

# localnews

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LIVING

## Vision of nature preserved

### Two families and Kawartha Heritage Conservancy work to reach long-term goals

In the late 1960s, Les Vincent and his wife, Sandy, were looking for an undisturbed piece of property where they could get away during the summer from the hustle and bustle of the Toronto area. The Vincents eventually found what they were looking for when a 102-acre forest of unspoiled nature came up for sale near Salmon Lake, about 30 minutes north of Buckhorn. Ever since then, the property has been a big part of their lives. Vincent Woods is a mixed coniferous-deciduous forest with a rich understory and, in the spring, extensive vernal ponds. Partly because of the limited access and having been mostly left alone, the woods are still rich in biodiversity. In fact, you can pretty much find all of the species there that are native to northern Peterborough County, including moose.



DREW MONKMAN

OUR CHANGING SEASONS

In 1969, the Vincents got permission from MNR to build an access road to the property through the surrounding crown land. "With the help of my wife and two kids, only eight and ten at the time, we basically built the road by hand, using just a wheelbarrow, a chainsaw and some shovels. It just goes to show how foolish you can be when you love nature! There was one point where we could see Salmon Lake itself and that's where we chose to build a rustic little cabin."

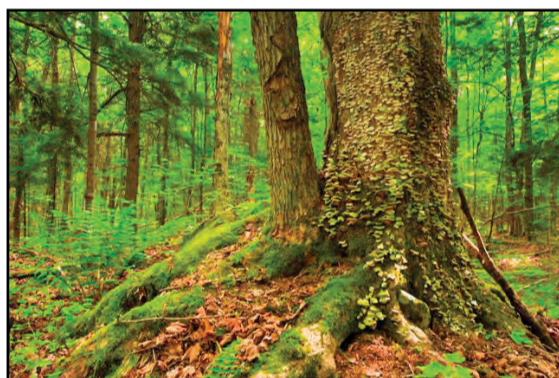
#### PROTECT THE LAND

For the Vincents, the desire to see the land protected for its natural values was present from the beginning. In the 1980s, they began to work with MNR to set up a managed forest program. This not only helped to improve the general health and biodiversity of the land but also led to certain property tax benefits. "Things were always moving towards conservation, right from the time we first bought the land to the years we ran it as a managed forest and worked with professional foresters. We were always striving to make the woods a little bit better and to make sure it still had high, undisturbed value. However, you reach a point when your kids move off in their own directions and, as you age, there just isn't the money, the time, the help and the energy to do all of the things you might like to do on your property. So, I moved towards looking for collaboration. With the conservancy (land trust) movement expanding at this time, it seemed like a natural fit for us." Les and his wife decided to donate the land to the Kawartha Heritage Conservancy (KHC) in 2010. For their donation, they received an income tax receipt for the value of the property as well as exemption from capital gains tax.

"We feel very good about the fact that the land is there and now others can share in the joy that we had in it. Although KHC now owns the property, it's still something that can be a part of our lives and we can still share, guide and be involved. Our children and grandchildren, too, are following this expedition into conservancy."



IAN ATTRIDGE Special to The Examiner



RANDY ROMANO Special to The Examiner

Heather and Don Elliott (at right with their grandchildren) planned to protect their Stony Lake property (top photo) with a conservation agreement even before Don passed away. Les and Sandy Vincent donated Vincent Woods (above), north of Buckhorn, to Kawartha Heritage Conservancy.



Photo courtesy of the Elliott family

Vincent Woods, like all of northern Peterborough County, is located in an area that is increasingly referred to as the "Land-Between." The term is used to describe the transition zone between the Canadian Shield and the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence Lowlands. It stretches across south-central Ontario from Georgian Bay through the northern Kawarthas and on to Kingston. The landscape of the Land-Between is characterized by low exposed granite to the north side and "stepping stones" of limestone plain along the south side. It is home to many rare species and rare habitats. Because land conservation is much more effective when the protected lands are part of a connected system, Les is pleased that his property helps to make a connection with the nearby Kawartha Highlands Provincial Park, the largest protected area in the Land-Between zone.

