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Find us on the web at:  
[www.parklandsfoundation.org](http://www.parklandsfoundation.org)

**Newsletter  
October - November  
2009**

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## The Gift of Frances Woodrum



Once it was scattered forest and farmland along the Mackinaw, increasingly eyed by developers, an area that seemed beyond ParkLands possibilities. Today it is almost 2,000 acres of protected lands in what is known as the Wood-

ford Corridor: the Chinquapin Bluffs, Kenyon, Wyatt Ford, Ridgetop, Letcher Basin, and Hidden Hills preserves. At the center is a woman whose love of the rolling hills falling toward Denman Creek led her to donate to the organization 50 acres that have been called the cornerstone of what is now some of ParkLands most extensive holdings.

She is Frances Woodrum, who with husband Howard once farmed the Hidden Hills lands, and after his death faced a decision: should she sell the land, accept its probable development and gain considerable wealth or should she try to preserve it so future generations could enjoy its beauty.

She was debating this issue with herself and her three children in 1989 when she was still in Oregon where she and her husband had retired. Frances, then recently widowed, wrote to the organization she had read about in the Pantagraph: "I should like some information about the ParkLands Foundation land trust. Things like: its purposes, how it operates, how land is acquired and what type of land is appropriate, who may use the property once it goes into the trust, who pays real estate taxes."

Both Dale Birkenholz, then ParkLands president, and Guy Fraker, handling its legal matters, responded quickly. Birkenholz recalls that he wrote her and emphasized that we were not interested in developing property and it would be protected in its natural state for perpetuity. "The next thing I knew she had offered it to us."

Her gift was 50 acres of Hidden Hills, where Frances and Howard before retirement had developed a small campground along with their 200-acre dairy farm operation. They were hardly well-to-do in a monetary sense. In those 17 years on the farm Howard was also driving to Normal every day to a service station job; after their move to Oregon they had rented the land, assuming they would sell it one day.

But that land had deep meaning for Frances, who recalled growing up on a farm near Kankakee where as a little girl she was sent often to bring back the cows, hiking over a sand hill, through meadows and forest, along a creek. The best place in the world to grow up. It had instilled in her an enduring love of nature.

In her correspondence with Birkenholz and Fraker, Frances told them of her love for the Hidden Hills, the high bluff rising from Denman Creek, the wild flowers, the birds: those surroundings signified that her son born there in 1954 was the luckiest boy in the world – he got to grow up on that farm. Anytime she could get away from house chores, she admitted, she would walk out through the rolling Hidden Hills. As she stressed to ParkLands when making the gift in 1989: "God made nature so great, so gorgeous. It's not fair for one person to hold it, so others have to look over a fence to see it".

Matt Fraker, who lives in the Bluffs area, responds with awe when describing the Woodrum land, noting that the Spring Bird Migration Survey always starts there because the warblers and other migrants usually work through there in insane numbers. The oak/hickory savanna still harbors wonderful native plants and wildflowers, as well as cloaking some remarkably rough terrain.

Thinking back on all of ParkLands acquisitions since 1967, Guy Fraker called the Woodrum land the only gift we have received from someone who did not have considerable assets. It was the beginning of our whole initiative on the Woodford County Mackinaw sites, he

*continued on next page*

### CHINQUAPIN BLUFFS REGISTERED WITH ILLINOIS NATURE PRESERVES COMMISSION

*On September 22nd the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission approved our application to register Chinquapin Bluffs (756.98 acres) as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve.*

*The INPC protects a tapestry of nature's treasures in the nationally acclaimed Illinois Nature Preserves System. Permanently protected by state law, ILWRs are private and public lands that have rare plants, animals or other unique natural features. Properties dedicated as ILWRs may be used for hiking, wildlife watching, photography, fishing and other approved scientific activities.*

*By registering Chinquapin Bluffs as a Land and Water Reserve, our goal is to permanently protect the varied landscapes, flora and fauna that make up this unique habitat in Woodford County. It is important to note that ParkLands retains all ownership and management responsibility for this property and that passive nature recreation will continue to be allowed.*

*Mary Horgan*

# Meet your ParkLands board member — Julie Elzanati



Julie Elzanati has served on the ParkLands Board for one year and has been a member for over 15 years. Julie has a broad knowledge of environmental sustainability issues

obtained through academic training and real-world experiences. In 1992 she earned a bachelor's in anthropology from the University of Illinois U-C. In 1994 she performed bird research for Dr. Scott Robinson in the Shawnee National Forest. In 2002 she earned a master's in conservation biology from ISU. From 2003-2006 Julie adjunct faculty in biology at Heartland Community College and as the Assistant Director, Membership Chair and Energy Coordinator at the Ecology Action Center in Normal. While at the EAC, Julie administered the Bloomington-Normal Regional Energy Program and helped to develop and implement the first Illinois Sustainable Living & Wellness Expo in 2004 in partnership with Illinois Wesleyan.

Julie is the coordinator of the Green Institute at HCC, which she helped create ([www.heartland.edu/greenInstitute](http://www.heartland.edu/greenInstitute)). She also co-founded the Illinois Community College Sustainability Network ([www.ilccsn.org](http://www.ilccsn.org)). The Green Institute provides educational programs for homeowners, businesses and

building industry professionals on sustainability topics green construction practices, efficient energy use, land and water conservation, recycling and waste management, local farming, alternative energy sources, and other environmental technologies. The Green Institute supports a wide range of green campus initiatives and offers a variety of innovative workforce training programs that prepare students for jobs in the emerging green industry. In April 2009 the institute's Pregracke Center environmental resource collection opened in the LEED-certified Workforce Development Center offering visitors an interactive display featuring the environmental reclamation work of HCC alumnus Chad Pregracke and the nonprofit organization which he founded, Living Lands & Waters.

Julie has been a leader with the Audubon Society and the Mackinaw River Ecosystem Partnership, as well as serving as regional chapter president of the Assoc. of Professional Energy Consultants.

Julie lives on 32 acres in Woodford County with her husband, Saad Elzanati, and their wonderful children, Michael and Peter. In the 12 years that they have owned this property, they have performed a major stream bank stabilization project and planted over 500 trees to restore the riparian corridor along the creek in their backyard. Julie is passionate about environmental sustainability issues and has a strong desire to increase community awareness and attainment of natural resource conservation.



## Welcome new board members

*Terry Gaines, Deborah Halperin and Susie Sears. And thank you Dave Jeffries for your years of board service.*

## Woodrum's gift continued

stressed. And Matt Fraker adds, "Frances did not give us 50 acres, she gifted to us the reason to have 2,000 acres out here now. She gifted to us a place that we know will remain so special in perpetuity".

Frances, interviewed in her small trailer home in Normal, has no regrets, only pride that she has been able to share the Hidden Hills with others. She holds in her memory "the beautiful, beautiful woods where the creek meandered through," running straight through the heart, it seems, of the woman whose love of nature became the cornerstone of a vast area now preserved for future generations.

*Mark Wyman*

## Calendar of Events

### Preserves Closed

**November 20, 21, 22**  
Deer Management Hunt

### Preserves Closed

**December 3, 4**  
Deer Management Hunt

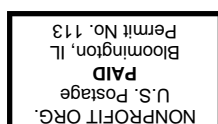
### Seed Cleaning

Saturday, Dec. 5, 9 a.m.  
Bloomington Parks  
Maintenance Building  
1813 Springfield Road

**NOTE:** *Dates are subject to change. Join Jason's e-mail list or log on to [www.parklandsfoundation.org](http://www.parklandsfoundation.org).*

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**Have an article, idea or photo for the newsletter?**  
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