

Friends NEWS

Benjamin Cox, editor • benjamin@fotfp.org | Volume 22, Issue 2 • Cook County, Illinois • Spring 2022



Generations of tradition shape family's love of the preserves

By Maddie Singler Kelly, Administrative Volunteer

Let's go back to a beautiful Sunday morning in the summer of 1964 when I was eight. My mom woke me and my brother up for an earlier-than-usual Mass because it was Picnic Day! We wanted to get to Papoose Lake in Palos Park as early as possible to see family and friends. We didn't have recreation centers, country clubs, or gyms so the forest preserves were our happy space to spend time in the great outdoors. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, this was our Sunday family ritual.

Continued on page 7...

Ensuring we are all involved is key in Cook County

By Benjamin Cox, Executive Director

I was walking along a reservoir with a coworker, picking up litter for AmeriCorps service hours, contemplating what I wanted to do next in life, when it hit me.

I had always known I wanted to be in the environmental field and had determined that science wasn't for me. I had worked as a journalist in hopes of being able to write about the environment, educating my community via the printed word, but newspapers were already struggling and a speciality gig like environmental reporter was like catching a unicorn.

That path didn't last long.

I worked in nonprofits that had components of environmental work as part of their mission, but never one that had that specific focus. Like at the Peace Learning Center where we led all Indianapolis Public School fourth-grade students in learning conflict resolution skills. Part of the field-trip experience was to lead kids from all different communities on a hike through the woods surrounding the old mansion that served as our center, now part of a large city park on a large reservoir. We wanted to help them discover that nature, with all of its calming sounds, colorful scenes, and natural wonders, could provide respite from the challenges and conflicts city life presented.

Continued on page 6...



Maddie is an invaluable asset to Friends, generously volunteering a half day every week or two in the downtown office. She assists with membership fulfillment, shredding, and organizing, helping the organization to run more smoothly.

Finding serenity in an unlikely place

By Ilana Federman, Outreach Manager

Each year it happens. The chatter and laughter and music fade to a hush. Time slows down and I feel calm. I scan face after face and see joy on each one. And then, surrounded by hundreds of people, I experience serenity...at a beer festival. It's the unlikely of places, but Beer in the Woods is no ordinary beer fest.

Since its inception in 2017, Beer in the Woods has built a loyal following of beer aficionados and nature enthusiasts. Now in its sixth year, we expect more than 1,000 people to gather at LaBagh Woods on the northwest side of Chicago on Saturday, September 24, 2022. The event is a fundraiser to support programs that expand and diversify the Friends community. The enthusiastic crowd comes for the beer and cider—some of the best this region has to offer—in a setting so remarkable, only nature could be the architect.

LaBagh Woods is a magnificent place to experience the wonder and magic found throughout our local forest preserves.

Nestled on the northwest side of Chicago, LaBagh is a haven for birders, bikers, and families celebrating traditions. At Beer in the Woods, nature walks, live animal exhibits, and other nature-based programs provide opportunities to experience this magic. With 40 breweries and cideries, food vendors, a DJ, an impressive raffle, and raptors, there is truly something for everyone. That's why, for many attendees, Beer in the Woods has become their newest tradition to be celebrated at LaBagh Woods.

Beer in the Woods is a celebration of beer, the forest preserves, and community. I hope you can join us this year and experience a moment of serenity.

For more information, please visit fotfp.org. If you are interested in joining or sponsoring the event, please contact Ilana Federman, Outreach Manager, at ilana@fotfp.org or 312-356-9990 ext. 305.



We're honored to have the support of amazing craft breweries, like Lil Beaver Brewery in Bloomington, Illinois. Some partnerships began in 2017 - our inaugural year - and we continue to forge new relationships with some of the newest and most sought-after breweries.

Above: Nature walks are very popular at Beer in the Woods, like this one led by Derek Ziomber, North Branch Field Organizer (far right). Folks can grab a beer sample and then learn about the wildlife found in this beloved forest preserve.

Right: The 6th Annual Beer in the Woods will be held at LaBagh Woods on the northwest side of Chicago on Saturday, September 24. The event will feature 40 regional craft breweries, nature programming, food trucks, music, and more!



Providing access upfront is a game changer

by Corryn Antonizio, Board Member

The Forest Preserves of Cook County and Friends of the Forest Preserves have been redeveloping and fine-tuning their commitments to providing safe and accessible natural areas throughout the Chicagoland area.

While the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 made it illegal to deny equal access to public events, it still placed the burden on the disabled community to request accommodations. Many times, by the time someone learns of an event they'd like to attend, the timeframe to request accommodations has passed. It can be frustrating, and as someone who is Deaf, I know the feeling firsthand.

