



# SUPERIOR LAND PRESERVATION SOCIETY NEWS

SPRING-SUMMER  
2012  
P.O. BOX 130041  
ANN ARBOR, MI  
48113-0041

## SUPERIOR TOWNSHIP WELCOMES DIXBORO FARMER'S MARKET

by Michelle Hartmann

After two years in the making, there's a new Farmer's Market in Superior Township. The Dixboro Village Green Merchants Association and the Dixboro Methodist Church have joined together to open a brand new Farmers Market in historic Dixboro Village. The market runs Friday afternoons every week from 3:30-7:30pm through October, and is located in the Dixboro Green, near the old schoolhouse on Plymouth Road, just east of Dixboro Road. Parking is available near the Dixboro Methodist Church, off of Church Street.

The community came together and saw the need for an area farmer's market. It's a neighborhood market with small producers and growers selling their goods.

"We saw so much interest in fresh, local food and produce that we feel there could not be a better time to begin the Dixboro Farmers market. It's a great way to bring our community and neighbors together." said Tom Freeman, Board member of The Dixboro Village Green.

The Dixboro Farmer's Market has live music, swings for the kids, a ball field, and a park like setting. Ninety percent of the vendors are Superior township residents. Such vendors include:

**Heart of the Hive Honey**- honey and honey stix

**Agricola**- old style handmade pretzels and cookies

**Our Hand Made Farm**- organic and biodynamic vegetables & fruits

**Ferris Farms**-legendary for strawberries, blueberries and veggies



Farmer John, Our Family Farm LLC

**Fair Feather Farms**- naturally raised, antibiotic free eggs, chicken and turkey

**Dyer Family Farm**-selling it's famous "Dick's pretty good garlic" with nearly 40 varieties

**Aurum Naturals**- offers high-quality, organic, plastic-free bath and beauty products.

**Our Family Farm**- 40 different types of vegetables, flowers, honey, herbs. They sell free range chicken and eggs as well as pork. All are grown naturally using guided organic principles

**Al Dente Pasta**- artisanal, whole grain, and low carb pastas and sauces

The market continues to add vendors every week. If you are interested in becoming a vendor visit the web-site: [www.dixborofarmersmarket.org](http://www.dixborofarmersmarket.org).

Come browse and shop the market filled with local fresh produce, eggs, meat, baked goods, jams and jellies, honey and cut flowers. Feel free to throw down a blanket and stay awhile. It's a great way to start your weekend!

# Bumps In the Time Line

By Ellen Kurath

Over time, people have tried to predict what the future might hold for Superior Township, but unexpected events have caused turning points, consequences, and impacts which have confounded attempts to anticipate the future.

Originally forest, Superior Township was cleared by settlers, so that only a few trees remained. Places not suited for major crops became pasture. During the Depression in the 1930's there were foreclosures, but land use remained largely agricultural. In 1942, the Willow Run Housing Project was built for workers at the bomber plant in the southeast part of Superior Township, and parts of Ypsilanti Township. Thousands of people lived there, separate from the city of Ypsilanti, with their own utilities. Water wells for this development were in what is now Harvest Moon Park. For a few years after the war, the University of Michigan temporarily used Willow Run for housing students and employees. In the late 1950s it was demolished, and the land sat vacant, but with sewer and water mains in place.

In the mid 1960s construction of residential subdivisions began in that area, with urban density, utilities, and paved streets. The rest of the Township was still mainly rural and agricultural, with scattered single family homes, and the two retained distinctly different character. By 1980, the subdivisions were populous enough to out-vote the rest of the Township, which still considered itself rural. This resulted in a long-standing difference of opinion about who was subsidizing whom.

Before the 60's building boom, a number of one-room school houses existed in Superior Township and went through 6<sup>th</sup> grade for local residents. They were inexpensive to operate, and property taxes were low. For 7<sup>th</sup> grade and up, students paid tuition to attend bigger schools. Those larger districts then quit accepting tuition, and in 1963-4, the larger school districts took over the entire area, dividing and annexing parts of the Township in order to get increased tax base. This resulted in a disadvantage for Willow Run's district, which included trailer parks contributing very little in the way of property tax.

see Bumps, p3



## *Mink (mustela vison)*

By Marion Morris, illustration by John Copley

A mink coat on a lady spells luxury, but on the mink it identifies one of the most hot-tempered creatures in the animal kingdom.

