

The Boerne Star

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The Cibolo Nature Center & Farm Stewardship Award winners for 2014, from left, Tommy Mathews, Juanita Herff Chipman, Carolyn Chipman Evans, Dr. Jeffrey Wilson, accepting on behalf of Art Wilson, Paul Barwick, Gene Miertschin, Carolyn Herff Kennon, Mike Morton, Dani Vollmer, Steve Lewis and David Langford.

Cibolo Nature Center & Farm presents 2014 Stewardship Awards

Brent Evans, Cibolo Nature Center & Farm | Posted: Tuesday, August 19, 2014 8:18 am

Every year we recognize and give awards to the individuals in our community we feel have made outstanding contributions in nurturing our natural and cultural resources. This year we honor folks who have been hard at work for years to make this a better place.

Our nature center teaches environmental ethics (considering the impact of behavior on the environment). Our honorees are citizens who have decided do good in their world, regardless of self-interest, forecasts of doom, obstacles or “Bozos.” And, they seem to have fun doing it.

David K. Langford is a widely respected conservation activist. Langford served as executive vice president of the Texas Wildlife Association from 1990 until his partial retirement in 2002, and still serves as TWA’s vice president emeritus.

During his years with the association, Langford has represented the group in a successful effort to introduce the “wildlife management tax valuation,” which extended discounts on land appraisals that parallel agricultural appraisals.

These tax reductions have helped many rural landowners who manage their land for wildlife and hunting or birding or other kinds of nature tourism. He has also worked to defuse tensions between the agricultural and environmental communities through an effort known as Plan-It

Texas, which used a Hill Country ranch as a case study on how to protect endangered species, diversify into a profitable bed-and-breakfast, cattle and hunting operation, and keep the land intact long into the future.

These days he emails up-to-date information to a large number of folks who are working in the conservation arena.

He received the Ray Murski Friend of Wildlife award, TWA's most prestigious honor, and the Lone Star Land Steward award.

Additionally Langford serves on the advisory board of the Hill Country Alliance, and served on the board of the Sand County Foundation, which continues to impart the messages of Aldo Leopold's land ethic to all generations.

David is also a well-known nature, wildlife and western-image photographer and writer. His list of credits is long:

People's Choice Award from the Outdoor Writers Association of America; Texas Outdoor Writers Association award winner; Addy Awards from the American Advertising Federation; Harvey Weil Professional Conservationist Award.

Langford's works have been in exhibitions all over Texas and the Southwest, and in many magazines such as Smithsonian, Outdoor Life, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Field and Stream, Texas Highways and Texas Monthly.

He has served as a director of the Texas Nature Tourism Association, and as a trustee of the San Antonio Art League and the Southwest School of Art, a member of the Texas Agricultural Resources Protection Authority and the Environmental Flows advisory committee.

Langford's current book, "Hillingdon Ranch: Four Seasons, Six Generations" was co-authored with Lorie Woodward Cantu, featuring his family's six-generation ranch. He and his wife of 47 years, Myrna, live on the ranch near Comfort. He claims to be retired.

Steve C Lewis was also a co-founder and instrumental leader of the Texas Wildlife Association, whose foundation has raised millions of dollars to fund natural resource education in Texas, which is, after all, Steve's thing.

Steve served as a director of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers, and was president of the Texas Agrifood Council in San Antonio in the 1990s.

He taught school kids that their milk did not come from H-E-B! Burgers had something to do with cattle, wheat, tomatoes, and lettuce farms. Not from McDonald's.

He served as treasurer and a director of San Antonio Zoo. Steve was interested in yellow school buses on the zoo grounds.

Steve also co-founded the Texas Youth Hunting Association, which has taken over 10,000 participants hunting since it was formed in the 1990s. Many kids have been able to quietly sit in a blind with their dad, mom or guardian for the first time in their lives. This program is a great success, being replicated in other states.

Steve served as the founding president of the Texas Agricultural Land Trust, which has grown into the second largest, with 216,000 acres currently under conservation easement. Steve believes open space is vital for the future of Texas.

And, Steve serves on the board of the Cibolo Nature Center.

He passionately believes that far too few young Texans get outside enough. Exposing children to the great outdoors has been at the heart of his good work. Steve operates his ranches in Kendall County and another ranch in Medina County.

Dani Vollmer is one the Cibolo Nature Center's longest serving volunteers.

"My good parents moved us out of San Antonio when I was 4. We were outside, close to nature and happy. I remember reading and writing poetry in a tree.

"When joyful feelings are so connected to nature, you gotta love it! And when you hear how many trees are dying because we want paper, you start getting involved with newspaper recycling drives in elementary school.

And, as you know from your experiences, the warm feeling you get (partly sweat!) volunteering for a worthy cause and the good company you share that just make you want more!

