



Guests hike in the new preserve. Photo: Bob Lee



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO
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challenges of the site which included flooding and invasive species. Several government agencies collaborated to address the drainage problem while Smith and Lee worked with CFC Restoration Program Manager Kevin Scheiwiller, natural resources expert Jim Anderson, and landscape architect Brandon Losey to create a functional plan for the site. Invasive species removal began later that year.

"This preserve is for all who wander in and

"This is a sanctuary for everyone to enjoy." – BOB LEE

Remembering Tom Vanderpoel

A NEW PRESERVE NAMED FOR A BELOVED CITIZENS FOR CONSERVATION PIONEER WELCOMES JOYFUL DISCOVERY AND CELEBRATES A CFC PIONEER

THE VOICES OF SANDHILL CRANES mingled with puffy clouds above a gathering of family, friends, and colleagues celebrating the October 9, 2021, dedication of the Tom Vanderpoel Memorial Preserve. Citizens for Conservation (CFC) Board Director and Steve Smith shared opening comments, followed by CFC Volunteer Bob Lee, and CFC Restoration Program Manager Kevin Scheiwiller.

Reflecting on the site's quiet location on Chapel

"There's something magical about this piece of property."

– STEVE SMITH

Road, Smith shared his gratitude for CFC's opportunity to partner with Barrington Hills Farm to create the memorial preserve. "Since Tom was a pioneer in perfecting wetland restoration, I think

he would have been proud to have been asked for his advice on this extraordinary site," Smith said.

The dedication continued with a story from Bob Lee that started with a phone call. Admiring a field of sunflowers at Barrington Hills Farm, Lee contacted JR Davis to see if he might be willing to share some of the farm's flowers with CFC to send home with each person who attended Vanderpoel's memorial service in 2017.

The sunflowers reminded Lee of Vanderpoel because he had read sunflowers "symbolize true faith and loyalty to something that is much bigger and brighter than themselves". While the timing of the memorial service and local bloom cycles did not allow Davis to provide flowers, Davis still wanted to honor Vanderpoel. Seeing the pond beside Chapel Road as a perfect place for respectful reflection, Davis offered to create a preserve in Vanderpoel's memory.

A steering committee soon formed to tackle

wonder and remember," read Lee from the "Welcome" sign at the entrance. "The hope is that you will find joy from all that grows, flies, crawls, swims, skitters, wiggles, floats, prances, leaps, soars, walks, and dances through this sanctuary." A smiling Tom Vanderpoel giving his son Cooper a piggyback ride is surrounded by text introducing Vanderpoel's lifetime "[learning] to heal the land by carefully observing and pondering each piece of the landscape puzzle." Additional signs explore the site's geological, natural, and cultural history, sharing the importance of seeing land and people as integral to each other's survival, offering insights into predator/prey relationships (including mosquitoes!), and illustrating the regional impact of glaciation.

"The seasons are becoming less predictable,



A view from the path.



The Vanderpoels gather at the Tom Vanderpoel Memorial Preserve to celebrate the memory of Tom at the October 9, 2021 dedication.



Some of the youngest members of the Vanderpoel family enjoy exploring the new preserve after its dedication. Tom's great nephews pictured here are (from left) Waid Pavlick, Johnny Pavlick, and Tyler Vanderpoel. In back: Tom's nephew Fred Vanderpoel.



Bob Lee presents Equestrian Community books to Kathleen Leitner and Gail Vanderpoel.



Tom Vanderpoel Memorial Preserve is a peaceful place to hike, view wildlife, and learn about Vanderpoel and the natural world he was dedicated to restoring.



LEFT: “These are the good old days,” Jim Vanderpoel said at the Thomas Waid Vanderpoel plaque dedication at CFC headquarters. He shared his brother’s goals and how progress is being made by CFC volunteers.

BELOW: Cooper and Gail Vanderpoel admire a welcome sign that shows Tom Vanderpoel giving Cooper a piggyback ride when he was 11. “That photo showed how much I loved him,” Cooper said.



ABOVE: CFC’s 50th Celebration offered a variety of activities, including crafts for children, a CFC education area, live bird encounters from Stillman Nature Center, and live music by Redhorse. CFC volunteers Tom and Edith Auchter enjoy the celebration.

RIGHT: CFC’s 2013 interns (from left) Mitchell Groenhof, Katherine Dahlberg, Stephanie LoCastro, and Joel Rangel attended the dedication of the plaque at CFC headquarters.



“The largest challenge we are facing at this site is the same challenge we are facing across the board. – KEVIN SCHEIWILLER

with some of the wettest and driest seasons on record in the short period since this project has commenced,” Scheiwiller said. “It makes it even more important to protect this site and so many others to buffer the effects of a changing planet.”

Over the course of the last 2½ years, CFC volunteers have removed invasive species, adding early prairie pioneer native seed in fall 2020, some

plantings around the pond in August, young oaks this past September, and prairie dropseed together with 30-40 different forbs to the upland this fall. About 40% of the site has been restored, and CFC plans to continue nurturing the site’s diversity through a prescribed burn next year, seed dispersal over the next two years, and the continued installation of 10 species of wetland “warrior” sedges.

Reminiscing about his work with Vanderpoel when he was an Audubon intern, Scheiwiller shared how Vanderpoel demonstrated patience in helping him identify big and little bluestem rather than irritation with his question. “All of the knowledge and generosity Tom showed to every

single person who came to volunteer lives on in each seed collected and new planting started,” noted Scheiwiller. “This preserve will hopefully pay homage to all that Tom has given and to remind us where many of our roots, literally and figuratively, started.”

For Sarah Voska, a volunteer with CFC since her 2017 summer internship, Vanderpoel transformed the way she looked at climate change from something to be debated to something she could positively impact by restoring local natural areas. “Tom’s legacy lives on in all of us,” said Voska, who works for an ecological restoration company.

“[Tom] was a quiet, knowledgeable, dedicated




Lara Svatko of Stillman Nature Center shares information about Great Horned Owls at CFC's 50th Celebration.

"This dedication event reflects the impact that Tom had on conservation efforts in our community." –KATHLEEN LEITNER, PRESIDENT, CITIZENS FOR CONSERVATION

leader who worked side-by-side with us, teaching and sharing the joy of being in nature," said Leitner. "This preserve gives people the opportunity to reflect on all that nature can provide now and into the future."

For Vanderpoel's widow and former CFC Youth Educator Gail Vanderpoel, the dedication of the new preserve was an opportunity to share sweet memories. For example, she explained how her husband would show her the most exciting things he had found that day to share with her students because he wanted everyone who visited each CFC site to connect with nature in a way that would be positive and memorable.

To spend time in nature with Tom Vanderpoel inspired interns and volunteers in more ways than one article can share. The new preserve named in honor of this amazing man is a tribute worth visiting throughout the year and volunteering to nurture, watch, and wander over time.

For information about upcoming workdays at the Tom Vanderpoel Memorial Preserve, contact Citizens for Conservation at cfc@citizensforconservation.org or call 847-382-7283. 

Tom Vanderpoel Memorial Preserve Quick Facts

Pond, prairie, savannah ecosystem restoration-in-progress
7.25 acres total
0.25-mile mowed walking path
3 overlooks
4 interpretive panels
Roughly 65 species of birds (including wood ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Buffleheads, and a variety of hawks)

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