

## PRAIRIE PLAINS LINK



What a great party!!! Over 100 people braved the winter weather on January 18 to celebrate Bill and Jan Whitney's retirement after 40 years of tireless dedication building Prairie Plains Resource Institute. Some common words shared by attendees were patience, persistence, passion, dedication, sacrifice and vision. It was truly a great day that celebrated two amazing people! Pictured left to right are Prairie Plains staff members: Jared Sullivan, Amy Jones, Jeff Gustafson, Jan Whitney, Bill Whitney, Sarah Bailey, Mike Bullerman and newly-hired executive director, Mitchell Lyon. Event photos by Britt Bailey.



**NEWSLETTER**  
**January, 2020**



**Thank you, thank you, thank you!** Appreciation was the theme of the Annual Meeting as Bill and Jan Whitney heard from Prairie Plains staff, members and friends throughout the afternoon. The assembled group shared favorite stories of meeting the Whitneys, of being impacted by their work and of lifelong friendships formed. The formal meeting closed with staff presenting the Whitneys with a wall hanging created from recycled barn wood from the Education Center (photo above). There was also ample time before and after the event to reminisce. Sharing stories in the smaller photo above are Cliff Dill, Jan Whitney, Jeanne Dill and Wayne Mollhoff. Also pictured are Lynda Oschner, Dick Schanou and Harry Eckerson.

How can we possibly summarize the 40 years Bill and Jan spent building Prairie Plains? It's an infinite conversation fueled by the memories of countless friends. Not only did they start as naïve 20-somethings creating an organization with a mission that many around them couldn't understand, they raised two kids, cared for four parents, owned a house, mowed the lawn (sometimes), made supper, **STAYED MARRIED!** There aren't many folks who could have done it. So thanks, Bill and Jan, for all of it, from all of us. We love you.

### **Prairie Plains Timeline**

- **April 29, 1980** - Prairie Plains Resource Institute incorporated as a 501c3.
- **1983** - Wilma Aalborg donated 6 acres along Lincoln Creek in Aurora. Howard Juhl donated the 320-acre Pearl Harbor Survivors Prairie.
- **1989** - Neal and Izen Ratzlaff donated a 30-acre virgin prairie in Hamilton County.
- **1991** - Work began on scaling up the high-diversity, local-ecotype prairie restoration program.
- **1992** - Summer Orientation About Rivers (SOAR) took flight.

Timeline continued on back.



**Starting the New Year off right! A record-breaking 80 people gathered at Gjerloff Prairie on January 1st to enjoy the Annual New Year's Day Hike. Despite cold temps, walkers of all ages enjoyed beautiful views, great conversation and a chance to start 2020 on the right foot - or the left foot - we let them choose!**

**Timeline continued**

- **1993** - Howard Juhl donated a 4,344-acre ranch in Sioux County.
- **1995** - Acquired 77 acres of the Olson Nature Preserve in Boone County.
- **1999** - Hired Jason Johnson as first non-Whitney employee.
- **2000** - Nebraska Environmental Trust grant helped expand restoration program. Mike Bullerman hired to lead that process.
- **2001** - Prairie Plains purchased 390-acre Griffith Prairie and Farm.
- **2002** - Gene and Margaret Pokorny donated 40 acres in Colfax County.
- **2004** - Amy Jones hired as office manager.
- **2006** - Construction began on the Charles L. Whitney Education Center. Prairie Plains Link began publishing as monthly newsletter.
- **2007** - Sands Barn moved across frozen fields to sit on its foundation at Griffith Prairie.
- **2010** - Hired intern Sarah Bailey as full-time greenhouse manager/restoration assistant. Planted first seeds in new greenhouse at Griffith Prairie.
- **2011** - Jeff Gustafson joined staff as land steward/restoration assistant.
- **2013** - Launched Youth Naturalist Program for 7-11 graders.
- **2014** - Planted 10,000th acre of prairie south of the Education Center.
- **2015** - Exercised purchase option for the Sherman Ranch after successfully raising \$1.8 million.
- **2019** - Hired Jared Sullivan as restoration/stewardship assistant. Completed record seed harvest with 3,668 gallons of forb seed hand collected.
- **December 31, 2019** - Founders Bill and Jan Whitney retired.

***Coming Soon!***

The board and staff of Prairie Plains are thrilled to announce Mitchell Lyon as our next executive director! Mitchell will take the reins on February 3, and brings with him a vast array of entrepreneurial, marketing and management experience. His passion for Prairie Plains is evident (he got married at Gjerloff Prairie!), and we're looking forward to starting the next chapter of the organization's story under his leadership. Stay tuned!



**PRAIRIE PLAINS LINK**

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**Preserving, restoring and maintaining Nebraska native prairies - Creating opportunities for education, research, stewardship and place-based community development.**

Prairie Plains Resource Institute is an educational land trust incorporated in 1980 as a non-profit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt membership organization based in Aurora, Nebraska.

Board of Directors:

- Carol Bodeen (North Platte)
- Brad Bangs (Aurora)
- Kim Sosin (Omaha)
- Wayne Mollhoff (Ashland)

Staff:

- Amy Jones, Admin. Director
- Mike Bullerman, Restoration Director and GIS Specialist
- Sarah Bailey, Greenhouse Manager, Restoration Ecologist and Youth Naturalist Program Director
- Jeff Gustafson, Land Steward and Restoration Assistant
- Jared Sullivan, Restoration and Stewardship Assistant

**Learn more and become a member:**

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

(and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter!)

Contact:

**402-694-5535**

**[ppri@hamilton.net](mailto:ppri@hamilton.net)**

**1307 L St. Aurora NE 68818**

**APPROACHING EVENTS**

**February 1:**

**Winter Explore Days  
Bader Park  
10 am**

**February 22:**

**Bader Park Bird Hike  
7 am**

**March 7:**

**Winter Explore Days  
Sherman Ranch  
10 am**