Fink gift provides Western students with local ecological laboratory

By Darci Shinberger

Rich habitats and varied ecological systems will be available for students and faculty to study as a result of a donation of 77 acres of protected land a couple of miles west of WIU's campus.

The land – which includes about half a mile of frontage property along the East Lamoine River and is governed by three United States Department of Agriculture conservancy agreements – comes from Rodney and Bertha Fink of Macomb. Rodney was Dean of the College of Applied Sciences, and Bertha was an instructor of health sciences.

The gift sets up the Rodney and Bertha Fink Environmental Studies Field Laboratory and Conservancy, to be managed by the College of Arts and Sciences' Institute for Environmental Studies (IES).

"The Fink's gift expands undergraduate research activities, which is an essential component of the College of Arts and Sciences' mission," said CAS Dean Inessa Levi. "Students involved in undergraduate research are better prepared for the future, their careers and for graduate programs."

The diversity of habitats there will provide students from many disciplines, such as biological sciences, geography and geology, with opportunities to work as individuals and as part of multidisciplinary teams, Levi continued, adding to WIU's educational and research capabilities at the Alice L. Kibbe Life Sciences Station in Warsaw, Ill., and Vishnu Springs, north of Tennessee, Ill.

Photo by Visual Production Center

Dozens of unspoiled acres have been preserved by Rodney and Bertha Fink, who donated the land to WIU for study.

"The Finks have been strong advocates of Western Illinois University and continue to be involved," said Western President Al Goldfarb. "We are appreciative of their commitment to the University. Through this gift, our students and faculty will have the chance to conduct even more research activities to further benefit their studies and professional work."

Rodney joined Western's agriculture department as an associate professor in 1968. He served as its chair before being named Dean of the College of Applied Sciences in 1974. He retired in March 1992. Bertha, who received her Master's degree from Western, taught health sciences from 1976 to 1981.

"We purchased this land 20 years ago so it could be preserved for future generations, and Western was in our thoughts when we bought it," the Finks said in a statement. "The University has meant a lot to us as a family and has been a big part of our lives. Our four children have Bachelor's degrees from Western, and one continued and received his Master's degree from Western as well.

"We're happy that the land will be used for faculty and student research, and that there will be an area so close to the city limits that remains a preserved natural area," they added.

The Rodney and Bertha Fink Environmental Studies Field Laboratory and Conservancy also will enhance Western's environmental awareness and sustainability efforts, said Dan Hendricks, WIU's vice president of advancement and public services.

"Bertha and Rodney have always had a strong interest in their students and a commitment to undergraduate and graduate programs at Western," Hendricks said. "Throughout their careers at Western, the Finks have provided outstanding service to their respective colleges and to the University. We are thankful for their generous gifts that support environmental studies."