



THE COASTAL CAMPAIGN

It's easy to miss, tucked as it is among hundreds of other stones of similar size and shape.

But there it is, halfway up an inconspicuous section of stone wall surrounding the grand old Victorian inn at Watervale. A smooth stone of medium size, with an inscription in all caps: DORI NOBLE TURNER—SHOOT FOR THE MOON. When asked about it, Turner stops her informal tour of the inn, glances out at the stone and smiles.

"It comes from a phrase of my mother's," Turner said. "It's better to shoot for the moon and hit a star than to aim for the fence post and miss."

GTRLC's moon shot, its David vs. Goliath fight, its singularly transformative experience came in the form of the Coastal Campaign. Launched in 2003, this multi-year effort ultimately protected more than 6,000 acres of premium dune, farm and forest land along the Lake Michigan coast in Benzie and Manistee counties. At the campaign's emotional core was Old Baldy, a beautiful and rare dune treasured by generations of locals and visitors.

A storm approaches Old Baldy.

PHOTO BY DREW SMITH

Never before – or since – has the conservancy tackled a project on such a scale. More than \$30 million was raised to purchase what are now known as Arcadia Dunes: The C.S. Mott Nature Preserve, Green Point Dunes, and the Betsie Dunes Preserve. GTRLC's staff doubled during the Coastal Campaign, but the changes didn't end there. It forced the organization to get serious about long-term fundraising, endowments, stewardship, communications and much more.

"I knew that we as an organization would never be the same," Chown said. "This changed us for the better."

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Ready for battle

Anyone who took even the most cursory glance at a Benzie or Manistee plat book in GTRLC's early days was aware of a giant chunk of land owned by CMS Energy, parent company of the longtime Michigan utility company now known as Consumers Energy.

Consumers had purchased thousands of acres of land on the Benzie-Manistee county line in the late 1960s and early 1970s in preparation to build a pumped storage power facility like the one it operates in Ludington. At these facilities, water is pumped up from the lake during periods of low energy demand, then sent downhill to run generators during peak demand. Consumers bought all this land from scores of fruit farmers whose families had farmed the land for generations.

After troubles at the Ludington plant and other issues at a planned nuclear facility in Midland, Consumers dropped plans for a power plant in Arcadia. But Consumers – and later CMS – continued to hold the land, waiting for the right opportunity to come along.



An aerial shot of Old Baldy.

PHOTO BY JIM GIBSON



PHOTO BY NATE RICHARDSON



Arcadia Dunes Forest Wild Blue Phlox.

In the 1990s, GTRLC hummed away, tackling project after project. “Consumers,” as it would come to be called in the office, would just have to wait.

“It was on the radar early, but we just weren’t ready for it,” Chown said. “In ‘95, ‘96, ‘98, I don’t think we would have had the mindset that a project of that size would even be feasible.”

Two things happened that positioned GTRLC for a shot at the CMS land. The first came in 1998, when Chown hired Heather Rigney (now Shumaker) as a land protection specialist for Benzie County. She would go on to play a critical role in the multi-year Coastal Campaign, often tending to critically important details on all aspects of the project.

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“Heather was a tiger – she was detailed, smart and tenacious,” Chown said. “Her level of follow-through and attention to detail, among other things, were exactly what we needed for a project like this.”

The second was a capacity grant from the Flint-based C.S. Mott Foundation that enabled GTRLC to hire a full-time director of development.

Up until that point, Chown did nearly all of the fundraising himself. If any serious campaign was to be launched, serious fundraising would be needed.

“We had the pieces in place,” Chown said. “We were ready.”

Chasing a deal with CMS

In the quiet holiday period of 1999, Shumaker sat down to make a detailed map of the CMS property. In the days before quality aerial mapping was only a mouse click away, such a project took a good deal of effort and focus. She presented the finished map to Chown, who quickly became “fired up” and resolved to pursue the project.

Offering full support was then board chairman Reg Bird, who encouraged Chown and GTRLC to dive in.

“You really need to make up your mind that we’re going to do this, and I’ll support you,” Chown recalls Bird telling him. “We’re going to do this together.”

It took some persistence, but through various connections Chown was able to connect with top CMS officials – including then-CEO Bill McCormick – to discuss the land.

“But they underestimated the power of community, the power of absolute passion and determination, the power of the conservancy and the connections that Glen and the rest of the folks had made throughout the conservancy’s history.”

