

Barrington's Elizabeth Hamill Bramsen wins state conservation award



A Barrington resident, Elizabeth Hamill Bramsen, will be named into the Illinois Outdoors Hall of Fame in September. (Illinois Conservation Foundation / HANDOUT)

By **Todd Shields** Pioneer Press

A life of protecting land for one Barrington resident

When Barrington resident Elizabeth Hamill Bramsen decided to support Brookfield Zoo's Hamill Family Play Zoo, she knew the nature center for children would be unique upon its 2001 opening.

With its hands-on, interactive program for teaching children about nature and conservation, the Play Zoo encouraged them to "dig in the dirt and get muddy," she said.

"It was an extremely innovative approach. Children can role play being zoo directors or veterinarians and collect 200 ladybugs and release them outdoors," she said.

"Touching rabbits, gerbils and snakes has a huge impact on them."

A life-long advocate of conservation education, Bramsen will be inducted into the Illinois Outdoors Hall of Fame on Sept. 24 at the annual Illinois Conservation Foundation Gala in Bloomington.

In July, she also opened Hamill Wild Encounters, which allows visitors to get up close to animals at Brookfield Zoo and participate in special zoo activities.

Bramsen is a founding board member of the Barrington Area Conservation Trust, where she helped develop the Barrington High School Conservation Leadership Project. The project provides students with classroom and field experiences "that help foster meaningful and lifelong connections to nature," according to the Illinois Conservation Foundation.

For instance, this year, more than 200 students will be engaged as "citizen scientists" to study the health of Flint Creek that runs through the high school campus.

Bramsen explained a guiding factor for her conservation advocacy was noticing years ago how green land was being used.

"In the Chicago area, it's not hard to see how it has been developed. If humans don't be proactive toward the land and keep paving over it, we won't have any," said Bramsen, a native of Wayne, 36 miles west of Chicago.

"I see what has happened around me. If we don't preserve large tracts of land that is sufficient for animal populations, they won't have food or territory to reproduce and thrive."

Fred Keck of downstate Vandalia will also be inducted into the Outdoors Hall of Fame for his work in developing hundreds of acres of Kaskaskia River bottom land in south-central Illinois.

The third inductee is Chad Pregracke of East Moline.

He grew up along the Mississippi River and as a teenager saw much toxic trash along the banks while working as commercial mussel shell diver.

"In 1998 at age 23, Pregracke founded Living Lands and Waters, an organization dedicated to restoration and cleanup of the Mississippi and many other rivers," the statement said, adding his staff and more than 90,000 volunteers have collected about 8.4 million pounds of debris.

Chad Pregracke has documented his efforts in the book ["From the Bottom Up: One Man's Crusade to Clean America's Rivers."](#)

Bramsen also supports the Chicago Zoological Society, Openlands, Land Conservancy of McHenry County Illinois Prairie Path, John G. Shedd Aquarium, Preservation Foundation of Lake County Forest Preserves and Environmental Law and Policy Center.

"I think we humans benefit from having clean air and being able to get away from man-made pressures and smog and see the stars. We have a responsibility to protect the land," she said.

"We are pleased to recognize these individuals for their dedication to the preservation, promotion and enhancement of the natural wonders of our state," said Illinois Conservation Foundation Board Chairman Wayne Rosenthal in the release.

"I can't think of a greater contribution in my life than giving to this wonderful world we live in by helping to preserve it," Bramsen said.

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