

**FRIENDS OF CRAB ORCHARD REFUGE
ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
OCTOBER 5, 2023, IN NEW VISITOR'S CENTER**

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Rick Whitecotton, Jill Adams, Jim Osborn, Mary Jo Osborn, Ruie Whitecotton, Kathy Belletire, Colleen Bogard, Wesley Calvert, Vicki Lang-Mendenhall, Don Mullison, Randy Osborn, Janie Pettigrew, Kathy Renfro

REFUGE STAFF PRESENT: Neil Vincent, Beth Kerley, Tricia Kelly

VISITORS PRESENT: Patricia A. Dunbar, Steve Belletire, Dennis Holtzclaw, Hannah Bushur, Wayne Allen, Ann Allen, Vern LeMasters, Danell LeMasters, Joseph Kretsch, Kathy Carstens, Bill Thomas, Rex Piper, Erica Marks

Meeting called to order at 6:01 p.m. by President Rick Whitecotton with a welcome to Members, Board, and Refuge Staff. Visitor's Services Manager Neil Vincent welcomed all and spoke about the New Visitor's Center and our new meeting room and terrace. He outlined some of the timeline of the upcoming exhibits that have been contracted.

STATE OF THE FRIENDS DELIVERED BY PRESIDENT RICK WHITECOTTON

"I welcome everyone here this evening and have some brief words and acknowledgements to share with you all. I wish first to acknowledge our partners, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. If you are here tonight as a part of this community please stand. Thank you! We exist as a nonprofit corporation to directly support the goals, targets, and priorities of the Service in their management and oversight of this Refuge we all love.

To accomplish this primary goal, we have two additional goals:

- To act as a bridge to our surrounding communities.
- To advocate on behalf of our partner whenever and where we are needed.

The last 12 months have been focused on rebuilding, recovering, and realigning. The pandemic was difficult for everyone. As we emerged from the pandemic over the last year here are the highlights of our accomplishments:

Joint Programs:

- We funded and directly supported the 75th anniversary celebration.
- Reestablished, funded and led the Eagle Tours in February
- Worked collaboratively with community partners to fund the Kids Fishing Derby and directly supported the event.
- Directly supported the recent visit from the Deputy Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service.
- We funded the annual Bass Classic High School Tournament through restricted funds.
- We supported the Hunting and Fishing Days event and were present in support of the Refuge throughout the event.
- We wrote a grant through the Fish and Wildlife Retirees Association, first to apply in the system! We received \$843 which was spent on 2 kayaks and campground cookware.

Woodland Giftshop our nature store: The Woodland Gift shop is the best nature store in the region and will continue to improve over time. I wish to acknowledge all present who are volunteers at the store, please stand if you give of your time and talent there. Thank you! We have reestablished, refocused, moved and resituated our store multiple times over the last 12

months. It is the backbone of our revenue. We are proud of our new store within the Visitor Center and hope you come by to visit regularly.

Administration focus: We recently formed an Executive Committee composed of our officers. Our purpose is to improve focus and communication. We are undertaking a codification of standard processes and procedures such that they aid turnover and function of the Friends. We are also starting a By-Laws review process to ensure compliance and feasibility of administration.

Pollinator Habitat Team: If you are currently volunteering and working directly with our Pollinator Habitat Team, please stand up. Thank you! This team has been working to establish and maintain pollinator habitat from the Headquarter campus area to Harmony Trail. They have had a core group intact for over 6 years now. They regularly work 9 months a year and wonder why they can't do more. If anyone wants to know more about their hard work and results, please ask them. **In conclusion, the Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge are rebuilding, reinforcing, and refocusing. We are stronger than last year, and the future is bright!"**

TREASURER'S REPORT: Treasurer Mary Jo Osborn presented a brief overview of Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge finances.

ELECTION OF INCUMBENT BOARD MEMBERS: Nominating Committee Chair Jim Osborn conducted the election process.

SPECIAL PROGRAM: Visitor's Services Manager Neil Vincent presented a power point program entitled, "The Making of a Refuge". Neil outlined the timeline of the fascinating history of Crab Orchard. He showed photographs of construction of Crab Orchard Lake, a history of the Department of Defense establishing the Illinois Ordinance Plant (ORDIL) during WWII. After the war Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge was established officially, by an act of Congress on August 5, 1947, with a stated 4 purposes, which remain today: Agriculture, Recreation, Wildlife, and Industry. **(For more on this presentation; check the October 2023 Newsletter).** *It was a very interesting presentation. The Board and Visitors thanked Neil for showing us more of the history of our great Refuge.*

RESIGNING BOARD MEMBERS RECOGNIZED: Rick reported there are 5 Board Members who have or are resigning the Board: Gene Honn, Kathleen Gaare-Wiese, Wesley Calvert, Kathy Renfro, and Vicki Lang-Mendenhall. A certificate of appreciation was awarded to those present: Wesley Calvert for his Chairmanship of the Education Committee and for years of Interpretive Training he has provided the Refuge and to Kathy Renfro for her work on the Membership Committee.

Lifetime Achievement Award presented: President Rick Whitecotton presented a Lifetime Achievement plaque to Vicki Lang-Mendenhall. Vicki has been on the Friends Board since its inception and a great asset to Friends and to the Refuge for over 20 years! Vicki is particularly invaluable for our Annual Eagle Tours.

MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR THE 5 FORMER BOARD MEMBERS WHO HAVE PASSED THIS YEAR: William Perry Young, Laurel Wendt, Aimee Hemphill, Rosemarie Howerton, and Ron Hamberg. ***Meeting adjourned. Door prizes were given, and some very tasty refreshments served.***

Minutes prepared by Ruie Whitecotton