

# Humble beginnings

Emily Hunter Connell, former SFH executive director, discusses organization's inception and mission

## At the beginning, what brought the first tentative board together?

The thing that bound all of us together was our love for the Flint Hills and the tallgrass prairie. Now that's the common bond very different people had.

## What made raising awareness of the Flint Hills and tallgrass prairie so imperative at that time?

We just thought, 'We may lose these hills, and we may lose them because we don't have friends in high places; we don't have friends in influential places, and we don't have the right numbers.'

## Why a symphony in a field?

The most effective thing that we knew was Jane's symphony, and so we decided to use that format of a symphony in the native landscape as a way to magnetize people to come into the hills that



Emily Hunter Connell

would normally not come. They would be intrigued, we hoped, like we all were, by the juxtaposition of a very sophisticated form of art in a wild bioregion.

## Why should people care about preserving the prairie?

The prairie is a genius. We are surrounded by genius when we are in the prairie, and we have so much to learn from it. Humans, like us, have a very strong tendency to refer to our own mind and imagination as both problem identifiers and problem solvers when, in fact, we are often problem causers. And there are teachers who are outside of ourselves who show us if we would just be a little humbler and go look and go ask about how it is that a prairie assembled itself and how it has survived all of these years, and what are the qualities?

## What is one of your biggest takeaways?

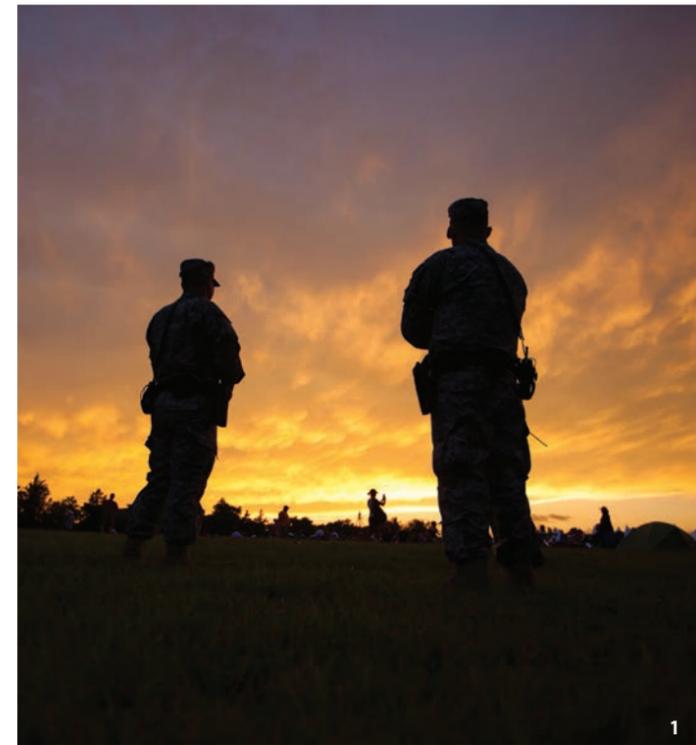
It's such a collaborative event. And I'm finding that more and more important things in this world are collaborative events.

## PETER COYOYE NARRATES

Emmy-award winning American author, actor, director and screenwriter Peter Coyote narrated the sixth symphony on Fix Pasture in Wabaunsee County between Alta Vista and Alma. Most veteran visitors claim the weather that day was the best in the event's 10-year history.



Soprano Aundi Marie Moore performs during the 2012 Symphony in the Flint Hills. The singer has performed for various operas, including the Atlanta Opera, the Virginia Opera, Sarasota Opera and the National Symphony Orchestra. Photo by Kaitlin Whelan



1. Private First Class Tyler Swanson and Sgt. Jonathan King patrol the grounds of the 2013 Symphony in the Flint Hills in historic Fort Riley. Photo by Kelly Glasscock

2. Sgt. Tommy Evans prepares to present the colors before the start of the 2013 concert. Photo by Jen Bookhout



3. First Sgt. Albert Curley displays his medals: (left to right) bronze star, purple heart, good conduct, two service medals and (above) a combat infantry pin. Photo by Melissa McGinty

## THE DAY THE WIND BLEW

The ninth annual concert was a windy one. The symphony took place on Rosalia Ranch, near El Dorado — the closest the event has ever been to Wichita. Wind gusts topped 40 mph that June day in Butler County, forcing the art and retail tents, made to only withstand 40 mph wind, to shut down as a safety concern.



The limestone ranch house sits near Prairie Kansas Highway 177 on the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. The home was completed in 1881. Photo by Christopher Bardo



## LYLE LOVETT AND STORM SCARE

For the fifth anniversary, the symphony returned to Chase County for a third time, this time on the South Clements Pasture in Chase County near Bazaar. Grammy award-winning artist Lyle Lovett, friend of property owner Ed Bass, performed during the concert. At the end of the night, attendees scattered to their cars to escape threatening weather.



## SOPRANO AUNDI MARIE MOORE

The seventh annual concert took place on Leet Pasture in Lyon County near Bushong. Aundi Marie Moore, one of America's leading young sopranos, joined the Kansas City Symphony on stage. With a background in opera and symphonic performances, she was a welcomed fit on the symphony stage.



## FORT RILEY: A CHANGE OF SCENERY

For the first time in the symphony's history, the event took place on a U.S. Army post rather than in a pasture. Concert attendees gave mixed reviews about the location, but the change in scenery added a new historic element to the organization's mission. "They have been the protector of the prairie since 1853," organizers said at the time.



## RETURN TO THE PRESERVE

For the 10-year anniversary, the Symphony in the Flint Hills returned to its birthplace, the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Chase County near Cottonwood Falls. Lyle Lovett also returned to the site to perform during the second half of the concert. The organization extended its mission in 2015 to include the preservation of grasslands from around the world.