

A gift for future generations

Conservation easements safeguard open space, yield tax incentives

In this season of gift-giving, it's worth noting that there are options available for people who care about preserving green space and protecting our natural environment, and want to give a gift that will last for future generations.

A local example can be found with Tammy and Dick Rynearson of Streetsboro. They have donated a conservation easement on their land to a local nonprofit organization, the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, that prevents the land from being developed but keeps it in private ownership. This allows the Rynearsons and whoever owns the land after them, to still live there and enjoy the property with the knowledge that the natural features and environmental benefits that come from conservation will continue forever.

During the almost 40 years the Rynearsons have lived in Streetsboro, they have seen green areas eaten up by development. According to Tammy, "We wanted to preserve this island of green as a gift to the community. Our small contribution will make Streetsboro a better place to live. Trees, plants, and animals will be undisturbed as well as a stream that is part of the Tinker's Creek Watershed."

Because they are giving up some of the value of the land that could come from development, while protecting those features that provide public benefits, they qualified for a tax deduction based on the value of the easement. The Internal Revenue Service considers allowing tax deductions for the following:

1. The preservation of land areas for outdoor recreation or the education of the general public;
2. The protection of a natural habitat of fish, wildlife, or plants, or similar ecosystem;
3. The preservation of open space including farmland and forestland where such preservation is: a) for the scenic enjoyment of the general public, b) pursuant to a clearly delineated federal, state, or local government conservation policy or c) the preservation of a historically impor-



GREEN PORTAGE

Helen Tremaine Gregory

tant land area or structure.

According to Christine Craycroft, executive director of the Portage Park District, land conservation is a public-private partnership with many options. For example in 2000, the Robert C. Dix family gifted 103 acres in Ravenna Township to the Park District which created Dix Park, a mix of natural areas and farmland featuring hiking trails that course through beautiful woods.

In another case, a family from eastern Portage County has placed a 57-acre conservation easement on their property with provisions in their wills to donate the land outright to the Park District upon their deaths. And in several instances, the Park District has received grants or cash donations to purchase properties from owners who are willing to sell at below market value, which also allows them to realize a tax benefit.

What a wonderful way to build our park system and protect natural areas. The people who have made such contributions deserve our heartfelt thanks. Their appreciation of the value of land conservation has led these generous people to give back to their communities in a way that benefits all the residents of Portage County, now and for future generations. If you'd like to learn more, or make a gift for land conservation, contact the Portage Park District at 330-297-7728.

Helen Tremaine Gregory is a member of the Portage Park District Foundation Board. Green Portage is a monthly feature of the Record-Courier in cooperation with the Portage Park District.

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