

Prairie Crossing at Twenty

November 2015: The Prairie Crossing Influence

By Erin Cummisford, Prairie Crossing resident & Liberty Prairie Foundation staff member

On December 16, 1994, John and Marianne Conway purchased the first home in Prairie Crossing at 1494 Potawatomi Road. Twenty years later, Prairie Crossing is a thriving community and a nationally renowned example of how conservation principles can be integrated into a suburban neighborhood. Throughout 2015, we will celebrate this 20th anniversary by sharing history and unique features of our home community. Whether you are a new or long-time resident, we hope this will deepen your appreciation of Prairie Crossing.

Vision for a “Conservation Community”

When Prairie Crossing was conceived by George & Vicki Ranney, a “conservation community” was not in the lexicon. Though we can’t prove the term was invented at Prairie Crossing, it is undisputable that we were among the first master-planned conservation communities.

Prairie Crossing transitioned from vision to reality with much interest from not only potential residents, but also urban planners, developers, and conservation-minded people across the U.S.

To this date, urban planning students and real estate developers consult with staff from the Liberty Prairie Foundation to continue learning from the Prairie Crossing model.



An early view of Prairie Crossing (courtesy of Aerial Images) with excavations of Lake Aldo Leopold and Sanctuary Pond along with the Osage Orange, Village Green, and Prairie Trail areas.

Message from the Urban Land Institute

Edward T. McMahon leads the Urban Land Institute's worldwide efforts to conduct research on sustainable development. ULI is the foremost association of real estate and land use professionals in the country.

Ed's most recent book *Conservation Communities: Creating Value with Nature, Open Space and Agriculture* includes much about Prairie Crossing. Here are excerpted quotes from the 20th anniversary program booklet about Prairie Crossing's influence:

Articles in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and other publications have been showcasing new developments that include agriculture at their core. However, the precursor and prototype for all of these communities is Prairie Crossing ... one of the first large developments that proved that developing in harmony with the land could be good for both the pocketbook and the land.

Prairie Crossing changed the paradigm of suburban development. Instead of carving up a century-old farm into cookie-cutter house lots and streets, Prairie Crossing restored the native prairie and the original barn, started a 100-acre organic farm, and took a natural approach to stormwater management

Prairie Crossing proved that developers and environmentalists could find common ground. It also proved that it was possible for a new community to work with nature, not against it.

Communities Influenced by Prairie Crossing

The overall influence of Prairie Crossing coupled with the planning team's time spent advising and consulting with others has impacted many new conservation developments across the U.S.

You will see many similarities and some differences among the following conservation communities. It is heartening that an increasing number of people around the U.S. are interested in living in communities that are in closer harmony to the natural world!

Hidden Springs – Ada County, Idaho

The founding vision for Hidden Springs was to build a rural community in the tradition of Idaho's small towns, while carefully preserving the natural surroundings of Dry Creek Valley. Hidden Springs' land plan includes numerous environmental precautions and improvements, over 800 acres of permanent open space, and on-site retail and educational facilities to minimize car travel. Open space includes parks, orchards, wetlands, wildlife habitat, agricultural fields, the Dry Creek corridor and surrounding foothills.

Hidden Springs was developed based on the following founding principles: rural character and farming traditions, small town, natural environment, traditional homes, quality of life and healthy living, education, diversity, and value and values. www.hiddensprings.com.

South Village – South Burlington, Vermont

South Village was designed to bring together two of Vermont's most cherished traditions: open space and village living.

Homes are surrounded by 150 acres of open space used for agriculture, wildlife and recreation. There is open space for walking, nearby paths for biking and cross country skiing, a 4-acre working organic farm, and community gardens. www.southvillage.com.

Tryon Farm – Michigan City, Indiana

The 170 acre Tryon Farm is primarily a weekend retreat with 120 protected acres of dunes, forest, wetlands, and grassland meadows. An on-site farm provides access to chickens, goats, and educational programming from the Tryon Farm

Institute. Residents enjoy 5+ miles of trails and open space, along with a variety of community events. www.tryonfarm.com.

Serenbe – outside Atlanta, Georgia

This 900 acre conservation community is in Chattahoochee Hill country, about 30 miles outside of Atlanta. Four "hamlets" (currently a combination of occupied and to be developed homes) each focus on a theme of a well-lived life: arts for inspiration, agriculture for nourishment, health for wellbeing, and education for awareness.

Serenbe is home to a 25 acre farm and several on-site restaurants that source local produce from that farm. The first house was built in 2004 and there approximately 400 residents to date. The Serenbe Institute for Art, Culture and Environment organizes a variety of programs and projects for the community. www.serenbe.com.

Willowsford – Loudoun County, Virginia

This 4,000 acre conservation community is located outside Washington DC. Development is partially completed and the community features 50% open space. Within those 2,000 acres are trails through dense woodlands and pastures, and a 300 acre working farm.

Homes are grouped in 4 neighborhoods with amenities including a pool, pop-up restaurants, a lake for fishing and boating, parks, amphitheaters, and more to bring residents together. www.willowsford.com.

The conservation community movement is growing! For more exciting examples, Google "agrihoods," another new term to describe communities such as Prairie Crossing.

NEXT MONTH: The FINAL 20th anniversary newsletter insert will feature interesting tidbits about Prairie Crossing, and why this is such an interesting place to live.

The update of Prairie Crossing's website, www.prairiecrossing.com, will be completed soon. Also, "like" the Prairie Crossing community on Facebook for photos and more.