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Subject: Bayou Land Conservancy announces 2020 Awards: Conservation Champions, Joe Swinbank and Don Poarch, and Trailblazer, Erin Valley Donato

Houston, TX – Bayou Land Conservancy (BLC) is pleased to announce they will be honoring Joe Swinbank and Don Poarch as 2020 Conservation Champions. The Conservation Champion award is presented annually to an individual, or group, that has had an exceptional impact on land conservation in our region. Mr. Swinbank and Mr. Poarch, partners at Sprint Sand & Clay, donated 117 acres of land along Spring Creek in the Tomball/Decker Prairie area to Bayou Land Conservancy in 2020. The new preserve is located in Montgomery County, on the opposite bank of Spring Creek from Lone Star College- Tomball and Harris County Precinct 4's Spring Creek Park. "We are excited to own this ecologically rich nature preserve that will help us connect the community to the benefits of land conservation", said BLC board chair Lisa Lin. "This donation will benefit the community for many generations, and be an enduring legacy of the incredible generosity of Mr. Swinbank and Mr. Poarch."

"As the greater Houston area continues to grow at a rapid pace, striking a healthy balance between land preservation and land development has never been more important as we seek to protect the many economic and community benefits we all enjoy," Swinbank said. "The Bayou Land Conservancy's extensive network of preserved trails and waterways just minutes from Houston is impressive in its form and function—a model of what can be achieved when community stakeholders work together. We're proud to partner with the Conservancy to continue these important environmental efforts and extend BLC's preserved trails and waterways west into the Tomball area."

Don Poarch echoed his partner's sentiments in acknowledging the award. "We're grateful for the recognition as this year's Conservation Champion and happy to continue to champion the BLC and its important mission to preserve these lands for natural flood control, cleaner water and wildlife protection," Poarch said. "On behalf of our entire team at Sprint Sand & Clay, Joe and I hope this land along Spring Creek enhances the community with protected green space while providing beautiful trails and waterways for people to reconnect with nature and each other."

Beyond the positive environmental and community impact, the land in Tomball has personal significance to Swinbank and his family. “My wife was raised in the area, and her extended family has deep roots in Tomball and Rosehill going back to the area’s original German settlers,” Swinbank added. “My family and I couldn’t be happier that the Conservancy will ensure this land is preserved and protected for generations to come.”

Each year BLC also recognizes an outstanding volunteer with the Trailblazer award. The 2020 Trailblazer is Erin Valley Donato, Sustainability Manager for the Houston Zoo. A graduate of Tulane University, Ms. Donato is being recognized for her extraordinary dedication to the mission of land preservation as Gala Committee Chair for the past 3 years. Says Erin, “Through exposure to organizations like the Bayou Land Conservancy, and business leaders in the Houston area that understand the importance of the natural world, I was inspired to continue my education and received a Master of Liberal Arts in Sustainability from the Harvard University Extension School in 2020. It’s truly an honor to be recognized by BLC, because I know the caliber of the volunteers who advance the mission of the organization.”

The Conservation Champion and Trailblazer awards will be presented at BLC’s Annual Land Lover Gala, which will be held virtually this year, from 6-7 pm on Friday, November 13th. More information about the event can be found [here](#).

About Bayou Land Conservancy: Bayou Land Conservancy protects land along streams for flood control, clean water, and wildlife. BLC is a nationally accredited, community-sponsored land preservation organization working to permanently protect land, with a focus on the streams that feed Lake Houston, an important source of drinking water for millions in the region. More information is available at our website: www.bayouland.org.

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Joe Swinbank



Don Poarch



Preserve on Spring Creek



Erin Valley Donato

