

A Brief History of Conserve School

Establishing Conserve School

With the passing of Jim Lowenstine at the age of 72 in January of 1996, the development of Conserve School began in accordance with his directives provided in the Lowenstine Trust.

The Lowenstine Trust established that the directors of Central Steel & Wire Company would also serve as trustees of the Conserve School Trust. These were the individuals that Jim had selected to help him guide his company, and to whom he entrusted the fulfillment of his vision for Conserve School.



Lowenstine Trust

Following are the provisions of the relevant parts of the James R. Lowenstine Trust dated August 17, 1981, as restated by Mr. Lowenstine on September 19, 1995, less than four months prior to his death. The trust contains numerous technical provisions dealing with various administrative matters. However, the basic provisions relating to the establishment and operation of Conserve School are set forth in the introductory paragraph and the ensuing eleven lettered paragraphs of Article VI of the Trust, all of which are set out below *verbatim*.

ARTICLE VI

The trustees shall retain the balance of the trust called the "Conserve School Trust." Commencing as of the date of my death and for as long as the Conserve School Trust is in existence, the trust principal and the net income thereon shall be administered as follows:

A. Except as otherwise provided, the trustees shall, at any time and from time to time as the trustees decide, use part or all of the net income of the Conserve School Trust to defray the costs incurred in the operation of a school called the "Conserve School." The Conserve School shall be nonsectarian. Any income not otherwise expended shall be added to the principal of the Conserve School Trust as the trustees from time to time shall decide.

B. Part of the property passing to the Conserve School Trust will be Lowenwood. As soon after my death as is reasonably possible, and from time to time thereafter, the trustees may also use net income and principal of the Conserve School Trust: (1) to remodel or enlarge the buildings and improvements located on Lowenwood in order to adapt them for use as student dormitories, faculty housing, classrooms, facilities for preparing and serving food to students and faculty, and for other purposes in connection with the establishment of the Conserve School; (2) to erect additional facilities for such purposes, if necessary; (3) to acquire additional land to enlarge or round out the grounds in order to provide additional lake frontage or areas for outdoor instruction, all as herein provided; (4) to properly maintain all such facilities and grounds as herein provided; (5) to acquire such equipment as the trustees deem reasonably necessary for operating the school; (6) to employ as superintendent of the Conserve School, a conservative, nonsectarian, experienced professional with academic and business qualifications; (7) to employ suitable faculty; (8) to prescribe a school curriculum which must include

instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic and shall comply as nearly as the trustees deem practicable with the requirements set by school officials of the State of Wisconsin and which also shall, to the extent the trustees deem practicable, include nature study (and in particular the study of the ecology of unspoiled forest and lake areas such as Lowenwood), instruction in outdoor sports including skiing, use of snow shoes, archery, ice skating, target practice, swimming, fishing, boating, camping, sledding, methods of survival in unexplored areas, and other outdoor activities; (9) to maintain dogs and other pets at Conserve School so that students may be educated in the proper training, care and habit of animals, and (10) to open the school for the regular enrollment of students beginning with the seventh grade, and extending, in the discretion of the trustees, through high school.

C. The trustees also may use the net income and principal of the Conserve School Trust to provide and maintain a suitable museum and library building or buildings at the school, and to install therein hunting and fishing trophies of animals, birds and fish, and other items such as photographs, films and books which the trustees wish to retain, so that such trophies and other items may be suitably preserved and attractively displayed for the enjoyment of, or observation and study by, the Conserve School students. I direct that the trustees provide suitable temporary storage for said trophies and other items, if it becomes advisable to do so, until such museum building or buildings can be erected and said trophies and other items installed therein. The trustees may use such portion of the net income from the Conserve School Trust as they deem appropriate for the storage, packing, shipping, installation, preservation, and display of said trophies and other items. I authorize the trustees to retain a competent taxidermist to supervise these activities. I further direct that the above mentioned building or buildings be erected as soon as practicable in order to keep storage costs at a minimum.

D. In making any expenditures out of trust principal, economies must be practiced and the trustees must first determine that there is a reasonable expectation that the trust principal would not be depleted to the extent that its earnings, plus any federal, state or local government grants or assistance, or gifts, grants, bequests or donations from others (which the trustees are hereby authorized to solicit, accept and administer), would be insufficient to continue the operation of the Conserve School and the upkeep and maintenance of the lands and buildings as herein provided.

E. If any other property or funds are acquired by the trustees from any party or governmental agency by grant, gift, devise or bequest, the trustees may accept such property or funds so long as such grant, gift, devise or bequest is made without restriction or pursuant to requirements that the same be used for substantially the same purposes as herein set forth. Further, such property or funds may be held and administered together with the Conserve School Trust as a single trust or as a separate trust.

