



# Geneva Lake Conservancy

## Press Release

Contact: Maddie Olivieri

Phone: 773-245-6856

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (All Walworth County)

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### **Geneva Lake Conservancy: Winners of the 2021 Heritage Oak Contest**

The Geneva Lake Conservancy announced today that through its 2021 Heritage Oak contest it has identified two oak trees in Walworth County that are older than the 350-year-old bur oak in the Kettle Moraine State Park's Southern Unit that won last year's contest.

This is the first time that two oak trees have received awards in the Oldest Oak category. Both trees are estimated to be 370 years old.

The first tree is located in the yard of Marina and Jerry Konz in Williams Bay. The white oak can be viewed off Laurel Street just down from Bell's Store. The second tree is a bur oak and is located on private property owned by Wendy Moon and Steve Clardy in Delavan.

"It is extraordinary to think that these trees began growing in 1651 when the Potawatomi tribe lived in this area, and more than 175 years before settlers came to what is now Walworth County," said Kiera Theys, Land Protection Manager. "The tree in Delavan is rumored to be one that soldiers sought shade under as they traveled to fight in the Civil War."

The Williams Bay tree is located right on the roadway between two driveways and has survived both development of the road and construction of nearby houses.

"The old oak trees of Walworth County are one of the most distinguishing features of our landscape and deserve to be protected," Theys said. "While oak trees are valued for their beauty and their importance as habitat for 500 species, we only have recently begun to appreciate that they are the tree that sequesters the most carbon from the environment, helping to slow climate change."

Both Wendy Moon & Steve Clardy and Marina & Jerry Konz were presented their awards at the Geneva Lake Conservancy's Annual Meeting in December. John Zinzow was also recognized for his submission of last year's winning tree in the Oldest Oak category.

Kathy Leith of the Town of Linn Park's Committee accepted the award for the Most Beautiful Oak tree, located in Linn Nature Park.

Bill and Laurie Buss received the Best Story award on behalf of the Harvard Club. They submitted a photo of a white oak tree that has formed the setting for many gatherings of the Club's members and guests over the last 100 years. The tree also survived the disastrous November 1963 fire that burned seven cottages to the ground.

The age of the winning oak trees was determined using a comparison of two growth factor equations used by organizations, including the Morton Arboretum. Tree growth can vary due to conditions such as weather and canopy cover. The only way to determine the exact age of a tree is to take a core sample that can expose the tree to disease and pests or to cut it down and count its rings, so the ages are only estimates, according to Theys.

The Geneva Lake Conservancy's Heritage Oak Contest seeks to educate the public about the importance of oak trees to the ecological health and scenic beauty of Walworth County. In the three years since the contest began, the Conservancy has identified ten Heritage Oak trees in Walworth County, and each is marked with a plaque. For further information about a tour to see these Heritage Oak trees or how to enter an oak tree in the 2022 contest, email [outreach@genevalakeconservancy.org](mailto:outreach@genevalakeconservancy.org),

The Geneva Lake Conservancy is an accredited land trust that has protected almost 3,000 acres of open land in Walworth County. Formed in 1977, it offers five public nature preserves for hiking and other recreational activities as well as other programs and educational activities for children and adults, including its Conservation@Home program. For more information, go to [genevalakeconservancy.org](http://genevalakeconservancy.org).



Wendy Moon's bur oak tree was one of the winners of the Oldest Oak Tree category.





Marina Konz's white oak tree was one of the winners of the Oldest Oak Tree category.