Friends approached me with an idea to provide American Sign Language interpreters at the 5th Annual Beer in the Woods event, and I happily endorsed the idea. We worked together with the interpreting agency to develop a schedule of interpreted activities in advance. Not only does this help ensure appropriate staffing of interpreters, but it also helps any Deaf people in attendance know where to be and at what time.

A group of eight Deaf people, including me, attended Beer in the Woods. Some did yoga. Some took the nature walk. Some looked at the animal exhibits. As attendees, we were able to freely choose our fun and not feel excluded. This is the very definition of equity and inclusion. By providing access upfront, it allowed us to choose what activities we'd like to attend—giving us the same equity that “hearing” people have when attending events.

I am so proud of Friends as an organization, and I encourage people of all abilities to come to our events. If there's something we can do to improve our access, please let us know. We know we have work to do, but I am excited about the progress we've made so far. If you're interested in board membership, I'd be happy to share my experiences. Contact me at antonizio.corryn@gmail.com.

“The yoga was challenging, as we expected - it's hard to watch someone and go into a move at the same time... But the two interpreters were wonderful and we really appreciated the access!!” said Corryn after the event in 2021.



Corryn (far left) attended Beer in the Woods in 2019, the first year Friends offered an ASL interpreter. Thanks to valuable input from Corryn and her friends, improvements were made in 2020 and 2021 to better meet the needs of the Deaf community.

As attendees, we were able to freely choose our fun and not feel excluded. This is the very definition of equity and inclusion.

Last year, two ASL interpreters were hired to take shifts at the live animal displays, yoga, and nature walks in order to provide a more meaningful experience for the Deaf community.





13th Annual Photo Contest Winners

Thank you for another great year of submissions! We continue to be blown away by the quality of photos and the passion you feel for our beloved forest preserves. Please visit fotfp.org/photo-contest to see the winners from previous years and to learn how you can submit your own photos to the 14th Annual Photo Contest.



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H

◀ **1ST PLACE**
“White pelicans,” Little Red Schoolhouse Nature Center, Willow Springs by Mark Hanna

- A 2nd Place:** “Finding peace and inspiration,” Schiller Woods East Pond, Chicago by Carlos Molano
- B 3rd Place:** “Family tree,” LaBagh Woods, Chicago by William Santus
- C Best Landscape:** “Beam,” Busse Lake, Schaumburg by Michelle Puszka
- D Best Fauna:** “Red-bellied woodpecker nesting,” Deer Grove East, Palatine by Edward Boe
- E Best Youth Photographer:** “Window to a heron’s soul,” Chicago Botanic Garden, Glenview by Jordan Kreiner
- F Best Flora:** “Splash of color,” Harms Woods, Glenview by Jordan Kreiner
- G Honorable mention:** “Fox Sparrow,” Crabtree Nature Center, Barrington by Janet Haugen
- H Best People in the Preserves:** “Sunrise voyage,” Busse Lake Boating Center, Elk Grove Village by Gary Henle
- I Honorable mention:** “Tiger Swallowtail on Blazing Star,” Wolf Road Prairie, Westchester by Fidencio Marbella
- J Honorable mention:** “Magical forest,” LaBagh Woods, Chicago by William Santus
- K Honorable mention:** “Ouch!,” Wolf Road Prairie, Westchester by Alan Gornik
- L Honorable mention:** “Reishi Mushroom” (Ganoderma lucidum), Green Lake Woods, Calumet City by Mark Banks
- M Honorable Mention (youth):** “Butterfly and bug,” Whistler Woods, Riverdale by Elm Stoelinga
- N Honorable mention:** “Goldfinch on Purple Coneflower,” Chicago Botanic Garden, Glencoe by Carlos Molano



