



Michelle Jaques, editor • michelle@fotfp.org • Volume 12, Issue 3 • Cook County, Illinois • Fall 2012

2 years in, the ship is turning

By Benjamin Cox

Friends has been cautious about the new administration at times, but after two years the report includes both progress and hope.

General Superintendent Arnold Randall is working to change the culture of the institution, which is no small task. For him, it's all about the "buy in," a phrase that he uses often, because without it, real change can't happen.

Much of what is happening came out of the work of the policy team, made up of advocates and volunteers including Friends and led by Randall, which President Toni Preckwinkle formed to set the direction for reform at the District.

From the software used to track finances, to a more transparent budget that shows actual past expenditures, to a flat out desire to just be able to spend money (more on that later), finances are a big part of the change.

For many years both Friends and the Civic Federation called on the Forest Preserve District of Cook County to be transparent about how the budget was actually being spent. Budgets were only plans, without "actuals" showing what happened the year before. Now, for the first time in memory, that's changed.

"(Showing actuals) shines a light on how we spend money, and it will help us decide how to better spend it going forward," Randall said.

This fall the District adopted a Minority and Women Business Enterprises policy, which requires that 25 percent of contracts go to MBE and 5 percent to WBE, something that peers couldn't believe wasn't already in place, he said.

Since 1978, the District has operated under the court-ordered Shakman Decree, which resulted from a lawsuit that specifically prohibits hiring practices from being influenced by any political reason.

Now, if anyone acts inappropriately with regard to hiring, the District takes very strong action against them, up to and including termination. And, Randall said, "the amount of discipline in the last two years far exceeds what happened before" - not just with regard to hiring, but



Cristina Rutter

"I am proud of what Arnold Randall and his team have accomplished in the forest preserves over the past year and am enthusiastic about the future. From bringing public camping back to the District, to developing a new habitat restoration master plan, to kicking off our centennial celebration, 2013 promises to be an exciting year. We will continue to work closely with our partners at Friends of the Forest Preserves and other organizations to accomplish the important goals that we all share," said Forest Preserve District of Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle.

with overall job performance for all employees.

"It sets a tone, weeds it out," he said. "People know it's not the way it used to be."

Rather than continuing to simply work under the hiring monitor, which makes it extremely cumbersome to hire and promote good people, the Superintendent is determined to create "a new employment plan that eliminates political hiring and influence" with less bureaucracy.

He believes that they are steps away from having the system in place that will allow them to no longer need a legal monitor reviewing every step of every hire - which has also been very costly for the District.

The District was running with very high vacancy rate (Friends has estimated it to be as high as 25 percent at times), meaning that a significant portion of the budget was allocated for non-existent staff. Money was spent in other ways, not reflected in the budget. Or funds just rolled over, which is part of what has made the District a fiscally sound government agency; a good thing, but only up to a point.

"There wasn't an organizational desire to spend" the funds to meet the District's identified needs, Randall

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News from around the District

1 District moving aggressively on land acquisition; 250 acres purchased

An updated 2012 Land Acquisition Plan was released by the District this fall. With real estate opportunities and conditions changing drastically in recent years, the District approved a new plan intended to be used over the next five to 10 years. With available proceeds from refinancing bonds, the District has dedicated an additional \$27 million toward land acquisition and is in active negotiations or has already closed on several hundred acres of land.

This fall, the District has acquired 161.58 acres of land adjacent to the south boundary of Orland Grassland near Orland Park for \$8 million. Two more parcels of 41.13 acres for \$100,000 and 47.94 acres for \$250,000 have been acquired near the Michael O'Malley Preserve near Sauk Village.