Last fall, well after dark, I heard a terrible commotion along the edge of our yard. It sounded like animals fighting, so I grabbed a flashlight and headed out there. Our cat was crouched in the grass, staring at the fenceline. On the other side, perched on a brush pile, a mink was having a real hissy fit. All that racket from one mink!

I didn't realize how prevalent minks are in Superior Township until I spoke to other residents. Active both day and night, the mink is at home in forest or in water. He trails prey by scent, captures small game and birds, raids henhouses, and eats eggs. He also eats fish, frogs, and other aquatic life.

The mink's den may be a hole in a bank, a burrow under tree roots, or inside a stump or a hollow log. In a nest of grass, a litter of 4 to 8 pups is born in the spring. Baby mink open their eyes at 5 weeks. The mother guards them well. She carries them by the scruff of the neck when they are too young to walk, and sometimes carries them on her back in the water.

Mink are known for their lustrous, durable fur, which reaches its prime in November. Members of the weasel family, they range from 20 to 28 inches in length and weigh from 1 to 3 pounds. Their range is most of the US, mostly near water, and they are fierce, fearless fighters that can scream, spit, and hiss. They can also emit a pungent odor when provoked.

After our encounter, the cat and I beat a hasty retreat!

Bumps, continued from p.2

The result for the Township was that property tax, mostly because of school tax, quadrupled. For farmers, assessed valuation was set as “developmental”, with extreme results – developers purchased a considerable amount of farmland. That was the “progress” of that moment, and made an impact, however (as it turned out) much of the Township farmland remains in agriculture.

The Township was one entity, despite encompassing two communities that didn’t always see things the same way. Annexation across the boundary with adjacent cities was a persistent possibility, and annexation was a threat to the identity and character of the Township. In April 1979, the Superior Township Board approved a resolution to make Superior a Charter Township. The trade-off was that General Law Township governance gave the people a more direct voice in some things (such as approving the budget), but a Charter Township had a better chance of resisting annexation – it was a compromise.

Development moved westward across Wayne County, approaching a rate of a mile a year. The Township might have been expected to develop, by extension, from the east. Two things happened that changed this logical outcome: In 1978, Superior Township adopted a new zoning ordinance, which adopted a new A2 category designating agricultural use, and the price of oil caused inflation and high interest rates. As a result, development stopped at Canton Center Road. Eventually development resumed, but not from the east – the north and west areas of the Township saw an influx of more individual homes, mostly large and expensive.

In the southeastern subdivisions, construction resumed, with urban density and sewer capacity a central factor. In 2000, the Township replaced the sewer main, which dated back to 1942 and the Willow Run housing project. Expectations and plans for development increased, including one for about 1,000 dwellings. Then demand evaporated. The economy and the mortgage disaster changed it all. Through all this, farmers continued working the land.

In recent times, developers have gone into foreclosure – a first for this Township. Farmers have purchased

land to farm, and other individuals and organizations have purchased property as projected developments have been abandoned.

Today, the Township is less divided than it used to be. The different types of areas – farming, urban, rural – are more unified as a part of one place, and Superior Township is perceived as a distinct community. Much of this is thanks to people in the Township who, over the years, have worked to advocate what they thought was best for the Township to preserve its unique character.

### **PROGRESS OF THE BUBBLE**

#### **Number of Single Family New Home Permits**

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Total for Period</b>
2003-2005	651
2006-2008	187
2009-2011	43 (avg. home price \$463,000)

#### **Residential Projects Approved but not Started:**

##### **EXPIRED**

2001-2011 (7) Projects, 1044 total single family homes

#### **Residential Projects Started but not Completed:**

2001-2011 (7) projects, 1295 total single family homes approved, 880 total not built yet

#### **Foreclosures:**

##### Single Family Residences:

2009	( 87)	
2010	(102)	(1) million dollar home
2011	( 90)	(1) million dollar home

##### Development:

2008 ( 1) at Wiard Road 196 homes approved, 12 built

Developer-Owned Vacant Land: several parcels

(information from SEMCOG and Superior Township Administration)

# ***DONATIONS***

**We thank all the folks who have given so generously to Superior Land Preservation Society during the last year.**

Charles and Roberta Anderson  
Eric & Pat Appleberry  
Bob & Kathy Asselstine  
Cathy Bach and Brian Hazlett  
Thomas and Sylvia Barnabei  
Rosalind and Bob Barnsdale  
Bill & Fran Beckley  
Tom Berry  
Carla Bisaro  
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Marianne Udow-Phillips and Bill Phillips  
Jane & John Van Bolt  
Ellen Elliott Weatherbee  
Kay and Karl Williams  
Judith Wysocki  
Henry & Dorothy Zelisse  
Karl and Ann Zinn

