

Remembering Max

A Man and His Foundation



THE MAX MCGRAW WILDLIFE
FOUNDATION CELEBRATES
50 YEARS OF CONSERVATION,
RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

An avid outdoorsman and entrepreneur,

Max McGraw bought and transformed more than 1,200 acres of farmland and cow pastures near East Dundee, Ill., into a place of natural resource abundance. The work he began in the 1930s lives on today through the research and education mission of the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation, which celebrated its 50th anniversary this year. Max McGraw understood that the heritage of hunting, fishing, and enjoying our natural resources depends upon and plays a direct role in the future of land and wildlife management.



The Pond Cottage is a gathering place that offers its guests a rustic and warm, prairie-style interior complete with fine dining, a bar, patio, conference rooms and a lobby filled with archives and memorabilia.

Just before sunset on a comfortably cool, September 17 evening, the celebration began in the newly remodeled, geothermal-heated Pond Cottage, flowed onto the patio by a wooded trout stream and ended within a large, white tent beneath a starry sky. Bringing together hunting, fishing, and conservation enthusiasts, the 50th anniversary of the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation (MMWF) provided an opportunity for Members to gather for fellowship and inspiration. Members who belong to MMWF directly support land conservation, education, and research at this one-of-a-kind natural area.

Established in 1962 by Max McGraw, owner of Toastmaster and founder of the McGraw-Edison Company, the 501(c) 3 nonprofit MMWF was created “for the purpose of furthering management and conservation of wildlife and fisheries resources through programs of research, education, and cooperation with other agencies.”

Investing in nature

In 1937, Max McGraw began to acquire roughly 1,200 acres of farm, pasture, and grazed woodlands extending from the Fox River to the west, past Route 25 to the east, north to Route 72, and south toward what would eventually become the I-90 tollway. From 1938 to 1962, the McGraw property was called the “Fin ‘N Feather Club”, and offered a place for members to fish, hunt, socialize, and enjoy fine dining.

To improve habitat for wildlife, McGraw worked with his friend, Arthur Hill of Hill Nursery (now Platt-Hill Nursery) and his staff from 1938-1939, planting between 750,000 and 800,000 trees and shrubs to reforest the sprawling Dundee

campus with birches, pine trees, and other desirable vegetation. Native oak-hickory woodlands, protected by the acquisition, persist in the McGraw holdings behind what is now Santa’s Village. A chart in MMWF’s Hunter’s Lodge has samples of wood that represent some of the 70 different species of trees found at MMWF.

In the 1980s, the Foundation enrolled in the Federal Conservation Reserve Program to re-establish prairie, and eventually donated 11 acres of pristine native habitat along the Fox River to the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission for restoration and preservation. A survey of plant life conducted on the Foundation’s property in the 1990s revealed a diverse ecosystem of 621 total species, with 457 of them native.

A heritage for generations

Carol Moorman and her cousin, Scott Elrod, attended the 50th anniversary celebration. Growing up in the large white house that now serves as the Foundation’s conservation education center, Max McGraw’s granddaughter, Carol Moorman reminisced. “We were surrounded by nature. In my younger years, my brother, sister, and I went to the Pond Cottage every weekend. He [Max McGraw] was out there every single weekend, if he wasn’t traveling. We’d always find my grandfather fishing, pruning trees, or walking around the property. He wouldn’t stand still, [but] he was low key. He’d drive us around to see some of the new lakes he had International Harvester dig out – about 34 manmade lakes.”

“My brother [who is three years older than me] spent a lot of time with my grandfather fishing, hunting, and traveling with him,” Moorman said.

“He was a guide for hunting and fishing through his teenage years,” Moorman continued, who did some fishing herself, but mostly enjoyed walking in the natural surroundings. “[My grandfather] contributed to my love of the outdoors,” said Moorman, who has shared this legacy with her own grandchildren.

