OUR MISSION IS TO CONSERVE NATURAL HABITATS, WATERWAYS, AND AGRICULTURAL LANDS IN SOUTHWESTERN OHIO, FOR THE BENEFIT OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS, THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS WITH PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

The Conservation Community of Southwest Ohio

by Amanda Brymer

On a warm day toward the end of winter, my son and I wandered along Collins Run near Peffer Park in Oxford. Clear skies and a gentle breeze previewed spring before the coming nor'easter that would soon blanket emerging blue bells and hepatica in a light layer of snow. That bright sunny day, as we surveyed the remnants of a washed-out beaver dam, my three-year-old son looked up at me and said, "Let's sit down here and listen to the water."

When was the last time you were invited to sit by a creek and just listen? In southwestern Ohio, where tributaries of the Great Miami and Ohio rivers wander through farmland, woodland, towns and parks, we have ample opportunity and access. This was a delightful surprise to me, a relative newcomer to the Midwest. To my son, who was born here, it is delightfully normal. In the spring and summer ahead, we'll explore the first phase of the Oxford Area Trail System, hiking and biking under towering sycamore and cottonwood trees. From the trail's temporary terminus at the DeWitt Log House and Natural Areas' bird blind, we'll hop over to Miami University's Natural Areas that provide access to Ruder Preserve, the Formal Gardens, and Silvoor Biological Sanctuary. On days when we're up



A dry spell in late August provides an opportunity to explore a local stream bed.

for a longer bike or short car-ride, we'll head over to Hueston Woods State Park to search for fossils in the creek bed. There are even more parks to explore across Butler, Hamilton, and Preble Counties: Sycamore Bluffs, Indian Creek, Governor Bebb and Fernald Nature Preserve, to name a few.

To my friends and colleagues who teased when I left the Pacific Northwest ("Why would anyone live east of the Mississippi?"), I say: Come and see! Our creeks and rivers flow through the world's third largest watershed, comprising a diverse range of habitat and wildlife species, from the common white-tailed deer to the rare and endangered cave sala-

Steve Gordon and Dick Munson enjoy a quiet rest while birding and walking.

mander. Our days and nights revolve through four beautiful seasons, each with a unique display: migrating birds and golden trees, cottontail tracks in powdery snow, swollen rivers and emerging green leaves, busy bees and fragrant wildflowers.

There is much to explore here in southwestern Ohio. Thanks to a vibrant conservation community including Ohio State Parks, MetroParks, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, Three Valley Conservation Trust and our partner landowners, we have access to a full spectrum of protected areas. Yet, even with such access, it can be challenging to connect with nature and our neighbors (people and wildlife alike) as we face the rapid reduction of another critical resource: time.

It is on this front that Three Valley can help. In addition to supporting space for wildlife species and their habitat through easement partnerships with landowners, Three Valley is revitalizing educational programming to support your time with your children, grandchildren, families, and friends. Inside this newsletter you will find dozens of opportunities to join us out-



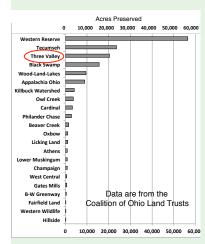
From the Board Mark Boardman

194 easements and counting 22,000+ acres preserved and counting 200 easements likely by the end of 2018

Conservation Is Our Legacy

"ENERGIZED is the word that encapsulates the excitement and spirit of Three Valley Conservation Trust (TVCT). We are proud of our steady expansion of conservation and agricultural

easements. TVCT is now the third largest land trust in Ohio. Not only



is TVCT conserving many thousands of acres of "natural habitats, waterways, and agricultural lands," TVCT is strengthening its mission of conservation via expanded stewardship, partnerships, outreach and education.

Stewardship of the riparian forest of Ruder Preserve is in full swing (TVCT owns this 14-acre woodland straddling Four Mile Creek near Yeager Stadium.), prairies are being re-established, and native flowers to supply food for our butterfly and bee pollinator friends are being planted. Read about these stewardship efforts and partnerships in this newsletter.

Outreach and education keep our community engaged and committed to conservation. TVCT members are offering a spectrum of activities and events for all ages throughout the year. TVCT annually selects recipients for a conservation financial award and, this year, provided funds to support a Talawanda student to attend the Yellow Springs 6th grade program.

In the end, we will conserve only what we LOVE; we will love only what we UNDERSTAND, and we will understand only what we EXPERIENCE.