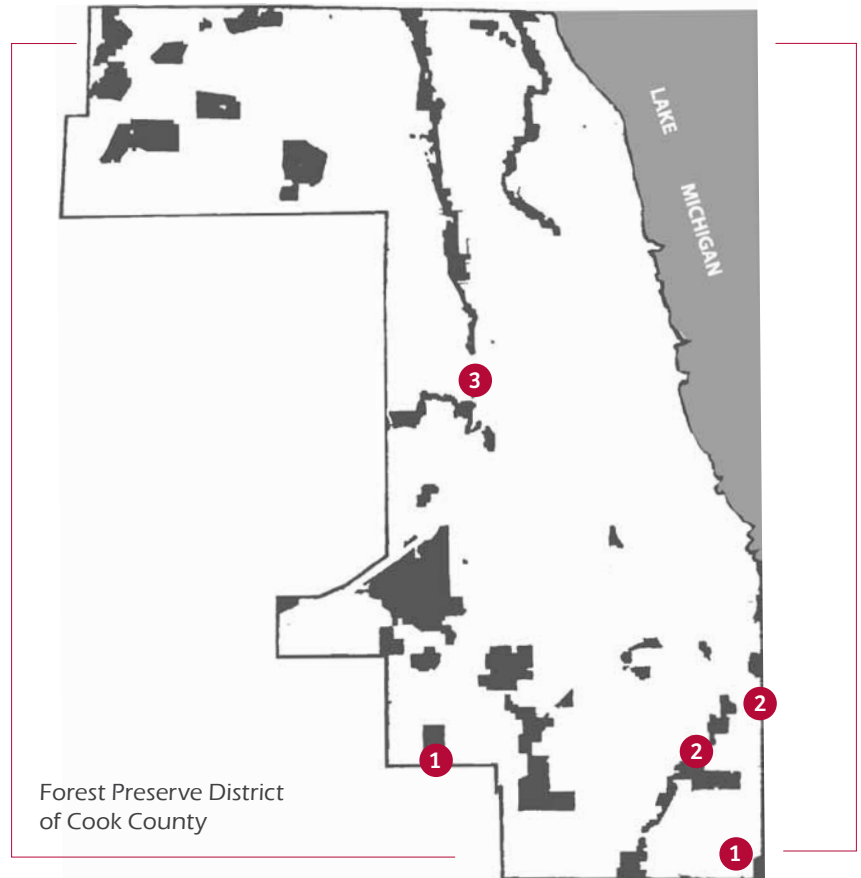
2 District receives more than \$563,646 in grants, assistance

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Services granted \$33,646, half of the project costs, to the District to remove invasive species at Powderhorn Prairie on Chicago's south side. In addition, two interpretive signs will be installed, highlighting the unique plant and animal communities found on the site.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation awarded a \$100,000 grant to the District through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative program to restore more than 130 acres of lakeplain habitat including sand savanna, sand prairie, marsh swale and riparian woodlands by removing invasive species in the Thornton-Lansing Road Nature Preserve (Zander Woods) near Glenwood. The total project cost is estimated to be \$219,920.

An additional \$350,000 was awarded through the GLRI program in partnership with Audubon-Chicago Region to facilitate the efforts of the District to restore and connect natural and human communities in the Calumet Region. The project goals include restoring some 160 acres of diverse ecosystems and, through the partnership, to hire outreach coordinators to connect the local community with the forest preserves.

Friends of the Chicago River has received an \$80,000 grant to establish the Gully Monitoring Project from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation. The project



goal is to establish a volunteer gully monitoring initiative over two years that will focus, in part, on gullies in the forest preserves. Gullies are formed when stormwater runoff flows through the landscape in an unnatural fashion, often gathering pollution, as it heads to nearby rivers. Identifying the gullies and eventually addressing their source, including restoring the landscape, will enhance the natural capacity of the forest preserves as well as the rivers.

3 Miller Meadow fence coming down

The chain link fence at Miller Meadow, surrounding more than 40 acres of land that was turned into a dumping ground for construction debris, is finally being removed. The fence restricted access to an area that has been partially ecologically restored. Friends members and advocates have worked for a number of years now to ensure that Miller Meadow, the site of two deep tunnel project drop shafts, is restored to usable condition for preserve users and wildlife. Next steps in Friends' recommendations to the District include installation of a trail and improvement of what remains of the creek and its outfall to the Des Plaines River.

Connect with Friends on Facebook at facebook.com/forestpreserves

Highway Department required to examine alternatives to Quentin expansion

By Douglas Chien

It is often said that no bad political idea ever truly dies. Fortunately, Friends' vigilance never diminishes, either.

This fall, as we heard rumblings about the Cook County Highway Department resuming their push to expand Quentin Road, we resumed our efforts to support a solution that addressed all issues in a manner that would not endanger residents or harm Deer Grove Forest Preserve.

With help from the Chicago Environmental Law Clinic, we now know that Deer Grove and the expansion of Quentin Road will get the proper study that it deserves.