“My granddaughters have gone to the camp at my old house, the conservation education center, for years, [and] are very nature-oriented. They go fishing and learn what’s in the water,” she added.

Far-reaching education

Beginning in the 1970s, MMWF commenced a conservation education program to teach children about local biodiversity, restoration, fishing, maple syrup production, Illinois habitats, water quality, and other topics relating to natural resources.

For youth, a regional Mighty Acorns program brings thousands of Chicagoland schoolchildren to MMWF to participate in educational explorations throughout the school year. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts earn awards and assist with service projects, and summer programs offer opportunities for children to enjoy hiking, fishing, looking for animal homes, and making crafts. “A lot of adults and parents remember when they came out as children,” shared MMWF vice president Clark Ganshirt.

To address the needs of adult learners, MMWF offers workshops for formal and non-formal educators, internship opportunities, and Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow (CLfT). “CLfT was developed [in partnership with the Wildlife



The Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation conducts pioneering research on the urban coyote population. Here, a coyote pup is measured.

Management Institute] because we want [present and future wildlife managers] to understand what's going on in the field of hunting and fishing programs," explained Ganshirt. "It is one of our most significant programs ever, [reaching] students in 40 universities across the U.S." Over the course of 4-5 days, CLfT participants are in class from 8 a.m. to about 10 p.m. every day, learning about birds, fish, guns, hunter ethics and responsibility, and traditions associated with outdoor sportsmanship. "There's a camaraderie and connection to nature," Ganshirt explained.

A haven to explore

Since the 1960s, bird watchers and staff wildlife biologists have been conducting weekly surveys and estimate that 260 different species have been seen on MMWF property. Biologists have identified and documented 52 species of fish, more than 18 species of amphibians and reptiles, 51 species of butterflies, and 33 species of mammals.

In 1989, the Fisheries Research Center was added to provide a fish hatchery and research facility for fishery biologists to conduct aquaculture studies. Researchers are currently studying hatching and rearing techniques for smallmouth bass and walleye, and the effect of invasive species on aquatic ecosystems. In 2002, the fisheries staff released the Fox River Fish Passage Feasibility Study assessing the impact of dams on fisheries, macro invertebrates, physical habitat, and water quality in a 100-mile stretch of the Fox River between the

Chain of Lakes and Dayton, Ill.

In the terrestrial arena, McGraw's Center for Wildlife Research chair, associate professor of The Ohio State University Dr. Stan Gehrt, has spent 16 years making discoveries about skunks, coyotes, and feral cats.

For six years, Gehrt conducted a long-term study of skunks, working with a team of wildlife biologists to pioneer the technique of catching skunks by hand. The research team discovered that parasites and winter weather tend to regulate skunk populations, but that the wide range of parasites eventually lead to their death.

Advanced research in progress

In 2000, Gehrt's focus shifted to the urban coyote population to provide "research ahead of the curve." Using radio collars (with GPS and SIM cards) to track more than 550 coyotes in 80,000 Chicagoland locations, Gehrt and his team witnessed how coyotes rapidly reproduced, learned to safely cross roads, and "help" to manage the expanding Canada goose population by eating their eggs.

Gehrt and his team are currently conducting the first experimental study of feral cat colonies in the nation – the Cook County Cat-Carnivore Study. Providing a "cat shack" with automatic feeders to explore the interactions between different species and learn about disease transmission, Gehrt expects to have the results of this research available within the next two years.

"I don't think anyone could have conceived the

hugeness of this," said Carol Moorman, thinking about the Foundation's strides in research, education, and conservation over the past 50 years.

Looking to the future

Although the rural surroundings have given way to suburbia, a narrow driveway leads to the Pond Cottage, which Carol Moorman said, "honors the past and prepares us for the future in a way that would have made my grandfather both pleased and proud.

"Everything that McGraw stands for is something I really like," emphasized MMWF 40-year employee and vice president Clark Ganshirt. "We like people to join because they think what we're doing is significant."

