



News Release

The Little Forks Conservancy
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Stark Farmstead Preserved



June 19, 2006

For over 50 years, Blanche Stark and her late husband, Philip, cared for their 79 acre property in Homer Township. They farmed the front half of their land that stretches for nearly a half mile along Five Mile Road. The back half of the property and its abundant natural resources of woods, wetlands and wildflowers were carefully managed and nurtured.

Blanche Stark and her family have protected their 79 acre property, which preserves this hardwood forest and a variety of other habitat.

Following Mr. Stark's passing, their children told Mrs. Stark how important the land was to their family's history and memories. So it was with little surprise that her children were very supportive when she informed them that she desired to protect the family

farm by donating a conservation easement to The Little Forks Conservancy of Midland, Michigan. On Friday, April 7, Mrs. Stark's wish to permanently protect her property was guaranteed.

The Stark Farmstead is the first finished project where the Conservancy was able to use the Priority Conservation Lands Assessment. The assessment is one of the tools used by the Conservancy to locate properties within their service area that have the highest potential for sustainable conservation.

"The property has a high score for natural vegetation as characterized by the woods, wetland and undisturbed habitat on the property," stated Elan Lipschitz, LFC land protection specialist.

The property has a wealth of natural features including a hardwood forest of maple, oak, hickory and basswood. Red pine trees were planted on the property adding to the diversity of evergreen trees like hemlock and white pine found growing on her land. A rich abundance of wildflowers can be seen on her property including trailing arbutus, pink lady slipper orchids, fringe poligolia and trillium. The woods also have vernal pools that provide important aquatic resources for local wildlife including a variety of amphibian life.

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The land has a long agricultural history and continues to be farmed for hay. At one time Mr. Stark grew a variety of crops and raised cattle. One of the notable features is a blueberry patch that still provides fresh berries in the summer.

Mrs. Stark has seen the land change since she moved to Midland from Oklahoma. She has strong feelings about the detrimental effects of urban sprawl upon our rural lands. Mrs. Stark commented that protecting her land "makes a small statement" and The Little Forks Conservancy helped her accomplish this goal.

"Protecting this property will ensure important natural land in our local community is forever protected," said Wendy Baker, LFC board member. "We commend Mrs. Stark on her commitment to conservation and the environment."

Upon hearing of her grandmother's intentions, Dénise Welch, who is studying in the Netherlands, wrote, "Community conservation endeavors can be so successful, in my opinion, because ordinary folks can see firsthand the benefits of local efforts by other ordinary people. Keep it small and humble and I think that is the best way to empower communities. It's very nice to have a say in the future of your own property. I'm really glad that you signed an agreement with them."

A conservation easement is a permanent agreement on the future uses of a property. The conservation easement does not require the landowner to provide public access to the property, which will remain in private ownership. To learn more, please contact our office at (989) 835-4886 or email us at info@littleforks.org.

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