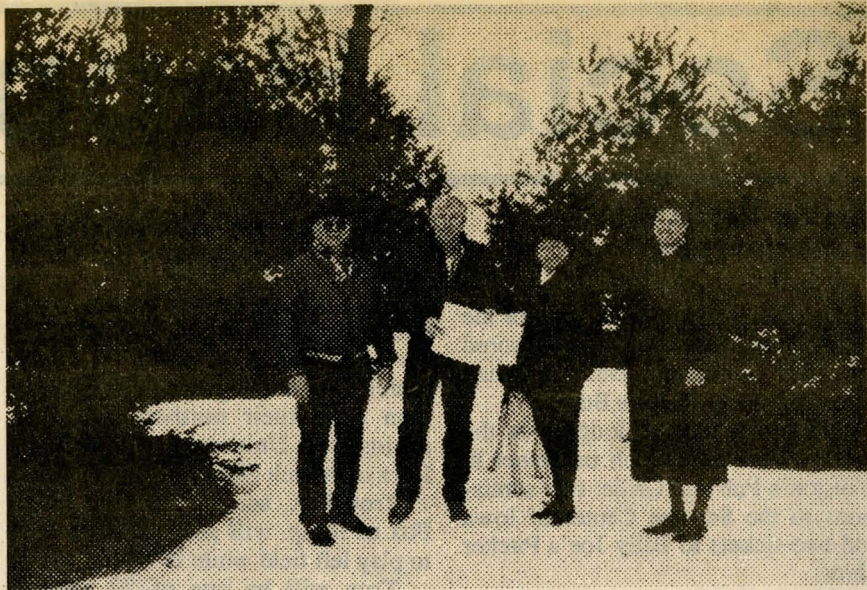




Award-winning windbreak. Robert and Alice Sienknecht of rural Dunkerton won the Izaak Walton League Windbreak Award recently. Shown from left to right are Nick Frost, President of the Waterloo chapter of the Izaak Walton League, Robert and Alice Sienknecht and Black Hawk Conservation Commissioner, Janeen Seehase of Jesup. Photo courtesy of Mike Webster, District Conservationist.

Dunkerton farmer plants award-winning windbreak

By Deb Holt

When Robert and Alice Sienknecht of rural Dunkerton faced the back-breaking chore of planting a windbreak more than 13 years ago, they didn't realize that the nearly 300 eighteen-inch seedlings would win them an award, the Izaak Walton League Windbreak Award.

The windbreak is comprised of four rows of trees; the outer two rows are arborvitaes, the third row is made up of white pines and the fourth row consists of Black Hills spruces.

The Sienknechts' farmstead windbreak was nominated for the Izaak Walton League's award by the Black Hawk Soil and Water Conservation District. Janeen Seehase of Jesup, conservation commissioner, first spotted the windbreak and recommended it for the award.

"We have been involved in presenting this award for about 20 years," said Nick Frost, president of the Waterloo chapter of the Izaak Walton League. "The League is interested in all aspects of preservation and conservation."

The Sienknechts' incorporated a gradual curve into their windbreak, located just north of their house.

"A neighbor, Joel Magee, came over the day we planted," explained Robert. "He drove his pickup truck in the curve and we planted in his tire tracks. It was perfect."

The Sienknechts ran tile at the site of the windbreak prior to planting. "Evergreens don't do well with wet feet," said Robert.

Alice recalled plenty of watering of the trees during the dry years. "It seemed to take them forever to grow at first," she said.

The farmstead has plenty of deciduous trees planted near the house and other farm buildings in addition to the windbreak. The Sienknechts' goal is to plant one tree a year. They hope to plant a ghinko tree in the near future and replace several older soft maples with hybrid poplars.

"The poplars will protect the arborvitaes from windburn," said Robert. "They're fast growing and live for about thirty years. They should make a thick habitat for pheasants."

Windbreaks not only block winds from the north and west during the cold winter months, they also diminish soil erosion and provide shelter for small animals such as squirrels, rabbits and pheasants.

Robert and Alice moved to their present farm in 1962. They are full-time corn and soybean producers and raise 125 dairy beef calves.

"Some environmental people think farmers don't do well (with the environment)," Robert said, "but that's not so. It's our livelihood. We can't destroy it."