I



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K



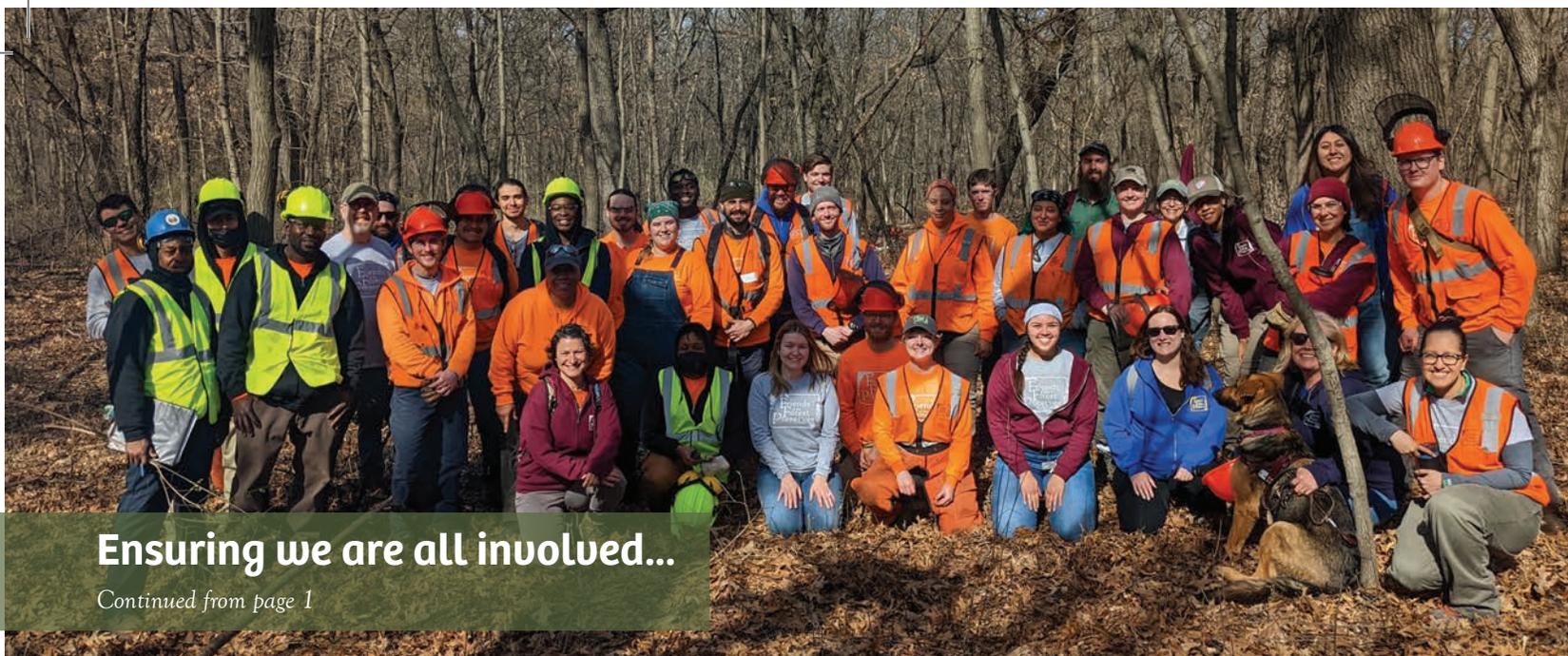
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Ensuring we are all involved...

Continued from page 1

A place to find peace.

My fellow AmeriCorps members and I would switch activities we led every day, such as instructing participants on the benefits of expressing hurt feelings via I-messages and discovering peace mentors who looked like them, such as Mother Theresa, the Dalai Lama, Rosa Parks, and Cesar Chavez. We each did them all and rotated regularly, but I always chose the hike as one of my activities to facilitate. Every day.

We ensured everyone felt safe in the woods, sharing that there were no lions, tigers, or bears in them. Then we would listen and take time to be quiet for a few moments. Time to hear and feel. I would always ask the kids if they had ever been in a place like this before, away from the noise and pollution and built environment, and my heart would sink when only a hand or two would go up, with rare exception.

When I was a kid, the woods were my own safe space, my place to be free. I climbed the same tree with friends day after day and different branches were each their own room. We had woods to explore and ponds to fish in and trails to follow. But I was a white kid who grew up in the suburbs, on the edge of Chicagoland.

Life was different for me.

There were forest preserves and undeveloped chunks of land with logs to flip, where we'd find garter snakes, tiger salamanders, and leopard frogs to catch.

That day, on the edge of the reservoir with my friend picking up litter, I thought, "How can I get more kids out in the woods, helping nature, while helping them to experience what I so cherished as a child?" And it hit me, I would connect urban and suburban kids to programs in the forest preserves. I would help make that magical connection, while maybe making the woods a little bit cleaner, a little bit better, for nature and people.

I would work to connect kids who didn't have the same opportunities and freedom as I did. Kids who come from urban communities, with little nature around. And, as I would learn later, this was a core part of the Forest Preserves' mission when it was founded in 1914, providing respite from the hot, noisy, stressful, and polluted city.

As it turns out, conservation corps programming was not a new idea. This was just the first of many new things I would learn and challenges I would face in my new career path as a conservationist, leading a nonprofit.

