



Philander Chase Conservancy

2021 – 2022 Year in Review







A Year of Transitions

This was a year of change and transition for Philander Chase Conservancy.

- We celebrated the retirement of our long-time director Lisa Schott (see story, page 5).
- We welcomed new director Khara Strum (see story, page 2).
- We learned about the largest development in Ohio's history happening just 30 miles away, and
- We began gathering in-person again, after two and half years of pandemic distancing.

COVID-19 changed our lives in an instant. As a global society, we rediscovered and regained appreciation for nature and open space — not just what we could extract from it physically but also how it could support us through this challenging time.

The open space around Gambier, enjoyed by so many during the pandemic and otherwise, is, in large part, due to the efforts of Lisa Schott, who retired in June 2022 as director of the Conservancy. Because of her efforts, the Conservancy has a solid foundation from which our new director, Khara Strum, will navigate increased development pressure arising from the \$20 billion investment made by Intel in northeast Columbus that is sure to impact the local landscape. Khara will guide the Conservancy forward as we rethink our place in regional land conservation and connections to Kenyon and community.

Change is something that people generally don't like, and for good reason. Change is often abrupt and begets transitions that feel unsteady; the guide rails of familiar patterns and routines that felt safe and comfortable are no longer there to hold us. We wobble and teeter as we look for firm footing, and each day, each action, becomes an experiment of trial and error.

Open space anchors us and grounds us when all else feels shaky. Kenyon and the surrounding area are grounded in a sense of place. The work of the Conservancy is instrumental in protecting that sense of place. As we transition out of the pandemic and reinstate the rituals of daily life, let's remember that open space offers the gift of support through any transition.

— Zali Win '84, *Chair*

A new director: Ohio native Khara Strum leads Kenyon's land trust

Khara Strum, a seasoned conservation professional with deep ties to Ohio and experience with agricultural land stewardship, was named the Conservancy's director in July. Throughout her career, Strum has worked with rural, agricultural communities to develop shared conservation goals that benefit landowners, wildlife and the environment. At both Audubon California and Point Blue Conservation Science, she partnered regularly with landowners, conservation groups, industry leaders and government agencies in her efforts to enhance wildlife habitats on working lands.

"Khara brings a wealth of knowledge about the benefits of conservation," said Zali Win '84, chair of the Philander Chase Conservancy Board of Trustees. "But what impressed us most was her sense of community and her naturally collaborative approach. Building strong partnerships is core to what we do, just as it is for Khara. We believe she will be an excellent leader as we enter our third decade in Knox County."

Strum has held leadership positions in the Central Valley Joint Venture, a 20-member board responsible for setting conservation objectives for an agricultural stronghold, the Central Valley of California. In these roles and others, she has been an avid spokesperson for conservation, deeply committed to community-science education and collaborative problem-solving.

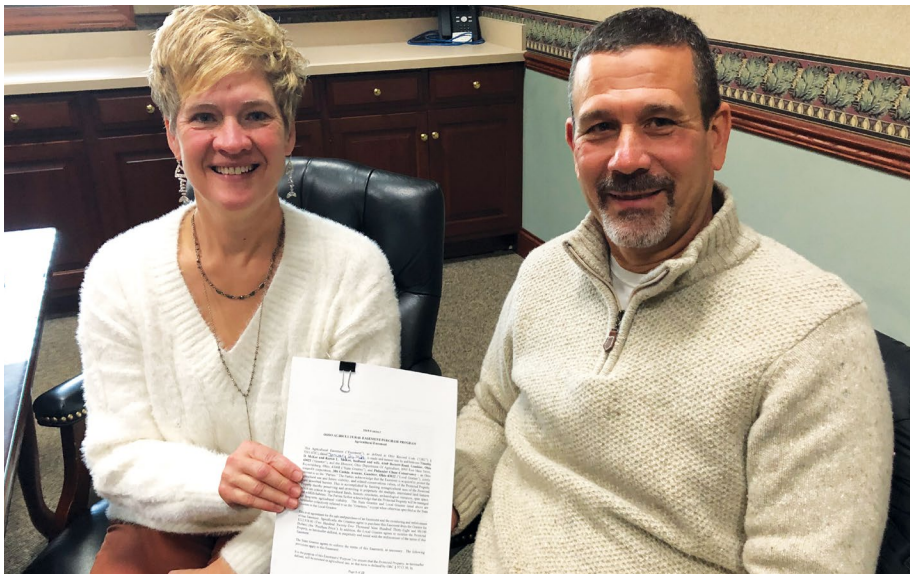


"As an Ohio native, I am thrilled to return to my home state and protect the land where my roots run deep," Strum said. "I look forward to engaging with the community and campus to connect more people to the land through the Conservancy."