“Basically, we were trying to figure out how in the heck we could do this. A state park, a limited development, a preserve, something – anything,” Chown said. “But CMS wasn’t ready to sell to us. They thought we were too small to deliver, and at that point, we really didn’t have the right plan in place anyway.”

In a world of bottom lines, CMS officials also knew they would probably make the most money if they sold the property to a developer. Money issues aside, McCormick also appeared to

genuinely believe the property would be better preserved if developed for private use instead of opened to the public at large.

“McCormick kept making the point that development, tastefully done, would preserve this land better than if it were used for public land,” Chown recalls.

These initial talks between GTRLC lasted for more than a year, but ultimately went nowhere at that time. Meanwhile, CMS continued to speak with developers about the property. They previously had extensive talks with David Johnson, who developed the Bay Harbor project in Petoskey, and talks and site visits from other developers as well.

But what CMS officials didn’t understand then, they would understand soon enough: GTRLC meant business and didn’t plan to stop until the property was saved from development.

“We were a little bunch of pipsqueaks – we had just started out (as an organization) not really that long before. And this was a lot of money,” Shumaker recalled this year. “But they underestimated the power of community, the power of absolute passion and determination, the power of the conservancy and the connections that Glen and the rest of the folks had made throughout the conservancy’s history.”

PHOTO BY ANGIE LUCAS







Saviors from Flint

Bird and Chown knew a potential deal with CMS would require millions. It would likely double the \$10 million required for Maple Bay, the previous record-holder for GTRLC's largest deal. This was uncharted territory, to be sure, and an amount that large would likely need to come from several sources. So while talks with CMS were ongoing, potential funding was sought.

Rob Collier, who had previously left Rotary Charities, was now head of the Council of Michigan Foundations in Grand Rapids. It was Collier who a few years earlier helped solicit support from the Mott Foundation for GTRLC's Antrim Creek project, the first land protection deal Mott had ever funded. Collier suggested that Mott, one of the biggest foundations in the state, be tapped again for a potential deal with CMS.

Bird got on the case. He and longtime Mott president and board chairman Bill White both had places on Torch Lake, and Bird made it his mission to do whatever it would take to get White on the CMS property. If White saw its splendor, Bird figured, he would be moved to try to save it. So Bird hit the Torch Lake party circuit, hoping to run into White and chew his ear.

"Reg would go to all of these little neighborhood parties on Torch Lake, and he'd always sidle up to Bill White," Chown said. "And Reg was all the right things – aggressive, but also charismatic and charming."

Eventually, after a few ear-chewing sessions, Bird coaxed White and his wife Claire (granddaughter of Charles Stewart Mott himself) to a walk on the beach underneath Old Baldy in the summer of 2001. White, who remains chairman of the Mott board, recalled the visit this year.

“IT WAS HUGE. BILL’S A VERY PASSIONATE GUY,” HE SAID. “WHEN HE GETS PASSIONATE ABOUT SOMETHING, HE’S ALL IN, ALL HEART. AND THIS GOT HIM PASSIONATE ABOUT IT.”

“I remember walking a good portion of that beach, walking quite a length of it, too,” he said. “Here was this gorgeous beach, untouched, with not a lot of footprints on it and no one there. It really was – and it still is – one of the most beautiful beaches in the world....It made quite an impression, particularly with the dunes behind it.”

This visit laid the groundwork for support from the influential and renowned C.S. Mott Foundation.

“It was just a spectacular piece of property,” White said. “I remember Claire and I talking about it, as we seemed to be a little overcommitted at the time in terms of spending, but she said ‘Well, you can always fund this or that, but rarely do you have the opportunity to save something like this for all time.’”

Chown remains thankful for Bird’s persistence in getting White to the property for an in-person look.

“It was huge. Bill’s a very passionate guy,” he said. “When he gets passionate about something, he’s all in, all heart. And this got him passionate about it.”

But GTRLC had yet to secure a deal with CMS. After a long period of stops and starts, 2002 would be a pivotal year.

Changing of the Guard

The guard changed in more ways than one in 2002 – and both of these changes proved critical to GTRLC’s efforts to protect Arcadia Dunes.

