



Foreman hangs up conservation hat

DMC Conservation Department throws retirement party for Mark Lieurance.

By JEFF ABELL

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Mark Lieurance was among friends as he leaned against a partition in a former dairy barn he helped renovate into an education center at Starr's Cave Park and Preserve near Burlington.

Dressed in western attire Friday, Lieurance stood ready to ride off into the sunset like the cowboys he admired as a boy.

"It's time for me to go," said Lieurance, who is retiring as operations foreman with the Des Moines County Conservation department after 29 years of employment. "I've had some great days here, but there'll be great days ahead, too."

At Friday's retirement party, Conservation Director Kim Perlstein praised Lieurance for his years of service.

"He has been an excellent operations supervisor. He is a proven leader. They don't come any better than Mark," she said.

Over the past three decades, Lieurance, 55, said he has seen numerous changes, but added the most significant has been the creation of a 178-acre lake at the Big Hollow Recreation Area, which he initially didn't support.

"I liked it the way it was. Looking at it now, it's a real asset for the county. It's going to be a great lake," he said.

The total cost for the Big Hollow project is estimated at \$3 million, with about \$1 million coming from Vision Iowa funds. About \$600,000 has been raised for the lake project from private donations, but conservation officials will need to raise another \$2 million.

The county-owned park, west of U.S. 61 and south of Mediapolis, will feature a fully stocked lake dotted with campsite cabins, a swimming beach and hunting areas across about 800 acres.

For Lieurance, who was hired as a park ranger in 1980, retirement means more time with his wife, Cheryl, and his stable of horses on their 20-acre ranch.

Looking back at his career, Lieurance said he is thankful to be able to pursue a passion for conservation nurtured as a Boy Scout.

"I'm going to miss the daily challenges the job threw at me," he said. "I've been fortunate to have had a job I love. I've enjoyed the people I work with. You won't find any better people anywhere."

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Mark Lieurance, Des Moines County Conservation operations supervisor, looks over a handicap fishing area at the Big Hollow Lake in February at Big Hollow Creek and Recreation Area north of Burlington. Lieurance is retiring after 29 years of working for the county.