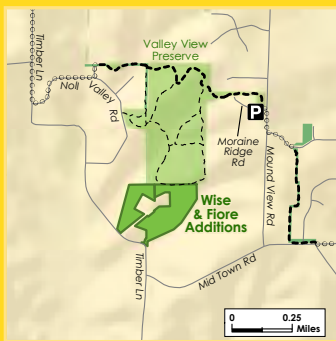


# Long-Time Neighbors/ Volunteers Donate Property, Expand Preserve Boundaries

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Tom Wise — a skillful sawyer and long-time “burn boss” — has volunteered with the Ice Age Trail Alliance for more than 25 years. His distinctive white beard and Einstein-like hairdo are iconic emblems at Dane County Chapter workdays.

About 30 years ago Tom and his wife Bonnie bought some land featuring beautifully mature oak trees, rolling topography, and a bit of distance from advancing development. The forest has only been improved since their ownership, the topography remains the same, and the Ice Age Trail made its appearance next door. But development is now at their doorstep. Few places in the state are



*Sprawl-buster: The donated properties from the Wise and Fiore families add more ecologically rich lands to the Valley View Preserve, an oasis of protected property in a rapidly developing area west of Madison. Photo by Kevin Thusius.*

experiencing suburban sprawl at a rate like the Town of Middleton in Dane County. This makes any open space that much more important.

In 2010, Tom started a statement with “I want to give this property to the Ice Age Trail Alliance...” and finished it with “...someday.” Tom mentioned this during a conversation when I had asked him to help our interns complete a management plan for the Alliance’s adjacent Valley View Preserve — an 80-acre property that includes the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, miles of side/loop trails and many acres of restored oak savanna and prairie. No one knows Valley View better than Tom.

Tom is a busy guy, traveling overseas for weeks at a time to work on massive projects to collect information on neutrinos — tiny energy-carrying particles. Who knew when “someday” would happen? Tom and his wife Bonnie got a nudge from their neighbors, Susan and Jim Fiore. The Fiore family had a pending timber cut on their property. If they did nothing, they would lose what they have grown to love so much — the many mature oak trees and the accompanying inter-connected species. So to save what they loved, the best option was to give it away. They contacted the Alliance and our friends at the Natural Heritage Land Trust. By the end of the first meeting with the two families, we had a plan to move forward with a rather complex process for both the Fiore and Wise families to donate their properties to Dane County, and then transfer them to the Alliance.

Complications arose with regulations relating to local subdivision rules, the managed forest program, driveway permits, and fire truck access. At several times over the next 18 months the project seemed like it was about to derail.

Accumulating costs of surveyors and accountants, along with various other fees, were adding up. At one point Jim muttered, “It costs a lot to do the right thing”. It’s true. Tens of thousands of dollars were spent to donate the properties. However, all parties persisted, with an extremely determined Jim Fiore leading the charge. The Fiores even donated a significant amount of money for the Alliance’s Property Monitoring Fund which will help oversee their property in perpetuity.

As the dust settled from the transactions in early 2016, the Alliance took ownership of approximately 8.5 acres from the Fiore family and 20 acres from the Wise family. Coupled with the existing Alliance property, the Preserve now totals nearly 110 acres of land conserved forever while providing habitat for a host of plant species and animal species, including humans.

The landowners also received benefits from these donations. They will receive unending satisfaction that the property they love so dearly will not be developed nor destroyed. And — after the donations had occurred — as a special holiday gift, Congress made permanent an enhanced incentive package for the donations of conservation land to tax-deductible charities, which means the donors will receive a greater-than-first-expected tax benefit for their generosity.

Thanks to Jim and Susan Fiore and Tom and Bonita Wise for their generous donation of property. Thanks also to our partners at Dane County, specifically Jan Zimmerman, and to the Fiores’ son/attorney Matt Dregne for their expert assistance on this project. Without all these folks and their dogged efforts, these types of altruistic transactions are simply not possible.