Max McGraw

Max McGraw was born in Clear Lake, Iowa on February 1, 1883 just a few months after Thomas Edison started the first commercial central generating station. His fascination with electricity drove young Max to visit local electric light and power plants and telephone companies to study networks of wires and to make friends with technicians.

Max enrolled in an electrical-engineering correspondence course in high school. He worked on his assignments until late at night, then got up every morning at 3:30 a.m. to complete a 7 ½-mile newspaper delivery route on horseback in addition to mowing lawns, shoveling snow, and pumping the pipe organ at church to pay for his clothes, bicycle, pony's needs, and courses.

The only boss he ever had was Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling, the circulation manager of the *Sioux City Journal*, who shared Max's love for conservation and eventually became known for his political cartoons promoting conservation. Max and Ding would remain friends for many years.

In the summer of 1900, at the age of 17, Max acquired Sioux City, Iowa's wiring permit #1, opened a shop in the basement of Ruff Drug Store, and worked hard to show that "the law of McGraw is quality." Two years later, the McGraw Electric Company moved to a new and larger site in Sioux City. Within the next seven years, he got married, and expanded his business to include the manufacture of magnets, telephones, and power switchboards.

By 1925, McGraw Electric Company operations extended into Iowa, part of Kansas and

50 Years OF MAX MCGRAW MEMORIES



President and CEO of Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation, Charlie Potter, and Max McGraw's granddaughter, Carol Moorman and grandson, Scott M. Elrod.



Illinois State Representative Jim Sacia, Mary Bradford-White, Lynn White, and Dee Beaubien.



Richard and Roxy Pepper, and Nancy and Jon Hamill.



Jake Pepper, Crystal Dao, Jane Fitzgerald and Susan Graunke.

During the evening of the anniversary dinner, auction, and program, members and guests reflected on their connection with the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation.

"I first started coming out here in the late 90s," said Lynn White, "and usually come out every weekend."

Thinking about the lake and pavilion, Michael Moorman said, "Both of our children got married here."

"We brought our grandchildren here on a night when no one else was here," shared Dee Beaubien. "It's a wonderful learning experience for kids."

"It's as close as you can get to what the real world is about," said Mary Bradford-White. Coming to MMWF to spend time with her husband, Bradford-White has discovered a spiritual connection. "To me, you're close to God here."

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Two years later, his team introduced the first “Toaster” toaster to the consumer market, perfecting a toaster designed by Charles Strite during WWI. “He used to bring the toast out here (from testing toasters in Elgin), grind it up, and feed it to the mallard ducks,” shared Ganshirt.

Merging with the Edison Electric Company in 1957, Max and his McGraw-Edison Company acquired the famous Edison laboratories in West Orange, N.J. along with several manufacturing divisions and subsidiaries. Two years later, Max named Al Bersted as president of McGraw-Edison Company and shifted to chairman of the executive committee.

While Max never retired, he made time to enjoy outdoor pursuits, passing away during a hunting trip to Utah in 1964. Chartering Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation two years before his death, McGraw said, “I am striving to realize Ding Darling’s dream of perpetuating our depleted wildlife by practical research,” said McGraw. 



I’ve been a McGraw Member for about four years, and our family enjoys the special outdoor experiences available so close to home. Fishing with my daughters, upland and waterfowl hunting, and target shooting are my favorites. We go there about every other week for clay target shooting, fishing, upland hunting (pheasants), waterfowl hunting (ducks and geese), or just dinner. Their walleye is the best in the world.

Hollie, my wife, says that I am most at peace after a few hours there. But the wildlife conservation mission of McGraw is the real substance of the place. Today we’re all blessed with a unique conservation heritage — from visionaries like Teddy Roosevelt, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Max McGraw — and the history is amazing. The Foundation is directly engaged with the front line of research and education, ensuring that those gifts remain and are respected tomorrow. We’re lucky to be a part of it.



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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