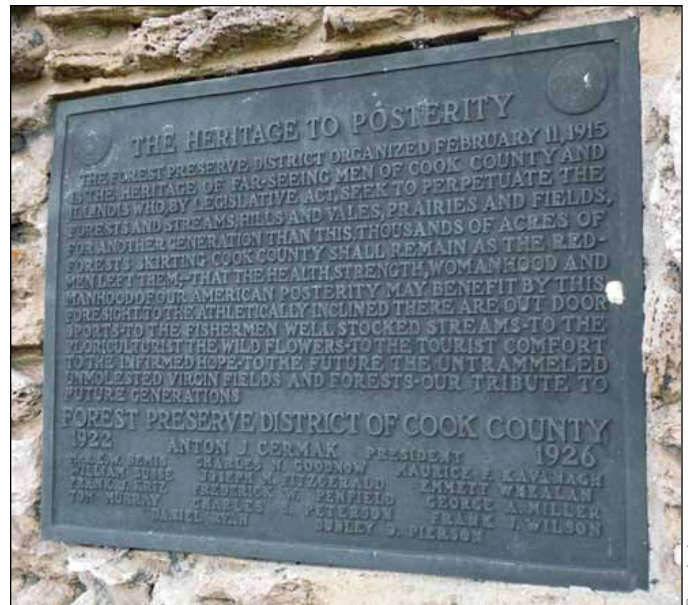
Deer Grove is our Nation's, even the World's, first forest preserve and has been protected public land for nearly 100 years. It is home to woodlands and savanna with centuries-old oak trees, recently restored wetlands, and other habitats providing a refuge for at least seven kinds of threatened and endangered plants and animals. Quentin Road bisects it north to south.

The Highway Department proposes to greatly expand Quentin Road from two-lanes to a five-lane highway. Their primary rationale seems to be the fact that since Quentin Road north and south of Deer Grove is already five-lanes, why not expand the section in-between. Since 2008, when this proposal first surfaced, Friends and a local citizens group, Build Quentin Right, brought attention to the various issues that the Highway Department failed to consider.

Issues such as: Safety – What is the impact of additional traffic on the neighborhoods adjacent to and users of Deer Grove? Pollution – What is the expected increase of air, water, noise and salt pollution? Groundwater – How will residents who rely on well water for drinking be impacted? Will the water supply for the Deer Grove East wetland mitigation project be harmed? Sewage – Will sewage leach fields be relocated or sewer mains need to be installed? Wetlands – What is the associated dollar value to do the required mitigation? Where and how will mitigation be accomplished? Wildlife – What is the anticipated impact upon amphibians and other wildlife? Land – What would the direct loss of part of Deer Grove Preserve really mean? How will renovations to Camp Reinberg be affected? Since 2008 the Highway Department consistently dismissed these issues and put forth claims about traffic volumes and highway manual recommendations as justification. Their only desire seemed to be to push as many cars through Deer Grove as possible. They also claimed an

Friends is pleased to support the Forest Preserve District in their efforts to reduce any negative impacts on Deer Grove Forest Preserve while improving access and safety. We support:

- **Realigning the east and west entrances**
- **Constructing an underpass or overpass for users**
- **Efforts to reduce amphibian and animal roadkill**
- **Improvements to Camp Reinberg**
- **Building a multi-use path along the east side of Quentin Road from Lake-Cook to Dundee roads.**



Pete Jackson

A historic plaque proclaims the importance of the Nation's first forest preserve, Deer Grove near Palatine. Friends now knows that the Cook County Highway Department will have to do an expanded environmental impact study on a road expansion that will impact the preserve, otherwise Friends will sue them and force them to do it.

exemption from their own "Complete Streets" policy – a good policy requiring broader considerations than just moving cars.

Not content to accept the Highway Department's excuses, Friends engaged the Chicago Environmental Law Clinic to research potential legal courses of action. In early-December we were very pleased to learn that the Highway Department is required by Federal law to consider all reasonable alternatives and their potential impacts. In other words, the five-lane solution could not be forced upon Deer Grove and the local neighborhoods.

Previously the Highway Department used a preliminary study to claim that they didn't have to do a more extensive study. The fact that up to seven T&E species might be impacted by the expansion requires the Highway Department to do a more extensive study. If they do not, third party groups, such as Friends, can sue the Highway Department and require them to start over with the project.

Friends is now calling upon the Highway Department to conduct a full Environmental Impact Statement to comply with the Federal National Environmental Policy Act. The EIS should contain a thorough and unbiased assessment of potential solutions and alternatives, such as two travel lanes with a center turn lane, inclusion of a new bike path, improvements to other nearby roads, signal improvements, or even no expansion of Quentin Road. Public input is required throughout the EIS development.