On May 24, 2002, CMS Energy announced the resignation of Bill McCormick as chairman and CEO. It was the fallout of a well-publicized scandal in which, according to news reports of the time, the company artificially inflated its revenue to the tune of \$4.4 billion. Replacing him was Bill Whipple, a former Ford Motor Company executive.

On Nov. 5, 2002, Jennifer Granholm was elected governor of Michigan, in part on a platform of environmental protection. She would be sworn in January of 2003, replacing longtime Governor John Engler.

GTRLC made sure Whipple, who happened to have a residence in Leelanau County, was getting as much pressure as possible to work with the Conservancy. Chown enlisted the full political clout of Helen Taylor, head of the Michigan chapter of the Nature Conservancy. Taylor had been closely involved with talks to that point and continued to play a big role.

In the aftermath of the scandal, CMS had made internal decisions to unload all non-performing assets, Chown said. Now would be the time to strike, as CMS was sure to unload its Arcadia holdings soon.

“Our negotiating strategy and our motto became: A fast nickel beats a slow dime,” Chown said. “We’re not developers; we’re not going to need a ton of approvals or have all of those other contingencies attached with development.”

But still, CMS’ faith in GTRLC remained low.

“They were cozy with the developers, but not cozy with us. They understood developers,” Shumaker said of the multi-year courting process. “They didn’t understand that we could be serious, or that we had some friends in high places. That’s one of the reasons it took so long – they just didn’t think we couldn’t do it.”

It was around this time that Shumaker got a call from a local realtor representing a big-time developer from Texas by the name of Fritz Duda. Duda, the real estate agent said, was looking for large chunks of coastal land. Shumaker and Chown eventually discovered that CMS had already partnered with Duda to complete a development study for the Arcadia land.

They called the Traverse City engineering firm that handled the plans and managed to get in for a look. There it was, in all of its gut-wrenching glory. Hundreds of homes sites interspersed among an 18-hole golf course, in the vivid colors and bold strokes of a conceptual development plan. Chown still recalls his reaction.

“The horror, of course, is that this would completely destroy the property. The excitement was that it’s a lot easier to raise money for protection when there’s a real, credible threat.”



A developer’s plans for the CMS Arcadia property. Dozens of homes and a golf course were included.

“It was mostly horror, but there was also a great deal of excitement,” Chown said. “The horror, of course, is that this would completely destroy the property. The excitement was that it’s a lot easier to raise money for protection when there’s a real, credible threat.”

Meanwhile, Shumaker took the lead on speaking with farmers who once owned much of the CMS holdings. While she couldn’t divulge a lot of details, she wanted them to be generally aware that GTRLC might find a way to acquire the CMS land. Shumaker and Chown knew early on that if GTRLC acquired the CMS land, it would likely place conservation easements on the farmland portion of the property and re-sell it to interested farmers.

“I figured that directness and honesty would be the best, instead of them hearing rumors or being blindsided,” she said. “It was about openness and partnerships, and this was essential, because it was a landscape project. They had a lot of knowledge. We needed their knowledge, and they needed us. I think we started on the right foot of mutual respect and openness.”

By the end of the year, after several appraisals and much price haggling, GTRLC had submitted a formal offer of \$18 million for the CMS land. Mott had already approved \$750,000 for an option, and GTRLC was comfortable that Mott would provide substantial additional funding to see the deal through.

That offer sat there until early 2003, when one of the project’s biggest champions took office.



Visitors hike at the Arcadia Dunes property.

A Deal – and a Deadline

Gov. Jennifer Granholm saw the opportunity right away. Here was a rare, beautiful and ecologically important piece of land along the coast that she could play a role in saving. GTRLC had contacted her office through various channels not long after she took office, explaining the plan and hoping she would support it.

As it turns out, she was willing to do much more than merely support it. In early 2003, during a meeting with Whipple and other top CMS officials, she encouraged them to take GTRLC's offer.

"What was important was that she was willing to talk directly to CMS about this," Chown said. "She was the golden girl."

In May of 2003, CMS was ready to accept the offer, under one massive condition – fork over 75 percent of the \$18 million by September of that year, or the deal was off. The utility wasn't in a position to sit around and wait while this little nonprofit took years to scrape together the cash.

A substantial grant from Mott would be the only way to meet that deadline. But Mott wasn't ready to give such a large gift

without its own massive condition – raise \$5 million in private local funding by the time the Mott board met in September. If GTRLC could pull it off by that deadline, Mott would provide \$13 million (\$6 million in an interest-free loan, \$7 million as a cash gift) for the purchase.

