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# Friends NEWS

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## President Preckwinkle's first 100 days – so far, so good

"We're just trying to get an organization in place that's functional," said Arnold Randall, the new General Superintendent of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County.

Forest Preserve District Board President Toni Preckwinkle appointed Randall shortly after she took office in December. She also brought in Mary Laraia to serve in a newly-created position as the Deputy Superintendent.

Randall and Laraia both served on Preckwinkle's forest preserve policy and transition teams, which helped shape the President's priorities for the Forest Preserve District. Friends' Executive Director Benjamin Cox and Restoration Programs Director Jean Sellar both served on that policy team as well, which began working last spring after the primary election.

"I am very pleased that Arnold Randall and Mary Laraia were willing to come and work for the Forest Preserve District," President Preckwinkle said.

She added that her priority is to get new people and procedures in place to ensure the District is run better.

Superintendent Randall said his first charge has been to find new staff for key roles in the District, including department heads, the human resources director and other key General Office Department positions. In addition, he has been putting systems in place to ensure proper management and oversight and to ensure the District is in compliance with the Shakman Decree. The Decree regulates hiring practices for the Forest Preserve District and other local governments in an effort to eliminate political hiring, with certain exclusions.

The new administration has been clear about its intention to improve the overall management of the preserves, including ecological management, to ensure the preserves are healthy and here for the next 100 years. Focus will also be placed on getting more people enjoying the preserves while ensuring that facilities, like trails and fishing areas, are maintained and clean.

Superintendent Randall held a series of roundtables around the county for volunteers. As a result of the feed-

back that he received, a number of task forces have been set up to deal with issues like volunteer retention, policies and procedures, and public education.

While President Preckwinkle has visited Dan Ryan Woods and the Palos preserves, she admitted that she was unaware of all the preserves have to offer.

"I freely admit ... I never knew the magnitude of the forest preserves," she said. "It's been a really pleasant surprise that our predecessors had the forethought to set this much land aside."

Another priority for President Preckwinkle is to visit every single preserve in her first two years in office. She recently attended Maple Syrup Days at the River Trail Nature Center with Superintendent Randall and his family. She ended up in the river, which she has joked about



Superintendent Randall with daughter Isabella and President Preckwinkle watch a demonstration by naturalist Karen Holmes at River Trail Nature Center's Maple Syrup Days.

frequently, while participating in the Happy Canoe Year paddle on the North Branch of the Chicago River.

Friends doesn't expect that we will agree with President Preckwinkle on every forest preserve issue during the course of her Administration. But so far we have been very impressed with her interest in improving the forest preserves and we look forward to working closely with her and her staff in the upcoming years.

## News from around the District

### 1 Orland Grassland receives \$4.27 million for restoration

Orland Grassland was 960 acres of mostly brush. Then thanks to Openlands, the Orland Grassland Volunteers, and Audubon-Chicago Region, large areas were cleared and replanted. Now the preserve is receiving \$4.27 million through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. All artificial drainage is being removed; all brush cut, all invasives treated. The result is 960 acres of prairie and savanna habitat for migratory and resident birds, amphibians, insects, and mammals.

The Grassland received a 2010 Conservation and Landscaping Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Chicago Wilderness. The Orland Tract Ecosystem Restoration Project was recognized for the exceptional restoration of 960 acres of grassland bird nesting habitat and its partnership with local volunteers. Grassland birds are the nation's most threatened group of avian species.

