

Lifetime Service Award

John and Jane Merdan

For a lifetime of dedication to land preservation, habitat improvement, and working farms and forests.

John and Jane Merdan have made wildlife habitat improvements on significant portions of their property over the years, reducing pastureland while increasing quality and quantity of habitat for deer, waterfowl, turkey, and numerous species of native plants. A Reinvest in Minnesota easement permanently preserves open spaces and habitat. The Merdans demonstrate good stewardship throughout their family farm and they are active community leaders.

Conservation Initiative Award

Bob and Bonnie Thomsen

For community leadership in the establishment of permanent conservation easements.

Bob and Bonnie Thomsen donated the first conservation easement under a partnership between the Avon Hills Initiative and the Minnesota Land Trust, made possible by a grant from the Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). Thomsens permanently protected 34 acres that will provide critical wildlife habitat, protect working forests, and enhance the Watab Creek/Watab Lake watershed. The Thomsens have beautified the community with plants for years and now our community will benefit from permanent protection of green open space.

Business Initiative Award

Anderson Family

For environmentally sensitive conservation design of Highland Crossing development.

After extensive reviews with Stearns County Environmental Services, Collegeville Township officials, and the Minnesota Land Trust, the Anderson Family chose to develop more than 200 acres of environmentally sensitive land adjacent to Little Watab Lake using conservation design principles. The Anderson family permanently preserved 80% of the land from future development. The result is Highland Crossing—nine lovely home sites on 40 acres with the remaining 160 acres of the land held in common in a permanent conservation easement under supervision of the Minnesota Land Trust.

Public Service Initiative Award

St. Joseph Farmers' Market

For building community by creating a link between local food producers and consumers.

The St. Joseph Farmers' Market, founded in 2000 under the auspices of Healthy Community Partners, has grown into a year-round market, weekly from May through October, providing area residents the opportunity to buy fresh produce from local growers and producers. The market was founded by local volunteers in the community to foster economic and social relationships and they have succeeded many times over. The St. Joseph Farmers' Market is widely regarded as one the best in Minnesota. It is not only a place to find good food, it is also known as a great place to see good friends and neighbors.