Management: Aligning and realigning the strengths of the TVCT staff, TVCT members, and the TVCT board to the needs and responsibilities of the trust's mission is improving our overall mission success. A new Executive Director, coupled with an experienced, professional staff and a board eager (or willing) to assume new responsibilities is increasing collaboration and efficiency in the TVCT management. A strengthened committee structure of the TVCT board is providing additional clarity and oversight to our finances, easement protocols, record-keeping, membership engagement, and strategic planning.

Our continued success, however, is dependent on more than our past success, more than a new alignment of management, and more than invigorated stewardship, education and outreach programs. Our continued success depends on your continued financial support. In addition to basic membership dues, I urge you to donate to TVCT via the Kroger and AmazonSmile giving programs. It costs you nothing to tell these businesses who to donate to.

Charitable Donations: We also rely upon the generosity of supporters and sponsors who are able to make additional financial contributions to sustain our operating budget and increase our endowments with any type of estate gift, IRA distribution, life insurance, or other charitable donation. We look forward to discussing how you can provide a "Legacy for Conservation"

Conservation Community

(continued from page 1)

side. Our volunteer education programmers are active and retired primary school teachers, professors, agricultural professionals, and conservationists. The range of expertise and interests represented by our volunteers, members, staff, and wider conservation community ensures a strong, sustained effort to leave our Ohio home a little better than we found it - and to have fun doing it!

We hope you will join us as we strengthen our role in children's lives and their ever-developing sense of place, and you are always welcome to sit with us by a creek and just listen.



Enjoying a walk and ride on the first completed segment of the Oxford Area Trail

#194 - Our Newest Easement

We are excited to welcome Robert and Kelli Planck from Gasper Township in Preble County into TVCT's family of easement holders!

The easement on their 99-acre farm is funded through the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program. Approximately 46.8 acres of their land is in annual crop rotation (corn and soybeans). About 32 acres of the land is covered by woods. Part of the forested area serves as a natural buffer for the Sevenmile Creek which flanks the northern and eastern boundary of the property. The remaining acres are dedicated to the two homesteads and the pasture.

The conservation easement will permanently protect the highly productive soils and water resources on the Planck family property.



Kelli and Robert Planck with Agnieszka Marchlewska and Chad Smith







Ruder Preserve

(Shadowy Hills Drive near Yeager Stadium) Saturday, Sept 29; noon - 3

Attention Landowners

Changes to the Current Agricultural Use Valuation (CAUV) Program

Tax Benefit to Abate Soil Erosion

A recent change to the tax law in Ohio reduces the soil tax rate on eligible conservation ground to the minimum valuation of \$230/acre. This applies to land dedicated to abate soil erosion (up to 25% of total farm acreage). To be eligible the land must be used to "abate soil erosion as required in the management of the farming operation: such as the installation, construction, development, planting, or use of grass waterways, terraces, diversions, filter strips, field borders, windbreaks, riparian buffers, wetlands, ponds, and cover crops for that purpose".

If you have ground in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or other federal conservation program (such as WRP, CREP, etc.) with your local USDA office, most conservation practices are eligible for this reduced tax rate. At this time practices exclusively for wildlife habitat are excluded. If you have an easement that specifically sets aside ground to reduce soil erosion you may also be eligible for this reduction. The acreage must have been enrolled in a conservation program by January 1st and remain in the conservation practice for 36 months from when the practice is certified with your auditor, or the benefit must be refunded.

To receive the lower conservation valuation you must provide a copy of the contract, a map showing areas that are eligible, and you will need to file an amended CAUV application with your county auditor's office. This will need to be completed when your CAUV application is normally due to your county office.

For questions about this change and your ground eligibility, please contact

- Sean Maggard, Preble County Auditor 937-456-8131,
- Harold Baxter, Butler County Auditor 513-887-3146,
- CAUV department for the Montgomery County Auditor 937-496-3281 or your local auditor's office.

From the Executive Director Chad Smith

Spring is here! And 2018 promises to be as busy as ever at Three Valley. The TVCT staff have been hard at work this winter, developing potential new partnerships with The Nature Conservancy and Miami University, continuing our ongoing collaboration with partners at the Ohio EPA, MetroParks of Butler County, and Five Rivers MetroParks, and



strengthening our civic memberships and connections in the communities we serve. We are also actively increasing our presence at various chambers of commerce, township trustees, and city council meetings, leading to multiple Three Valley speaking engagements and presentations with many more scheduled in the coming months.