In addition to continuing to protect farms and natural resources around Kenyon, the incoming director has the opportunity to further integrate the Conservancy with the College's academic programs, Kenyon's other green centers, and the surrounding community.

Historic McKee Family Farm Conserved

The Philander Chase Conservancy welcomed the addition of an agricultural easement, co-held with the Ohio Department of Agriculture, on Tim and Karen McKee’s beautiful 162-acre family farm southeast of Gambier. This easement permanently conserves 88 acres of cropland, 43 acres of pasture and 27 acres of forest as agricultural land on their sesquicentennial (150-year-old) farm. We are thankful that the McKees chose to conserve their farmland in perpetuity and help retain the rural nature of our region.



Tim and Karen McKee were all smiles on closing day. The McKees believe open space is integral to Knox County.

Philander Chase Conservancy achieves new standard of excellence

In February, Philander Chase Conservancy received accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. Accreditation is a mark of distinction, showing that the Conservancy meets high national standards for land conservation, demonstrating a commitment to professional excellence and to maintaining the public’s trust in its work. The accreditation seal is awarded only to land trusts that have successfully implemented land trust standards and practices, a large and successful undertaking by the Conservancy staff and board members. Only 10 percent of land trusts in the U.S. have received the accreditation seal.



Hall Farm Becomes Part of the Brown Family Environmental Center

In 2015, Philander Chase Conservancy worked with Mary Hall’s descendants to fulfill her wishes and conserve their family’s sesquicentennial farm with a conservation easement. The farm, located on New Gambier Road, is now a part of the Brown Family Environmental Center (BFEC), after ownership of the farm was transferred to Kenyon in August 2021. The property is strategically located, bordering the existing BFEC property along part of the Bishop’s Backbone hiking trail. The addition of the Hall Farm to the BFEC expands the area used for public access enjoyment by 111 acres (equal to 84 football fields).



The natural beauty of the Hall Farm is seasonally open for all to enjoy. Get a map at the Brown Family Environmental Center and hit the trails.

Sunflowers for Everyone!

These gorgeous sunflowers are part of Tim and Heidi Norris' conserved farm on Zion Road. The Norrises invited the community to walk into the field and enjoy the flowers on trails they created. Many local high school seniors used this field as the backdrop for their senior pictures, and riders on the nearby Kokosing Gap Trail often made side trips to experience the vista. The Norrises have been part of the Ohio Preserved Farmland program since 2003.





Lisa Schott retires after 40 years leaving a legacy for all to enjoy

Lisa Schott '80, managing director of Philander Chase Conservancy from 2010-2022, retired from her position in June after a nearly 40-year career with Kenyon. She leaves a legacy enjoyed by nearly every person arriving at the College through unspoiled rural and agricultural landscapes.

“She nurtured productive relationships between the College and local farmers and landowners, built on a foundation of trust and mutual respect,” said Kenyon President Sean Decatur.

The Philander Chase Conservancy was founded in 2000 with a mission to protect the natural beauty and ecosystems of the farms, woodlands, waters and open spaces surrounding Kenyon. Under Schott's direction, the conservancy worked with farmers, landowners, environmental groups and government agencies to preserve nearly 5,600 acres through conservation and agricultural easements, including 2,800 acres of agricultural land, 1,400 acres of woodland, 700 acres of pasture, and 18 miles of rivers and streams. Schott was also instrumental in establishing the Kenyon Farm as well as the Kokosing Nature Preserve, a conservation burial ground on 23 acres of restored prairie.

Before joining the Conservancy in 2010, Lisa spent 25 years in various roles in the College's advancement division — overseeing annual



funds, serving as a gift officer, and harnessing her contagious enthusiasm for Kenyon and firsthand knowledge as an alumna to direct programming for Kenyon families and graduates returning for homecoming, reunion and other events. Schott was an anthropology major at Kenyon and earned an M.A. in history and museum studies at Case Western Reserve University.