#### CAUSE FOR ALARM

Asked how he feels about the future of conservation, Les had this to say. "There are things happening - the warming of the planet, for example - that cause a certain amount of alarm in all of us. At least my wife and I can feel that this particular 100-acre piece of property is going to be left intact and

allowed to make its own adjustments. There's never been a greater need for this kind of land conservation. My hope would be that through this conversation and article, maybe just one other person will realize that he or she has a similar kind of situation to ours and therefore decide to look into the Kawartha Heritage Conservancy and find out what it's all about. Maybe a similar partnership to mine can be arranged. For us, it's been a very positive experience. Yes, you do have to give up a little and sometimes it's hard to let go. However, there's no better way of doing it than by bringing in a partner that you feel confident about like the KHC. It's really nice to know that, in some small way, you've maybe helped the old planet along a little bit."

#### HEATHER ELLIOTT

Heather Elliott is one of those fortunate people whose family has had the privilege of cottaging on Stony Lake for generations. Like so many cottagers, she and her late husband, Don, have always had a strong attachment to the surrounding land and to seeing it protected. For Don, the best way to assure protection was to actually buy potentially threatened property. So, when he was approached in 1988 about whether

he was interested in purchasing 140 acres that had come up for sale, he jumped at the opportunity. Twenty-five years later, the beneficiaries of this decision are the people of Ontario.

#### STONY LAKE 'BRIDGE'

Located between McCracken's Landing and Crowe's Landing and just south of Boshink Narrows, the Elliott Property forms part of a "bridge" between the north and south shores of Stony Lake. As Heather explains, "it acts as a wildlife corridor, connecting with forests to the south and across the islands to the north shore." The property also includes 26 acres of provincially significant wetland, which are part of the larger Clarina Wetland, and the natural shoreline protects two bays that act as fish nurseries.

Biologists from the Natural Heritage Information Centre in Peterborough have identified the Elliott property as one of the most biologically diverse on Stony Lake, with some 400 plant species. This amazing diversity is explained by the property's location right on the edge of the Canadian Shield. Because both granite and limestone bedrock are present, there is a wide variety of soils, hence the great number of species. The Blanding's turtle and the butternut tree, both of

which are species at risk, are found here. For years, Don led nature walks on the property in conjunction with the Stony Lake Cottagers Association. He also enabled research on the land by local college students, developed trails and arranged for a managed forest plan.

For Heather Elliott, there are more personal reasons, too, that make this property so wonderful. Heather explained to me that there is a very special stream on the property that goes underground for quite a long way before resurfacing. "We've always called it the Disappearing Stream, and we go there quite often with the grandchildren to enjoy its beauty. It even has Jack-in-the-pulpit growing along its course."

A life-long conservationist and lover of trees, Don Elliott's land purchases were not limited to Stony Lake. In 1966, he and his brother had also bought a 17-acre, mature woodlot near Barrie. However, when Don learned that he had cancer and wasn't going to live much longer, he needed to decide what to do with these properties. He finally decided to donate the Barrie woodlot to the Couchiching Conservancy. "With Elliott Woods being so close to Barrie, we knew if we sold it, it might become a subdivision, so we simply donated the land to the Conservancy and they took over the title," said Heather.

#### ENJOYED, NOT DEVELOPED

With the Stony Lake property, the Elliott's took a different route. They decided to put a conservation agreement on the land through the help of the Kawartha Heritage Conservancy. Although Don initiated the process, he died before it was completed. Heather saw the process through to its completion. The agreement means it can never be developed. In addition the Elliott's receive an income tax advantage for this donated "gift" of conservation in the public interest, as well as a property tax reduction while the managed forest plan is in place. Finally and foremost, the Elliott family's ongoing use and enjoyment of the property doesn't change, and any future sale or transfer of the property means the new owners will also enjoy the benefits of an exemption from capital gains. This is all made possible by Environment Canada's Ecological Gifts Program - and registered "recipients" of Ecological Gifts like our local Land Trust, Kawartha Heritage Conservancy. "The agreement limits development and protects the property's natural features, which is what we have been doing here for years and want to see continue," says Heather.

"The KHC has been very good to work with. I've appreciated the support I've had from them. I've also enjoyed working with Mike Hendren, the executive director, as well as the KHC staff and its many volunteers. They are now putting together a stewardship team to help care for the land. My family and I are really pleased to know that the land is protected. I also feel that I'm carrying out the wishes of my husband. He's the one who had the vision."

Kawartha Heritage Conservancy is a growing community organization working in Peterborough and the Kawarthas. Contact them at 705-743-5599 or online at [www.kawarthaheritage.org](http://www.kawarthaheritage.org)

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