"Mary Kennedy took me along to meet with Carolyn Chipman-Evans at a picnic table on a piece of city property. Carolyn dreamed of making a difference for the better and we called it the Cibolo Wilderness. We were its Friends and our numbers would grow as Carolyn dreamed in her compelling way to ever larger groups ... good company again, for such a good cause!

"I taught English for 20 years at BHS and started Boerne Students Environmental Team, which kicked things off by collecting, you guessed it, newspapers! The students were good company; some went into environmental studies and, I think, all carry with them the joy and responsibility of loving nature.

"I so enjoyed the good company when we tore the sheetrock out of Plummer's building (now the CNC Visitor Center), watched a controlled prairie burn and sold Mostly Native Plants and homemade bread. Watching kids learning in the creek and at Project Wild ... all unforgettable. Now I am enjoying good company at the Inspiration Garden at Herff Farm. I never expected to get an award for having fun playing outside, sharing my love of nature, and enjoying good company. Brent, you told me once that I shouldn't let the state of things political and environmental get me down ... to spend some time outside just living with nature, not worrying over it. You were right and I have passed it on many times. Thanks!"

Mike Morton is Critical Path Strategies' managing partner. Mike has excellent facilitation skills and has shared these skills with many non-profits over the years. His understanding of business, finance and strategic planning has helped numerous non-profit organizations grow and thrive.

Morton's conservation and community service interests include the Cibolo Nature Center and many other organizations. He has volunteered for, or served on the board of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church, Cibolo Nature Center and Farm, the City of Boerne RUDAT, Riverside Nature Center in Kerrville, the Rappaport Center for Human Rights and Justice of the UT Austin Law School, the Hill Country Alliance and many others.

Mike has served in a trustee and officer capacity at the Cibolo Nature Center for over 15 years. He has worked to help the Cibolo grow and thrive through two capital campaigns. His business experience helps the CNC be successful in reaching goals, and his planning experience helps crystalize the goals.

He was a founding director of the Cibolo Conservancy Land Trust where he served for 10 years as a director and held several offices. He is a past president of the Boerne Public Library Foundation. During his time as president, the foundation supported the library director and city staff; this team was responsible for the evaluation, planning and funding for the construction of the LEED-certified Patrick Heath Public Library.

Mike resides Boerne, Texas with his wife, Mary. They have three daughters and three grandchildren. Mike and Mary have a lovely home in Boerne on the Cibolo, and can often be seen running or riding their bikes to the Farmers Market on Saturday mornings.

Gene Miertschin is a veteran of the U.S. Navy. He first moved to Kendall County in 1968, when he was one of the engineers that started Datapoint Corp. in San Antonio. His career has included 22 years in aerospace, working for major space system contractors at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. While in Houston, Gene met and married his wife Bonnie, a teacher's aide and church secretary. Gene retired in 1997, and he and Bonnie built a new home on their Kendall County property where they currently reside.

As County Commissioner, Gene has served Kendall County well.

He persuaded the county to donate county land for the establishment of the Bergheim Fire Department, which was the first to capture and use rain water to fill tanker trucks.

He motioned to freeze the property taxes for the elderly.

He championed the application for a successful grant and oversaw the restoration of the Kendall County Historic Courthouse.

He developed the first county website, and established a countywide network for information sharing.

And, in 2004, he took an avid interest in local environmental issues, and became the champion on Commissioners Court for Proposition One Bond Election for parks and natural areas. Kendall County now has three county parks and a county parks system, which would not exist without the determination and advocacy of Gene Miertschin. His three terms as commissioner focused on long term thinking, rather than the quick-buck mentality – which was not always popular, but Gene was not in it to win applause. He set his sights on keeping the Hill Country country.

Gene also participated in the initial planning that led to forming of the Kendall County Partnership for Parks, that resulted in significant grant money being obtained and used to develop the Kendall County Parks.

Art Wilson started in the early '50s working to understand, appreciate and conserve his family ranch, Fabra Acres, under guidance from his grandparents Amy and Arthur Fabra. His work included erosion prevention, and destruction of the nefarious cedar trees!

In the mid 1970s he went with then-Boerne City Administrator Edgar Swartz to present the case for disallowing a dense development with developer provided waste treatment near the headwaters of Comanche Springs ... the development was disallowed.

Since 1990 Art has made major financial and time commitments to the Cibolo Nature Center, providing visioning workshops and vital consultation.

He has been a sponsor of the Nature Box program.

In 1997 he spearheaded the development of the Cibolo Conservancy Land Trust, and donated its first conservation easement in Kendall County, 100 acres of the now 20 square miles of easements in the trust.. Art has served as a board member on CC since its inception.

