



The Illinois Prairie Path Newsletter

June 2015

A BIG Thank You to all of our members!

By Erik Andersen

Did you ever wonder how your membership dollars are being used to improve the Path?

It's important that you, a valued member of the Illinois Prairie Path, know that your membership dollars are making the Path better. Our mission is to improve and preserve the path, and your dollars are hard at work doing exactly that. The attached graph shows where expenditures were made last fiscal year.

Twenty-five cents of every dollar received was spent on prairie restoration. Twenty-one cents was spent on advocating for the trail and history preservation, and

nineteen cents was spent on litter removal and portable restroom services. You can see from the graph that other important efforts were also funded such as web page enhancements and an electronic map, newsletters and donations to groups that promote trail usage and growth.

While the programs each year will be somewhat different, we will always keep a focus on the basics of prairie restoration, a clean enjoyable trail, and advocacy to promote trail usage for people of all ages and interests. Your membership is critical in these important efforts. Without that, the Path becomes totally dependent upon government funding, and we all know how that can change if those budgets come under pressure.

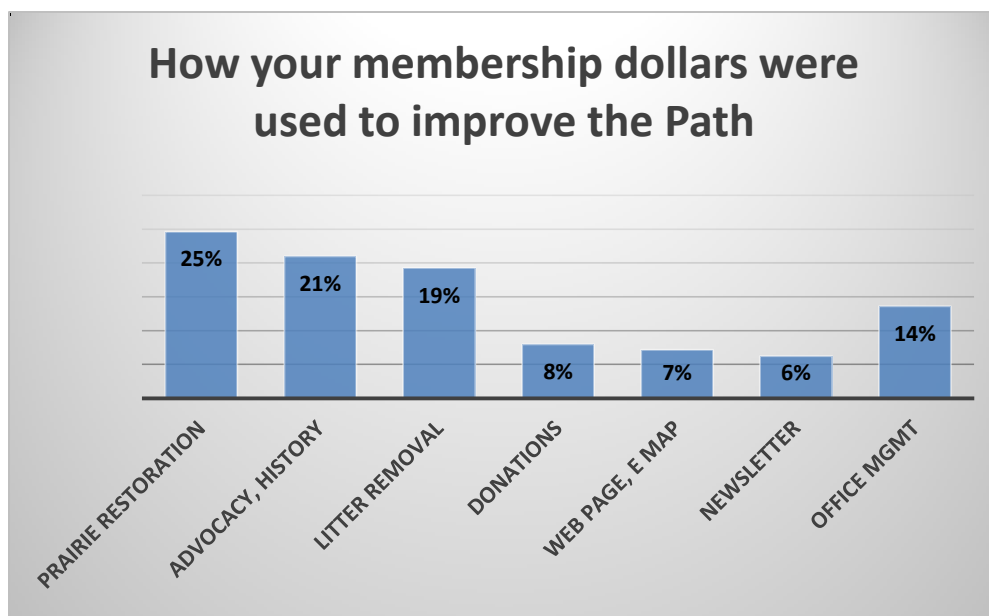
We hope we can count on your continued support and membership. Please make sure to renew when you receive notice that your annual membership is expiring. And also, you can be a valuable missionary for the path. If you have neighbors or friends who use the path but aren't members, ask them to join. It's easy and doesn't cost much. Direct them to our website at www.ipp.org and take a couple minutes to join. Remember, the path benefits from your investment. It also benefits from the many volunteer efforts coordinated by the IPP(c).

Most of all, enjoy the path! Warm weather is finally here.

Trail Reporters needed to help keep the Path clean and safe

By Alan Bergeson

Attention walkers, runners, cyclists, equestrians and others who use the Illinois Prairie Path. You are invited to participate in the Trail Reporter program. As you travel the Path and observe any issues regarding maintenance or safety, you will be provided with a dedicated email address to communicate directly with Dan Thomas, Trail Path Coordinator for DuPage County. You must be a member of the Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation (IPPc) to participate. For more information contact Alan Bergeson at alanbergeson@comcast.net. We look forward to hearing from you and seeing you on the Illinois Prairie Path.



Thanks to Annual Earth Day Volunteers who cleaned the Path in cold and rain!



By Susan Degnan

Earth Day was a day of remembrance as the skies let loose with a steady rain. However, that didn't stop the dedicated volunteers who came out to remove trash on the trails of the Illinois Prairie Path and the Great Western Trail. Cities, towns and villages pulled their weight, as well as a few of our remote locations by being a part of teams who braved the elements and did the job on April 25, 2015. The IPP(c) extends a big "thank you" to all who came out to help keep the spirit of Earth Day.



Part 1: Developing a Forest Garden along the Path

In 1964, founder May Watts wrote the script for a film strip that contained her vision of a Prairie Path. At Slide 87 she explained the *Round Fruits* photo: “Whatever the interest is in – hearts or horses, birds or bicycles, everyone will enjoy an occasional nibble of the many wild fruits that will adorn the Illinois Prairie Path.” Over 50 years later, her vision of a forest garden along the Path, thanks to the Resiliency Institute, is becoming a reality.



“Round Fruits”

Who proposed the idea of a Food Forest?

