

Interview with OLTA volunteer, Kristie Virgoe



Kristie Virgoe (pictured above) is the Past Chair of the OLTA Board of Governors. As a leadership volunteer, Kristie dedicates her time to ensuring OLTA continues steadily forward with its mission to strengthen land conservation in Ontario by building and supporting a strong land trust movement.

OLTA is fortunate to have someone so experienced at OLTA's helm. Kristie is the current Director, Stewardship and Conservation Lands at Kawartha Conservation. In fact, she started her career with Kawartha Conservation where she led the Stewardship and Land Protection divisions for over eight years as the Manager of Environmental Protection and Restoration. Since that time she has worked for OLTA as Program Manager, the Muskoka Conservancy as their Executive Director, and the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust as their Program Manager.

We recently sat down with Kristie to find out why she decided to volunteer her time with OLTA, and what motivates her to stay involved in a volunteer capacity. Here's what she had to say:

Q. How long have you been a volunteer/board member with OLTA?

I joined the board at OLTA in October of 2015. In the spring of 2016 I stepped in as the acting Vice Chair which later became a permanent appointment. At the AGM in 2016 I was elected Chair of the Board.

Q. What attracted you to OLTA in particular?

I believe in OLTA. I think that volunteerism comes from the things we feel most passionate about. I believe that the Land Trust Movement in Ontario is essential to helping local communities connect to nature locally. As a young adult, I would wander the forest of a local property with my brothers and friends. It became a mainstay for us. A touchstone when times were tough, and a place to celebrate when things were wonderful. We still go there. Now, we take our kids there and we meet each other there to reconnect with the land, with each other, and with ourselves. If it weren't for the local land trust, that property would be developed now and we would have lost a vital part of who we are and our sense of place. I believe that OLTA is a force for building the strength of our Land Trusts. I believe OLTA offers much needed support, a sense of community, and a unified voice to the Land Trusts in Ontario. Our work isn't always easy, it isn't always easily seen, but it is ALWAYS worthwhile!

Q. What motivates you to keep volunteering with OLTA/other organizations?

As I said before, I think our motivation for volunteering comes from our passion for the mission of the organization. These aren't logical decisions we make, they are emotional decisions. I volunteer with organizations I believe in. I offer my spare time to causes that resonate with me. Look, at the end of the day I'm not the wisest person in the room, I'm not the richest, and I'm certainly not the most talented. But I believe in the work we do and I know, first hand, the impact that access to wild spaces has on people and communities. I want to be a part of that. In some small way, I want to make a difference.

Q. Does anyone in your life play a role in supporting your involvement? In providing inspiration?

Wow, great question! First of all, my family. My husband and son are so patient with me whenever I come home with another cause! They know how important these things are to me and they support my involvement. My employer as well. Kawartha Conservation has been a tremendous support for my involvement in OLTA and with local land trusts. Having the support of family and work really makes a difference. As far as inspiration goes, my Mom has been a huge factor in role as a volunteer. When I was growing up she was always involved in helping others. Sometimes it was through

a Lady's Auxiliary lunch, sometimes it was a church event, and sometimes it was just through offering a safe place to sleep and a warm meal to people in need. I've seen her go without so that she can buy groceries for a neighbour. When I look at her, I see someone who always does whatever she can to reduce the suffering of others. She never looks for thanks, she never looks for recognition. She doesn't do it because people are watching. She does it because she believes it is the right thing to do. She gives her time and then worries that she hasn't given enough. When I look at my Mom I see a woman who has impacted the lives of thousands of people through the tireless hours of effort she gives to her causes. She has made the world a little more friendly, a little safer. She's made a difference. While our causes may differ slightly, when I grow up...I want to be just like my mom.

Q. What would you say to someone who doesn't think they have anything to offer as a volunteer?

The first question I would ask is...what do you love? What are you passionate about? You don't have to be the wisest, the richest, or the most talented voice in the room. If you have passion then you have something to offer. Because volunteering is about giving your time. It is such a valuable resource and it isn't a renewable one. If you give your time to a cause then you are providing the most valuable resource there is. Show up, ask questions, be willing. You'll learn, you'll grow, and you'll make a difference.

THANK YOU KRISTIE, for all that you do to protect the land we love!!