Art facilitated community planning sessions that activated the bond issue for county parks, and facilitated cross-community stakeholder sessions for RUDAT. In 2010 Art received the Forest Stewardship Award from Texas Forest service for 20 years of work addressing live oak wilt on his ranch.

Most importantly, as a fifth generation Kendall County resident, through conservation easements and family limited partnership, Art protected the remaining 120 acres of land with two miles of Cibolo Creek frontage in a way that can be enjoyed by family, friends and business associates. Accepting the award for Art was his son, Professor Jeff Wilson.

Paul Barwick has worked in both private and public sectors as a landscape architect, grassroots greenway organizer, land and water conservation specialist and planner.

For the City of San Antonio, Paul launched the early planning, acquisition and implementation phases of the city's greenways programs for Leon and Salado Creeks. Subsequently, for eight years he served as project director for the Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Southern Edwards Aquifer project; implementing community-based conservation in a 10-county region of Central Texas and managing two publically-funded campaigns for aquifer protection totaling \$135

million in sales tax proceeds for natural areas acquisition and water quality focused conservation easements.

Additional TNC work includes facilitating the purchase of several tracts of land for parkland and TNC's Love Creek Preserve in Bandera County. Other trail, open space and resource protection initiatives that Paul has assisted with include Boerne's Old No. 9 Trail, Kendall County's 2004 Proposition 1 for park land and natural area acquisition, Cibolo Canyonlands Plan for Bexar County, including protection of Bracken Cave and the Cibolo Nature Center's "Cibolo Conservation Corridor Project."

Paul currently serves as special projects director for Boerne's downtown Hill Country Mile initiative. Local planning activities include the creation of Boerne's Historic Design Guidelines and the application, organization and management of Boerne by Design, a public planning initiative.

Other recent projects include several community trails, improvements to the Boerne City Campus and project management and landscape architecture of the LEED Gold-certified Patrick Heath Public Library, a demonstration site for low impact development strategies. He currently serves on the Kendall County Historical Commission. And he donated a Lipan Apache tipi to us!

Tommy Mathews served on the Cow Creek GCD until his most recent term ended in May 2014. Mathews served as Cow Creek board president most of his 14 years of service and lead the formation of the Cow Creek Groundwater Conservation District, driving efforts to secure funding for the district, the formation of its rules, developing its management plan and serving as a strong voice for groundwater conservation in the Hill Country. He is currently serving as the Kendall County representative on the Guadalupe Blanco River Authority board where he is vice chairman.

He has been passionate about water issues in Boerne and Kendall County since the 1970s when Boerne City Lake and several other flood control lakes were built in and around Boerne.

He is a member of the National Registry of Environmental Professionals, Texas Board of Professional Geoscientists, Texas Aggregate and Concrete Association, Associated General Contractors of Texas and the Texas Hot Mix Asphalt Pavement Association.

Tommy is past board chairman of the Allied Division of the Texas Aggregate and Concrete Association, and a past board member of the National Stone, Sand and Gravel Association. He is also past president of the Hill Country Alliance of Groundwater Conservation Districts, past citizen representative of the Lower Guadalupe River Water Supply Project Advisory Forum, and past board secretary of the Winston School San Antonio Board. Tommy is now president of Westward Environmental, Inc.

The Herff Twins, Juanita and Carolyn, donated 50 acres of their land to the Boerne Independent School District for Boerne High School in 1968. This has been the largest private donation for education in the history of our region.

They were born in 1922 to a large German pioneer family in San Antonio. They have held their family ranch together through wars, depressions, droughts and hardships, passing the land on to the seventh generation of Herff landowners, and preserved the kind of open space that gives Boerne its long-lived reputation.

Juanita writes, “The Cibolo Creek, with its maidenhair fern banks, huge cypress trees, falls and shallows and deep, dark rocky pools was a favorite place ... The Canyon was a special place for these two wild girls, carrying long, freshly plucked ligustrum whips, riding a cart helter-skelter over the vast range, through creek beds up rocky hills and over the flats.”

Julio de la Garza worked for the family, and the children developed a great fondness for him. Years later, when he passed away and Juanita planned to have him buried in the family plot in the Boerne cemetery, she was told this would not be allowed because the cemetery was segregated. Well, Juanita would have none of that, and was the first to break that barrier in our town.

They live on the Herff Ranch today, Carolyn in her home on the Malakopf Hill, and Juanita in hers with husband of 53 years, Guy Chipman.

The twins have been steadfast supporters of the Cibolo Nature Center and Farm, and over the years have contributed in countless ways to its success. They befriended visiting Russian and Ukranian guests of the nature center. Their pictures and stories adorn interpretive panels along the Cibolo walking trail in Boerne, and they will forever be remembered as those two wild girls who lived life to the hilt in Boerne’s glory days.