We are currently awaiting a response from the Highway Department and look forward to seeing all potential solutions get a thorough review. A wise and legal needs to be consider a wide range of issues and solve more than one problem, not just move cars.



George Birmingham

The Forest Preserve Leadership Corps fills a gap in our internship programs for high school graduates that aren't yet old enough to be crew leaders for our summer high school internship program.

Bridging the internship gap

By Whitney Behr

Michelle Murawski wanted to pursue an environmental career, but feared she wouldn't be able to find a job – a harsh reality for many young people today. She supposed she would study nursing like her mother had, believing there to be a stable future in that field. Instead, she heard about Friends' newest intern program, the Forest Preserve Leadership Corps, which is designed to provide opportunities for recent high school graduates like Michelle who are longing for opportunities in the environmental field. Now, she's well on her way to pursuing her dream of a future in conservation.

Last year, Friends' Conservation Director Alice Brandon noticed a troubling gap in opportunities for young people ages 18 to 20. Students would repeatedly earn positions in the wildly successful summer high school internship program only to be shut out when they turned 18.

"Passionate summer program graduates would call me and ask 'How can I stay involved?'" Brandon recalls. "But we didn't have any positions for them until they qualified for a crew leader position at 21. The three years between 18 and 21 are very important for these young people and

we wanted to expand our programming to fill that gap."

The Forest Preserve Leadership Corps was born.

The FPLC, which began in September, is a 30-week paid internship for adults aged 18 to 20, created in partnership with the Student Conservation Association and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. It is a different from other Friends internships in that in addition to field restoration work, interns will also be representing Friends in a community leadership and outreach capacity.

All of the interns successfully graduated from one or more years of the high school summer internship program, each of them has a solid knowledge base in invasive species, trail work, conservation and forest preserve issues.

Under the direct guidance of crew leader Daiva Gyls, the interns will expand their knowledge and be connected with professionals in diverse environmental and conservation fields. To date, the interns have completed the Chicago Wilderness Prescribed Burn Training, the FPDCC's new Brushpile Burn Training, Wilderness First Aid Training, and have acquired their herbicide licenses.

"It brings maturity into the equation. In learning how to cope with diverse environmental conditions, you become a diverse person," FPLC intern Devon Brown said, reflecting on his four years in Friends and SCA internship programs. "And, you know you're leaving behind something for younger generations."

Without this program, many of these interns would be following different paths, unaware of the opportunities in the environmental field.

"This program builds character," said intern Dyrrell Williams. "I've learned how connected I am to everything and I've found a lot of people I can look up to."

FPLC interns are well on their way to becoming influential conservation leaders in their communities. Throughout the coming months, the interns will sharpen their leadership skills by representing Friends at a variety of outreach events, conferences and volunteer workdays. Since the interns are over 18, they are eligible for many certification and leadership opportunities they didn't have access to in the high school program. As Friends branches out to new audiences and invests in established relationships, the FPLC interns will be working side-by-side with the staff to educate and empower citizens of Cook County to take care of the forest preserves.

"You don't have to convince them that what they are doing is important," Brandon said of the FPLC interns. "They are already invested in the forest preserves. They are all passionate, top-notch young people."

For a chance to follow the FPLC interns and everything else Friends is up to, "like" Friends' Facebook page, which the interns will be updating regularly.

Advocates' Network brings new faces to Friends

By: Douglas Chien and Madeline Marin-Foucher

Friends is beginning a new phase of growth aimed at increasing our ability to “protect, restore and promote the forest preserves of Cook County for the benefit of people and nature.” Madeline Marin-Foucher and Douglas Chien have been charged with building, growing and supporting a network of people who will advocate for the 68,000-acres of public forest preserves.

In the coming months they will be reaching out to “natural” allies for the preserves such as stewards, birders, trail users and any and all who enjoy and appreciate the forest preserves. If you are an existing advocate for the preserves, or would like to be one, we want to hear from you.



Madeline Marin-Foucher, formerly a Park Ranger, will be working with Douglas to support the network for members to be more involved with advocacy.

About Doug: I've been working in the conservation community since moving to Chicago in 1998, including a 10-year stint at the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club where I collaborated with Friends on various issues. I'm a co-steward of the most biologically diverse part of Chicago: Powderhorn Prairie Nature Preserve.



