

Active devotion to Loess Hills

By Olivia Young and Jack Thumser

Chad Graeve is helping change the face of Iowa as he works to restore and preserve the Loess Hills.

Chad is the recipient of the 2011 Lawrence and Eula Hagie Heritage Award, presented annually by INHF to an individual who demonstrates extraordinary dedication to Iowa's natural places. Chad was selected this year based on his contributions to the Loess Hills Alliance (LHA) and his service to landowners in Pottawattamie County. He has been both chair and co-chair of the LHA Stewardship Committee.

"Chad has been a quiet leader working to protect and restore the Loess Hills for almost two decades," INHF President Mark Ackelson said. "We couldn't be happier to present him with the Hagie Heritage Award."

Graeve was nominated for the award by Shelley Bishop and Cal Parrott, along with Paul Koch and Melvyn Houser of the Pottawattamie County Board of Supervisors.

"Not much of what Chad does is 'inside the box,'" Bishop said. "He doesn't let his job description keep him from going those extra miles."

When Graeve first visited Bishop's land, he examined the entire property while taking the time — much of it off the clock — to explain what the Bishops could do to improve their land stewardship.

"This isn't a field where you watch the clock," Graeve said. "Nothing gets done talking about it. It only gets done by doing."

After graduating from Loras College, Graeve worked on the Wabash Trace Nature Trail summer crew that INHF



Jack Thumser

Chad Graeve overlooking the Loess Hills.

manages. He started working for the county as a seasonal employee in 1997, and later as a naturalist and park ranger at Hitchcock Nature Area north of Council Bluffs. His current title of Natural Resource Specialist doesn't come close to reflecting his deep commitment to expanding and managing the prairie and natural lands at this premier place to experience the Loess Hills.

"Chad has been a driving force in developing an innovative 50-year plan so this area of the Loess Hills will be preserved for generations," nominator Melvyn Houser said.

An Iowa native, Graeve's passion for the state is evident. It inspires his own life and serves as a call to action: "Iowa is one of the most altered states in the country," he said, "but Iowans should realize there's a lot here to protect."

Fortunately, Graeve's dedication to Iowa and the Loess Hills is not temporary.

"My wife Amy and I looked at some other opportunities, but we decided the vision here is something that I need to keep plugging away on," Graeve said.

"This is home."

Olivia Young and Jack Thumser are the current and former Robert R. Buckmaster Communications interns for INHF.



Chad Graeve was honored at an October 9th reception where he received a hand-carved acorn sculpture by Iowa artist and naturalist Dennis Schlicht, along with a cash gift from the INHF Hagie Heritage Award endowment. Chad is donating his \$1,000 cash award to help expand the Clanton Creek Natural Resource Area in Madison County.

