

## Message from Ken Herring, Chair Whiterock Board of Directors

On March 30, Whiterock said farewell to Executive Director Tolif Hunt, with our best wishes for his new career. Tolif has been our Executive Director for more than five years, during which time Whiterock grew from a fledgling organization into a leader in rural tourism and natural resource conservation. While we will miss Tolif here at Whiterock, our paths may still cross as he plans to remain in Iowa. Tolif has accepted a position in Grants Administration with the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls. He also plans to continue his activism in soil conservation, agricultural policy, and natural resource management.

Tolif's work has set the stage for Whiterock's continued success, and all of us at Whiterock—the Board, staff, and volunteers—are excited about building on this groundwork and developing innovative programs with a new Executive Director.

## Director's Message

Tolif Hunt, Executive Director

Hello Everyone,



I want to take this moment to thank each of you for your support of Whiterock Conservancy. It has been a pleasure working and knowing all of you through Whiterock, and it has been a wonderful experience serving as Whiterock Conservancy's Executive Director. After March, I will remain involved in conservation to help better Iowa's wonderful outdoors.

Thank you,

### Herring to Serve as Interim Director

Ken Herring, President of Whiterock's Board of Directors, will serve as Whiterock's Interim Director while the board engages in strategic planning and searches for a new Executive Director. Herring will oversee the daily operations of the organization while staff, volunteers, and consultants move the organization forward. Herring praised the quality of Whiterock's staff and volunteers and said that he is looking forward to working with them to create exciting programs for the general public.

### Soft Trails Open the Landscape to the Public

A key focus for Whiterock during the next few years will be development of more than 35 miles of eco-friendly trails serving hikers, mountain bikers, and horseback riders as well as the physically challenged. "Expanding Access: Whiterock's Sustainable Soft Trails Project" is critical to providing access to Whiterock's 4,300 acres of contiguous land. Most of this land is inaccessible from area roads and can only be reached by a system of old and worn-out trails pieced together from abandoned farm roads and foot paths.

The new trail network, which will be more than 35 miles in length, will turn this old and eroding trail system into state-of-the-art sustainable trails open to hikers, bikers and equestrians. Completion of this new trail network will make Whiterock one of the few places in the Midwest to offer meaningful multi-day experiences for

visitors to interact with, learn from, and enjoy the unique features of Whiterock's farmed and natural landscapes—the rolling, timbered pastures and prairies; restored oak savannas that are home to thousands of species of plants and animals; unique geologic features that date back 105 million years; and its historical importance as the cradle for the development of hybrid seed corn and a ray of hope for better relations between the people of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.



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## The Garst Farmhouse: From Simple Abode to Historical Register

Built in the late 1800s, the Garst farmhouse began its humble life as a plain T-style building—a simple abode for the original owners as they tried to make a living on a rural Iowa farm.

In the 1900s, life changed drastically for this soon-to-be-famous home. Roswell and Elizabeth Garst moved into the farmhouse during the Great Depression. In addition to raising their own five children on the farm, Elizabeth Garst held a summer camp for city children who could spend one or more weeks experiencing life on a real farm. In 1959, Garst's Farm was invaded by hundreds of reporters in one of the first modern-day media frenzies. **The house and surrounding farm became a focal point for the exchange of ideas between Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and Roswell Garst.**

Most of the expansion to the house occurred between 1916 and 1959. The additions resulted in the Colonial Revivalist style seen today. Changes noticed in a 1918 photograph include a new screened-in porch and dormer. A second dormer appears in a 1925 photograph along with a short north wing extension. Today, the dormers, seen from inside the second floor bedrooms, make for interesting lines and eye appeal. (See below.) The upstairs layout,



with all three bedrooms having windows on three sides, provides a great natural cooling system during hot summers.

In 2009, the Garst Farm was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Today, this historic home serves as an inviting five-bedroom bed and breakfast. The rooms are well appointed with period-appropriate carpeting, window treatments, wallpapers, and antique furniture that serve as reminders of the humble farmhouse that grew and hosted amazing events.

**Come spend a night or a weekend with us and experience this fabulous and famous farmhouse for yourself.** It's a rare treat for a fan of rural American antiques, architecture, and American history. Review the extensive photographic collection and be transported back to the series of historical events that moved this humble abode into the international spotlight.



Edwin Garst farmhouse, source unknown



Artist's rendition from 1918 photo by Lee. The dormer and screened porch are early additions to the house.



Photo from the Garst Family, circa 1925. A second dormer and northern expansion.



The east side of the farmhouse as currently viewed. Photo courtesy of Tallgrass Historians, LLC

## ***Walk at Whiterock for Father's Day June 16***

**Treat the favorite man** in your life with a change of pace and explore the great outdoors here at Whiterock Conservancy. For the history buff, stay at our world-famous bed and breakfast at the Garst Farm visited by Nikita Khrushchev in 1959. There's a library, extensive photograph collection, and entire farm for him to explore. Or choose to rent one of our country cabins with comfortable beds and full kitchens. We also have campground options, ranging from remote primitive areas to RV and camper-accessible ones. Camping is a great way to promote togetherness and to have some old fashioned fun.