Landowners have been contacting our office on a weekly basis to express interest in putting their land under easement. Consequently, the Land Protection and Stewardship (LPS) team has been busy working with these landowners, vetting and qualifying their properties for new easements. LPS is also handling the time-consuming annual application for Butler and Preble Counties Ohio Department of Agriculture easements. The public interest in land conservation is showing no sign of slowing down.

As the weather breaks, monitoring TVCT easements is picking up pace; the drone has already been up and flying the skies of southwest Ohio several times since the first of the year. Easement donors will notice a new system of reporting with the goal of sending monitoring reports within a month of when their site is visited instead of at the end of the calendar year.

In addition to the fast pace of daily operations, our talented staff still finds time to work on numerous other projects that enhance the TVCT mission. Agnieszka Marchlewska, Land Protection Specialist, is assisting the Outreach Committee with programming and coordinating social media communication. Agnes is also advising a group of Miami University students in the creation of updated brochures, handouts, and TVCT-related media. Randy Evans, Stewardship Specialist, wrote an article that will be featured in an upcoming Land Trust Alliance Magazine. Randy received \$6,500 from two grants that will be used for the installation of pollinator habitat at the Ruder Preserve. Office efficiency and workflow improvements have been made with the addition of Maria Fagin, our new Stewardship Technician. Maria wears many hats, assisting each staff member on project logistics on any given day. Maria brings an expertise in GIS database management, graphic design, a knowledge of various computer programs, and experience in social media to the table.

I am looking forward to a busy and exciting spring and summer. I hope to see you all at one of the many Three Valley events and programs this year. In the mean time, don't hesitate to contact me or stop by the office anytime.

Thank you for your dedication to conservation.

GIVE WHILE YOU SHOP

Kroger Community Rewards:

www.kroger.com/topic/kroger-community-rewards-3 just use your Kroger Plus account; TVCT"s KROGER ID number: 80803

AMAZON SMILE: enroll and shop via:

http://smile.amazon.com/about



Plows, Prairies, and Pollinators

by Steve Gordon

Woodlands, wetlands, cropland, pasture, riparian corridors: frequently missing from lists of local land uses is prairies, even though they are potentially a critical part of any land conservation plan. Defined as a grassy land area, prairies once were a significant landscape feature of the Midwest. In 1841, the Indiana farmer Solon Robinson wrote, "It was about noon of a beautiful October day when we emerged from the wood, and for miles around stretched forth one broad expanse of clear, open land. I stood alone....beholding a broad rolling prairie for the first time. Oh, what a rich mine of wealth lay outstretched before me."

Today, most prairies in southwestern Ohio have been extirpated; only a few remnants remain. Our nation's forefathers



Why plant a prairie? Consider these redeeming, sustainable prairie benefits:

- Reduces rapid runoff, filters water, retains surface soil.
 Prairies are nature's sponges.
- Absorbs phosphates from agricultural field runoff, reducing harmful algal blooms (HAB). Phosphate runoff degrades water quality and releases harmful toxins.
- Deep root zones sequester carbon and act as carbon sinks (See next page for amazing root systems of native plants.)
- · Provides habitat and food sources for
 - Birds nesting sites, seeds and insects for food —"Plant a Seed and a Bird Will Grow"
 - Insects notably butterflies, moths, dragonflies, and bees. Many prairie forbs bloom in August and September, providing a critical late summer food source for migrating butterflies and pollinators.
 - Rodents, reptiles, and mammals critical in natural food webs



Prairie at Salamander Run Preserve, a new public park operated by Metroparks of Butler County (conservation easement by Three Valley Conservation Trust).

discovered steel plows pulled by teams of oxen could "break prairies" into suitable cropland. Fortunately, all is not lost. Through the efforts of Great Parks of Hamilton County, MetroParks of Butler County, and the TVCT, several hundred acres of cropland, often marginally productive, have been converted to native prairie. Several private landowners have also developed prairies on their conservation easements.

The good news is a prairie can be a small backyard plot or fifty-acre field. Installation can be a DIY project or can be done by professionals. The TVCT has worked closely with experienced professionals [see next page].