Conservancy Interns Reflect on Their Efforts

Rediscovering My Hometown

by *Jordan Schisler '24*

Growing up in Mount Vernon, the farmlands and green spaces of Knox County have given me a great appreciation for the local landscape and an understanding of the importance of small agriculture across the U.S. Although I was not raised on a farm, I knew that studying at Kenyon would allow me to merge both my love of the environment and my hometown.

While serving as an intern at the Conservancy, my eyes were opened to a world of collaboration between local landowners and the Kenyon community. During the year, my work consisted of everything from organization and research to student outreach and visits to properties. I learned many lessons from these experiences, one of the most important lessons being communication.

Communication is the cornerstone of the Conservancy's efforts; it is what bridges the gap between Kenyon and the larger Knox County community. I hope to continue to promote communication between Kenyon students and local easement owners in my future work with the Conservancy. I believe this will further strengthen the relationship between the Knox County community and the College. It will allow students to see and understand the importance of the land and agriculture around Kenyon.

I am so appreciative of the small, hardworking team in the office as well as all of those who have and are continuing to support this important endeavor.

Thank you, John Woollam '61

by *Mikaela Lancy '23*

During the two-hour drive to Kenyon from my busy hometown in suburban Cleveland, I see the landscape change before my eyes. At first, old, cozy neighborhood homes abound outside my window. These are soon followed by a gray expanse of highway that blurs together for the next hour. Slowly, as the Interstate fades away, my view is overwhelmed by wide swaths of farmland, rolling green hills covered in crops of corn and soybeans, fields of horses and cows and weathered barns.

Closer to Kenyon, I notice the Kokosing River, in whose cool waters I have swum with friends, and the Kokosing Gap Trail, lush and green in late summer. I see the work of the Philander Chase Conservancy, the College's other green centers, and the families who rely on farming for their livelihood. I see protectors of this land and way of life, and for two years now I can say I have been one of them.

While working with the Conservancy, I have had the opportunity to learn about the intricacies of easements, meet with landowners, help survey conserved land and so much more. This past semester I was presented with the opportunity to create a book to honor the organization's largest supporter: John Woollam '61. Through compiling information on the many easements he helped secure, collecting photographs and testimonials of all the lives he has touched, and learning of his dedication to land conservation

throughout the years, I came to appreciate the true importance of his contributions.

I would like to give my own thanks to John Woollam. By means of his generosity, students like me will continue to walk the trails of the Brown Family Environmental Center, the Kokosing Nature Preserve and Walker's Pond for generations to come. As they return to campus each semester, they will welcome the sight of old, weathered barns, abundant fields of crops and rolling hills of pastures, just as I have done so many times before.

Thank you, John, for going above and beyond to conserve such a beautiful and special area — it is through the work of people like you that Kenyon is able to preserve what makes it "Kenyon." I hope to do my part by continuing to educate the local community about the Conservancy's mission and why it is so important. We all must do our part to protect this land, and you have certainly done yours.

Studying Motivation Behind Easements

by *Hadley Seymour '22*

I had the opportunity to work with Philander Chase Conservancy on my senior exercise as an environmental studies major. I became interested in conservation easements during my junior year because of the interconnectedness with science, economics, political and sociological disciplines. After talking with Conservancy staff in spring 2021, I began preliminary research for a thesis and beneficial report on why

people choose to put their land under easement. I used my internship with Lake Forest Open Lands Association to explore how easements have benefited conservation efforts there as well.

When I got back to school, I started on the survey-making process. Once my survey questions were confirmed as appropriate for my research purposes, I began interviews. During those interviews, I heard about the unique characteristics of properties under easement and what landowners found valuable and worth protecting. While factors varied by property, the most common factors that influenced a landowner's choice to place their land under easement were both environmental and economic. Landowners were moved by a desire to conserve their family farms or the open space their land creates, and the easement made it affordable for them to do so.

I spent the first half of my spring semester researching, summarizing and writing my paper. After working on the project for almost a year, it felt great to finally write about my experience. I am proud to have received a high pass for my work and I couldn't have done it without the help of the Conservancy staff and the environmental studies and economics department staffs, as well as my advisor Dave Heithaus. It was a great way to cap off my environmental studies major, and I definitely recommend that students work with any of the Kenyon green centers for a fulfilling senior exercise experience.