### 2 District acquires 81 acres in 2010

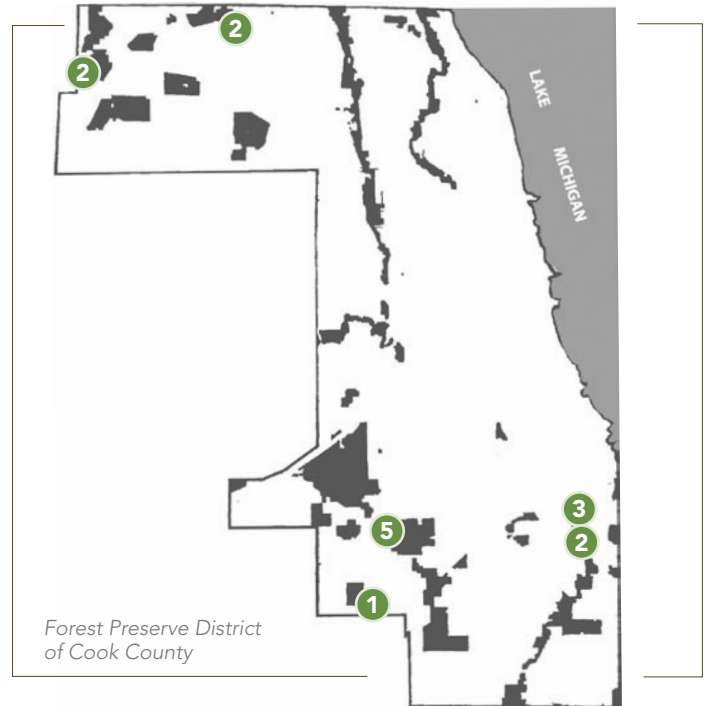
The Forest Preserve District of Cook County acquired 81 acres of land in 2010. Some 55 acres were picked up in Elgin near the Poplar Creek Preserve with the purchase of the Rolling Knolls Country Club; more than 24 acres came with the acquisition of Dolton Avenue Prairie near Calumet City; and a little less than 2 acres were acquired at Deer Grove East near Palatine.

### 3 \$2.1 million to restore Burnham Prairie

The District, in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, is implementing the Burnham Prairie Great Lakes Fisheries and Ecosystem Restoration Project. The \$2.1 million project is funded through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative with the District matching 35 percent of the cost. It will re-route nutrient-polluted water away from the site and restore marsh, prairie and savanna habitat.

### 4 Long-time Director of Resource Management retires

After 39 years, Richard Newhard has retired as Director of Resource Management for the District. He began his career at the District as a student forester in 1969 and worked as a forester and Chief Forester. He also organized the merging of the Forestry and Conservation Departments to create the Resource Management Department, where as Director he oversaw impressive advances in the District's land management and restoration program.



### 5 District acquires 13.9 acres and more in exchange for 1.5 acre easement

After negotiations with the Village of Orland Park, the District gave 1.5 acres of permanent easement at McGinnis Slough in exchange for 13.9 acres attached to the same preserve. The Village also agreed to help facilitate the acquisition of an additional 52 acres that the District has not been able to acquire through other means.

### 6 Independent Inspector General engaged

In April, the District established the FPDCC Office of the Independent Inspector General. The purpose of the Office is to detect, deter and prevent corruption, fraud, waste, mismanagement or unlawful political discrimination or misconduct in the operation of the District. The Inspector General uncovered the scandal at the District's Cermak Pool that involved employees drinking, sleeping, skimming cash and engaging in timecard fraud.

### 7 District contracts for desk audits

The District entered into a contract with AMD Business Solutions, Inc. of Homewood to conduct desk audits of District employees, which will result in reviewing and revising job descriptions, and recommend a performance management system. Face-to-face interviews will be conducted, and the firm will assist the District's Human Resources Department in implementing the performance management system.

## Friends' awarded \$177,000 for Great Lakes restoration project

The Great Lakes are a unique and special place that people often take for granted. They host some of the world's most majestic shorelines, contain 20 percent of the world's fresh water, and are home to more than 33 million people. Many of the habitats and waters in the Great Lakes watershed – the local streams, rivers and marshes that ultimately drain into the lakes – are currently threatened by invasive species, toxic chemicals and degraded habitats.

Friends has been awarded a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grant of \$177,000 to help turn things around. GLRI is the largest investment in the Great Lakes in two decades, made possible by federal funding combined with matching investments by project partners such as Friends and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County.

In 2010 GLRI put out the call to local non-profits and state and local governments for proposals to restore the Great Lakes and its adjacent wetland habitats. Over 240 applications were submitted to GLRI from Canada and the Great Lakes states, but fewer than 30 percent were funded. Friends was one of them. (Items #1 and #3 in "News from around the District" on page 2 report two other forest preserve projects funded by this massive initiative.)

