

The Beginning of Land Conservation in Northeast Ohio

Jerry Bohinc recalls, "In the 1980's, when it came to land conservation, Tom Quintrell was always trying to get groups of people to support it because you needed to have a lot of people involved. Tom's style was to try to get other people motivated and then move on to another effort. He was a background kind of guy, a motivator. You know, like, let's do it right now. I was either on the periphery or directly involved with Tom in negotiating, funding or the business aspects of his conservation efforts. That is how **Grand River Partners, Inc.** came to be, which predated the Western Reserve."

Stephen C. Morse, likewise became the founder of the **Chagrin River Land Conservancy**. "If you look at the original board of directors and the historical connections of these organizations", said Jerry, "it's like a who's who of the Hunt Club in Gates Mills. Half of them were from Gates Mills or from Hunting Valley or up and down the valley. What you had was a core group of people who were all friends or who all knew each other. Most of them made contributions."

Then in 1988, the **Gates Mills Land Conservancy** was formed. GMLC's claim to fame was community funding. Volunteer community funding was a very unique model, and is a rarity even today. Gates Mills Land Conservancy became the first all-volunteer land trust in Ohio. Tom Quintrell was instrumental in setting up that structure, establishing the funding and getting the Land Trust Alliance accreditation.

Other communities in northern Ohio also had a land conservancy rationale. Each had a few pieces of property and a couple supporters, but they didn't have the leadership or funding to accomplish their goals. Gates Mills did not because of their funding source, which is the local tax. "At the beginning, Jerry said, Gates Mills Land Conservancy was frankly dominant because they had more money and were funded by the community." Considerable time was spent trying to convince Gates Mills to meld into the Chagrin River Land Conservancy to provide greater funding and leverage. But the final analysis was, that since Gates Mills was the only land conservancy with a funding stream that was based on community taxes, it would be very difficult to flow into the other conservancies. Chagrin River Land Conservancy, on the other hand, had a vision for being regional.

In 2006, under the effective leadership of Rich Cochran, the Chagrin River Land Conservancy joined forces with eight northern Ohio land trusts to form a private, nonprofit conservation organization. Tom Quintrell and his law partner, Lee Chilcote, did the legal work to form the new organization, and integrated the conservancies to get the land transferred. Thus, the **Western Reserve Land Conservancy** was created by the largest ever merger ever of land trusts.

In 2009, Grand River Partners, Inc. also merged with the Western Reserve. In 2013, the **Waite Hill Land Conservancy** and the **Little Beaver Creek Land Foundation** also joined. Today, Western Reserve Land Conservancy is the result of the merger of 13 organizations, with a 28-county footprint. It is still one of the largest land trusts in the nation through the largest merger of land trusts in U.S. history.

In 1996, Tom Quintrell also helped to found the **Chagrin River Watershed Partners**. He was intimately involved in the beginning, going from community to community seeking financial support. The organization includes 16 cities and park districts, with 36 members representing over 91% of the land area in the Chagrin River watershed. They provide technical assistance to address current water quality and quantity problems, flooding, and erosion.