

**2008 Charles L. Whitney Award for Outstanding Service
presented by Prairie Plains director Bill Whitney**

I remember Norris Alfred for many things. He was editor of the *Polk Progress* and "Polking Around" until his death in 1995. His writing was wonderful. Norris had an ability to capture some of the more colorful characters in the Polk area as well as honor many of the locals with endearing tributes when they passed on. He was an avid birdwatcher who made a weekly list of birds encountered on what he called Birding Road along the Platte River in Merrick and Polk Counties. He was a rather shy and unassuming man, a painter, very gentle, a contrast to the persona behind his critical essays against war and political corruption, or bemoaning the loss of farmers and small towns, or against the rampant environmental destruction taking place in the world. Norris enjoyed people, especially children, nature, small towns, engaging discussion about many topics, good books and art. He liked forthrightness – a word he used often and which is a strong character trait of Norris's I remember the most. Norris hated – unequivocally hated – duplicity, deceit, brutish ignorance and arrogance, lack of compassion, pomposity, shallowness – you get the point. He wouldn't be having much fun right now the way the world is 12 years after his passing,

When I began to write this introduction I did not realize it would become a tribute to Norris – of course it's nice to occasionally reflect on his life. But the connection was that I was thinking of the word forthright – saying and acting by firm principle, nonevasive, blunt and straight shooting, direct, candid, frank. Then I realized it would be a fitting tribute to be compared in many ways to Norris. The recipients - we have two for the price of one this year - of this year's Charles L. Whitney Outstanding Service Award are noteworthy because of their appreciation for the land, for farmers and small towns, for nature, children, good discussion, compassion for others, willingness to help when there is a need. They are noteworthy for their good naturedness and optimism amidst the troubled world we live in. But they are noteworthy as well for what they think and say. Like Norris they are forthright about telling it like it is, and own a genuine wide-ranging concern for a concept that we need to spend more time discussing in this land – the common good. Every small town needs a couple like this to make people think, to offer constructive and realistic advice, to cut through the baloney and to be enjoyable to work and socialize with. They are aware of the larger world and look for good ideas everywhere, yet vitally concerned with the needs of the local community.

These people have been members for many years, more importantly they have made many contributions of dollars and time and equipment hours to the betterment of the Olson Nature Preserve since its inception in 1995. They are models for local land stewards that Prairie Plains needs to have for all its preserves. When you visit ONP and walk the trails, then rest under the shelter on the new picnic tables – oh, and visit the porta-john - you will be enjoying the fruits of their continued service. Of course, I'm talking about Ted and Ramona Thieman. It is a great pleasure of mine to present this award to the most fitting of recipients. I wish they were my next door neighbors and we could spend more time sitting and talking together. But I'll just have to visit ONP more often and get them down to the new Center more often where we can all sit together in the screened porch on a spring evening listening to the frogs.

Below top- Ted and Mona Thieman (center), listening to Bill's comments and realizing he's talking about *them*. Enjoying the moment with them are board members Steve Rothenberger (to Mona's right) and David Meyer. Next photo, the Thiemans with their 2008 Charles L. Whitney Award for Outstanding Service to Prairie Plains Resource Institute.



J. Dill

Prairie Plains - Past, Present and Future

a synopsis of Bill Whitney's
Annual Meeting Director's Address

Because you, the members, supporters and friends of Prairie Plains, are responsible for so much of the success of this organization, it is appropriate that you know where the organization is at the moment, and where we want to go in the future. But first, a little about the past to set the stage.



When Jan and I, along with Hal Nagel and Curt Twedt, set out to create this institution in 1980 we knew what we wanted to do but little about how to grow and manage an organization. We knew we wanted to preserve and manage prairie remnants near our home, do educational activities and ecological restoration

of prairies. What followed is something we haven't romanticized about much. Between the benchmarks of successes, such as early prairie restorations along Lincoln Creek, the Aalborg land gift, Pearl Harbor Survivors preserve gift, establishment of the Marie Ratzlaff Prairie Preserve, the Bader Park interpretive guide, and all the prescribed fires accomplished, life was challenging. Jan and I worked various other jobs, nurturing this "avocation" along because we believed it had potential. It is difficult to describe a vision to others. One simply works at something passionately and hopes some day it will lead to greater things.

Persistence eventually paid off. People supported the effort and we got better at what we did. By 1991 there was steady pay; by 2000 a staff of four - unimaginable since even one job seemed impossible in the early going. Things unfolded gradually, but almost as if scripted. Maybe call it luck - but we have had good timing and have seen and reacted to good ideas and people's needs. Prairie Plains has always, from the start, been tied to a cultural ideal about people and the land rather than solely conservation. We see abundant opportunity in what we do. The work is a form of community social and economic development, and we seek participation and social exchange.

Prairie Plains history is documented from 1980 to the present in *Prairie Plains Journals, Quarterlies, Links* and the web site (prairieplains.org). We have touched quite a few lives deeply. We own seven amazingly beautiful and diverse properties representing classic Great Plains landscapes. And we are bootstrap, entrepreneurial, homegrown, and not afraid to say we love the Great Plains. We do a few things well that others won't, don't, or can't do, or are afraid to try. We've paid our bills.