Walk with conservationists
Steve Gordon and Eric Hollins
of Three Valley Conservation Trust
as they explore and admire local

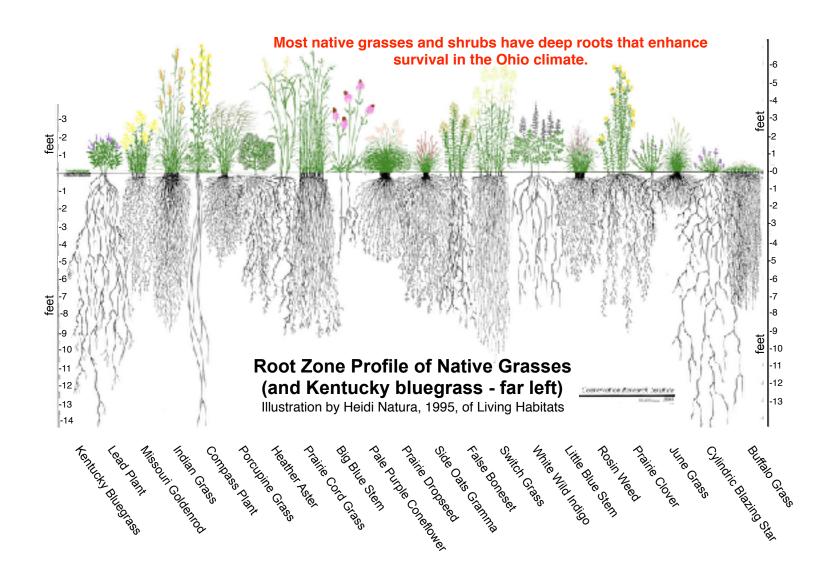
Prairies and Nature Preserves

Learn about the history, restoration efforts, and beauty of the plants and animals of our wonderful local prairies!

These summer walks are free and

These summer walks are free and suitable for all ages. Details on page 6.

Wildflowers, Butterflies, and Birds
(Oh my!)



Information and Seed Sources

www.ohioprairie.org/
www.ohioprairienursery.com/
www.beeandbutterflyfund.org/
www.aldoleopold.org/
prairiebioticresearch.org/

Blakeman, John. A. A Viable Solution to Phosphate Eutrophication of the Western Basin of Lake Erie.

OhioPrairie@aol.com

"Six Basic Elements for a Successful Native Grass and Forb Establishment." Roundstone Native Seed, Upton. KY.

www.roundstoneseed.com

Professional Prairie Consultants / Contractors

Al Gerhart 513-403-1626 algerhart@earthlink.net

Charlie Ford Songbird Environmental 765-265-1555

songbirdenvironmental.com

Al Bruns / Jon Constanzo 513-939-8388 (cell) 513-896-7865 (home) alanandmaryb@gmail.com

John Kiertscher Envirotech, Inc. jkiertscher@envirotechcon.com 614-554-2089 cell 740-743-1669

Others? Let us know.

Caleb Shields Ohio Dept. Nat. Res. (937) 347-0926

Caleb.shields@dnr.state.oh.us

Donnie Knight
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
614-747-0256
donald knight@fws.gov

Don McCool dmccool@greendalefire.com 513-720-0676

Mike Rack Construction 513-265-6360 (cell) 513-738-2177 (home, office)

Dick Munson L'Obel Nursery 6751 Brown Road 513-374-2118

Enhancing a Legacy of Conservation 2018 Slate of Summer Activities - for All Ages

Three Valley's Outreach / Education Committee is coordinating and sponsoring summer activities for all ages and abilities. all ages and abilities. We would love for you to participate in any of these fun activities. Come enjoy the outdoors!

For questions about any of these programs, to reserve a spot, or to suggest additional activities, we encourage you to contact TVCT by phone (524-2150) or by email (office@3TVCT.org). Also, join the TVCT Facebook page where all these programs will be updated and advertised.

Explore the Outdoors - 2018 (Fun for ALL AGES)

"Prairies and Nature Preserves"

Steve Gordon and Eric Hollins are leaders in restoration and conservation ecology. They head TVCT prairie restoration projects and have planned a series of six walks at local prairies and nature preserves. These Sunday morning hikes will be both enjoyable and educational. Walks start at each site at 9 a.m., or meet Steve and Eric at 8:30 a.m. at the Oxford TJ Maxx parking lot to car-pool or caravan to the site.

These walks are **FREE** and designed for family enjoyment; so, grandparents and parents, grab those kids and come along for an educational and fun prairies/preserve walk.