F. The trustees may cooperate with, or act independently of, any one or more of such lay or religious organizations, school authorities or social agencies as may sponsor students for enrollment at the Conserve School. However, although such organizations, authorities or agencies may be permitted to contribute to the cost of sponsoring students for enrollment at the Conserve School, no such organizations, authorities or agencies shall be given power to physically maintain the school or its grounds, to control the manner in which the school is

operated, or to act in any other way, except with respect to assisting the trustees in the selection of students for the school and giving counsel and advice with respect to its operation.

G. It is my desire that the trustees take a strong interest in the employment and retention of administrative, teaching and other personnel of the Conserve School, although the day to day management of the school shall be the responsibility of the professional superintendent hired by and acting under the direction of the trustees.

H. I direct that students admitted to the Conserve School be persons deemed by the trustees to be honest, of good moral character, mentally alert, and in good health. Such students may include those who, because of lack of funds, might not otherwise be able to afford the benefits of instruction at an institution such as the Conserve School, and may also include those whose lack of material advantages is such that they would receive more than normal benefits from instruction in the open air environment to be provided for the school. The trustees may formulate, modify from time to time, and enforce reasonable rules and standards to be uniformly and impartially applied in making such selection, but in all events such selection shall always be made so that no private benefit will inure, directly or indirectly, to the trustees, and so that the school always will be maintained and operated for the public good and in accordance with the foregoing provisions. The trustees are authorized to establish scholarship funds for students, if sufficient funds are available.

I. In order that the students may be given an opportunity to study birds, fish, animals and other wildlife in their natural setting, and be afforded the benefits of outdoor education in an open and uncrowded area, I direct that the school grounds be maintained so that their natural beauty and wildlife will not be harmed; the grounds be afforded proper fire protection; the grounds and woods and lakes be kept free of rubbish, refuse and pollution; the buildings and improvements be kept neat, clean and maintained according to the highest standards of care; the woods and forest lands be preserved in their natural state and not be cut or logged except as is necessary to preserve them in their natural state; the grounds be preserved in their natural state to the extent possible; some considerable areas of the grounds be left free of all buildings, equipment or other improvements so that students may enjoy the quiet of a natural forest; and to the extent the trustees believe it to be practical and advisable, no part of the lands herein given to or hereafter acquired by the trustees be sold, leased, or otherwise disposed of or exploited for any commercial purpose not benefiting Conserve School, but shall be maintained for the educational purposes hereinabove set forth.

J. It is my hope that some students may be instructed or trained at the Conserve School so as to prepare them for or incline them toward ultimate employment in some activity related to the preservation and use of forests, lakes and streams for public recreation without spoliation, and in the general science of the conservation of natural resources.

K. I further request that if, after due consideration, the trustees deem it feasible, students who are enrolled in public or other private schools may be permitted to enroll in the Conserve School to receive tutorial instruction after such students' regular school hours or on Saturdays and school holidays, and during summer vacations.

Design and Construction 1996 - 2002

Following the directions Mr. Lowenstine left, the Conserve School Board of Trustees began the initial planning stages for the construction of Conserve School. The Conserve School Corporation was established as the legal entity that would administer the operations of the school. The trustees of the Conserve School Trust also serve as the directors of the Conserve School Corporation.

The Land O' Lakes community, and especially the property owners on Black Oak Lake adjacent to Lowenwood were curious about what would become of Jim's 1200 acre Lowenwood estate. On March 27, 1996 the Trustees published an "open letter to the residents of Land O' Lakes from the Trustees of the Conserve School Trust" in the Vilas County News Review. The letter stated:

In keeping with Mr. Lowenstine's wishes, the trust will establish a boarding school that will have students from possibly the seventh grade to seniors in high school. Although no determination has been made to the size of the school, every effort will be made to have it be in keeping with Mr. Lowenstine's objectives and compatible with Lowenwood and the surrounding area.

In 1997 the Conserve School Board of Directors employed Pat Bassett who was then the Head of the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS) to help guide them. It was determined that a four-year boarding school with facilities to accommodate up to 200 students and the staff required to educate them would be appropriate.

Facilities Design and Construction

The Conserve School Board contracted with INTERPLAN Practice Ltd. of Oakbrook Terrace, Illinois to design the buildings. INTERPLAN Practice brought in the architectural firm of Blomquist and Associates from Iron Mountain, Michigan. Blomquist and Associates was especially helpful with its experience designing buildings for the extreme cold and heavy snows of northern Wisconsin. INTERPLAN Practice also brought in the company Planning Resources, Inc., an environmental planning firm from Wheaton, Illinois. Planning Resources contributed heavily to the selection of building sites and construction practices that would minimize the environmental impact of both the construction of the school and its long-term operation on the environment of Lowenwood. The collaboration of these three firms was called Team Interplan. To help insure that work was done in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way Team Interplan engaged Audubon International. Audubon International partners with organizations to facilitate the sustainable management of land, water, wildlife, and other natural resources. Throughout the construction process Audubon International audited the work being done on Conserve School and at the conclusion of construction named Conserve School as an Audubon International Certified Sanctuary.

