

SPOTLIGHT

## Dedication event celebrates land's family heritage

By MIKE KRANCE Special to the Daily News Jun 11, 2019 Updated 14 hrs ago



Don Nelson, center, received a wildlife print to commemorate the dedication event from the Minnesota DNR's Jeanine Vorla and Joe Stangel. (Photo courtesy of Mike Krance)

About 160 acres of former Rice County farmland was dedicated June 1 as the Engeseth-Rinde Unit of the Prairie Creek Wildlife Management Area, ensuring the area will again become native prairie.

The dedication, was held at Valley Grove Church in Nerstrand, and was attended by former landowner Don Nelson and nearly 50 of his family and friends.

It was hosted by Northfield Shares and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, in cooperation with the Friends of the Prairie Creek Wildlife Management Area and the Cannon River Watershed Partnership.

Nelson transferred the land to the DNR for a WMA through the Reinvest in Minnesota Critical Habitat Match Program. Half the value of the land was donated to the state, generating a cash match of equal value from the state's matching fund.

Nelson also donated additional funds for the initial development of the property and established the Engeseth-Rinde Restoration Fund through Northfield Shares, providing for continuous conservation, education, and research activities on the property and other important conservation lands nearby.

"Don Nelson is a shining example of how people's passions can become their legacies," said Mike Krance, Northfield Shares executive director. "By establishing the Engeseth-Rinde Restoration Fund at Northfield Shares, Don not only ensures the preservation of his ancestors' land, but he will provide for native prairie restoration and land stewardship in the area for years to come."

Krance added that the endowment fund's impact extends far beyond its environmental aspects by enabling Northfield Shares to perform its daily work to improve the Northfield area.

"This fund's very existence also helps support the administration of a variety of our daily activities like providing grants to the nonprofit community, coordinating storm cleanup volunteers after last September's tornadoes, and hosting free educational events," he said.

Speakers at the event included Krance, along with Engeseth-Rinde Advisory Committee chair Dave Kuhnau, Minnesota DNR Assistant Regional Manager Joe Stangel and DNR Area Wildlife Supervisor Jeanine Vorland, Nelson, and his niece Barb Barzen. In addition, Stangel and Vorland presented Nelson with a framed wildlife print to help commemorate the dedication.

### **Origins of the Engeseth-Rinde Farm**

The Engeseth family, of Norwegian descent, built their homestead in Nerstrand area in the 1800s. Helena Rinde married Andrew Engeseth in the mid-1800s, and the farm was a gift to the newlyweds from Andrew's father. Andrew and Helena raised seven children on the farm, one of which was Nelson's grandmother, Johanna; their eldest sons Ingebret and Russel helped manage the property and eventually took over the farm.

In 1982, when no one in the family was in a position to take over the farm, Nelson and his brother, Richard, bid on the land. Although Nelson and his siblings grew up in Minneapolis, they visited the Engeseth-Rinde farm several times a year and grew connected to the land. The Nelson brothers rented out the land to neighboring farmers, and Nelson also began planting trees on the property as a hobby. The brothers eventually divided the property for investment purposes.

Nelson, who owned several farm properties, put conservation easements on them so they could never be developed with housing. Next, he began working with the DNR to ensure the properties would be preserved.

“I thought the DNR would be the best stewards of the property,” Nelson said. “All the farmland I owned is now owned by the DNR, and I have every confidence they will manage the land just the way I had wanted. I laid the foundation with these conservation easements and the DNR so I can go to my grave knowing my land is in good hands.”

In addition to this farm, Nelson previously donated land through the RIMCHM program for the Rock Dell WMA and an addition to the Gordon Yeager WMA in Haverhill Township near Rochester.

Nelson sold his portion of the Engeseth-Rinde property to the DNR in 2015 and established the Engeseth-Rinde Restoration Fund through Northfield Shares the next year. In 2018, he made a second donation, making it Northfield Shares’ first \$1 million endowment. Distributions from the fund are used primarily for restoration, research, silviculture and related educational activities on the area. Secondly, disbursements from the fund will be used for the same purposes on other conservation properties within a defined corridor between Nerstrand and Dennison.

According to the DNR’s Jeanine Vorland, the Critical Habitat Match Program including this tract has been very important for the conservation of wildlife, their habitats and for the people that value wildlife-based recreation.

“During the coming years, we are gradually retiring the land,” she says. The current crops and woods will gradually return to native habitat of prairie, wetland and oak savanna as the DNR’s restoration activities supported by the Engeseth-Rinde Restoration Fund take effect.”

### **First grants awarded**

The Engeseth-Rinde Restoration Fund awarded its first grants — \$33,617 — in 2018.

According to Dave Kuhnau, chair of the Engeseth-Rinde Advisory Committee makes distribution recommendations, the group enjoys managing the grant making process and the ongoing activities related to the fund. They were especially delighted to plan the dedication event.

“We are so happy with results of the Engeseth-Rinde Unit dedication event,” he said. “Members of Don’s extended family met or reconnected while celebrating their family history and the exciting future of this land. We look forward to more opportunities to partner with Don and Northfield Shares in building a legacy of environmental stewardship, habitat restoration, science and education.”

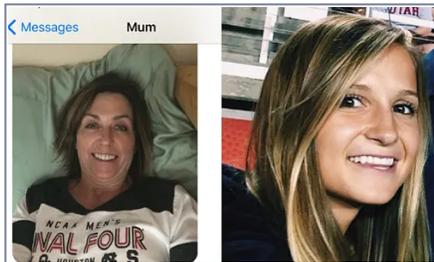
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## SHARING

Northfield Shares is the area’s community foundation founded to advance philanthropy, inspire volunteerism and promote collaborative leadership. For more information about Northfield Shares, visit [northfieldshares.org](http://northfieldshares.org).

To learn more about donating to the Engeseth-Rinde Restoration Fund, email Mike Krance at [mikekrance@northfieldshares.org](mailto:mikekrance@northfieldshares.org).

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## Suzy Rook

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