Douglas Chien and his daughter Kanohi Gurgas hanging out at Blue Mound State Park in Wisconsin. Douglas is working to support and expand the network for Friends' members to be involved with advocacy.

When home, I like to mess around in the yard, read, listen to music that my spouse can't stand and be a parent to our Kindergarten-aged daughter.

About Madeline: A former interpretive park ranger from my native Oregon, I moved to Chicago in January (wedding bells!). As a ranger I focused on community outreach and events, environmental education and volunteer coordinating. I'm excited to use those skills to support the Advocates' Network with Doug, and I look forward to meeting lots of our forest preserve Friends in the future.

As the Forest Preserve District enters its centennial anniversary, Friends of the Forest Preserves is poised to enhance its ability to advocate for the preserves. Only with your support can we be successful in assuring that the woodlands, prairies and wetlands are sustained for the next 100-years and beyond.

Please get in touch with us: we want to hear your concerns, ideas, and hope to meet and get to know you.

Am I an advocate for the forest preserves?

- I enjoy the forest preserves and want to keep them safe.
- I've noticed graffiti or litter I'd like removed from the forest preserves.
- I've gone picnicking in the forest preserves needs for improvements.
- I've visited the forest preserves and noticed areas of erosion or degradation.
- I've driven past a forest preserve and appreciated that trees and fields are not being destroyed for development.
- I've walked my dog in the forest preserves and wondered what smelled so enticing to her.

If you've done any of these things, you just might be an advocate! But what does that mean?

An advocate doesn't have to be inclined to political activism; in fact, Friends believe the best advocates for the forest preserves are the folks who know the areas and use them regularly. If that's you, whether you're hiking, biking, picnicking, or enjoying time with your family, please reach out to us. Shoot us a quick email or give us a call: all friends of the forest preserves are Friends we want to know! Contact us at (312) 356-9990 or douglas@fotfp.org.

Donors putting their money where their woods are

By Alice Brandon

Portage Woods is receiving much needed care after an anonymous donor stepped up to help the site thrive. The donor's \$12,496 will be used to treat highly invasive plants, such as Common Reed, that grow to more than 8-foot tall in the site's wetlands.

Eventually without control this invasive plant would crowd out all native plants to the detriment of wading shorebirds, ducks and other wildlife that call this preserve home. Plans include initial herbicide treatment as well as follow up spot herbicide treatment as needed. In addition, the Forest Preserve District has agreed to match the donor's funds with additional work at the site.

Portage Woods played a significant role in Chicago's founding, which makes this work not only ecologically important but also important in helping to maintain our regional heritage. It is one of only two sites in Illinois designated as a National Historic Landmark (the other is Abraham Lincoln's home



Elizabeth Plonka of Turning Leaf Restoration treats invasive Common Reed at the Chicago Portage National Historic Site. A donor funded the removal of this and other invasive plants.

in Springfield). Here you can stand on the same ground walked by the explorers, early settlers and creators of Chicago. Long used by Native Americans, the portage was revealed to French explorers Marquette and Joliet in 1673. It provided a connection between the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico by linking Lake Michigan with the Mississippi River.

This is the second donor-funded project of this type for Friends. The other is an ecological restoration project along the North Branch Trail in Harms Woods. This project removed invasive species along more than 1,200 feet of the trail and includes a prescribed burn and native seeding. Trail users can now enjoy a rich diversity of wildflowers and healthy oak woodland as they bike, jog or walk rather than a

wall of invasive buckthorn ... all thanks to the vision and support of the donor.

To discuss project opportunities, please contact Michelle Jaques at (312) 356-9990 or michelle@fotfp.org.

SHIP TURNING Continued from page 1

said. "It was ridiculous and inappropriate."

The District is completing its first performance evaluations of staff in over 20 years. It forces supervisors to sit down and have difficult conversations with their staff and it provides the opportunity to give praise. Evaluations are based on job descriptions and the form of work that the employee does. If they are not meeting standards, then a performance improvement plan is put in place.

"This is a monumental culture shift in this institution," Randall said. "We are the first of the county agencies to do performance evaluations, and they are all watching us."

As a separate government, the District is setting the pace and leading by example, rather than catching up. To ensure that everyone is up to speed, the District has implemented an organization-wide training program. Where in the past only very specific training was provided, such as prescribed burn training or chainsaw safety by the Resource Management Department, now there is a wide range, including customer service training.