Student Intern Jordan Schisler '24 at Jay Dorsey and Beth Waller's farm, conserved with a conservation easement since 2011.



Conservancy intern Mikaela Lancy '23 (left) shares the message of land conservation with fellow students on Earth Day.



Kenyon grad Hadley Seymour '22 conducts her senior thesis research by monitoring Spence and Nancy Badet's farm, conserved with a conservation easement since 2011.



Environmental Studies Class Includes Kokosing Nature Preserve

In fall 2021, Kenyon students enrolled in ENVS 106 (Reading the Ohio Landscape) visited Kokosing Nature Preserve, the green burial cemetery created by the Philander Chase Conservancy, to learn about conservation burial and tour the restored property. Reading the Ohio Landscape is a seminar course covering local geology and landscape history, and this visit fit perfectly into our discussion of the goals and challenges of ecological restoration. We spent the beautiful afternoon walking throughout the grounds with Conservancy staff Amy Henricksen and Jill Shriver and sitting outside to discuss our impressions of the preserve. For many students, this

was an introduction to green burial and land conservation — concepts that they found fascinating but hadn't encountered before. Only two minutes away from campus, the preserve offered my students an opportunity to get off campus and engage with the landscape from a new perspective. I'm looking forward to bringing many classes there in the future.

— *Ruth Heindel, Dorothy and Thomas Jegla Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies*



Students from an environmental studies class tour Kokosing Nature Preserve with Amy Henricksen, the preserve steward, and make connections to their classroom work on the Ohio landscape.

Green Burial at Kokosing Nature Preserve: The Way to Go

Two women I never met — the late wives of Jerry Griffin and Jim Kreimer — will be my neighbors in perpetuity.

Yes, late, as Jim's wife Donna and Jerry's wife Judith died in 2021 and 2018, respectively. And, yes, neighbors, because both ladies are laid to rest under the same ground that I have chosen as my final resting place.

The location is Kokosing Nature Preserve, a place covered with trees, prairie grasses, lavender bee balm, coneflowers, and black-eyed Susans. The land was once part of a golf course and is now one of 166 green burial sites in the U.S. and one of five in Ohio.

My husband and I began researching natural burials six years ago. We took a field trip with two friends, Paul and Alicia, to Foxfield Preserve in Wilmot, Ohio. After an orientation, green burial seemed the right thing to do.

After that 2016 green burial introduction, my life on earth went on with other priorities. Death was on the back burner — until June 28, 2021, when Mom died. In the aftermath of grieving, Mike and I accelerated our plans to leave the world a better place as God leads us, both when breathing above the ground and settling in below it.

We visited the preserve to compare it to the one we visited in 2016. I decided on burial plot #2032, located next to Mike's #2033. We bought Kokosing Nature Preserve t-shirts from the Kenyon College Bookstore and laid flat on our plots to have our photo taken.

I wish I had known Jerry's wife, Judith. Her work at a university, her non-traditional way of looking at things and her highly social personality seem aligned with mine.

Jerry shared how a friend of Judith's chose a green burial plan and sent around a shroud for friends to sign before she died and was buried in it.

Jim shared with me some loving notes and numerous photos of Donna, who at age 79 took her last breath three weeks after my mom took hers. Donna was buried wearing her favorite red dress, in a biodegradable wicker coffin covered with a spray of wildflowers. Her notes, typed into emails to Jim, spoke of "no regrets" and deep love.



Patty Huston-Holm and Mike Holm select their burial lots at Kokosing Nature Preserve.

Thanks to the knowledgeable staff of Philander Chase Conservancy and the willingness of these two widowers to share, I got a better feel for my own decision. We talked about the issue of handling one's own death details versus leaving that task to others. We talked about the controversy and, from some, discomfort about the green way of human deposition. Mostly, however, I

listened as Jim and Jerry shared how much they miss their wives and all they were.

For those of us who are Christians, our forever home is with God. Our bodies are a temporary encasement for our souls. How we dispose of those bodies is an individual choice often affected by religious and family tradition. I don't plan on checking out soon, but I believe the imprint we leave on others on earth is as important as the imprint within God's earth that supports the living when we ascend.

— *Patty Huston-Holm*





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