

Pines and Prairies Land Trust

The mission of Pines and Prairies Land Trust is to protect natural and cultural resources and promote sustainable agriculture through education and preservation of open space in Central Texas.

In this Newsletter:

Pages 2 & 3: Party on the River

Pages 4 & 5: To Catch a Fairy

Page 6: A Tribute to Alan Jaeger

Page 7: Letter from the President

Page 8: Announcements

PPLT WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING SPONSORS OF
OUR FIRST EVER FUNDRAISING EVENT *BANDS FOR LANDS*:

NEIGHBOR'S
KITCHEN & YARD



BONE
SPIRITS



MARGIE CRISP

BANDS FOR LANDS

Party By The River

by Larry Gfeller

Groceries, gasoline, electricity and water. . .all commodities of life that we pay for on a monthly basis. But there's another basic of life: people will pay to have a good time! It was this realization that the PPLT board harnessed on October 17th to orchestrate a successful fundraiser, touted as "Bands for Lands." It was a Saturday night extravaganza that mixed good food and drink with a silent auction and three crowd-pleasing bands in the most iconic setting in Bastrop: the verdant banks of the Colorado River with the glow of a summery evening, overhanging trees and the last rays of sunlight sparkling its surface.

Successfully pulling something like this off entails taking risks. Success can be elusive, and just because everyone works hard doesn't mean "they" will come. Well, they did! First,



you've got to have a philanthropic partner—in this case, Neighbors Kitchen & Yard, a family-friendly neighborhood pizza restaurant, bar and music venue on the Colorado River in Bastrop. Their signature pizzas and other delicacies, two cash bars and a rockin' backyard music venue, we couldn't have asked for a more enthusiastic and generous partner.

Next, you've got to have a crowd draw; ours came in the form of three popular bands Chubby Knuckle Choir, Mark Jungers Band, and the headliner, Carolyn Wonderland. Chubby Knuckle Choir is an eclectic and local favorite, Mark Jungers is not only a popular performer but a landowner near Lock-

hart, and Carolyn Wonderland is a downright Blues diva with a huge following!

Finally, there must be a cause that energizes people. PPLT is respected as an area non-profit dedicated to protecting wide open spaces; but, this evening there was another poignant public beneficiary. . . victims of the recent Hidden Pines Wildfire. Part of every at-the-door ticket sale and donation paid that Saturday went to the Bastrop County Longterm Recovery Team to help relieve some small part of the suffering of residents besieged by yet another horrific Bastrop County wildfire. Carolyn Wonderland even donated to the cause.

Our public opened their pocketbooks, came out on a picture-perfect evening and partied down hard until well after the sun went down. We are especially thankful to our Board of Directors (every one of them poured their souls into the effort), the management and supportive staff of Neighbors, Larry Wilson (Larryland Music), our Master of Ceremonies, the donors who scavenged the makings of a praised silent auction, the troubadours who picked and performed for expenses only and, of course, the citizens and friends who supported our causes. PPLT and those attending have proclaimed this inaugural fundraiser a big success. We earned 30% more than anticipated and most important of all, got to know our community better.

Mark your calendars for the Second Annual
Bands for Lands concert, October 22, 2016



Clockwise from top: Carolyn Wonderland, Mark Jungers Band, Chubby Knuckle Choir

To Catch a Fairy by Larry Gfeller

Page 4

The Reusing Foundation has been a generous supporter of the Pines and Prairies Land Trust, for which we are most appreciative. We lost Mike Reusing in 2007. What follows is a short tribute to Mike and to a thoroughly intense and unselfish life well lived.

The Land of the Midnight Sun, The Last Frontier—Alaska! Over the ages it has changed countless people's view of life. . .and so it did for Mike Reusing. With a law degree from the University of North Carolina and five years as an assistant DA under his belt, Mike moved his law practice to what is arguably the most breathtaking wilderness in the world. With a pearly cold daylight that seems to bear no relation to the risen sun, the experience can quiet the mind and erase the limits of one's potential. This wildness and beauty changed the course of Mike's life. Alaska was ground zero for the remainder of what would become an incredible journey. Nothing would ever be the same.

