

Avon Hills Initiative

Fall Update 2006

September 2006

Schellinger Family Agrees to Permanently Protect Land for the Public

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA) Program has elected to purchase approximately 100 acres of mature oak forest from Francis and Karen Schellinger. This rolling tract of land is located approximately 3 miles south of Avon, Minnesota along the scenic Schuman Lake Road in Section 4 of Collegeville Township. The purpose of Scientific and Natural Areas assures examples of native ecosystems are preserved across the state. The land will be open to the public for nature observation, scientific research, and environmental education. SNAs are not open to motorized traffic or hunting. The SNA Program will continue to work with adjacent landowners in the area to provide long-term land protection options for their consideration.

The Francis and Karen Schellinger family has owned this land since about 1970. During these 36 years Francis, Karen, and their family have hunted, cut firewood, gathered mushrooms, practiced selective harvesting of timber (many of the trees are mature Red and White Oak) and otherwise enjoyed the natural setting that this 100 acres has offered. Located within the heart of the biologically significant Avon Hills and surrounded by tremendous natural beauty (amid increasing development), this property provides a core area of preservation that will hopefully encourage other landowners to similarly protect the

rural nature of the Avon Hills and seek options that benefit them, their family, their land, and future generations.

With a family of eight siblings the future of the Schellinger's property was very uncertain. Francis and Karen have always valued the natural beauty and integrity of the property and hoped for a way to preserve it while also providing a "fair" solution given the eight children in the family. The sale of the property for SNA designation allowed for its preservation as well as providing a solution to how this property would be passed onto the siblings. Had this property not been designated as an SNA, the future of the property would likely been one of being broken up into smaller parcels in some way. Francis and Karen hope more people will look to the future, beyond their interests and life-

times to preserve for future generations what we and others before us have been blessed to enjoy and experience.

The purchase of land by the MN DNR is just one option landowners have to permanently preserve their property. Conservation easements and cluster developments are additional options. Through this designation the Schellinger property will remain in its natural state and be protected from further development.

For more information on SNAs, contact Lee Markell at MN DNR- (651) 259-5477. For more information on land preservation options, come to the MFA conference on September 23 at Saint John's. (Note: The Schellingers and the DNR first became acquainted at a past Avon Hills Initiative conference.)

Inside this issue:

Schellinger SNA	1
Schuman Lake Road Event	1
Comprehensive Plan Update	2
Growing up in the Avon Hills	2
AHI Executive Board	3
Parting Message from the Chair	3
AHI Job Opening	3
Chairman Elections	4

Schuman Lake Road Event

Come out and enjoy the fall colors and learn more about the Avon Hills Initiative while enjoying the incredible natural beauty of this area.

WHAT: A Celebration of Schuman Lake Road (Lover's Lane)

WHEN: Three weekends at the height of fall, September 30-Oct. 1, Oct. 7-8, and Oct. 14-15, all from 10:00a.m. to 5:00p.m.

WHO: Sponsored by the Avon Hills Initiative

WHY: To draw attention to the incredible natural beauty of the Avon Hills

Come and enjoy the fall colors while learning more about the Avon Hills Initiative. We'll have some history about this glorious road and information about the entire region. We'll also have good things to eat and on October 15 we'll have a grand finale – so come on out and join us, or call the Avon Hills Initiative (320.363.3163) to volunteer. To learn more, visit www.csbsju.edu/arboretum/avonhills.

Stearns County Comprehensive Plan Update

Heidi Lenz

Purpose For The Comprehensive Plan Update

Stearns County has begun the process of updating their Comprehensive Plan. This will enable the county to better coordinate land use planning regulations.

Rapid growth and development in the eastern portion of Stearns County and changing demographics and agricultural practices in the western portion have created the need for a Comprehensive Plan update. The existing plan was revised in 1998 and no longer accurately reflects the needs of the County.

In order to assure that development occurs in a manner that realizes long-term benefits to the natural environment and local communities, the Comprehensive Plan will be used to coordinate plans and deliver services more efficiently.

What Has Been Done So Far?

Stearns County has hired a consultant team to lead them through the process of updating the comprehensive plan. This team will be responsible for facilitating meetings, developing new maps, analyzing existing

data, and preparing the updated comprehensive plan.