# ON LIFE IN SUPERIOR TOWNSHIP

by Jason Gold

As I sit and type this, I breathe in the sounds of the morning and reflect deeply on our year in Superior. Prior to the move to our little Superior farm, my family, consisting of my wife, myself, and my two children, lived as urban homesteaders on a small city plot in Ann Arbor. While life was good living in the city, it was also loud. Loud cars, loud people, loud colors, loud buildings, all made up for a loud life that seemed to encourage the minutes to tick faster. With two small girls full of wonder and optimism my wife and I knew we needed to make a location change that will enable our family to grow up, learn, and experience the world TOGETHER. When a small farm on Vreeland Road opened up, we jumped at the opportunity and fell into one of the most magnificent years of our lives.

We moved to Superior in late May. For the next month we slowly introduced ourselves to our 100 year farm house and the land that would grow our food. After a month of painting, repair, tilling, and digging we finally looked up and looked out, taking in a serene view that is normally reserved for the Italian countryside. It is a very comforting feeling that the acres upon acres of preserved land will be around for grandchildren just the way that I view them today.

As I speak with many of the seasoned Superior residents, they talk about their experience growing up, and I realize that, with some adjustment for time and technology, it is very similar to my children's experience. Our citified children took to our new farm with unbridled curiosity. From morning till evening they are outside working their imaginations and learning about nature. I don't worry about them the same way that I worried back in the city. Occasionally when they want to walk to our friends' house a half mile away through fields and woods, my only response is to take our walkie talkie and make sure to stop and take in the wildlife.

Day after day and twelve months later I still cannot believe that this piece of paradise remains untouched and yet so close to Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor. Yet, I feel as if I am faced with a dilemma. If I speak too loudly about the paradise that we found, many more people



Illustration by John Copley

will wish to move in and change the very thing that makes this great. However, if I don't speak loudly enough, developers will take the profit initiative to plow up everything and put cheap cookie-cutter versions of America all over the place. My remedy is just to sit outside, close my eyes and breathe in the sounds of the morning.

## OUR MISSION

- To maintain and protect open spaces in Superior Township, Washtenaw County, Michigan. These areas include, but are not limited to, nature sanctuaries, nature preserves, natural areas, many of which contain or contribute to habitat for wildlife and plants.
- To help residents of Superior Township obtain conservation easements on their properties to prevent them from being developed.
- And, overall, to preserve land resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

# Spring Discovery!

article and photo by John Copley

Over the years, Cherry Hill Nature Preserve has provided me with many fine adventures and experiences. A case in point: early this year in June, I was walking on the woodland trail, approaching the main entrance, when something unusual on a tree trunk caught my eye – a sort of whitish fluffy-looking thing. On closer examination, I discovered to my delight that what I had spotted was a newly-hatched Luna Moth in the process of pumping up its wings!

Lunas have wonderful celery green wings, with lavender edges on their forewings, golden yellow antennae, and white furry bodies with pink legs! Each wing bears a menacing eyespot, to deter would-be predators. The most stunning and unique feature of a Luna Moth is the long tapering tail that extends from each of its hind wings.

Rarely seen because of their nocturnal habits and short lives, Luna Moths are among the largest moths in America. They can achieve wingspans of 4.5 inches or more!

Luna Moths have no mouths, so they do not eat during their short week-long life, but exist in this state of ethereal beauty for the sole purpose of reproducing. After mating, the female lays several hundred eggs, a few at a time, on the underside of leaves of the host plant. Once hatched, the caterpillars go to work eating leaves, and proceed through 5 stages (instars) as they grow. Finally, they will create a thin cocoon from leaves, weaving them together with silk from their mouths, and, depending on the time of year, will hatch out (eclose) from their cocoon in 2-3 weeks. If they are of the occasional second brood, they will overwinter in their cocoon and eclose in the spring of the next year.

Spotting a Luna Moth in the Preserve should not have surprised me – some of their natural food plants (white oak, walnut, hickory) are found in abundance in the woods there. But these large silk moths are becoming less common as their habitat is reduced by development. Retaining tracts of mixed hardwood forest in places such as Cherry Hill Nature Preserve is one of the ways we can help keep these lovely moths flying.



I have seldom seen a Luna Moth up close like this. This was a stunningly beautiful moth, and a tribute to the purpose of a place such as the Cherry Hill Nature Preserve. Keep your eyes open as you walk in woods and fields – investigate anything that looks different. You may just be as surprised as I was seeing something rare and beautiful!

