‘A neighborhoods project’

Volunteer group taking back Kalamazoo preserve

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ALAMAZOO

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ate Fuller stood in the mid-
dle of a trail in Kalamazoo’s
Kleinstuck Preserve and
made a sweeping gesture toward an
area taken over by invasive species of
plants.

“This is Eurasia in front of you,” he
said, referring to the mix of shrubs,
trees, and undergrowth, almost none
which is native.

He pointed out honeysuckle from pan,
buckthorn from Europe and a handful of other offenders that
were choking out the few native plants
that remained.

As the conservation and stewardship
director for the Southwest
Michigan Land Conservancy, Fuller’s
job is to manage land. But his daily
walks through the 48-acre preserve,
hich abuts his property and is
owned by Western Michigan
University, were becoming frustrating be-
cause it was just too much for him to
take on by himself in his free time.

“Part of me was just going crazy be-
cause I couldn’t manage it,” he said.

had, you know, these dreams of,
’ couldn’t it be great if we got all the
neighborhood involved, but I don’t
see the time or the energy’.

luckily, Fuller was not the only one
who dreamed of restoring the health
of the preserve.

A group of Kalamazoo residents
who are inspired and contacted
the MacNells, of WMU’s Landscape
Service, for help in getting started.

And then Fuller met Fuller, who jumped at the chance to
help out. He created a new program.

Now just a few months into a five-
year management plan, the Stewards
are trying to speed up the process.

A bowl-shaped area of wetlands
which is surrounded by highland forest, the reserve is a 50/50 mix of exotics
and native plants, Fuller guesses.

“Some areas, it’s 90 percent ex-
ic species or more,” Fuller said. “To
the extent, we really need a plan. So we tried
these other units and making real
progress. This is excellent.

On Mother’s Day, the Stewards plan
to put down their trash bags full of
garlic mustard and begin planting
native species, an equally important
part of the project.

“We need all the native plants that are there to come
back and thrive, but there are some
that have been lost over the years and
so we’re trying to reintroduce some
of those,” he said.

He said that while progress has
been slow, the group doesn’t expect
to expect to have the preserve in healthy
condition at the end of the five-year
plan. Full restoration will likely take
years longer.

“If the effort continues to build
like it is, it could be pretty amazing,”
Fuller said.

For Ratcliffe, the Stewards of
Kleinstuck are doing something more
than just a healthy preserve. The way
that the community surrounding the
area has become involved has been a side benefit.

“The one thing that is just so exciting
and fun for me,” Ratcliffe said, “is it feels like a neighborhoods project. It feels really great and the way a
neighborhood should work to-
gether.”

STEWARDS OF KLEINSTUCK

What: A volunteer organization
dedicated to restoring the health
of Kalamazoo’s Kleinstuck Preserve.
Where: Wetlands surrounded by the
Oakland Drive, Maple Street and
Bronson Boulevard neighborhoods.
Next workday: 3-5 p.m., May 11.
Web site: stewardsofkleinstuck.org

Rus Chmil, a steward of Kleinstuck Preserve, shakes soil off the roots of a garlic
mustard plant. Chmil and others are removing invasive plants from the preserve.