June 3 - Salamander Run Metropark

4821 Layhigh Rd. Hamilton OH

Eric and Steve worked hard to restore and enhance these prairies, vernal pools, and woodland habitats where nature now thrives (Thank you, Eric and Steve). Visit this park later in the fall (see below) to see seasonal changes.

June 24 - Fernald Preserve

7400 Willey Road, Hamilton, OH Explore the habitats created by the Dept. of Energy and Ohio EPA in the cleanup of this former EPA superfund site to become a mecca for wildlife and birds

July 22- Huffman Prairie

2380 Memorial Rd, Fairborn, OH; Gate 16a - SR 444 This near-virgin tallgrass prairie is one of the finest in Ohio. The Wright brothers perfected powered flight at this prairie site, now located on Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton. (Meet at 7:30 at TJ Maxx parking lot.)

August 6 (Monday) - Shaker Trace Nursery

8749 New Haven Rd, Harrison, OH

This nursery was created in 1992 for the express purpose of harvesting native prairie and wetland seeds for habitat restoration projects

August 19 - Salamander Run Metropark

Return to Salamander Run MetroPark to view some fall flowers, dried vernal pools, and fall animals. Compare this experience to the spring walk.

Sept 9 – Edge of the Farm Conservation Area

5398 McCoy Road, Oxford (Reily Township)
This 33-acre easement has it all, forests, streams, and wetlands to explore and thousands of blooming Maximillian sunflowers to enjoy.

Amateur Photography Contest (ALL AGES)

Share your talent and express your love for nature! TVCT will host a photo contest open to all non-professional photographers. Capturing the natural world of Southwest Ohio in five categories:

- 1) animal life,
- 2) plant life.
- 3) natural landscapes of scenic views,
- 4) agricultural activities, and
- 5) public use or recreation

Contest submission from April 15th to September 14th. Winning photos will be part of the 2019 TVCT calendar! For details, watch the TVCT Facebook page or our new website.



Backyard Birders

(3RD - 5TH GRADERS)

These 5 days of birding fun are for "serious" young birders, ones who are likely to show up every other day. We will use Cornell Ornithology Lab's *Bird Sleuth* and *Habitat Connections* curriculum to inspire your young birder to learn to identify 50 birds, recognize some of their calls, and understand lots of ecology and natural history about birds including many back yard species.

Who: Rising 3rd to 5th graders **When/Where:** 9 - 11 a.m.

May 30th & June 1st - *DeWitt Homestead*June 4th - 6th - *Edge of the Farm* 5398 McCoy Rd
June 8th - final field trip - students' choice!

Donation: \$35 (\$25 for members), includes a T-shirt, journal, field guide for birds and other goodies!

Become a Bird Sleuth with TVCT!



Little Mudders (PRESCHOOL)

It's all in the name - this preschool program will get your little one exploring the outdoors - water, bugs, dirt and all! Our little mudders are off to a good start with 15 preschoolers already signed up. All locations will be in the Oxford area and will be announced the week before the event.

When: 9:30 -11:30 am

2nd Saturday of each month (April through October)

Who: Preschool-aged children

Cost: \$35 (\$25 for members), to include a T-shirt, journal, binoculars and other good-

ies!

TVCT Book Club

(ADULTS)

To focus discussions about conservation topics while enjoying an early evening social gathering, TVCT inaugurated a book club. Its first meeting included a discussion of a book by Doug Tallamy: *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*. About 10 people gathered for dinner and discussion at La Rosa's, and the discussion was led by three speakers: Alex Zomcheck (how to support bees), Charlie Ford (landscaping with native plants), and Randy Evans (restoration of Ruder Preserve).

The next book will be *A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail* (by Bill Bryson) on **Thursday**, **September 6th @ 6 – 8 pm**. At this meeting we will view clips of the recent movie relating to this book (starring Robert Redford and Nick Nolte), so we'll likely meet at the Oxford Lane Library. We'll discuss issues about hiking such as the 5 best area hikes for kids and what to pack or leave at home when hiking.

Each book discussion is independent of others, so please join us for the next discussion on *A Walk in the Woods*. We'll supply the popcorn!

Contact Three Valley Conservation Trust (524-2150 or office@3vct.org) for more information.