Stearns County has also formed a Citizen's Advisory Committee. This committee will play a key role in the development of the comprehensive plan and is made up of individuals that represent different interests within Stearns County. To date, the Citizen's Advisory Committee has met two times and will continue to meet until the final comprehensive plan has been adopted by the Stearns County Board of Commissioners.

There have also been a series of township cluster meetings held throughout the county. These meetings are designed to inform and educate township officials on good planning practices. The goal is to develop a comprehensive growth plan map for each township within Stearns County. There will be another round of township cluster meetings held this winter.

How Can The Public Be Involved?

There will be open houses conducted for the public to attend. The open houses will update the public on what the comprehensive plan update is all about, where we are at in the process and, most importantly, provide an opportunity for the public to

give their input. They will be held at various locations and times around the county. The first round of open houses will be this fall and the second round will be this winter. Exact dates and locations have not been determined. Please watch the local newspapers or the Comprehensive Plan page of the Stearns County website (www.co.stearns.mn.us/Government/4643.htm) for notices of these open houses.

Public hearings will also be held towards the end of the Comprehensive Plan Update process, prior to the adoption of the final Plan.

Completion of the Comprehensive Plan Update

The Comprehensive Plan Update is scheduled to be completed and approved by the Stearns County Board of Commissioners during the summer of 2007.

Heidi Lenz is an Environmental Specialist with Stearns County Environmental Services

Note: Two Avon Hills Initiative board members, Allan Davisson and Steve Plantenberg, hold places on the Citizen's Advisory Committee

What it Means to Grow Up in the Avon Hills

Kenzie Cotty

Hi! My name is Kenzie. I am twelve years old and I've grown up in the Avon Hills, which I believe has shaped my life. Just riding to school on the old dirt roads and watching the seasons change in the surrounding woods has always had some effect on me. I love living in the woods. I love seeing deer in the morning right after I've woken up and watching the sun come up over the tops of the awaiting trees. Morning has always been one of my favorite times of the day, watching everything wake up over the long sleepy night. A lot of people say that they aren't morning people. But I

believe that if you live in the Avon Hills, that is when everything is most beautiful.

Fall and winter would have to be my two favorite seasons. I believe that if you want to see someplace magical, you should drive along Schuman Lake Road in the fall. The leaves are changing colors and falling onto the road, welcoming you into the hills. Now if you want to believe that anything is possible, you should go take a hike in the woods, in the winter, as the snow falls. Catching snowflakes on your tongue will make you smile. Looking up at the tops of the majestic trees as you make a snow angel makes you keep a special place in your heart for

the hills.

Now when I grow up and move away, I will always keep a special place in my heart for this place because this is what puts a smile on my face and what made me learn to love and accept the simple things in life. Life has many "hills", but I have learned how to move past them because I grew up in them. This has shaped my life.

Kenzie is the step-daughter of Mark Reum and daughter of Jackie Leedahl, head of the AHI Cultural History/Sense of Place committee

Avon Hills Initiative Executive Board

Allan Davisson & Steve Plantenberg
Government Relations Committee
Collegeville, MN and Avon, MN

Ernie Diedrich
Fundraising Committee
Saint Joseph, MN

Lowell Rushmeyer
Land Stewardship/Biological Sciences
Committee
Albany, MN

Bill Fahrney
Administration Committee
St. Cloud, MN

Jackie Leedahl
Cultural History/Sense of Place Com-
mittee
Avon, MN

Phyllis Plantenberg
Non-Governmental Committee
Saint Joseph, MN

The Education/Promotion board position is currently open. If you are interested in applying, please contact a committee member. Contact information online.

Non-voting staff assistance provided by: Melissa Holm, *Saint John's Arboretum*; Tom Kroll, *Saint John's Arboretum*; and John Maile, *The Nature Conservancy*

A Parting Message from the Chair

Steve Plantenberg, Chair

On behalf of the friends and neighbors of the Avon Hills, I wish to extend our gratitude and special thanks to those individuals who have served in advisory roles to our young organization. The gifts and talents of these many individuals have played an integral role in our ability to reach out and educate the greater community on the necessity to find

entrepreneurial solutions to balance land development pressures and preserve our rich, rural character.

