

Roger Johnson

Guardian of wildlife, environment

In 1990, when walking on the old Doc Marshall property near West 80th Avenue and Kipling Street, the city would disappear from sight as Roger Johnson led his children to the ponds rich with bass and wildlife. That was when signs for rezoning appeared on the property borders. Johnson, who lived near the area, realized the value of the land with its marshes, wetlands and native grasses. He described it as a “uniquely different” rural area within the city.

Encouraging neighbors to a call to action, Johnson set up meetings to discuss the potential preservation of the property. He developed public awareness to bring Arvadans together and to organize their efforts. The would-be developer named the property Two Ponds, as he defended his plan to commercialize the area. Johnson and his supporters rallied a vigorous attack against this plan. He even offered to write a personal check for \$50,000 for the developer’s option on the property to express the serious nature of the crusade to save the land.

“What we didn’t count on was the strength of our argument that the property had significant environmental value,” Johnson said. Arvadans responded positively to Johnson’s blitz to the City Council for land preservation.

Johnson started the Two Ponds Preservation Foundation to add credibility and funding to the effort. The foundation continues to operate as a way to continue to “raise the baby,” according to Johnson. His meetings with congressional representatives and senators established the federal funding to purchase the land under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Near the end of the fight to preserve the property, Johnson said he had to act quickly to defend the land against “environmental terrorism” by the disgruntled developer.

Today, the Two Ponds National Wildlife Refuge is the smallest wildlife refuge in the country located entirely in an urban community.

Johnson recognized the benefit of having this remarkable mix of geogra-



Roger Johnson led the fight against a developer to preserve wetland property, which is today the Two Ponds National Wildlife Refuge.

phy as an educational tool for others, especially schoolchildren. He emphasized the natural combination of seven different environmental regions in one place.

“You would have to take school kids to several areas to be exposed to all of the features on this property,” Johnson said. “It is excellent for environmental education in an urban setting.”

Johnson feels it is a coincidence that he lives near the property. He said he wanted to preserve this area for all Arvada residents and the surrounding regions. He remains an active volunteer at Two Ponds, taking care of the property and working to maintain the natural setting.

“If you live in a community, you should always give something back to it,” he said. “My involvement has always kept this in mind.”

At a glance

- Contribution: Created national urban wildlife, environmental refuge
- Born: June 16, 1944, in Denver
- Arvada resident: 1971 to present
- Married: Joyce on June 4, 1966
- Children: Eric, Brian and Paula
- Career: Investment advisor

Story by Diane Brunsdon-Jones
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Arvada Profiles

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