RUDER PRESERVE HABITAT ENHANCEMENT Invasive Suppression and Native Plant Restoration

Our habitat enhancement work at Ruder Preserve is continuing strong this spring. A combination of Three Valley members, board members, staff and many students have already put in about 90 hours of work spraying the flood plain invasive, lesser celandine, as well as staking and putting up new protective cages and sleeves around trees planted in the fall. The area has already witnessed its first spring flood and, as always, has survived!

Randy Evans added a huge boost to the project this year by securing 2 different grants (\$6500): 1. The *Feed A Bee program* is designed to provide plants for pollinators, so we will be planting flower seeds and plugs this spring. 2. *Monarch Watch* also provides pollinator plants, particularly Milkweed species that help support monarch caterpillars and migrating butterflies.



Miami University students help clear honeysuckle.

Schedule of Work Days

Pullers, haulers, planters, painters, food provid-ers, and chainsaw operators are always needed.

Mon, April 16^{th} - 8:30-12:30 and 1:15-5:15 Wed, April 18^{th} - 8:30-12:30 and 1:15-5:15

Thur, April 19th - 1:45-5:15

Sun, April 22nd - 9-noon, lunch; 12-3; 3-6 Sat, April 28th - 9-noon, followed by lunch Planting days in May will be decided when we know plant arrival dates — stay tuned.

Please let Donna know you can help or sign up for future announcements about the Ruder Preserve Enhancement. Call: 524-2150 or email office@3vct.org.

On Sunday, April 22nd, construction of a ground-level observation deck will begin in the central portion of the wooded portion of Ruder Preserve. This deck will eventually be connected to the entrance by a ground-level boardwalk which will provide access to the observation deck for mobility challenged individuals. Woodworkers, please consider joining us in this effort.

We have several workdays scheduled for this spring that YOU can help with. We initially need chain saw operators, stump painters and honeysuckle haulers as we continue to remove honeysuckle with the help of several student service groups. If you don't want to do any of those things, we would welcome food for our student help, photographers that can catch the action, or just good company! We also have a garlic mustard pull scheduled for Sunday, April 29th and will schedule times in May to plant several hundred flower plugs. If you don't know how to pull garlic mustard or plant plugs, don't worry, we'll teach you! We'd love to have whatever way you can offer.



5995 Fairfield Road P.O. Box 234 Oxford, OH 45056 513-524-2150

www.3vct.org

"Valley Trust News" the newsletter for members of Three Valley Conservation Trust is published twice a year.



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Stewardship Technician
Eric Hollins
Paddys Run Contractor

SUMMER EVENTS

TVCT SUMMER PICNIC Sponsored by Oxford LaRosa's

Join us the afternoon of June 2nd for a family friendly *Celebration of Conservation*! Come with friends, make new friends, show your support of Three Valley Conservation Trust, and help continue our mission of preserving natural habitats, waterways, and agricultural lands for future generations!





Activities for all ages: Tour the historic Dewitt Log House and its beautiful grounds. Walk the new Oxford Area Trail or stroll over to the shaded Natural Areas Bird Blind and share a few minutes with our feathered friends. In addition to these activities, there will be guided hikes, live music, raffles, and games.

Music: John Kogge

Food and Drinks: provided by Oxford LaRosa's

(adult and children's options)

Date: Saturday June 2
Place: Dewitt Log House
4824 Oxford-Trenton Rd.

Time: 1:00pm – 3:00pm





ELEGANT DINNER

Chef Anne Kearney of Rue Dumaine in Dayton is returning to Sugar Valley Farm for an extraordinary farm-to-table fundraising dinner to support land conservation. Chef Kearney is returning to New Orleans this fall, so this special dinner will be your last chance to sample her unique culinary skills in this area.



The House family will again host this special dinner which will highlight organic, sustainably raised meats, vegetables, fresh greens and produce, with wines and beer to compliment.

Price is \$250/per-

son (\$200 is tax deductible) with all proceeds going to the Three Valley Conservation Trust

Amid the pastoral beauty of the farm and late summer's bounty, we invite you to support the Trust while you savor the food, wine and heirloom tomatoes, and revel in the farm and conservation ethic that you are helping to sustain. Please join us.

Date: Sunday August 5, 2018

Place: Sugar-Valley Farm

7611 Camden Sugar Valley Rd.

Camden, OH 45311

Time: 4:30 Drinks / Hors d'oeuvres

Live music / Entertainment

6:30 Seated dinner

Three Valley Conservation Trust (TVCT) is a member-funded, not-for-profit organization certified by the IRS under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Your contribution/donation is deductible.