Conceptual plans for Conserve School were unveiled in December of 1997. It was determined that the academic school site would be located near a small bay on Little Donahue Lake, an undeveloped lake on the Lowenwood property. The recreation building was to be constructed on the shore of the more active Big Donahue Lake. In between these two sites, the student and

teaching housing would be built. While the initial buildings would accommodate 200 students, the design included plans for potential expansion to 400 students. The entire campus was set well away from any existing developments, and occupied less than ten percent of the twelve hundred acre estate.

In the summer of 1998, the initial construction began when the school's infrastructure was put into place, and sites were cleared for the Conserve School buildings. The protection of trees, wetland, streams, and lakes was imperative to their low-environmental-impact approach. Many of the trees cleared from the building sites were milled into lumber, and used in the school buildings, while much of the landscape stone for walls was taken from the site. Other materials selected for the construction of Conserve School were evaluated for their environmental impact, both in the manufacturing process and onsite use.

On June 9, 1999, the Conserve School Board of Directors hosted an official groundbreaking ceremony on the campus. In attendance were school administrators, design and construction members of Team Interplan, and local officials. The ceremony honored the memory of the school's benefactor, Jim Lowenstine, and presented the school's vision. Conserve School Chairman and President, Jack Tiernan also introduced Dr. John Frederick the school's founding director. At this time, construction was well underway at Conserve School, as buildings began to take shape.

Over the next two years, the construction of Conserve School was completed. Academic buildings, dormitories, the recreation facility, and the remainder of the campus were nestled among the towering trees of Lowenwood. The Trustee's goal of having Conserve School blend with the environment was achieved. The use of native stone and wood is prevalent throughout, creating a feeling of warmth for students, faculty, and staff.



Founding Staff

On August 1, 1999 Dr. John Friedrich joined Conserve School as its founding Director. Friedrich brought 28 years of experience as a science educator, including 10 years as director of the the North Carolina School of Math, Science and Technology (NCSMST). NCSMST is a nationally recognized residential school for academically talented students. Dr. Friedrich was also brought his experience founding a science high school in Texas.

In the spring of 2000 Dr. Friedrich began hiring teachers and staff for Conserve School. His plan was to provide the founding staff with two years before the first students arrived to create the unique curriculum and experience that would be Conserve School. The hiring process continued through June of 2001 at which time the school was fully staffed.

The Four-Year Program

On August 17, 2002 Conserve School opened its doors to its first students in grades 9 through 11. Conserve School had a policy of not accepting seniors so that students would have at least two years at the school.

In the fall of 2002 Dr. Friedrich stepped down as Director of Conserve School and Conserve School's Head of Admissions stepped up to be Interim Director. In February of 2003 the Board appointed Stefan Anderson to the position of Headmaster.

Conserve School operated as a Four-Year boarding high school through the spring of 2010. During those eight years Conserve School developed a positive reputation for excellence in environmental and outdoor education. Conserve School's Envirothon team placed in the top three in Wisconsin every year that it competed and held the first place position for five years in a row. Week long exploration trips were developed for each grade level with students canoeing the Sylvania Wilderness, Boundary Waters Canoe Area or Wisconsin River. Hiking trips took students to the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Porcupine Mountains or North Country Trail. Over the eight years Conserve School had international students from over 20 countries.

Conserve School students did well academically with impressive college placements and strong scores on college entrance exams. Conserve School's academic program included an emphasis on environmental stewardship. The academic program also included everything else needed for a four year high school diploma, much of which was not directly related to the environmental stewardship aspect of Conserve School's mission.

Conserve School fielded a variety of sports teams and was most successful with cross country skiing, cross country running, track, boys soccer, and boys basketball.

Conserve School also offered a variety of non-athletic afterschool activities including Quiz Bowl, First Robotics, Destination Imagination, yearbook and knitting club.

Conserve School's enrollment grew to 135 students and the average graduating class size was 30 students.

The Decision to Transition

On January 30, 2009, in the aftermath of the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy and in the depths of the financial crisis, the Trustees announced that Conserve School would transition from a four-year boarding school for high school aged students to a semester school primarily for high school juniors.

As a semester school, students would come to Conserve School for one semester of their high school career and then return to their sending school having earned academic credits to replace those they missed at their sending school.

The semester school model was selected because:

The semester school impacts the lives of more students. As a semester school, Conserve School would create at least three times more alums each year than the four year school did. In addition, these alums would return to their sending schools for at least a year energized about environmental stewardship and ready to make a difference. Through the work of these alums, the impact of Conserve School would be increased many times over.