As a community based organization, our future is dependent on our members coming forward to participate in a joint effort to educate and preserve this region for generations to come.

At this time we are asking for your assistance. If you would have any interest in serving on the Avon Hills Ini-

tiative Board or would like to join us at an upcoming meeting, we wish to extend a warm invitation to join us. In the interim if you have any questions we ask that you contact Melissa Holm in care of the St. Johns Arboretum at 320-363-3163 to find out more information.

Fall will be upon us soon, make sure you set aside some special time with friends and family to get out and enjoy the hills in all their fall splendor.

Avon Hills Initiative Job Opening

Tom Kroll

The Avon Hills Initiative is cooperating with the Healthy Community Partnerships (HCP) in St. Joseph, Avon, and Cold Spring as well as the Healthy Township Partnership from Collegeville Township to ask for \$10,000 from the Initiative Foundation.

If the funding is received as expected, much of it would go towards a paid, part-time position to assist in accomplishing Avon Hills related activities. These would include:

- Work with Allan Davisson and Steve Plantenberg to do internet and library research on comprehensive land use plans and ordinances from around the country that could be modified to fit the needs of the citizens of this area;
- Preparing drafts of comprehensive land use plan and ordinance lan-

guage that could be presented to the appropriate Stearns County and Township boards and officials;

- Assuring strong two-way communication and idea gathering from the citizens of the Avon Hills through local meetings, news releases, and newsletters.

Since funding is not yet assured, no definite timetable has been established. The position will just be part-time and would not have any additional benefits. We are looking for someone with a passion for the goals of the Avon Hills Initiative and maybe 8 hours a week to work on these goals. So, if you are at all interested in seeing the job description when it is prepared, please contact Melissa at Saint John's Arboretum of office to be put on the mailing list. You will also be notified of how to apply. The Avon Hills Executive Board is hoping interest will be high from local

landowners. The Executive Board will be responsible for choosing among the candidates.

We thank the Healthy Community Partnerships and the Initiative Foundation for their support in seeking this funding.

For more information contact:
Melissa – 320-363-3163 or
ocfellow@csbsju.edu

Raised in the Hills Teen Art Exhibit

October 7th, 8th

Four teenage artists, raised in the hills of Avon, will showcase the finest of their artistic creations. For more information visit www.csbsju.edu/arboretum/avonhills or call (320) 363-3163.

Voting Ballot

Please vote for one candidate. Vote at any of the Schuman Lake Road events or send by mail to Saint John's Arboretum, Collegeville, MN 56321-

Bill Fahrney

Peter Dwyer

Avon Hills Initiative Chairman Election

Who Are We?

The Avon Hills Initiative is an informal group of citizens and organizations interested in:

- Preserving the rural character of our community
- Protecting the quality of our natural areas
- Maintaining economic productivity in our communities while respecting individual landowner rights.

We have no legal status and we take no positions on specific activities. We try to educate and encourage citizen involvement in issues affecting land use. Anyone who lives in the Avon Hills or who has an interest may request to be on the mailing list. There are no fees or dues.

Election for Next Chair

The only elected position of the Avon Hills Initiative is the chair. Voting for the next chair of the Avon Hills Initiative can be done by mail or in person at any of the Schuman Lake Road events. All ballots must be received by Monday, October 16th. Anyone who is on the Avon Hills Initiative mailing list may vote (Including all family members over 18). Anyone not now on the mailing list may request to be added and also may vote.

Meet the Candidates

Bill Fahrney

Bill Fahrney is a civil engineer and has lived on Big Watab Lake for 32 years. He serves on the Collegeville Township Planning Commission and is the facilitator and lobbyist for the Central Minnesota Transportation Alliance.

Peter Dwyer

Peter and Rosemary Dwyer have lived in Collegeville Township for eight years. They manage their land for habitat preservation. Peter is director of the Liturgical Press in Collegeville.

**Woodlands as Resources
Conference
September 22nd, 23rd**
A conference for those with an interest in managing and maintaining private woodlands. For more information visit www.csbsj.edu/arboretum or call (320) 363-3163.

Avon Hills Initiative
Saint John's Arboretum
Saint John's University
Collegeville, MN 56321