Fortunately, when I applied to be the first Executive Director of Friends of the Forest Preserves, the board hiring committee, which included Debra Shore, John Sheerin, and Stephen Packard, took a chance on me. And 18 years later, I can proudly say that Friends has had 2,000 alumni of our summer high-school and adult conservation corps programs.

Each and every one of them paid a real hourly wage, not just a stipend, and given real job skills for the conservation field or any career that they chose. At a minimum we hope they are lifelong advocates for nature, bringing the message of conservation back to their neighborhoods, families, and friends.

Partnerships with other nonprofits, the forest preserve district, and volunteers along with support from corporate, government, foundation, and individual funders, led to this success. Many of our alumni are now working in the conservation field with organizations such as nonprofits, the National Park Service, the Chicago Park District, ecological contractors, and the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

More than half of our program alumni are people of color and/or female. We are working to diversify a field that has long been dominated by white males. We are ensuring that the preserves have input from everyone in our community, because they belong to all of us. And that doesn't mean offering merely the things that we like, but finding ways that connect people who are not comfortable in nature, who might have very different experiences in their family histories in the woods. We are working to find new ways to meet people's needs in the forest preserves and to forge connections that are based on their interests and their comfort levels. We are also interrogating our own organizational systems and practices to root out unfairness and unintended white supremacy culture.

At times this work is hard, seemingly never-ending, daunting, and so very challenging and yet so very rewarding in many, many ways. But our conservation corps programs bring what might be the most rare of emotions, joy.

Generations of tradition...

Continued from page 1

Although born and bred in the city, my dad was a huge outdoorsman. Whenever he came across woods and water, he would stop the car, go into the trunk of his sedan, and pull out a rod and fishing boots. The forest preserves in Cook County were one of his many playgrounds. And one of his favorite playground buddies was his father. As far back as the early 1920s, my grandfather and his siblings would drive from the Beverly community in Chicago “all the way” out to Palos to enjoy a day of hiking, fishing, and bird watching. Luckily for me, they passed on this passion for the preserves.

As a result of my lifelong experiences with my family in the forest preserves, I became an ardent supporter of the preservation of open space. My 35 years in the field of Parks and Recreation allowed me to advocate for conservation, which included meeting with legislators in Springfield and D.C. on a regular basis. Although I recently retired as the Director of the Oak Lawn Park District, I feel that I am still contributing to the mission of conservation and advocacy by volunteering in the office for Friends of the Forest Preserves.

We are so fortunate to live in an area that has one of the finest preserve systems in the country. Whether hosting a 70-year-old tradition of pumpkin carving at Tinley Creek Woods or meeting my girlfriends for a walk at Swallow Cliff Woods, my family and I will always turn to the forest preserves for recreation and for creating meaningful memories.



The Singler Family Pumpkin Carve Picnic is a 70-year-old tradition held at Tinley Creek Woods each fall. The tradition was started by Maddie's grandfather and his siblings and has been passed down through four generations.

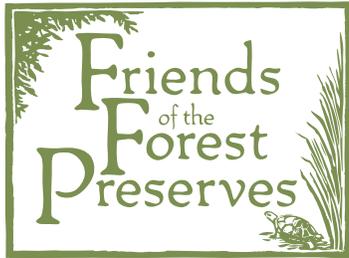
“PALOS HILLS”

by Charles Singler (Maddie's grandfather)

The Palos Hills are calling
In Winter as in May...
To city folk, and all and each,
They bid a welcome stay.
The invitation's year round...
When Winter's icy hand
Has hushed the gossip of the stream,
When Spring rides through the land,
In Summer's green maturity,
In hazy days of Fall,
The hills of Palos beckon
To each of us and all!
Serene, majestic in their strength,
They wait for those who roam
Chicago's recreationland...
The lovely hills of home.



Maddie's grandfather (far left) and dad (far right) enjoyed fishing, birding, and spending time with friends in the forest preserves in Cook County. They passed on their love of nature to Maddie, who became an advocate for conservation.



Friends of the Forest Preserves
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Thanks to the dedication of caring people like you, the Friends community has been hard at work for nearly 25 years. **Please renew your membership today** to ensure that land, water, and life thrive in the forest preserves. Visit fotfp.org, scan the QR code, or mail a check to the address above. Thank you for your continued support.



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SAVE THE DATE!

The 6th Annual Beer in the Woods is Saturday, September 24 at LaBagh Woods in Chicago. Please join us for this celebration of beer, nature, and community. Learn more at fotfp.org.

Photo: "Unexpected visitor," Pileated woodpecker at Busse Woods in Rolling Meadows by Carlos Molano