"(Performance management) and training will get us turned around as an organization," he said. "If we do it right and we're serious about it."

Randall said the District did, and still does, have a lot

of good people, but "Nobody was paying attention to running a real organization."

Finally, the District is looking to the future. The District updated its Land Acquisition Plan (and is buying land; see page 2) and approved a five-year Capital Improvement Plan. It is moving ahead rapidly on the Recreation Master Plan, Campground Master Plan and a Centennial Plan that will speak to legacy and the big picture.

Next up is an ecological management master plan to guide the care of the 55,000 acres of natural land. The plan is for this effort to be led by outside consultants with partner organizations, such as Friends, working hand-in-hand with the District to create it.

In the case of the camping and recreation plans, the contracting firms seemed to have a poor understanding of the difference between a park district and a forest preserve district. It's hoped that the natural land consultants will do better. Friends' members and advocates are working hard to ensure these plans are headed in the right direction and early indications are good (more on this in the next newsletter).

Randall believes, as does Friends, that the forest preserves should be proudly touted right along with all of the other things that make the Chicago area great, like its lakefront, architecture, culture ... and soon, the forest preserves.



Photos on left: Diane Bokkin; photo on right: Tamara Votis

Lois Haubold, Judy Tolle and Jessica Underwood once again rock the raffle at Ignite the Night. We are thankful to all of the volunteers that make this great event happen — because it simply wouldn't without them! More than 500 attendees enjoyed the beautiful evening and all of the activities including raptors provided by Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation, wagon rides, stargazing and live music and dancing around a roaring bonfire.

Ignite the Night roars again

Gorgeous fall weather set the stage for a roaring success as Ignite the Night, a nighttime fall festival for all ages, returned in September with more than 500 attendees and \$15,000 raised. Most importantly, there were many smiling faces of people young and old enjoying lively conversations and having a great time.

Dave Anderson and the I-Lites had people on their feet dancing. Volunteers set their telescopes to look at the moons – yes, moons – of Jupiter! Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation brought some of their amazing raptors, which were just stunning to look at up close. The horse-drawn narrated wagon rides of one of the ecological restoration areas in the Spring Creek Preserves were popular with every trip loaded to capacity. And the food, lots of food prepared by volunteers was delicious. Everyone enjoyed the donated Goose Island Beer and other beverages.

Speaking of thirsty, no one could miss our amazing and dedicated fire tender John Yapelli who created the stockpile of wood and worked the fire all night long building it up to the iconic symbol of the night.

It was wonderful to see so many people come together and enjoy each other's company in such a wonderful setting with amazing weather. And to top it off, a wonderfully involved Friends of the Forest Preserves membership, friends and families on hand! No wonder it was so great!

We owe a huge thank you, much gratitude and a round of applause to Ginger Underwood, Friends Board Member and Chair of the event for the enormous amount of hours of planning, setting up, working, follow ups and the many nights she woke up in the middle wondering what she forgot. Thank you Ginger.

And, most of all, sincerest of thank yous go to the many (and there were many!) volunteers who helped decorate, prepare the delicious food, provide auction items, run the auction, setup and cleanup after the event, and donated their time in the numerous roles it takes to put on such a wonderful event. Last and by no means least, thank you to our many sponsors including: Kristina Anderson and David Cook, Barrington Countryside Park District, The Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Fox River Valley Pony Club, Performance Mailers Inc., The Riding Club of Barrington Hills, Shamrock Farm and Holly & Matt Yeterian.



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Thank You

Thank you for being a member of Friends of the Forest Preserves and for all of your generous support in 2012.

Please help us get off to a great start in 2013 by sending in your donation today. Your contributions help us further our mission of working to protect, restore and promote the forest preserves of Cook County for the benefit of people and nature.

From paying for staff time to fight for the best solution for the Quentin Road issue to intern supplies (stories in this newsletter) or simply paying the phone bill, your support is essential.

You are Friends and we *appreciate* your help.

Donate at fotfp.org or mail your donation to:

Friends of the Forest Preserves
 542 S. Dearborn St., Suite 400
 Chicago, IL 60605



Michelle Murawski
 Intern, Forest Preserve
 Leadership Corps

Save the Date

Friends Perennial

3rd Annual Gala

6 to 10 p.m. Saturday, April 13

Join us as we celebrate the 100 year anniversary of the forest preserves and we honor

Ken Burns and
 Congressman Mike Quigley

