



# Conservancy NEWS

Protecting the special natural features of the Couchiching region for future generations.

Seasonal Highlights from The Couchiching Conservancy

March 2004

## We've made the move!

**F**ebruary 1st was a banner day for the Conservancy. Twenty-six volunteers converged on the downtown basement office that has been home for the past two years, and within 90 minutes everything was moved into our bright new home at Grant's Woods.

The new Conservancy Centre, set amongst large pines, is everything we hoped. Two large offices provide plenty of working space for staff. The meeting room holds a dozen people comfortably, and will stretch to 20. There is lots of storage space, a handicapped-accessible washroom, and even a small kitchen space.

Virtually everything in the house interior has been renewed, so that it is safe, low-maintenance, and energy-efficient. We still have some exterior work to do – finishing off a new entrance, two small decks, and parking and landscaping improvements. And we are hoping to add an Eco-Gazebo that will provide an attractive sheltered space overlooking our little wetland. But the major renovations are done, and the result is both attractive and functional.

This move would not have been possible without the generosity of many people, starting with Bill Grant who gave us his 52-acre



Sharon Jenkins cleans and paints trim shortly before the big move.

property that includes the house. The Ontario Trillium Foundation provided vital financial support with a major capital grant. Local businesses and contractors supplied services and materials at no cost or greatly reduced prices. And dozens of volunteers donated hundreds of hours of their labour and expertise under the gentle guidance of Ken Thomson.

We will be hosting at least one (or maybe several) open houses in the spring to show off our new home, and to thank all of our supporters properly. In the meantime, you are

welcome to drop in anytime to the Conservancy Centre, located at 1485 Division Road West, just east of Fairgrounds Road. A loop trail through the old-growth woods is available, with parking by the house.

For now, snow blankets the grounds around the Centre. An irregular pattern of tracks reveals a visit to the bird feeder by a Short-tailed Weasel, an intriguing touch of nature to welcome us to our new location. No doubt that will be the first of many interesting nature sightings in the years to come. ∞

## A Word from the President

**W**e are now well into 2004, and as you may be aware from the Annual General Meeting, the Conservancy board has a number of new projects in their sights.

These new projects will eventually require more volunteers and an increase in our membership. Our members represent our support and strength in the community. As new properties become available, we must have the membership numbers to maintain our viability and visibility in the surrounding area.

Our goal is to increase our membership by at least 20% per year over the next five years. The board will be trying various ideas to "twig" people's interest and encourage involvement in the Conservancy.

Membership in the Couchiching Conservancy is an affirmation of your support for ecological land management for the long term. It allows the board and Executive Director to negotiate with the government, municipalities and private foundations from a position of strength on your behalf.

If you know anyone interested in the Conservancy, please spread the word. We can send them information or a brochure, or they can talk to Ron at the office or to any board member. If you are really enthusiastic, consider giving a year's membership as a gift to let interested people learn first-hand about our projects. ∞

*Dr. Bob Sullivan, President*

## A snake in the hand

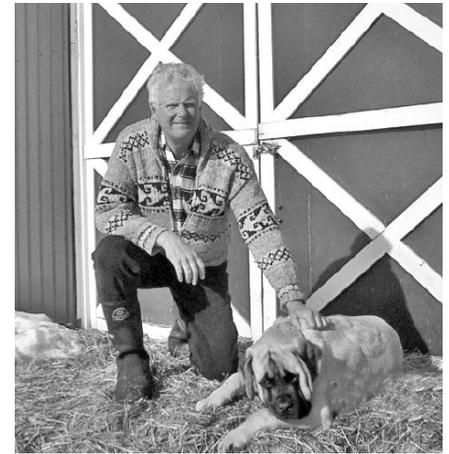


**Bob Sullivan shows off a Bull Snake.**

**A**mong all nature's creatures, few have as much ability to fascinate us as snakes. That fascination was fully on display on February 28th, as the Conservancy joined Jeff Hathaway and Jenny Pearce of Sciensational Ssnakes at the Orillia Square Mall. Over 150 people, mostly children but some adults too, overcame their fears to have their photo taken with a snake draped over their shoulders. Conservancy President Bob Sullivan and director Dan Stoutt handled the constant crowds and passed on a message about the importance of snakes as part of the natural world. By the end of the day, nearly \$800 had been raised for Conservancy projects.

