



# Family preserves sacred Pawnee land

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*Fremont Tribune*

**P**at Leading Fox stood on a bluff overlooking the Platte River near here on Friday morning, enjoying a sense a homecoming.

"It's a pretty nice view. I feel like I belong here. It feels like being at home," said Leading Fox, head chief of the Nashara Council of the Pawnee Nation.

Leading Fox and three other Pawnee traveled from Oklahoma to witness the Friday morning dedication of 257 acres of land to permanent preservation. The land, owned by Pat and Nancy Shanahan, includes the sacred Pawnee ground known as Pahaku or Pahuk Hill, situated on a high bluff along the river south of Fremont.

Through a conservation easement, the land will be protected permanently from development. The Nebraska Land Trust purchased development rights to the land so the property can never be subdivided and buildings can never be constructed on it. However, the Shanahans can still farm the land and pass it down to their descendants, said Dave Sands, executive director.

The Shanahans were recognized for donating a substantial portion of the land's value. The Natural Resources and Conservation Service provided 50 percent of the easement's value and the Nebraska Environmental Trust provided a \$77,280 grant.

About 40 people attended the dedication.

Leading Fox said he is grateful the Pawnee site will be preserved. "We consider this place very sacred," he said, comparing it to the Temple Mount for Jews and Mecca for Muslims.

Many stories surround the site, but Leading Fox said it is the place of an animal lodge. Animals would pick a person,



CHRIS BRISTOL/Fremont Tribune

James Knife Chief videotapes his view from the bluff on the Shanahan Easement northeast of Cedar Bluffs on Friday, while Pat Leading Fox takes in the view for the first time. The easement is of historical significance to the Pawnee Nation.

**'We consider this place very sacred.'**

— Pat Leading Fox,  
 head chief of the Nashara Council of the Pawnee Nation

take him into their lodge and teach him how to heal people, divulging their secrets of which herbs to use. The person then would become a doctor to his people.

"That's gone now," Leading Fox said. "Nobody is practicing that in our tribe that I know of."

But the site is important, and Leading Fox commended the Shanahans for their decision. "I hope you have many blessings for what you have done," he said.

Pat Shanahan was hesitant to talk before the group, but smiled as he spoke briefly.

"I'm just happy to do this. ... I couldn't see ruining the farm and letting people come in and develop it," he said.

Shanahan's mother, Jeannine, who lives in Fremont, was excited to see the preservation effort.

"I'm glad we're doing something good for the state of Nebraska and the people," she said.

Besides protecting farmland and a sacred Pawnee site, the move also preserves a bluff with ecological importance, Sands said. The eastern oak/hickory woodland and other plants reach the absolute western edge of their range on this bluff.

From a woodland standpoint, this is where the west begins, he said.

"Preservation of this land will certainly preserve these exceptional resources," Sands said.

Those attending included Nebraska author Roger Welsch.