## If you share our goal...

... of preserving the rural character and natural habitat of Superior Township, please become a member

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Great Horned Owl<br>\$1000 | <input type="checkbox"/> Red-tailed Hawk<br>\$500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooper's Hawk<br>\$100     | <input type="checkbox"/> Screech Owl<br>\$50      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goldfinch<br>\$25          | <input type="checkbox"/> Other<br>_____           |

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Please send to SLPS, P.O. Box 130041  
Ann Arbor, MI 48113-0041

# FAQ On Conservation Easements

By Dan Moerman

Note that these questions and answers are very general in nature, and probably will not exactly characterize any individual situation. This is a generic, not a legal, account.

**What is a conservation easement (or CE)?** A CE is a legal document between a landowner and a land trust, or governmental unit, which prohibits development of the land (or perhaps restricts cattle grazing or logging) in the future, usually “in perpetuity,” or, “forever.” The landowner continues to own the property and uses it as he sees fit, and can grant, rent, lease or sell it, within the terms of the easement. There are a number of local land trusts of varying sorts (both government agencies and non-governmental organizations) including the Ann Arbor Green Belt, the Legacy (formerly Washtenaw Land Trust), Washtenaw County, and the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy. SLPS does not, and will not, hold easements, but will work hard to help arrange them for landowners and trusts.

**How many land trusts are there; how much land is protected?** There are approximately 2000 land trusts in the US protecting about 10,000,000 acres of land. (This is an estimate based on a census done in 2003).

**Why would I want to get a CE?** Because you do not want a developer to build 5 houses, or perhaps an apartment building, on the woods behind your home. You would prefer to have that woodland be there instead, forever.

**What are the financial costs of a CE?** A CE is a legal document and it should be properly drafted by an attorney familiar with the law surrounding such easements. Depending on the complexity of the easement, it might take from one hour up to maybe five hours of an attorney’s time (lawyers usually charge by the hour). The attorney may also require a survey of the property, a legal description of the actual land involved. A simple survey can cost up to a few hundred dollars.

**What are the financial benefits of a CE?** Under federal law, you can take a deduction on your income

tax for the foregone value of your property. To do so, you need to get a “double appraisal” (this is also ordinarily at your expense). That is, an appraiser will look at your property and decide how much it is worth without the easement, and how much it is worth with the easement. Subtract one from the other, and that’s your deduction. But, the IRS being what it is, it’s not quite that simple. There are limits on how much of the deduction you can take each year, and you can only take the deduction for 6 years. Note that this only works if you pay a fair amount of income tax. So, your tax break may vary.

**What is the role of the land trust?** The land trust guarantees that the provisions of the easement are kept. To do this, they ordinarily survey the property each year to see that no prohibited changes have been made to the property. This obligation costs the land trust some money; someone has to become familiar with the property and the easement, visit the property, and write a report. Depending on the property, this might take a few hours or a few weeks (some properties with easements are many thousands of acres in size). These routine examinations are a modest expense. The larger problem comes should a property owner decide that s/he wants to build those 5 houses regardless of what it says on some paper signed 50 years ago. Such a situation, probably rare, could occasion significant costs for legal work. Most land trusts have an endowment which they can draw on for such expenses; many purchase insurance policies to protect against serious violations of easements. Land trusts often request or require a contribution to their endowment from a grantor.

**What properties are most sought after by land trusts?** Trusts look for many things in this area. They prefer property which is environmentally important, with interesting animal life, with a bird rookery, a running stream, a productive wetland, steep slopes, or land adjacent to, or near, already protected property. Properties which are relatively large are often preferred (a small property probably has the same assessment costs as a much larger one; but if the small property has several important features, it may be fine.) No two situations are the same, and what might not interest one land trust might be fine with another.



## Riding the Thermals

By Marion Morris, illustration by John Copley

For the past few years, spring through fall, in the late morning Black Vultures rise in lazy circles over the woods north of our home. They ride up on the thermal currents, rising as the air warms, in ever widening circles until they soar. It is said that this bird knows where the thermals are rising, and will fly to the place where they will get the most lift to glide, giving opportunity to soar higher.

Superior Land Preservation Society board members, you could say, are also “seeking the thermals”.... looking for land opportunities that will benefit our community, members, and friends. Assisting, facilitating, collaborating with like-minded groups and individuals who care deeply about keeping our Township diverse and green is what our SLPS group is all about, and it is akin to soaring, which is how we feel as each land opportunity rises to fruition.



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