies and river cleanups.

Ken Dunn, of Chicago, is founder and director of the **Resource Center** of Chicago which has provided environmental education to individuals, community groups and schools for more than 30 years. The Resource Center has been a leader in urban composting, operating a full-scale facility that composts plant materials from landscaping companies, food waste from grocery stores and University of Chicago cafeterias, and horse manure from the Chicago Mounted Police stables. The Resource Center also promotes backyard composting throughout the urban area.

Henry Eilers, of Litchfield, is the founder and longtime steward of the Shoal Creek Conservation Area, 210 acres of savanna, prairie, seeps and barrens near Lake Lou Yeager. A retired nurseryman, Eilers has a wealth of knowledge about planting and restoration. He has worked to build an interpretive trail and sign program, a bluebird and butterfly monitoring program, and leads periodic workdays to maintain the conservation area through invasive species removal, prescribed burns and other management techniques.

Warren Gale, of Orion, has served on the board of directors of the Quad Cities Conservation Alliance for more than 25 years. Throughout that time, he has participated regularly in Quad Cities Bald Eagle Days, as well as many other conservation programs that have provided new ideas and built new constituencies for outdoor programs.

Brothers **Ted** and **Ron Gilles**, of Princeville, are farmers who lead tours of their family farm to educate schoolchildren and other members of the public about prairies and conservation practices. Their farm includes more than 500 acres of wildlife habitat, including Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and wetlands, along with more than 200 acres of native grasses and prairie plants.

Jerry and **Connie Heinrich**, of Wilmington, are active members of the Sauk-Calumet Sierra Club. They have been recognized by the USDA Forest Service for their outstanding volunteer contributions to the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. They work to manage and maintain the prairie, and also help to care for Midewin's native seed production gardens. They were among the first volunteer tour guides to escort visitors to Midewin, the former Joliet Arsenal.

Max Hutchison, of Belknap, has devoted nearly 40 years to preserving the wildness of the Cache River area and its rare and important natural communities. A frequent speaker, author, and guide, he led the creation of the Cache River Wetlands Center and has been described as “the driving force behind saving the Cache River Wetlands.”

Terrence N. Ingram, of Apple River, currently the founder, president, and executive director of the Eagle Nature Foundation, has been a persistent and impassioned defender of the environment and wildlife for more than 40 years. His research on bald eagles and other native birds led to the creation and protection of nesting sites throughout Midwest. Today, he is fighting to keep the bald eagle on the national list of endangered species.

Hazel Johnson, of Chicago, founder and CEO of People for Community Recovery (PCR), has spent years fighting industrial pollution on the city’s Southeast Side. Thanks to her advocacy, city and state health officials have investigated environmental problems caused by “corporate polluters.” Today, PCR continues its fight for environmental justice in Chicago’s African American neighborhoods.

Jane Johnson, of Gillison, is a leader of the Citizens Organizing Project, which works to protect rural areas in west central Illinois from being converted to surface mines or sprawling developments. She was active in saving the Rice Lake/Banner Marsh State Fish & Wildlife Areas, and has served on the board of the Illinois Stewardship Alliance.

Dawn Keller, of Barrington, is a federally licensed animal rehabilitation specialist who owns and operates the Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation Centers in Barrington and downtown Chicago. A former executive, she now devotes herself to treating injured and orphaned wildlife, rehabilitating them, and releasing them back to their natural habitat.

Metro East Park and Recreation District, located in Collinsville, was formed by voters in 2000 and is responsible for the development of regional parks, trails, greenways and recreational services in Madison and St. Clair counties. The new district, the first of its kind in Illinois, is creating the Malcolm W. Martin Memorial Park in East St. Louis, to include a new \$4.2 million Mississippi River Overlook and the Gateway Geysers, to be the world’s tallest fountain with a water jet 600 feet tall.

The Village of Northbrook has a long history of environmental awareness, and has been a leader among local government agencies in supporting environmental initiatives. In 1999, the village dedicated a 3,000 gallon fuel tank to ethanol (E-85) to fuel bi-fuel vehicles. It also began purchasing bio-diesel fuel years before it was mandated. In 2000, the village purchased its first renewable energy credits (REC’s), also known as “green tags,” for 155 megawatts of wind-generated energy. Northbrook is now partnering with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to operate a regional air testing laboratory.

Verena Owen, of Winthrop Harbor, has led the Sierra Club’s Illinois Clean Air Campaign, working to create awareness of mercury contamination and promote solutions. Her work was rewarded this year when the State of Illinois adopted aggressive new rules requiring coal-fired power plants to reduce mercury pollution by 90% or more by 2009.

Gregory A. Sherwood, of Martinsville, is the watershed coordinator for the Embarras River Management Association, working to promote conservation, improve water quality, reduce soil erosion and sedimentation, and expand recreational and economic opportunities throughout the watershed.

Dr. Cynthia Skrukrud, of Richmond, has served as Clean Water Advocate for the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club since 2001. The former executive director of the McHenry County Defenders, she still chairs the Defenders’ Water Resources Protection Committee. A past president of the Friends of the Fox River, she chairs the Fox River Study Group and serves as secretary of the Fox River Ecosystem Partnership.

Doug Wood, of Chicago, has revitalized the Wicker Park Garden Club. Wood, a University of Illinois Master Gardener, and the garden club have revitalized the public Westfall Garden, which now serves as a place for Chicago-area residents to get “hands-on” gardening experience and learn organic gardening techniques.

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