Friends will use its GLRI grant to enhance habitat at Green Lake Savanna and Sand Ridge Nature Preserve located in southeastern Cook County. These sites are close to Lake Michigan and provide critical habitat for over 300 species of migratory birds that stop over in the area each year to rest and feed. Project work will include the removal of invasive species such



*Culvers Root at Green Lake Savanna.*

as purple loosestrife, as well as tree thinning to allow much-needed sunlight to reach the ground layer in the savanna. This initial work will be followed by controlled burns, which bring grasslands and oak woodlands back into ecological balance like nothing else. Work will start this summer and complete in fall of 2013.

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## Friends receives U.S. Forest Service Award for fall internship program



*Fall 2010 interns in Friends' award-winning program: Briant Holloway, Patrick Small, Jr., Cornelius Tripp, Whitney Behr and Brian Mann.*

Friends of the Forest Preserves has been selected for a Forest Service Eastern Region Honor Award in a category we are quite proud of: Being an Employer of Choice. The award recognizes Friends' Urban Restoration and Prescribed Fire Crew Internship program. This program provides young adults with the skills that can lead to a conservation career, while also accomplishing essential work, such as prescribed fires, on behalf of the preserves each fall. Friends has partnered with the Student Conservation Association, Forest Preserve District of Cook County, the U.S. Forest Service, Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie, Openlands, the Illinois Conservation Foundation and Chicago Wilderness on this project. Over the program's four years, nearly half of the 22 participants have gone on to another job in conservation, including Whitney Behr pictured below with the fall 2010 intern team.

# Third Annual Friends Photo Contest Winners

**First Place (right)** Sandhill Cranes, Somme Prairie Grove near Northbrook, Lisa Culp

**Second Place (below left)** Thatcher Woods near River Forest, Dave Coulter

**Third Place (below right)** Sand Ridge Nature Preserve near Calumet City, Alice Brandon



**Best Flora (right)** Shooting Star, Powderhorn Prairie Nature near Chicago, Laura Milkert

**Best Fauna (far right)** Amberwing Dragonfly on Prairie Plantain, Somme Prairie Grove near Northbrook, Lisa Culp



**We're impressed.** Every year, the photos we receive for the Friends Photo Contest get better and better. This year, we received 50 entries. Most are amateurs, but their work is anything but. Get your camera out now and prepare for next year's photo contest – the preserves are in their spring and summer glory. We hope to see your photo here next year. And watch for an announcement about Friends photo exhibit where you can see all of the winners and join Friends in celebrating their fine work. These photos will be posted on our website, [www.fotfp.org](http://www.fotfp.org), in full color. Black and white just can't do them justice.



### Runner-Up Winners

**Top (left to right):** **Blue Heron** in Busse Lake, Ned Brown Preserve near Elk Grove Village, Bob Kuraszek; **Great Horned Owlets**, Somme Nature Preserve near Northbrook, Lisa Culp

**Center:** **Six Spotted Fishing Spider**, Dolton Avenue Prairie near Thornton, Laura Milkert; **Iron Weed and Grayheaded Coneflower**, Theodore Stone near Hodgkins, Robert Callebert; **Purple Coneflower**, Sagawau Environmental Learning Center near Lemont, Samuel Vergara

**Bottom:** **Leopard Frog**, Sand Ridge Nature Center near Calumet City, Karen Garrett; **White Wild Indigo and Spiderwort**, Powderhorn Prairie Nature Preserve near Chicago, Robert Callebert

## Friends Perennial 2011 – Oh, what a night!

On Saturday, April 9th at the Garfield Park Conservatory, Friends made history at its inaugural dinner dance, which sold out three weeks early. On one of this spring's few beautiful sunny days, 160 guests including Friends board members, staff, members, donors and Forest Preserve District officials gathered for an elegant evening of cocktails, dinner, silent auction and lots of dancing and fun. Amidst the lush backdrop of the Garfield Park Conservatory, guests were treated to the beauty of the Annual Spring Flower Show and live jazz music by students of the Jones College High School Prep Jazz Band.