"They basically needed to see that there was some local skin in the game," Chown said.

GTRLC's fundraising team decided to package the CMS land with two other key parcels and dub the entire effort the "Coastal Campaign." These other parcels included the magnificent Ranke property just up the coast from the CMS holdings – named Green Point Dunes after protection – and property owned by the Kilian family near the Nature Conservancy's existing preserve on Point Betsie. GTRLC had already been in conversations with both families for quite some time.

Earlier calculations brought the tally for acquiring and caring for all three properties to \$30.6 million – the official Coastal Campaign goal. The Mott Foundation, via Lois DeBacker – the very same program officer Collier and Chown coaxed up north years earlier for the Antrim Creek project – and Mike Dow of the Dow Foundation forced GTRLC to carefully calculate the true, long-term costs of the campaign before considering any support.

"They really didn't want the Coastal Campaign to bankrupt the rest of the organization. This thing could bury us, and they knew that," Chown said. "They really made us think comprehensively about costs across the board. Lois whipped us into shape, and we really needed that."

Mott's White said it's something his foundation has always taken seriously.

"We have, over the years, tried to build the fundamental muscle strength and capacity of local organizations we work with," he said this year. "We strongly believe that people on the ground in local areas need to set priorities about what's important and take action, and one way to help them do that is to build the capacity of the organizations those people identify with so that they can do all the technical work that's required to pull off complex projects."

So the overall Coastal Campaign vision was in place, but it all began with the centerpiece CMS property. And the situation with that parcel was crystal clear: A deal with CMS wouldn't be possible without Mott money, and Mott money wouldn't come if GTRLC couldn't raise \$5 million in local funding in roughly 90 days.

The race was on.

90 Days for a Dream

Serving as bookends to what was then CMS-owned land are two special places treasured by nearly a century's worth of summer visitors. These two places – along with the Crystal Downs County Club further up the coast – served as the setting for GTRLC's impassioned pleas for support in the whirlwind summer of 2003.

Camp Arcadia is an almost impossibly idyllic community hugging the Lake Michigan coast just south of the land owned by CMS. This historic Lutheran Camp, founded in 1922, buzzes all summer long with returning campers and those who own cottages in the associated “cottage colony.”

It's home to an incredibly close-knit group of folks, many of whom met their spouses and best friends there.

North of the CMS land, tucked along the shores of Lower Herring Lake, sits the historic community of Watervale. Not to be outdone by Camp Arcadia, this place is steeped in its own rich history and beautiful traditions. Founded in the 1890s as a lumbering town – complete with an inn, post office, and several homes – it was eventually abandoned. A Chicago doctor named Oscar Kraft purchased the remains of the old lumber town in 1917, and he eventually turned it into a resort. This resort would welcome generations of regular visitors over the years, and much like Camp Arcadia, it was filled with families tied together by generations of visits.

“IT’S ALWAYS BEEN SUCH AN INTEGRAL PART OF WATERTALE, EVEN IF WE DIDN’T OWN IT,” TURNER RECALLED THIS YEAR. “GROWING UP HERE, YOU FEEL LIKE YOU DO.”



Oscar Kraft, with Dori Turner and Glen Chown by his side, speaks to campaign supporters.

Watervale was eventually purchased by Kraft's niece, Vera Kraft Noble, around 1960. By the time of the Coastal Campaign, it was largely run by Noble's daughter, Dori Noble Turner. Turner served on GTRLC's board, and her cousin Oscar Kraft (nephew of the Chicago doctor) donated a conservation easement on some of the land in 1990. Noble herself donated an easement on another portion in 1995.

Folks in both Watervale and Camp Arcadia treasured Old Baldy, though the Arcadia visitors had always referred to it as “North Bluff.” A trail that leads directly to Baldy exists from Watervale, and visitors from both resort communities had longstanding and deeply meaningful traditions of

hiking to the top of the magnificent dune for various reasons.

“It's always been such an integral part of Watervale, even if we didn't own it,” Turner recalled this year. “Growing up here, you feel like you do. The path is here, and everybody goes up there.”