In May 2013, **Michelle Hickey** and **Jodi Trendler** from the **Resiliency Institute** (theresiliencyinstitute.net) attended a meeting of the DuPage County Environmental Commission. When the subject of supporting community gardens was brought up, **Michelle** gave a brief speech about food security and the importance of preserving public spaces for growing food. At the end of the meeting, **Dan Thomas**, Trail Coordinator / Principal Planner, DuPage County Division of Transportation, invited Michelle and Jodi to his office to talk about areas along the trail system that might provide opportunities for growing an edible forest garden pilot project.

What are the Benefits? An Edible Forest Garden...



- Provides fresh local food to the community
- Demonstrates a commitment to food security and ecological restoration
- Reduces or eliminates lawn maintenance costs
- Creates a community park
- Serves as an outdoor classroom or educational resource
- Connects people to food and nature
- Inspires the growth of individual edible forest gardens
- Increases wildlife biodiversity and habitat

When/how was a site selected?

In September, 2014 Michelle and Jodi reconnected with Dan to identify a handful of prospective properties, quickly narrowing the selection to the site of the Ferry Forest Garden. Michelle explained, “This site was the most desirable because it was a large underutilized lawn space that required regular maintenance by the County, **was along the Illinois Prairie Path**, close to existing forest and in northern Naperville which expanded our reach.”



The location of the Ferry Forest Garden is on Ferry Road, near Hwy. 59.

When did the work begin?

“Dan acted as our liaison,” she added, “and supporter for navigating the County permitting process and in November, 2014, The Resiliency Institute hosted two **Permablitz** (a work *and* learn volunteer experience) events to sheet mulch the 1/3 acre site. Sheet mulching is a technique used to kill grass and transition the soil from bacterial to fungal in preparation for planting woody perennials. We added soil amendments, then layered cardboard over the grass, and topped the cardboard with dry fall leaves and wood chips. All of the cardboard was donated by area businesses, the leaves dropped off by the City of Naperville, wood chips dropped off by several tree care companies, and all of the labor volunteered. The weather did turn very cold and wet quickly, so we did have to rent a front loader to complete the moving of leaves, mulch and logs.”



Sheet mulching volunteers

PART 2: To be continued in the Path’s September 2015 Newsletter

Volunteers and donors are needed to complete this project. Contact Michelle or Jodi to donate your time and talents. **Membership dues enabled the Illinois Prairie Path to donate \$600 to purchase all of the trees.**

Explore the new loop trail from the Path to St. James Farm

The Forest Preserve District (FPD) of DuPage County opened a new two-mile limestone loop trail at St. James Farm Forest Preserve in Warrenville during the preserve's May 23 "Family Field Day" event.

This new trail offers a great opportunity to add a few miles to your ride and get to know St. James Farm Forest Preserve better. In addition, the FPD recently re-surfaced and re-graded the cracked, steep surface area north of the IPP underpass of IL 56 at St. James Farm. This replaces the cracked, steep surface that had previously existed. All of these improvements were identified in the 2010 St. James Farm Master Plan that sought to improve access to amenities within St. James.

The trail, one of many ongoing improvements at the preserve, connects to the Illinois Prairie Path and circles the preserve's main and eastern farm areas. Much of it follows historic trail alignments and tree-lined promenades to minimize habitat disturbance while creating scenic outdoor experiences. The project was funded in part by a \$200,000 grant from the Federal Highway Administration for the Recreational Trails Program, which is administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.



Eugene Lewis, Legacy Volunteer recalls origins of the Prairie Path

Gene died on April 25 at his home in Fort Bragg, California. He believed he would be remembered "probably as an unrepentant railroad man," but his Path colleagues remember him as a valiant volunteer (and Board Secretary) who defended the Path against opponents during the Path's formative years (1968-1980).



For 33 years, he was a civil engineer and corporate consultant for the Chicago & North Western Railway. He wrote *12,000 Days on the North Western Line*, an account of his railroad career published and distributed by the Chicago & North Western Historical Society in 2006.

"The CA&E was an old friend and had operated through the southern part of our town. So we often saw the abandoned right-of-way and remarked on its desolation. My wife, Barbara Lewis, noticed the abundant growth of native grasses along the former line and mentioned their occurrence to May Watts and the *Sketching Gardeners*. Soon they descended on the site and began recording the big bluestem, rattlesnake master, prairie lupine, etc. At that meeting Barbara said that it was a shame that this environment could not be protected and preserved all along the former railroad. The idea took hold and was discussed at length by the gardeners. May Watts said she would write to the *Chicago Tribune* and the Illinois Prairie Path idea was born."

He recalled, "May Watts with her far-ranging contacts was a tower of strength through those early days. A positive event was the application for National Trail Status."

Gene developed, copyrighted and marketed a computer-based geographic database (1964-1980). He also authored a series of books *Births, Deaths and Marriages on the Mendocino Coast, 1889-1999* for which he received a Distinguished Achievement Award from the California State Genealogical Alliance in 2001. He donated his entire slide collection to Jean and Paul Mooring, and his slides, biography and selected letters are now part of the Illinois Prairie Path Collection at the North Central College Archives.



In 1979, Gene (and other Path board members) were at the historic signing of the acquisition of 4.5 miles of right-of-way by the Illinois Department of Conservation to develop the Path in Cook County.