As the evening progressed, guests moved into Horticultural Hall where they enjoyed a delicious three-course dinner, exciting silent auction items, a fun game of chance and the opportunity to celebrate and support the mission of Friends. Forest Preserve District President Toni Preckwinkle and Deputy Superintendent Mary Laraia attended, and President Preckwinkle made a few impromptu remarks about the forest preserves' importance to our community. Friends Board President Carl Birkelbach talked about his long involvement with the organization, which began with his interest in improving bicycle trails. And finally, Executive Director Benjamin Cox presented the work of Friends in both words and pictures, but not until his wife Kristi introduced him to the crowd in a heartfelt yet honest way. The evening culminated with guests enjoying merriment, good company, cocktails and dancing to a wide (really wide) variety of music played by a professional disc jockey.



*Dominic Kempson (Stantec), Kris Feggstad, Aaron Feggstad (Stantec), Joe Roth (Openlands), Keith Williams (Friends), Justin Pepper (Audubon), Linda Masters (Openlands)*



*Forest Preserve District Board president Toni Preckwinkle*

What a fabulous evening! Well the fabulousness of the evening continued to ring through the air as we tallied the funds and realized that we had raised over \$19,000 net – double our goal. Wow! We'd like to say thanks once again to Stantec and Dominic Kempson, as well as the Stantec professionals who attended, for their generous \$5,000 sponsorship. Stantec is an environmental contracting firm of the highest quality, and often undertakes the heavy lifting required on some of our and the District's ecological restoration work. The 1st Annual Friends Perennial was definitely a runaway success.

We would also like to say thank you to Perennial Committee members Carl Birkelbach, Chuck Kierscht, José Colón and John Ross, and to these creative contributors of silent auction items: Jennifer Pfeiffer and the folks at Sutton Place Hotel; John Hall and Hall's Rentals; Kathleen Garness, Margaret Frisbie, Steve Schlegel, Ron Milnarik, Laura Nunez, Greg Lochow, Glasses Ltd., and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County Golf Courses. Finally, we'd like to thank our supportive and hardworking board of directors and our many, many members, friends, and community partners for your contributions to making this event the success that it was.

We raised over \$19,000 – double our goal. Thank you to all of our guests who helped make this inaugural event a huge success!



*Above top:* Board member Ed Zelasko and Mary Zelasko

*Above:* Board vice president Chuck Kierscht (center) surrounded by his family: Marion Kierscht, Charlie Kierscht and Jennifer Kierscht, Denny and Susan Georgopulos

*Below:* Dr. John and Erin Ross, Joan Colón and board member José Colón

*Below bottom left:* Executive Director Benjamin Cox and Board president Carl Birkelbach

*Below bottom right:* Jones High School College Prep Jazz Band



Remember to keep your eyes and ears open for details about the 2012 Friends Perennial. We are already in the planning stages. If you would like to join the party by serving on the planning committee, becoming a sponsor or supporting in other capacities, feel free to contact Keith Williams at 312.356.9990 or email: [keithw@fotfp.org](mailto:keithw@fotfp.org).



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## Time to renew!

All Friends of the Forest Preserves members come up for renewal at the same time, in June. You can expect to receive your renewal letter soon, if you haven't already. If you'd like to get out ahead of the mail, just **go to [www.fotfp.org](http://www.fotfp.org) and click "donate now" to renew online**. We've even added the ability for you to give monthly and automatically, if that works for you.

Thanks for being part of this growing organization – quite a feat in today's economy. But we won't continue to grow in size or influence without you, so please remember to renew your membership this month.

*Friends of the Forest Preserves cordially invites you and yours to*

## The Friends Summer Fest

A family-centered fundraising festival with fun activities for the whole family

**Saturday, June 25th, 2011**

**1:00p – 7:00p**

June 25 commemorates the date the first forest preserve land was acquired (June 25, 1916). Share the day with your family and do some good...all at the same time!

\$40 for adults

\$20 for children (18 and under)

Free for children 3 and under

*We want the entire family to come out and have a great time, so any family of 6 or more gets a 20% discount off the original price of the tickets.*

*Look out for more details. Invitations are forthcoming.*