Rumors had swirled for years in both places about CMS selling the land for development. Turner recalls tales of Japanese investors and circling helicopters. When GTRLC delivered news of an actual, tangible threat, the news sent shock waves. The potential for another Bay Harbor in their own backyards was too much to bear.

Norm Ulbrich met his wife Sue at Camp Arcadia, and their kids would go on to meet their spouses there as well. For Ulbrich, hearing of Fritz Duda's plans was like a bad dream, in every sense of the term.

“Before I'd even heard of that, I had dreams sometimes of being on the beach and there being factories and development there, and I'd wake up in shivers,” he said. “When this came up, it was just like a nightmare.”

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A view from the top of Old Baldy looking north to Green Point Dunes.

PHOTO BY DREW SMITH

Kathleen and Bill Parsons met at Camp Arcadia in 1959 as teenagers. While Bill was away on business, a friend called Kathleen to tell her of the news. She still trembles at the thought of losing the land.

“This is one of those moments where I remember exactly where I was when I got the phone call that this was going to happen. I felt like I had just heard a friend had been diagnosed with a terminal illness,” Kathleen said. “A great grief came over me. That following evening when Bill got home from California, we stayed up all night and talked about it. Is it really going to happen? How can we stop it? Is it stoppable?”

“She was the rock. She was the heart and soul of the campaign,” he said. “So many people made those heroic gifts out of respect for Dori.”

GTRLC fundraisers traveled to Camp Arcadia and Watervale several times a week to speak with visitors. Chip May, director of Camp Arcadia, allowed GTRLC fundraisers to address dinnertime gatherings of campers and visitors. Turner hummed around Watervale, preparing snacks and drinks for those who gathered to hear fundraising pitches.



Turner's support of the campaign was critical, Chown said. Her tangible and emotional support moved others to get involved.

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GTRLC's team had the unenviable task of stating that they were only interested in scheduling meetings with people who could provide a gift of at least \$25,000. The harsh reality was they needed a ton of big gifts, and fast. Turner recalls people "fainting dead away" at the figure.



From left to right, Chuck Brickman, Glen Chown, Louise Reese, Becky Chown, Nancy Brickman and David Reese.



An aerial shot of Old Baldy looking north to Lower Herring Lake.

PHOTO BY JIM GIBSON

“I had to walk around my condo in downtown Traverse City and repeatedly say the phrase, ‘Will you give a gift of \$25,000,’ out loud, because every time I said it I honestly felt like I was shouting the number,” newly hired fundraiser Kate Pearson recalls.

“That’s a lot of money.”

Chown, Pearson and other GTRLC fundraising staffers put in 50-70 hour weeks that summer.

“It was very stressful and very exhausting, but for me at least, it was also a very happy time,” Pearson said. “The work had this distinctly David and Goliath feel to it. And because we were dealing with so many

people, every day there was a new heartwarming story about what that property meant to people. It was so rewarding to be a part of something that felt so much bigger than any one person.”

“This was such a David and Goliath thing going in,” Phil Meek said. “The odds were really, really long, and for the Conservancy to be able to accomplish that, it was really something.”

Several people were absolutely critical to GTRLC’s fundraising efforts. These leaders not only provided their own six-figure gifts, but also worked hard to energize and encourage others to support the campaign.

Chuck and Nancy Brickman, David Reese and Naomi Borwell are among those folks who gave their all to see the project through.

"Their peer-to-peer fundraising was absolutely, positively critical to the success of this campaign," Chown said.

Reese and Brickman, in particular, were instrumental in connecting GTRLC with donors at Crystal Downs who were capable of providing significant gifts.

"They allowed us to not only shake hands with people we'd never met, but to have the trust of people we'd never met," Pearson said. "These were incredibly valuable endorsements."

Reese, who had a home on Platte Lake, speaks matter-of-factly about his role in the campaign.

"We basically said that we just had to get this job done. We convinced the neighbors that it should be done to preserve the natural beauty of the area. Considering the beauty of that piece of property – the stretch of beach and that huge sand dune – it's just so breathtaking," he said. "We all got together and started marketing it to our friends, so to speak. But once you took people down there, it kind of sold itself."

Two of the people Reese brought into the fold were Phil and Nancy Meek, who had a cottage on Crystal Lake. They gave a substantial gift after becoming incensed at the idea of a massive development along the Benzie coast.

"I don't tend to move very fast unless I get mad, and the idea of this area having anything like that was just a huge red flag," Phil Meek said.

