

# MASTERS AT CONSERVATION



## Burkhardts honored by state commission

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**F**OR MUCH OF HIS LIFE, YOU could find Dan Burkhardt trekking through muddy trails or dense forest. But his first encounter with the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) was in a windowless office in a Jefferson City basement, bundling receipts for fishing permits into piles of 50. Perhaps not the most auspicious beginning, Burkhardt admits, but a beginning nonetheless.

“At that point, I had no skills, no conservation ability, no training, no nothing,” Burkhardt said. “But I knew I loved the outdoors. And that was my start.”  
On Friday, May 29, in a packed Washington City Council chambers, Burkhardt and his wife Connie joined one of Missouri’s most exclusive clubs: Master Conservationists. Only 71 Missourians had received the honor prior to the Burkhardts. As she introduced the couple, MDC Deputy Director Laura Conlee said the distinction honors the Burkhardts for their many contributions to keeping Missouri beautiful.  
“And as we go through this

list, I think you’ll really realize how far-reaching it is,” she added.  
Conlee highlighted their longstanding commitment to the Katy Trail, dating back to its earliest days establishing it as a state park established in the 1990s. In 2010, the Burkhardts launched the Katy Land Trust “to protect the agricultural, scenic and natural resources along the Katy Trail in central Missouri” and became the first property owners to join it. They placed 200 acres of their farm in the trust through a conservation agreement. Although they retain full use of the property, it can never be developed once it is put in the trust.  
“The projects that Dan and

PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER PARKER/MISSOURIAN  
**Missouri Conservation Commission Chair Margy Eckelkamp, center, presents Dan and Connie Burkhardt with the Master Conservationist Award Friday in the Washington City Council Chambers.**



A large crowd including leaders from Missouri nonprofit and conservation organizations applaud for the Burkhardts after they officially receive the award.

Connie have supported will have a lasting impact on Missouri’s natural resources and will be enjoyed by citizens and visitors to our great state for decades to come,” Conlee said.

Dan Burkhardt also founded Magnificent Missouri, a conservation-focused nonprofit, in 2012 with the late John McPheeters. The Burkhardts later restored the historic Treloar Mercantile building and in 2024 donated it to become the Katy Trail’s first and only State Parks welcome center. They own and operate the Peers Store a few miles east, which has become a landmark on the trail.

Missouri Conservation Commission Chair Margy Eckelkamp, a Washington native, said Missouri is a better place because the Burkhardts live here. She presented the award, which included a picture of an American goldfinch — “wildlife commonly seen at pollinator gardens, just like the one you created at the Peers Store, just here across the river,” she said.

Connie Burkhardt said that as a born-and-raised Missourian, she has always appreciated the outdoors. It wasn’t until going to work for Edward “Ted” Jones Jr. and meeting his wife Pat, however, that the Burkhardts’ work really took off.