Jeff and Jenny, who have settled just south of Orillia, regularly travel to schools and special events with their snakes. Anyone who would like to find out more about their programs can visit their web page at [www.scisnake.com](http://www.scisnake.com) or call them at 327-2353. ∞

## Volunteer profile:



### Lou Probst

The Carden Plain is chock full of interesting birds and butterflies and alvar plants, but it has some interesting people too. One of those is Lou Probst, who with his wife Judy "retired" to a farmstead in the heart of the Carden Plain in 1995.

An engineer and manager by training, Lou had worked in the private sector in Toronto for many years. But it was travelling as ecotourists to many parts of the world that awakened Lou and Judy to the need to protect natural habitats, and they bought over 600 acres in Carden as a place both to live and to protect.

It wasn't long before Lou became involved with the Conservancy's program to designate and protect the Carden Plain as an Important Bird Area (IBA), and for the past several years he has chaired the local IBA committee. He has been an active participant in municipal planning processes, seeking controls on quarries and policies to protect the environment. He is an active member of the Environmental Advisory Committee for the City of Kawartha Lakes, and of the new Carden Field Naturalists club. Both he and Judy have been major supporters of the Cameron Ranch Alvar project, and we are sure they will continue to be environmental leaders for many years to come. ∞

# UPDATES

## from the Conservation Front

### Oro Moraine landowners receive Stewardship Awards



MP Paul Devillers and landowner Ron Lockhart share a laugh with Conservancy Stewardship Coordinator Gayle Carlyle.

**E**nlightened private ownership can be a powerful tool for protecting natural areas, and the Oro Moraine is blessed with many landowners who cherish nature. At a ceremony in the Jarratt Hall in early February, 28 families with a combined land ownership of over 1850 acres were presented with Stewardship Awards by the Conservancy.

These landowners, which included Oro-Medonte Mayor Neil Craig and Councillor John Crawford, had voluntarily pledged to maintain their land in its natural state to the best of their ability, and to manage it responsibly. The essence of the stewardship program is perhaps best summed up by a 1912 quote from John Muir which graces the award plaques: “Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul alike.” ∞

**O**ur annual meeting in late January – this year with about 80 members in attendance – gives us an opportunity to thank a few of the special volunteers that are so important to our success. Six people received silver Conservancy pins this year in recognition of their exceptional service:

### Annual Meeting honors special volunteers

Mary Lou Kirby and Sandy Agnew stepped down from the board this year, after several years of active participation in many Conservancy projects. Mary Lou is continuing as a property team volunteer, and Sandy is in the process of donating a conservation easement on his rural property.

Don Scott and Kristie McKechnie have been the technical experts for renovations on the Grant house,

providing design drawings, help with arranging donated materials and services, and their own work on some of the more technical aspects. As well, Kristie arranged the donation of half of the proceeds from the Brewery Bay Golf Tournament to the Conservancy this year.



Kristie McKechnie and Don Scott receive silver pins from Executive Director Ron Reid.

John Jenkins and Gary Thiess have each contributed countless hours as hands-on volunteers on the house renovations, and are both actively involved with property management teams.

The annual meeting also confirmed Bob Sullivan as President for a second year, and elected two new Directors: Joan Rosebush, who is a retired pharmacist and former President of the Orillia Naturalists Club, and Earl Dertinger, who is currently the Stewardship

Coordinator for North Simcoe with the Ministry of Natural Resources. We look forward to their active involvement with our projects in the coming year. ∞



## The Couchiching Conservancy Board

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