Back at Arcadia, Kathleen and John Parsons dove into the campaign, imploring their friends to provide support.

"We were just struck down by the fear. This had to be stopped. The train was coming, and if we had to throw our bodies in front of the tracks, then that's what we needed to do," Kathleen said. "It was that significant to us. The love of that land – it was inconceivable that they could put another Bay Harbor up there."

They did all they could to convince their associates to give as much as they could afford.

"If they didn't dig deep, if they didn't make a total commitment, they would have to face that reality every time they drove up over that bluff," Kathleen said. "They would have to ask themselves – could I have made a difference if I had reached deeper?"

Sweet Success

By the time August rolled around – with only one month to go – GTRLC wasn't even halfway to the \$5 million goal. Chown was hardly sleeping at that point, and he recalls some tense conversations with other staffers regarding the campaign goal.

"We acknowledged that we could fail," he said. "But we came to the conclusion that we would do everything – make every ask that we possibly could – and if it did fail, we would at least know that we gave it our best shot."



From left to right, Bill White, Ken Whipple and Jennifer Granholm at a Coastal Campaign press conference in October of 2003.

But the groundwork had been laid. Like a giant snowball rolling downhill, the momentum was surging and unstoppable. Pledge after pledge after pledge poured in as the deadline loomed.

"When we started that 90-day campaign, it was the staff driving it, the staff pushing it. By August, it was shifting, it was the people themselves who

took over," Chown said. "They put us on their backs."

By Labor Day weekend, the goal was not only met, but slightly exceeded. Staff delighted in calling hundreds of donors to tell them the news.

"I couldn't even get the words out because I was crying. These were calls of gratitude, and these all had been gifts from the heart, so our success meant so much to the donors, too," Pearson said. "We all defied the odds together. It was simply incredible. I'd be crying, they'd be crying. And on the

The stunning view from Green Point Dunes looking south to Old Baldy.

PHOTO BY DREW SMITH



other end there'd be these shouts to other people in the room: 'It's Kate at the conservancy, she said we did it!'"

Those who supported the campaign still look back with joy and wonder that the 90-day deadline was met.

"It was monumental, when you think about it, how it all came together. It was a dream come true," Reese said. "It was a very satisfying thing to know that people cared enough to keep that northern Michigan area pristine."

Kathleen Parsons likes to imagine that everyone who supported the effort remembers their role every time they drive up M-22 toward Old Baldy.

"After it was all over, every time I go over that hill, and I think every time each of them goes over the hill, they remember that they helped, that they were a part of it," she said. "They see those signs and they know they helped. And that joy goes on, the joy continues – they knew they did all they could do."



The victory was especially delightful considering how daunting the goal seemed at the outset of the project.

“This was such a David and Goliath thing going in,” Phil Meek said. “The odds were really, really long, and for the Conservancy to be able to accomplish that, it was really something.”

With \$5 million of local pledges in hand, Mott’s board voted that September to extend the \$13 million loan-gift combo with about a week to spare before the CMS deadline. The

CMS property – soon to be renamed Arcadia Dunes: The C.S. Mott Nature Preserve – would be protected forever.

“This was a ‘wow’ project. These types of projects don’t come along every day of the week, and when they come along you support them,” Bill White recalls. “When something is very unique and compelling, you have to bend over backwards to get it done.”



Finishing Strong

All fundraising up until that point had been conducted in a “quiet phase,” as is traditional with major campaigns. Conventional wisdom tells fundraisers to secure a very large portion of the campaign goal before going public in order to establish momentum down the stretch. It also allows fundraisers to specifically ask for a certain amount from donors, instead of having those donors send in what would likely be much smaller gifts after reading about the campaign in the newspaper.

Needless to say, that had been a difficult concept to explain to some people during the 90-day blitz.

“There was a lot of educating people about why it needed to be silent, because that seemed really counterintuitive,” Chown said. “People wanted to shout it from the mountaintops.”

After the deal with CMS was reached in September of 2003, the time had come for mountaintop shouting. Granholm, Whipple and White joined Chown, Shumaker and other GTRLC staff for a press conference in Lansing in October.