**Creating memories** is what we're about, and we're here to help you plan your weekend so Dad and the family can have fun together. For walkers, there are formal trails and off-the-beaten-path prairies, rolling hillsides, and wooded preserves to explore on foot. Or bring your mountain bike or horse and explore that way. You can rent a canoe, ride a John Deere Gator, and go on a hayrack ride. There are rivers and ponds to fish and a variety of birds, animals, and plants to identify or simply enjoy the sightings. Due to our unusual degree of darkness, Coon Rapids has the best stargazing in the state. Campfires, s'mores, and watching for falling stars are great activities for winding down at the end of the day.

Give us a call at 712-684-2964 ext. 112 and we'll help you start planning your memorable Father's Day weekend! Call 712-999-2246 for Natural Expressions Photography for wonderful outdoor family photos.

## ***Community Tree Planting: May 15***

Put your sun hat and work gloves on and join us on Tuesday, May 15 for a satisfying day of work and fun. Join a flurry of youth and adults planting trees near the Steve Garst Trailhead on Main Street, east of Coon Rapids. We need to plant and water more than 5,000 seedlings, including numerous varieties of native species. Chris Troendle, Whiterock's Land Manager, is heading up a Service Learning Day with area youth. They will be planting a small orchard of fruit-bearing trees (apple, cherry, pears, and plum) for the community to experience and enjoy.

We need volunteers to assist with tree planting, skirting, sheltering, and watering these young trees. Activities should start by 9 a.m. Please contact Chris at 712-684-2697 ext. 114 if you can help for a half day or a whole day.

## ***House Concert at the River House, May 12, 7 p.m.***

The Roe Family Singers are a Good-Time, Old-Time Hillbilly band from the Mississippi-headwaters community of Kirkwood Hollow, Minnesota. Led by wife and husband team, Kim Roe (Best Female Vocalist, City Pages/Village Voice) and Quillan Roe (Accident Clearinghouse), the band blends characteristic old-time sound with rock and roll urgency and influence.

Guests are invited to bring their own beverages to the show and even a snack to share. There is a suggested donation of \$10—\$20 per person, and all donations go directly to the band.

## ***BioBlitz and Land Stewardship Program Sign Up***

June 8 and 9, a Friday and Saturday, will see another BioBlitz at Whiterock. A BioBlitz is a 24-hour event during which participants try to identify as many species as possible. The purpose of this year's event is to strengthen Whiterock's Land Stewardship Program.

We rely on land steward volunteers to help assess and maintain our land to keep it an ecologically rich and diverse resource in Central Iowa. The BioBlitz will educate the public and our land stewards so everyone can better appreciate and participate in the Conservancy's efforts.

We are asking any adults actively interested in participating with the Land Stewardship program to attend the BioBlitz and sign up to be a Land Steward. It is a fun and easy way to volunteer, requiring only a few hours each quarter (spring, summer, fall, and winter) and gives you the chance to hone your plant and animal identification skills. Land Stewards play an integral part in maintaining Whiterock Conservancy.

Mark your calendars now to participate in our BioBlitz on June 8 and 9 and stay tuned for more information.



## Upcoming Events

### **All of April—Prescribed burn season.**

Volunteers needed. Contact Land Manager Chris Troendle at [landmanager@whiterockconservancy.org](mailto:landmanager@whiterockconservancy.org)

**May 12 — Raccoon River House Concert** at the River House and Dance Barn

**May 15 — Community Tree Planting** along the Garst Farm Trail

**June 8 — BioBlitz & Land Stewardship Volunteer Training**

**June 15—17 — Father's Day Weekend**

**July 19 — 2nd Annual River Float**

**August 18 — Flan Chen Fire Show**

**September 14 — 16th Annual Star Party**

**October 25 — Fall Family Hayrack Rides**

For more details, check our website:

[www.whiterockconservancy.org](http://www.whiterockconservancy.org)

## THE CHALLENGE OF OPENING WHITEROCK

Whiterock Conservancy was created in 2004 to steward and restore an enormous 5,000-acre land gift from the Garst Family of Coon Rapids and to develop creative ways to open this beautiful landscape to the general public.

Whiterock needs your help in supporting our day-to-day land conservation and restoration mission as well as providing unique low-cost, low impact outdoor programs for people of all ages. We are also conducting a capital campaign to raise \$900,000 to build an upgraded 35-mile soft (natural) trail system that will provide far greater public access to Whiterock's landscapes.

**Please make a donation to Whiterock today or consider an in-kind gift of a vehicle, mower, shop tools, etc.** Tax-deductible donations can be made on-line at [www.whiterockconservancy.org](http://www.whiterockconservancy.org) (look for the **Donate Now** button) or mailed to Whiterock Conservancy, 1390 Hwy 141, Coon Rapids, IA 50058.

If you prefer to receive your newsletter electronically, please let us know at [april@whiterockconservancy.org](mailto:april@whiterockconservancy.org).



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