Despite Mike's success in law, he had a plan to retire early from day one. He lived on half his salary, no matter how little that might have been. He had cars without radios. Anything to save towards his ultimate goal. His widow, Melissa Cole, describes how a busy attorney pulled off the Indiana Jones lifestyle amidst the press of a full docket:



"Since Mike's practice often ended up in the courtroom, he always had an adventure planned should the court case settle before actually going to court. Since his time was already marked off the office calendar, it might be his choice to head off to a remote sail or hike on what would have been court time."

Clamoring for new experiences, Mike practiced no restraint in pursuing every expedition, enterprise and adventure he could find in the world. He climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro, waded through swamps in Gabon, rafted the BioBio in Chile, sailed from Fiji to Singapore, trekked through the steamy jungles of Borneo and crossed the dunes of Mongolia by camelback. Nothing was off limits. . .he even tracked snow leopards in Pakistan. Just look around. It is not outer space or middle earth where life happens; it's right here in front of us, officially off the map—places where old-time mapmakers might scribble, "Here be dragons." It belongs to a category of half-things, aurora, rainbows, ghosts. Life is mysterious, ephemeral and exists in its most elemental form on the edges. This impressed him as a truth. Mike meant to savor every extreme he could experience.

But there was another truth. A compelling one. There is suffering in the world, extreme suffering. When you look under the beauty that clothes most images of the planet, this is the skeleton beneath. Mike retired in 1996 and he believed that

it is our collective and individual responsibility to protect and nurture the global family, to support its weaker members, and to share good fortune. There would be more world travel in his future.

Mike's thirst for adventure did not abate; it merely coalesced into humanitarian passion. He continued to travel the globe, embracing hunger, homelessness, poverty—that unfortunate twenty-one percent of mankind for whom daily life is a crap shoot. The smallest amount of change makes the greatest amount of impact. If you live on less than \$1.25 a day, this is not just charity—this is everything. Mike went on missions with the likes of Operation Smile, Turtle Will, Habitat for Humanity. It was in Honduras, on a mission for Habitat for Humanity, that Mike met Melissa. They were thrown together unexpectedly on the same errand, two souls with one objective, side-by-side—the air so close as if you had to breathe faster to get enough. They hit it off. It was like they had simultaneous lines in the same reservoir of impulses. Melissa describes the courtship, "For the next year, we met each other almost monthly on some adventure (hiking to the bottom of the Grand Canyon, canoeing the Everglades, etc), culminating in a 12 week trip throughout Southeast Asia. He proposed in Hanoi, our last stop." This was 1998.

It was in Vietnam that Mike and Melissa learned about Operation Smile, a group of doctors, nurses and others who serve the poorest countries of the world on cleft lip and palate repair missions. With neither having a medical background, admittance to the organization appeared bleak—it just made Mike try harder. Later, while on a Habitat for Humanity mission to Bolivia, Mike heard that Operation Smile was operating in Peru. After finishing

in Bolivia Mike and Melissa made their way northwest to Lima where 600 hopeful patients were undergoing two weeks of pre-op screening. The duo was not only accepted, ripe and sweaty from the life struggle, they were warmly welcomed!

This connection would take them to some of the most indigent countries on earth, ranging from Rwanda to Nepal, Haiti to Madagascar. As they continued their quest, Mike and Melissa created a foundation designed to fund long-term projects, like Doctors Without Borders and Partners in Health in the most desperate and destitute regions of Darfur, Rwanda and Niger. Angels of mercy? No, "activists"—derived from the phrase *to act*. Eventually, Mike and Melissa bought land near Elgin, Texas—acreage adjoining a family-owned homestead (Melissa also had a 25-year history with the Elgin Veterinary Hospital). It has been said that conservation is a state of harmony between men and the land. With a mix of meadows and oak/pine woodlands Mike and Melissa had an immediate bond with the land—they dedicated themselves to husbanding their natural open space, charmed by a spring-fed pond. It was here, on 425 acres of native Texas wilderness, that the couple found shared values with Pines and Prairies Land Trust—"protecting the earth upon which we live." Like much of our land today, it had been overgrazed, overplanted for forage and ravaged for profit. Through dogged relentlessness, Mike set out to restore the land to its original munificence. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department rewarded his efforts by conferring the Texas Lone Star Land Steward award (post oak savannah ecoregion) in 2007. This award is given to only a handful of individuals or organizations each year; the best-

of-the-best land managers.