“This project represents some of the best qualities of Michigan – pristine shoreline, majestic sand dunes and thousands of acres of irreplaceable farmland and forests,” Granholm said at the time. “I commend this partnership between the Regional Conservancy, the private sector, the

foundation community, and governmental entities to protect a rare undeveloped stretch of coastline and preserve a way of life that is unique to our state.”

But despite much celebration, there was much work to be done. Although the tightest deadline was met and much of the pressure surrounding it was off, more than \$15 million still needed to be raised over the next two years.

GTRLC raised it, of course, with the help of thousands of additional smaller donors and additional foundational support from The Dow Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, The J.A. Woollam Foundation and even the Walmart Foundation.

“We had to apply for everything we could possibly think of,” Chown said.

John Woollam, a Michigan-born doctor who now lives and works in Nebraska, focuses much of the energy of his foundation on conservation projects. He’s proud to have helped save a beautiful stretch of the Lake Michigan coast.

“It’s quite an inspiration to be able to have long stretches of shoreline like that without housing that will surely be appreciated for generations to come,” he said. “It’s nice to know (the dunes) were saved for public enjoyment.”

The Conservancy also secured roughly \$11 million from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund through groundbreaking grants in which the state purchased the development rights for Arcadia Dunes and Green Point. These rights have a cash value and can be purchased, as with the Purchase of Development Rights programs in Peninsula and Acme townships.

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Shumaker took the lead on re-selling much of the farmland portion of the former CMS property to local farmers in the years after GTRLC closed on the land. Many farmers with



Members of the Ranke family gather at Green Point Dunes for an official dedication in July of 2005.

connections to the land prior to the CMS purchases bought available parcels.

Aside from the sentimental benefits of reconnecting these farmers with the land, they had another huge benefit – it encouraged fruit farming after decades of decline under CMS ownership. Because CMS offered short-term leases on the land, many farmers had switched to corn or other crops that produce yields much faster than fruit.

GTRLC closed on the magnificent Green Point Dunes property in early 2004, capping years of discussions with the property owners. This 242-acre gem was purchased in the 1950s by Rudy and Nancy Ranke, who treasured the land and made regular visits there with their family. The property offers unparalleled views of Old Baldy from its own towering bluff, along with a secluded beach backed up against gorgeous dunes.

“It’s quite an inspiration to be able to have long stretches of shoreline like that without housing that will surely be appreciated for generations to come.”

“There’s just no place like it,” said Rudy and Nancy’s son, John Ranke.

Rudy, a World War II veteran, died in 1985. Though the family had explored development options, Nancy knew that preservation was the best option. She set the wheels in motion before her death in 2002.

“It was clearly her desire to have the land preserved for future generations to enjoy, and I think she certainly believed this would be her legacy,” John said.

John was delighted to work with GTRLC to safeguard the land for those future generations.

“It took a lot of work to get it done, but it was well worth it,” he said. “Everybody in my family was delighted to see it protected.”

Momentum for the Future

In short, the Coastal Campaign was a game changer. The trial-by-fire stretch of 2003-2005 created a conservancy that was much better equipped for big thinking going forward.

“It truly transformed the organization – we were now positioned for the long haul,” Chown said. “We were now focusing on setting aside long-term funds, and it forced us to take our stewardship program to a whole new level. It also forced us to think about a volunteer program, and it forced us to think about branding and signage, marking trails so people wouldn’t get lost.”

The Mott Foundation’s insistence on long-term planning was critical, Chown said.

“Basically, this campaign forced us to grow up – and a lot of that credit goes to Mott,” he said.

Bill White looks back fondly on the Mott Foundation’s involvement. Not only did the Coastal Campaign preserve natural beauty, he said, but the farmland preservation component goes a long way toward preserving the heritage of the area.

“If you just look at the beach, you’re only looking at the veneer of the project. If you look closer, you see how it’s affecting local people, local farmers and local communities,” White said. “The more you’re around it, the more you realize how deep it is and how rich it is in various aspects of the environment and economics.”

Many people who donated to the Coastal Campaign continue to donate to the organization, providing much-needed momentum for future land protection projects.

“It was so meaningful to us that you were able to make this happen,” Kathleen Parsons said. “It was with all of our help, yes, but the Conservancy took the initiative and did it. Even though the Coastal Campaign is complete, our continued connection is partly out of appreciation for what happened there.”

Visitors enjoy the Lake Michigan beach at Watervale.

PHOTO BY DREW SMITH