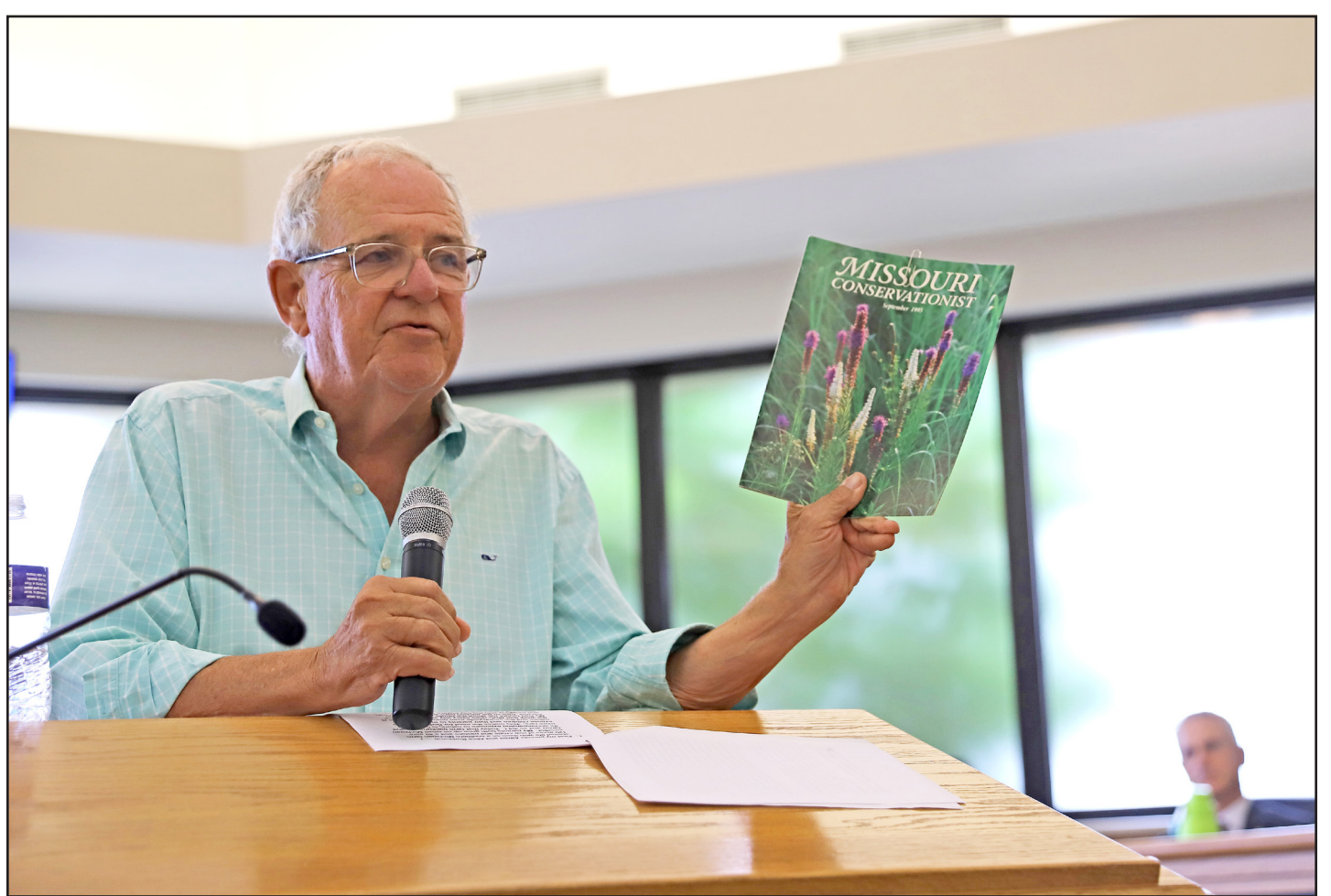
“In the days when Ted Jones was still roaming the second floor of our building ... he was truly fired up about the Katy Trail, and it seemed like everyone at Edward knew about his biggest product outside of the office,” Burkhardt said.

“I had the good fortune to learn about Missouri’s conservation ethos from three of the best — Ted, Pat and Dan,” she added.

Burkhardt said she and her husband practiced what they preached. When developers planned to turn the 220-acre Bethlehem Valley Farm in Marthasville into chalets and dam the valley, the Burkhardts purchased the land instead in 1994.

“We really got serious about stopping the bulldozers, taking the valley, bought the farm, and that’s when my personal immersion into land conservation began,” she said.

Dan Burkhardt, meanwhile, said his



Dan Burkhardt shares a story about his mother who was recognized in MDC’s Conservationist magazine in 1995 teaching schoolchildren in Jefferson City about pressing flowers.

connection with land conservation runs all the way back to his childhood. He grew up on a farm in southern Michigan, spending his earliest years taking animals to market with his father and learning the names of wildflowers from his mother. He said he fell in love with Missouri’s natural wonders when his family moved to this state.

In 1978, Burkhardt got a job at Edward Jones and became close with Ted as they fought together for the establishment of the Katy Trail.

“In addition to getting a job that I badly needed at the time, I was also getting a role model and a mentor, who happened to have his name on the building,” Burkhardt said. Jones’ wife Pat was named a Master Conservationist two decades ago,

in 2006.  
Burkhardt thanked the many colleagues who helped make Magnificent Missouri and the Treloar project a reality. He also recognized some of his now-deceased supporters like John (Jack) Galmiche III, former president and CEO of the Nine Network public television corporation in St. Louis, and former Missouri Botanical Garden President Peter Raven. Their successors, current Nine Network President Amy Shaw and Botanical Garden President Dr. Lúcia Lohmann, attended Friday’s ceremony.  
Burkhardt said he was humbled to receive the designation, but added he’s far from the only person eligible.  
“I know we’re just two of hundreds in Missouri that could receive an award like

this. I know there are people out there doing remarkable things for our environment and our landscape every day,” he said.

Connie Burkhardt said she’d like to share the award with every conservationist on the state commission and working at MDC. She observed that unlike many public servants, the constituents who most rely on MDC’s work — the fish in Missouri’s waters, the birds in its trees and the insects in its dirt — cannot appropriately voice their appreciation for that work.

“So, with this beautiful award in hand, I will speak on their behalf and say that all of the wild things that spend their lives in Missouri thank you sincerely and deeply for your work,” she said. ■