

# A LEGACY RECLAIMED

## Environmental Project at Former Kansas Quarry Receives Prestigious Honor

**T**here's a schoolhouse on the north side where Rocky Hett's aunt used to teach in the 1930s. For a relatively brief time at the turn of the century, the same building was a Martin Marietta scale house. Today, returned to the Hett family, it's a small lodge where hunters rest while pursuing quail, turkey and deer.

For the better part of 25 years, the land was home to North Marion Quarry. In January, the site was recognized as winner of the Kansas Department of Agriculture's 2018 Governor's Mined Land Reclamation Award.

**James Nicholson**, a senior environmental engineer with Martin Marietta, said the honor is appreciated, but that the greater reward has been seeing the impact of the reclaimed land on its people.

"This is one of the best parts of my job," said Nicholson, the reclamation project's lead. "This property is something we're truly proud of. We mined it and then returned it to a state as good — if not better — than it was before we arrived."

Martin Marietta took over the lease on the 640-acre site in 1989, paying the Hetts and another family to mine the limestone beneath the surface. In 2010, a third-party contractor took over operations, working the site until the rock was depleted in 2014. After selling off the stockpiled material, reclamation efforts began in 2016, Nicholson said.

The first step in the process, according to the environmental engineer, involved meeting with both property owners along with the state Department of Agriculture's Division of Conservation to determine the best options for the land's future.

Divided by a creek near the property's center, the reclamation efforts were broken down into two sections. The owners of the southern section wanted their grounds made suitable for cattle to graze. To the north, the Hetts preferred a rougher terrain that could accommodate wild game hunting. With the land owners' wishes and the requirements of the state known, Nicholson and his team moved forward.

For the better part of two years, the site was dozed, graded and seeded with a mixture of native grasses and flowers approved by the state. Additional steps were taken to minimize land erosion and create suitable wetlands across parts of the landscape. Nicholson said the



Originally constructed in 1873, this building was a schoolhouse for decades.

While it was used as a scale house when the land was an active quarry, it today stands as a hunting lodge used frequently by the Hett family.

Plant Manager Ian Osban (right) receives the 2018 Governor's Mined Land Reclamation Award from Kansas Lt. Gov. Lynn Rogers.



Photo by Bruce Lacaze

Once the site of Martin Marietta's North Marion Quarry, this reclaimed land is now used for hunting, stargazing and attracting monarch butterflies.

Arkansas District was responsible for the site and the reclamation efforts and that the team's investment has already begun to pay substantial returns.

In recent years, the Hetts have collected seeds from prairie blazing star, purple prairie clover and other wildflowers planted at the site and distributed them to friends and family. Hunters from the east coast are regularly led through the grounds and Hett has made a point of working with hunting parties from the local chapter of Wounded Warriors United. Built in 1873, the schoolhouse is a valued gathering place during these hunts.

"I was a drill sergeant while serving with the U.S. Army Reserve and the National Guard, so I was trained to pick out the flaws in anything," said the 75-year-old Hett. "It's hard to find anything bad out here. Martin Marietta has been a good company to work with."

Beyond simply benefiting from the land as Martin Marietta has prepared it, the Hett family has taken it on themselves to improve the grounds.

In 2017, the family planted 500 milkweed plants to attract monarch butterflies and other at-risk insects. They're currently working to have the site certified as a Monarch Waystation by Monarch Watch,

a University of Kansas-based nonprofit that works to educate the public about the butterflies and environmental conservation.

According to Wendy Hett, the elder Hett's daughter, the family's efforts have been rewarded; the land has won two local conservation awards and a photo of an eastern collard lizard taken on the grounds was awarded third place in Kansas Wildlife and Parks magazine's 2017 Wild about Kansas Photo Contest.

On a more personal level, the Hett family has, for generations, come together for an annual family reunion. Last summer, they celebrated their centennial event right on the former quarry grounds.

"That land has been in our family since 1965 and I survey it every day," Rocky Hett said. "My daughter and her friends sometimes go out there just to look at the stars. I really believe that God must have given it to us for a reason because it's worked out so great."

In a December letter notifying Nicholson and Martin Marietta about the reclamation award, Kansas Department of Agriculture Assistant Director Scott B. Carlson, manager of the Mined Land Reclamation Program, said his office would be submitting the North Marion project to the National Association of

State Land Reclamationists (NASLR) for consideration in its awards program later this year. While Nicholson is hopeful the project will place well in national competition, he's content at this stage simply to see the land returned to its natural beauty.

"I think this all comes back to the idea that we wanted this to be something we could all be proud of," he said. "We mined the land and provided the local community with a much-needed natural resource for decades. When that opportunity passed, we took the time and effort to return the property to its natural state. We've done the right thing for this land and for its owners and that's something we should all feel good about." ▼

#### A MARTIN MARIETTA VALUE

The North Marion reclamation project is a perfect example of the company's **stewardship** focus. In every Martin Marietta division, there are environmental engineers like James Nicholson who work to make sure our ultimate impact on the earth is negligible.



Sections of North Marion that were overgrown after the site was mined (left) have been replanted with natural grasses (right).

Photo submitted by the Hett family

Photo by James Nicholson