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**Gathering Waters Names Charles and Dianna Colman
Wisconsin's 2020 Conservationists of the Year**

[MADISON, July 20, 2020] – [Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts](#) is pleased to announce Charles and Dianna Colman are the 2020 Conservationists of the Year. The Colmans' commitment to protecting special places in and around the Geneva Lake area and their impressive leadership have earned them the award.

Charles Colman provided leadership for [Geneva Lake Conservancy](#). Charles served on the Board of Directors for 16 years before retiring in December 2019. He chaired the Board for four years and led advocacy and accreditation committees. During his tenure, the Conservancy protected over 2,000 acres, applied for and received accreditation from the national [Land Trust Accreditation Commission](#), and advocated for the [Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program](#). When the organization applied for its first Stewardship matching grant, Charles stepped up to give the first gift.

"The Colmans use their talents and insights to protect and enhance conservation in Walworth County," said Janet Happ, Director of Development at Geneva Lake Conservancy. "From sharing their love of the environment with children to raising money to help organizations continue conservation work, and protecting their own property forever, they share their love of conservation and lead by example."

In 2015, the Colmans made a personal commitment to conservation by permanently [protecting the 28-acre oak forest](#) surrounding their home with a conservation easement. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement that limits land use to protect its conservation value.

The Colmans' tireless efforts have benefited many people. In addition to his time with Geneva Lake Conservancy, Charles served as president of the [Friends of Kishwaukee Nature Conservancy](#), a group that supports the unique 212-acre Kishwaukee Nature Conservancy in Walworth County. Dianna supported this work through her contacts with the Lake Geneva Garden Club.

Dianna served as President of the [Lake Geneva Fresh Air Association](#), which operates [Holiday Home Camp](#). The camp introduces between 500 to 700 low-income youth from urban areas to nature each year. Dianna raised funds for cabins, addressed lakefront concerns, and built a health center. Holiday Home is the oldest camp in the United States still operating in its original location.

"Dianna's belief in the importance of children experiencing the outdoor environment led to her involvement with Holiday Home Camp, which serves underprivileged children and teens, many of whom live in neighborhoods where access to the natural world and green spaces to play is limited, non-existent, or not encouraged by their families," said Janet Happ. "Under Dianna's guidance, the donor base of Holiday Home Camp widened, and the camp became financially healthy."

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Charles also serves as Chairman and Commissioner of the [Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission](#) (SWRPC).

“Charles has long demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to land conservation in Southeastern Wisconsin,” said Kevin J. Muhs, SWRPC Executive Director. “He is an excellent leader and brings knowledge, resources, and experience to his efforts to help the Region’s environment. Charles is a committed citizen-leader.”

Dianna’s most recent accomplishment was the preservation of the [historic Yerkes Observatory](#) property, the birthplace of modern astrophysics and home of the largest refracting telescope in the world. In 2018, the University of Chicago announced it was closing the Observatory and seeking a new steward. The [Williams Bay Community](#) thought they would lose the iconic structure that has overlooked the village since 1887 forever.

Then Dianna stepped up to lead the Yerkes Future Foundation, a nonprofit group dedicated to protecting the Observatory and the lands surrounding it. She led a team that spent two years negotiating with the University. In May 2020, the University transferred ownership of the Yerkes Observatory and 49 acres of critical habitat to the Yerkes Future Foundation. Now the public can continue to enjoy these open spaces, wooded areas, and tour the magnificent building for generations to come.

Whether the project involves restoring and protecting the Colman Woods or preserving and restoring the Yerkes Observatory, the Colmans begin with the next generation in mind. Approaching projects with a generational mindset ensures the efforts will be beneficial in the future. Recently, the Lake Geneva Fresh Air Association honored Charles and Dianna as Hall of Fame Legacy members.

About Gathering Waters:

[Gathering Waters](#) helps Wisconsin’s land trusts, landowners, and communities protect the state’s land, water, wildlife, and way of life by strengthening nearly 50 [member land trusts](#). Land trusts are nonprofit organizations that permanently protect land. To make sure Wisconsin’s land trusts are strong, sustainable organizations, Gathering Waters advocates for favorable public policies and funding, provides technical and educational resources, and increases awareness of the benefits land trusts bring to their communities.

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