

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Portage County Environmental Conservation Awards Benefit Dinner

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Over 300 individuals and businesses from across Portage County contributed to the recent 17th Annual Portage County Environmental Conservation Awards celebration. Held at the American Legion Hall in Kent on April 11th, the evening focused on the 2015 Environmental Conservation Awards, with six individual and group awards in various categories. The event started with a reception featuring local food appetizers, live music by Portage County the Byrne Brothers (Jay and Greg) and an always unique silent auction. The event was also a fundraiser sponsored by the Portage Park District Foundation, with proceeds of \$21,000 going to support parks and trails.

This year's awardees:

- **Environmental Activism: The Downtown Mantua Revitalization Corporation (DMRC)**
DMRC initiated a partnership called the *Headwaters Trail 'Connecting Communities' Collaborative Consortium (HT4Cs)* to engage communities and partners for promotion of the Headwaters Trail, with plans to increase trail formation efforts while promoting environmental education, economic development, and entrepreneurship. Currently the group is pursuing matching resources and exploring branding of the trails. They also promote the Cuyahoga River, local nature preserves and historic restoration as part of their economic development strategy.
- **Environmental Education: Hiram College TREE House Project**
Hiram College's TREE (Teaching, Research, and Environmental Engagement) House. The 1901 house, sitting on the college campus, was transformed into an educational model of energy efficiency with budget-friendly renovations. It features newly designed, recycled, cost-effective and repurposed materials. The TREE House officially opened in August 2014 after a year-long renovation. Classes and community programs promote hands-on learning and the house serves as a resource for those interested in sustainability and efficiency-related home improvements.
- **Environmental Building/Development: Emerald Environmental**
Emerald Environmental has a patented process and "Greenology" that diverts tens of thousands tons of waste from landfills annually. This technology has earned several unique EPA approvals. Over the past 20 years, co-owners Brian Grimm and Scott Hershberger have grown the company into a successful, innovative business that improves the environment while helping clients comply with regulations. One of their successes is managing hazardous waste, including developing an alternative method to handle water treatment byproducts which is better for the environment and saves disposal costs.
- **Green Business: Kelly Ferry**

Kelly is a champion of the local foods movement and a strong supporter of small businesses and farmers that help produce local foods for our consumption and enjoyment. For the last 5 years, she has been the manager of Haymaker Farmers' Market, a producers-only market here in Kent. Her background in graphic design and copyrighting arm her with the expertise to promote the market through recruiting, advertising, website management, and consumer newsletters. She added the opportunity to use the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program which helps community members with food insecurity work toward better nutrition through local food. Through Kelly's management, Haymaker Farmers' Market flourishes year-round with 40 local vendors and a rising customer base.

- ***Honor Roll for Land Conservation: Virginia Shaw***

Virginia Shaw—a past Portage Park District Commissioner—is well known and recognized for her passion and concern for the stewardship of our region's natural resources. For many years, Virginia and her late husband Doug planned to donate their 145 acre property in Ravenna Township to the Portage Park District. It includes mature forests, wetlands and a portion of the West Branch of the Mahoning River, along with bridle trails that Virginia established. The park will be called Shaw Woods Working Lands Park and will be used to showcase the forest stewardship program and other opportunities for realizing income from conserved natural areas. **Lifetime Achievement: Ann Ward**

For nearly 4 decades, Ann has worked enthusiastically for environmental education and awareness. She chaired the Kent Environmental Council (KEC) for several years and was a member of the founding committee that planned the Environmental Conservation Awards Benefit Dinner for the Portage Park District. Ann is currently on the Executive Board for KEC. Not afraid to get her hands dirty, she spent many years on the Kent recycling board as one of the state's earliest and most successful recycling programs, now implemented by the Portage County Solid Waste District. She has always been generous with her time and talents and continues still today to serve on local committees and work on projects, such as Friends of Kent Bog and the landscaping and beautification of Haymaker Parkway. Over the years, Ann's unassuming nature and good humor have helped attract countless volunteers to important environmental causes.

Following the awards presentation, Park District Executive Director Christine Craycroft thanked all who helped to pass the Park District's first ever levy last year and updated the crowd on the Park District's plans for this year. The District said farewell to two longtime affiliates: Park Commissioner Gary Cross retired after 16 years of volunteer service to the Board, and Maintenance Coordinator Mick Owen retired at the end of 2014 after 10 years of service. They also welcomed two new staff members, Operations Manager Craig Alderman and Administrative Assistant Rory Locke. With new levy funds, deferred maintenance will be tackled including resurfacing of the hike and bike trails. Also in the works is the development of a countywide Parks Master Plan, and plans for the several park properties which are not yet open. The public is invited to participate in the planning process and offer their opinions and ideas when the project starts in June.

For more information about the Park District visit www.portageparkdistrict.org, or call (330) 297-7728.