



Post Office Box 8531
Kansas City, Missouri 64114
www.missouriparksassociation.org

New State Park the Gift of Don Robinson

by Kally Coleman, MPA Board

I first met Don Robinson in March 2000, after a late winter storm had blanketed his property with snow. After several hours exploring sandstone canyons, glades and deep hollows with his long-time friend, John Higgins, we made our way back to the house for proper introductions. As I began to take off my muddy boots so as not to track the floor, John opened the door to reveal the ‘floor’ was the same dirt hilltop I was standing on outside. It was at that moment I realized Don was as unique as his 843 acres.

On March 19, 2012, Don died of congestive heart failure, leaving his magnificent property to the Department of Natural Resources to become Missouri’s newest state park. "I think it should be the Don Robinson State Park, not the Robinson State Park," he had told an interviewer in 2008. "There's a lot of Robinsons, but only one me." With prices for undeveloped land in the area averaging more than \$6,000 per acre, the estimated value of the donated land is more than \$5 million. State Park Director Bill Bryan notes this is among the largest gifts in the 95-year history of the state park system.

It all started in the 1960s when Don fell in love with a small piece of land he found near Cedar Hill in Jefferson County. With a small fortune from producing, marketing and selling a spot remover called “Off,” he was able to continue buying adjoining parcels until his property equaled the exact size of New York City's famed Central Park. This was an intentional decision in which he took pride.

But it is more than just a Central Park-sized tract of land. In Bill Bryan's view, it’s unparalleled. “It’s just a place where people can experience biological richness in a small area that you can’t find literally anywhere else.” The park is situated in the upper watershed of LaBarque Creek, a relatively undisturbed watershed close to St. Louis that has attracted increasing attention for conservation. More than 700 species of plants, 158 bryophytes, and 44 species of fish have been identified in the watershed.

State park staff and volunteers are currently inventorying what’s on the property. In the next few months they’ll be reaching out to the public, including Robinson’s friends and neighbors, about what they’d like to see the park become. Robinson also left a portion of his estate, including a small amount of cash and some additional tracts of land, to the Missouri State Park Foundation to defray development, operation and maintenance of the park.

In true Don Robinson fashion, when asked in a 2009 segment on KETC’s Living St. Louis why he decided to leave his home to the state park system, he responded “I had to do something about it or else my melon-head cousins from out of nowhere would come out of the woodwork and sell the joint over a weekend or something.”