Today, Melissa carries on Mike's legacy, continuing the transition to native grasses, improving erosion control and creating favorable wildlife habitat. She has participated in the Prairies for Upland Birds Program, sponsored by Texas Parks and Wildlife. She maintains nest boxes for bluebird, wood ducks and barn owls and spends an hour a day caring for the miles of hiking trails that meander through her property. On most mornings, before the day's heat has a chance to get properly underway, you can find her on the trail with camera, notebook and her three dogs, Waylon, Shorty and Violet. Later, there is scheduled office time most every day of the week; spent administering the foundation, overseeing the land management effort and coordinating travel. Melissa continues to participate in several humanitarian assignments a year. Despite the heavy schedule, generally one day a week is reserved for grandchildren—that genetic link—the most natural receptacle for legacies.

Should there be surprise at a connection among seemingly disparate passions: the precision of law, an appetite for freelance adventure, concern for the downtrodden and affection for the land? When fortunate enough to have a choice, a man pursues what he loves. *...and there is the gossamer thread!* Melissa says, "Our goal was to give

back some of our good fortune to aid the most vulnerable people in the world, and to strive to protect the earth on which we all live."

All energy is only borrowed; and, then one day, we must give it back, back to the land from which it sprang. All that we are and all that we do eventually become memory. Thank goodness for that! The world is sparsely graced by exceptional people, but their reach and impact on others is limitless and timeless. It's not about race or culture, wealth or poverty. It's not about perfection. . . it's about forward movement. It's about demonstrating the human condition as a powerful force: compassionate, hopeful and contagious. Remarkable personalities ignite the spirit within; they inspire unimaginable



fire and energy in others by the way they live their lives. Mike Reusing lived life on his own terms. If you caught a fairy during that waxing moon, and you kind of shook her around a little until she granted you one wish. . . well. . . what would it be?

Don't believe? You should!

A Tribute to Alan Jaeger *By Larry Gfeller*

Okay. You've struggled to form a new non-profit organization . . . and in walks this guy—a towering, resolute guy with a commanding presence—who says, “Do you need any help? I do treasurer stuff.” *No-body* asks to be a treasurer! Can't you just imagine?

With piercing blue eyes and a tight, precise mind, this was the sort of fellow—if selected as jury foreman—who would personify a defense attorney's worst nightmare. Alan Jaeger, then a new resident of Tahitian Village, drove by the Pines and Prairies Land Trust office frequently (he knew many of the founders), so one day he just stopped in to ask this incredulous question. That was 2003. Alan stepped down as the PPLT Treasurer in summer of 2014.

He continued to serve on the board through the end of that year, before stepping away completely this last March. “I felt as if a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders,” he said. Entrusted with the receipt, care and disbursement of funds all this time, Alan presided over an original purse that could barely jingle, and helped it grow into a model portfolio that ultimately passed the scrutiny of the national Land Trust Accreditation Commission. No mean feat.

There comes a time in everyone's life, no matter how illustrious or accomplished, when we turn to family. Call it an internal compass or whatever you like, but Alan and Vera have chosen this time to enjoy chil-

to live within one's means—whatever they are—can be immense.

Pulling PPLT into the 20th Century, through integration of Quickbooks, implementation of modern portfolio theory and

online trading, were among Alan's most satisfying accomplishments. He built a first class financial system from the ground up.

