



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Champions of the local environment recognized for their dedication by NVCA

UTOPIA, Ontario, Nov. 4, 2009 – Lifelong conservationists and new environmentalists came together last night to be named Conservation Champions by the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority.

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Evening of Thanks, awards were presented to Bruce Haire, William Brooks, Troy Wilson, the Bass Lake Ratepayers Association and Kyle Pearson, who won the Young Conservation Champion award. A special recognition award was also presented to the last and recently retired members of the Fort Willow Improvement Group, Bernie Longson, Harold McMaster and Frank Ford.

#### Member Municipalities

Adjala-Tosorontio

Amaranth

Barrie

The Blue Mountains

Bradford-West Gwillimbury

Clearview

Collingwood

Essa

Innisfil

Melancthon

Mono

Mulmur

New Tecumseth

Oro-Medonte

Grey Highlands

Shelburne

Springwater

Wasaga Beach

#### Watershed Counties

Simcoe

Dufferin

Grey

Bruce Haire, Editor Emeritus of the New Tecumseth Times, has been a tireless supporter of the New Tecumseth Streams Committee and South Simcoe Streams Network. He has been instrumental in getting the stewardship message to the community via publications in his newspaper.

“The community of New Tecumseth is very active environmentally,” says Fred Dobbs, NVCA Manager of Stewardship Services. “There is no doubt that there is a link between Bruce’s efforts and the development and growth of the Streams Committee and Network.”



From left to right: John Cameron (Bass Lake Ratepayers Association), Dan Pearson (accepting on behalf of son Kyle), Troy Wilson, Erin Evans (BLRA), Bruce Haire, William Brooks and Connie Simo (BLRA)

Over the years, Haire has been a regular at Streams Committee events, often behind the lens capturing the dedication of hundreds of volunteers. He was also an active member of the Tottenham Conservation Area Committee, working to improve the health of the pond and organize the annual pond fishing derby for youth.

Haire’s work may even have indirectly led to William Brooks and Troy Wilson joining the South Simcoe Streams Network and subsequently being named Conservation Champions for all of their efforts this past year.

Brooks and Wilson are both first-year members of the Network who participated in more than half a dozen events in 2009 with on-site volunteer coordination and tree planting. Their work has contributed greatly to stream restoration in the south end of the watershed.

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Brooks has also extended his community environmentalism to his backyard by increasing the riparian buffer along the stream running through his property. This helps to create habitat for fish and wildlife, improve water quality and reduce erosion.

Similar stewardship initiatives can be seen in the work of the Bass Lake Ratepayers Association (BLRA), also recognized as a Conservation Champion.

The association prepared a three-year stewardship plan in consultation with the NVCA, Severn Sound Environmental Association and the Township of Oro-Medonte, to protect the health of Bass Lake.

“They’re very interested in protecting Bass Lake and making sure the environment stays healthy for themselves and for future generations,” said David Featherstone, NVCA Manager of Watershed Monitoring.

Over the past couple of years, the BLRA has encouraged and participated in the production of the Bass Lake Report Card, which sets benchmarks to track environmental restoration efforts in the future. Current conditions were evaluated and grades were given for forest and wetland cover and surface water quality.

Their stewardship plan addresses areas for improvement and how residents around the lake can get involved with projects such as naturalizing their shoreline.

This year’s Young Conservation Champion was Kyle Pearson, a Grade 7 student at St. Mary’s school in Collingwood.

When Kyle was in Grade 6, he had to analyze a local issue for a project in Mrs. Baginski’s class. He chose the Silver Creek wetland.

“I have noticed many new developments in the community removing forest and replacing farmland and I find this to be upsetting... I wonder if that is the best use of our land,” says Kyle.

As part of the project, Kyle developed a slide show, which included a section on how people can help; he created a short movie; he made a one-hour presentation to his class; and made a donation to and became the youngest member of the Blue Mountain Watershed Trust Foundation (BMWTF).

“How lucky are we to have the young minds of our community engaging in topics that will help define our future,” said Jeanne Hazell, member of the BMWTF.

Finally, a special recognition award was presented to the founders and final members of the Fort Willow Improvement Group, Bernie Longson, Harold McMaster and Frank Ford.

The three men have been part of the group since it started in 1996. They are responsible for turning the forgotten lot into the majestic Fort it is today, complete with palisade walls, interpretative signage, annual archaeological digs and re-enactments of the War of 1812.

“Bernie, Harold and Frank were the dream-team of volunteers. Their dedication over the past decade is unparalleled,” says Byron Wesson, NVCA Director of Land Operations and Stewardship Services. “Residents and visitors to the area now have a

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special place to learn about Canada’s history and natural heritage because of the efforts of these gentlemen.”

A common sentiment at the Evening of Thanks was that the retiring conservationists will be greatly missed, but the other award winners showed that there are many youth and those young-at-heart who are dedicated to restoring and being champions for our local environment.

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**About the NVCA**

The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority is a public agency dedicated to the preservation of a healthy environment through specialized programs to protect, conserve and enhance our water, wetlands, forests and lands.

For more information or to conduct an interview, please contact:

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**Photo attachments**

Photo #1 – Bruce Haire

Photo #2 – Troy Wilson (left) and William Brooks

Photo #3 – Bass Lake Ratepayers Association  
(from left to right): Erin Evans, Coun. Sandy Agnew (Oro-Medonte), Connie Simo (President), David Featherstone (NVCA), John Cameron

Photo #4 – Dan Pearson accepting the award on behalf of his son Kyle who was sick and could not attend.

Photos #5 – Group photo of Champions  
(from left to right): John Cameron (Bass Lake Ratepayers Association), Dan Pearson (accepting on behalf of son Kyle), Troy Wilson, Erin Evans (BLRA), Bruce Haire, William Brooks and Connie Simo (BLRA)

Photo #6 – Fort Willow Improvement Group members  
(from left to right): Harold McMaster, Bernie Longson, Byron Wesson (NVCA)

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