The semester school is fully focused on creating environmental stewards. Environmental stewardship and outdoor activities are woven throughout all courses, with Lowenwood serving as an ideal setting for hands-on, relevant, place-based learning. Without the distraction of interscholastic sports, applying to colleges, and preparing for college entrance exams, students are encouraged to spend their unscheduled time in outdoor pursuits exploring the Lowenwood campus, much as Jim did throughout his life. All students are enrolled in the same set of core classes (environmental science, English, history, and outdoor skills), assuring a truly shared experience for every student, and setting the stage for cooperative learning.

The semester school can operate primarily from endowment earnings. The budget of the semester school model is such that the yearly operating expenses are below the amount needed for financial aid in the four-year program. As a result, Conserve School is able to offer the semester school students the Lowenstine Scholarship.

On January 30, 2009 the transition to the semester school model was shared with the Conserve School community. The transition occurred over the next 18 months. Applicants for the fall of 2009 were informed of the transition and no new students were accepted. Current sophomore and junior students were invited to come back for the 2009-10 school year free of charge. Juniors then had the chance to finish their four-years. Sophomores were given the opportunity to graduate early in the spring of 2010. Freshmen students were offered assistance in finding alternative schooling for the fall of 2010. Current staff were retained for the remainder of the 2008-09 school-year.

There were legal challenges to the transition, but the decision to transition was upheld. The court's decision included the comments: "Although the trustees' new program is a significant departure from the way the school previously operated, it does not reflect a finding of legal

impossibility or impracticality. To the contrary, it reflects the trustees' desire to operate the school in a manner best suited to current economic realities within the boundaries of the trust instrument."

Conserve School has 216 alums from the four-year program.

The Semester School Program

The Conserve School Board of Directors reviewed and updated the School's mission statement as part of the transition process. The mission became:

Conserve School inspires young people to environmental stewardship through academics and engagement with the forests, lakes and wildlife of Lowenwood.

The semester school program at Conserve School is designed so that all students get the same core experience with a limited opportunity to customize their experiences through electives. The core experience has all students taking the same mission focused English, history, Advanced Placement Environmental Science, and outdoor skills classes. Additionally, students all participate in stewardship activities, camping trips, solo camping, and college and career presentations.

Enrollment

On August 21, 2010, Conserve School semester school began with 48 students enrolled in Conserve School Semester One. By the end of the semester school's eighth year, the semester school had 993 alumni, more than four times the 216 alumni from the eight years of the four-year program.

Accreditation

In 2009, Conserve School began the process to gain accreditation through the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), an accreditation division of AdvancED. AdvancED was chosen because of it is a nationally recognized accreditation agency and because other semester schools are accredited by it. On June 23, 2012, Conserve School received academic accreditation. Conserve School renewed this accreditation in the spring of 2017.

While Conserve School is not a camp, it maintains accreditation with the American Camp Association to insure that its outdoor programs meet national standards.

Recognition

Conserve School has been recognized by both the state of Wisconsin and the U.S. Department of Education for its leadership in reducing environmental impact and cost, improving health and wellness, and providing effective environmental education.

The State of Wisconsin has recognized Conserve School as a Sugar Maple School, through the Wisconsin Department of Education's Green & Healthy Schools program. This is the highest level of recognition available.

In 2014, U.S. Department of Education honored Conserve School as a U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School.

The National Wildlife Federation has given Conserve School its highest level of recognition with its Green Flag Award.

Affiliations

Part of the strength of the Conserve School program comes from its work with others. Here are a few of Conserve Schools important affiliations.

Conserve School is a member of the Semester Schools Network (SSN). The Semester Schools Network has two key functions. First, the network provides a forum for semester schools to share information about how different schools handle issues and programming which are unique to semester schools. Second, the network promotes enrollment in semester schools and helps schools cross promote each other.

Conserve School is an associate member of the Association of Boarding Schools (TABS). TABS provides a variety of resources to support the boarding school components of Conserve School's program.

Conserve School is a member of the Wisconsin Association for Environmental Education (WAE). Through the WAE, Conserve School has formed working relationships with environmental educators and programs throughout the state of Wisconsin

Conserve School is a Green Schools National Network (GSNN) Catalyst School. The GSNN provides Conserve School with timely access to best practices in environmental education.

Tuition, Fees and Scholarships

Conserve School's tuition is comparable to other schools in the Semester Schools Network. The tuition for the semesters during the 2018-19 school year is \$25,000.

However, all accepted students have their tuition reduced by a James R. Lowenstine Honors Scholarship. Currently that scholarship has a \$10,000 value. Families may apply for additional need based financial aid. For the 2018-19 school year 47.5% of students received an additional \$15,000 in needs-based financial aid bringing their tuition expense to zero.