Moving forward always leaves behind a wake, a disturbance, a sense of loss—for the person leaving and the organization left. For Alan, it was the comfortable and satisfying routine of coming into the office on a morning to update computer records, then spending time with

the E.D. (he's worked alongside them all) catching up on news, plans and juicy tidbits; a type of organizational gestalt. For PPLT, Alan's departure meant losing a stalwart fact-based advisor: wrapped rather tightly on the outside, a thoughtful core of caring on the inside, like a half-melted candle. He will always be an advocate. A dyed-in-the-wool crusader against deficit-spending, Alan enjoins the Board to remember that “**Fund Raising is Key**,” as those piercing eyes watch from the sidelines. No pressure there.

Alan and Vera in Budapest earlier this year.



dren, grandchildren and each other. For 30 years, Alan moved around with IBM Corporation. Texas is home now. Both spent their child-rearing years as single parents. There are two grandsons each on both sides to cherish and spoil, a fitting reward for years of sacrifice and struggle.

The man's sense of discipline and commitment is apparent. . . you can feel it in his gaze, the set of his jaw. It isn't easy managing growth, especially when it comes to finances. The pressures of managing money, explaining to idealists that there are practical limits and a need

Letter from the President

We have moved our office location to downtown Bastrop. Our office is now located at 1018 Main Street, Suite B. This gives us much more visibility as we work to preserve open space in Bastrop, Caldwell, Fayette, Lee and eastern Travis Counties.

We hope that all of you have come through the recent flood season without damage. These recent flood events remind us all of one of the benefits of protecting land from urban development and that is reduced losses from flooding. Open space and well managed land helps to reduce run-off from storm events, natural water courses slow the damaging force of rapidly flowing water, and protected riparian areas help to reduce the loss of property and improvements next to stream and river banks. Our work is important to all of us who reside in this 5 county region. I encourage you to seriously consider helping us to continue our work in protecting land here in Central Texas.

I hope that you have made note of our work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in restoring native prairie on one of our land holdings. Please come and see what is happening as we announce future field days to show how this works to benefit the environment, wildlife and livestock.

We are also working with Keep Bastrop County Beautiful, Bastrop County, Lost Pines Master Naturalists and others to continue to improve access to the Colorado River. These groups have worked to improve access to the Lost Pines Nature Trail and to our Colorado River Refuge that joins it. If you haven't been to these preserves in a while, I encourage you to go see what these wonderful volunteers have done and are doing to keep this special place beautiful and publicly accessible.

Lastly, I am pleased to report that the Texas Legislature approved moving the oversight of the Texas Farm and Ranchlands Conservation Program (FRCP) to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. This program was created in 2005 and this legislative session also provided the first funding ever for the FRCP with an appropriation of \$2 million to begin demonstrations of how the program will work to serve Texans in the future.

Sincerely,

Smith Covey



Staff and volunteers from NRCs, PPLT, TPWD and USFWS at one of the prairie restoration areas at Billig Ranch.



1018 Main St. Ste. B
PO Box 737
Bastrop, Texas
78602
512-308-1911



Board and Staff

Smith Covey, Pres.
Maria Alonso, V-Pres.
David Vogel, Treas.

John Hart Asher II
Travis Brown
Cristin Embree
Jeremiah Jarvis
Jarle Lillemoen
Frank May

Melanie Pavlas,
Executive Director

Nicole Harris, Staff

We're on the Web!

pplt.org | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#)

Announcements:

- ⇒ Join us every Monday at 9 a.m. at the Lost Pines Nature Trails and the Colorado River Refuge to help the Lost Pines Master Naturalists with trail upkeep and special projects. Contact Frank May for more info: frank.may46@gmail.com
- ⇒ Have a group interested in visiting our preserves? Let us know and we'll set you up!
- ⇒ Our newsletter is now only offered electronically, unless you request a printed copy. Saves trees and money.

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING DONORS:

MERRILYN BARTON, ALAN JAEGER, BECKY JOLIN,

VANICE MEDLEY, DAVID VOGEL AND

CENTEX MECHANICAL AIR & HEAT!!!