Now, we sit at a crossroad. Prairie Plains faces financial challenges at a time when there is great competition for nonprofit funds. We must become less dependent on contracted services of land management and restoration due to fluctuations in the market for these services. We need more members who can share our story with prospective members and who will continue and even increase their annual support. We must seek individual donors with capacity to provide substantial capital that will enable stability and program growth. We need corporate and foundation contributors for operational and special project funds. Now, as we near the halfway funding point on the Charles L. Whitney Education Center building, we need to modify our overall program direction toward fulfilling its potential. Prairie Plains must cultivate new leaders: volunteers to help with projects, committee members and new board members, successors to current staff members shifting roles or planning an exit strategy in the next decade. We must create a flexible and effective management system to quicken and manage growth. Most of all we need to reach out to many more people who might benefit from our services. Despite some major challenges, the future can be incredibly exciting and fun.

Continued support of Prairie Plains in the next few years is an investment in Nebraska's youth, the restoration of natural resources and rural development. The years to come offer enormous potential - regionally and globally - in the arenas of land education and ecological restoration. Prairie Plains is in a position to be a significant contributor in these processes, and in so doing can become a much greater asset to the local and regional community. Two new programs will be created at the new Center: The Prairie School and the Academy for Great Plains Restoration. I will explain these in the next issue of the *Link*, along with some of the challenges we face reaching these goals.



Conspicuously missing from the annual meeting was board treasurer Dennis Ferguson. He had a pretty good excuse. Son Lofton was born the day before (Jan. 11). He waited just a day too long to have the same birthday as big brother Grant. Congratulations to the Ferguson Family!

THANK YOU

- to member Gerhard Assenmacher for his beautiful photo collage of "Feathers Along the Medicine Creek" for our office;
- to Wenda Eckerson for the lasagne dinner following the New Year's Day hike;
- to Richard Schaffert and John Cates for gravelling our driveway at the Griffith Farm - and for snow removal;
- to the Land Trust Alliance for a \$300 scholarship for Prairie Plains personnel to attend the Central U.S. Land Trusts Meeting in Nebraska City, January 25-26.

WISH LIST

- ATV blade
- Truck - half or 3/4 ton crew cab, long box
- 6' wide trailer (the longer the better)
- \$ for new computers

Check out the article (part 2) on Prairie Plains in the February issue of *Prairie Fire* - prairiefirenewspaper.com

Approaching Events

<p>Saturday, February 9 Annual Cedar Attack at Griffith Prairie followed by lunch* 9:00 a.m. or meet at office at 8:30 *RSVP to amyppri@hamilton.net or 402-694-5535.</p>	<p>Saturday, February 23 Bader Park Earlybird Hike 7:00 a.m. followed by breakfast*</p>	<p>Saturday, March 1 Bader Park Earlybird Hike 7:00 a.m.</p>
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Prairie Plains Link

is a publication of



-An educational land trust incorporated in 1980 as a non-profit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt membership organization based in Aurora, NE.

MISSION:
Maintaining and restoring Nebraska ecosystems -
Creating opportunities for education, research, stewardship and community development.

Link Editor & Layout
Jan Whitney
Photos by Prairie Plains staff members unless noted otherwise.

Learn more and **BECOME A MEMBER** at www.prairieplains.org



New Year's Day Hike, 2008
Griffith Prairie
Photo above by Marlin Seeman;
photos below, top - Cale Jones;
next two - Amy Jones



monthly newsletter of



January, 2008

Sixth Annual New Year's Day Hike

Last year we could almost skate across the ice-encrusted prairie. This year it was snow, and plenty of it. But we had a much better turnout for the 2008 event. Twenty-five people including four dogs braved the frigid temperatures to observe the New Year's Day tradition. Most warmed up quickly while making their way up and down the hills, enjoying the view. And thanks to Wenda Eckerson, a warm, tasty lasagne dinner topped off the adventure (no dogs there). We're hoping next year it will be served in the Education Center on site. Thanks to everyone who participated!

2008 Annual Meeting of Members

January 12, 2008

Bremer Community Center in Aurora

After all the 2007 events that didn't happen due to bad weather, we're hoping that the bright and sunny day that greeted our annual meeting was a good omen for 2008. Fifty members gathered together for the morning's business, celebration, and fine dining. Board member Colleen Babcock served as emcee. President Cliff Dill gave a recap of 2007, a brief business meeting was held, followed by a "Year in Review" slide show. The highlight was the presentation of the 2008 Charles L. Whitney Award for Outstanding Service to Prairie Plains Resource Institute.

continued...



Cliff Dill in his last two hours as president. We are grateful for all the hours (and miles) he contributed.

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1307 L Street
Aurora NE 68818-2126
402-694-5535 ppri@hamilton.net
prairieplains.org

