

“This is a great gift to enjoy forever”

County, Friends dedicate North Point park

By Deborah Klinger

“This is the best example of how government should work,” said Van Buren County Commissioner Tom Erdman at last Thursday’s dedication celebrating a conservation easement for South Haven’s lakeshore North Point Conservation Park.

In 2007, Van Buren County Commissioners heard a recommendation from Van Buren County’s Long-Range Planning Committee to sell 400 feet of lakefront property located in South Haven Township next to the Van Buren State Park, commonly known as North Point, to help fund future county improvements. Hundreds of people, including a South Haven Boy Scout Troop, voiced opposition against selling the Lake Michigan beach front, which led commissioners to form an ad-hoc committee, The Friends of North Point.

The committee evaluated the county’s use of the park and presented a plan to commissioners that included a recommendation that the county partner with the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy for a conservation easement on the property to protect the 17 acres

of pristine woods, and allow the property to remain as a public park for generations to come.

Commissioners agreed to the Land Conservancy recommendation as long as the Friends of North Point could raise the \$10,000 needed to implement the conservancy. With the help of generous donors, the Friends of North Point reached that goal within three weeks.

In November 2009, Van Buren County Commissioners approved a conservation easement for North Point Park and, with the easement officially in place, celebrated with a rededication of the park last week.

“The power we can have when people come together is shown here. Thank you to the commissioners for listening to us,” said Marcy Colclough, Senior Planner with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission.

According to Colclough, 230 people submitted comments and over 1,400 people signed petitions to help keep the property a public park. “We’ve had an incredible amount of support to get to this point today. This day is special to dedicate this

beautiful property.”

Maureen Lewandowski, of The Friends of North Point, also expressed gratitude to the commissioners, and to the donors who gave financial gifts to the project. “I’m grateful that our board was up to this process and agreed to venture forward with it to completion,” Lewandowski said. “I’m grateful that North Point has the conservation easement, not because we can enjoy North Point -- I’m grateful because future generations will be able to enjoy this county-owned park.

“Having the conservation easement makes North Point a forever park for the future families and people in Van Buren County. The conservation easement quiets down the nagging voice of ‘coulda-shoulda-woulda,’ as now North Point will be preserved forever,” said Lewandowski.

“This was an unusual project, because it is the only conservation our organization has for property owned by the government. But we got it done because of the commitment of many people,” said Peter Ter Low, Executive Director for the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy. “This is a great gift to enjoy forever.”

Following the dedication ceremony, the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy and local boy scouts assisted with public tours of the North Point property.



Representatives of the Van County Commission, the Friends of North Point, the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, area boy scouts, and others met near South Haven last Thursday to dedicate as a public park 17 acres of Lake Michigan property now under land conservancy through the efforts of Van Buren County officials and interested citizens. Taking part in the brief ceremony were, at right, from left: VB Co. Commissioner Donald Hanson, Maureen Lewandowski of the Friends of North Point, Peter Ter Low, executive director of SW Michigan Land Conservancy, Mary Colclough of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, VB Co. Commissioner Tom Erdman, and VB Co. Attorney Harold Schuitmaker. Former state representatives Mick and Mary Ann Middaugh, above, were among those interested in the project.



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