



Mary Kaiser, editor • maryk@fotfp.org Volume 12, Issue 1 • Cook County, Illinois • Spring 2012

JOIN CAMPAIGN FOR New Chicago forest preserve

Benjamin Cox, President & CEO

Forty-five acres of old-growth oak trees may become big box stores – or a new forest preserve. The Beverly Improvement Association (the civic association for the North Beverly neighborhood in Chicago) and Friends of the Forest Preserves were shocked when the 100-acre Evergreen Country Club was sold last year to a developer. His goal: to turn the golf course into a shopping center with two big box stores, two medium boxes, nine outlet retailers and nearly 2,000 parking spaces.

The property is a stone's throw from Dan Ryan Woods on Chicago's south side. While the property isn't a pristine natural area, it has the bones of an oak savanna with some 300 trees that have been around for a century or two. This isn't the type of golf course that was created by scraping the earth clean. It was built in the 1920s with the trees and topography in mind.

Opportunities like this, to add land to the Forest Preserve District of Cook County holdings near the City of Chicago, are rare. Most of the available land in the city, near it, and even in the inner suburbs has been developed.



Heidi Zimmerman Broad

Friends has joined the Beverly Improvement Association to save more than 300 oak trees on 45 acres of open space near Chicago's southside.

And, only some 3,000 acres of the District's more than 68,000 are in Chicago. Golf courses present an opportunity that the District should keep an eye on. The Forest Preserve District of Cook County should – and could because they have the money – seize this opportunity to acquire the land before it is too late.

Aside from the conservation opportunity that could be

Continued on page 3

Congratulations and concerns on District budget

Benjamin Cox, President & CEO

Congratulations to the Forest Preserve District of Cook County are in order. President Toni Preckwinkle and her new administration have made great strides in some areas, evident in the recently-passed 2012 budget. Good news for Cook County taxpayers: the budget is balanced, without raising taxes. No small accomplishment for a government body these days. And the District is wringing some great stuff out of its budget.

Congratulations are in order for:

- Aggressively protecting land from encroachment and even acquiring more

- Improving the hiring process for the essential Forest Preserve Police Department
- Charging forward with the important Capital Improvement Plan and updated Land Acquisition Plan
- Restoring the District's historic campgrounds for the eventual use of young summer campers
- Increasing money and staff for land acquisition, ecological restoration, outreach, education, recreation and facilities.

However, as President Preckwinkle stated in her budget address, "Budgets are not merely numbers and line items

Continued on page 3

News from around the District

1 Paddling, fish obstructions being removed

Fish, fishermen, paddlers and more will benefit from the partial removal of the Hofmann Dam on the Des Plaines River near Riverside. The dam is being notched as part of an Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Project being implemented by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the US Army Corps of Engineers. The project will remove safety hazards for recreational users, and it will potentially increase biodiversity by improving natural habitat at this location. Phase I of the project included the removal of Armitage Dam and Fairbanks Dam, upstream. When the project is complete, more than 50 miles of the river will be unobstructed for fish and paddlers alike.

2 Preserves grow by 2 acres

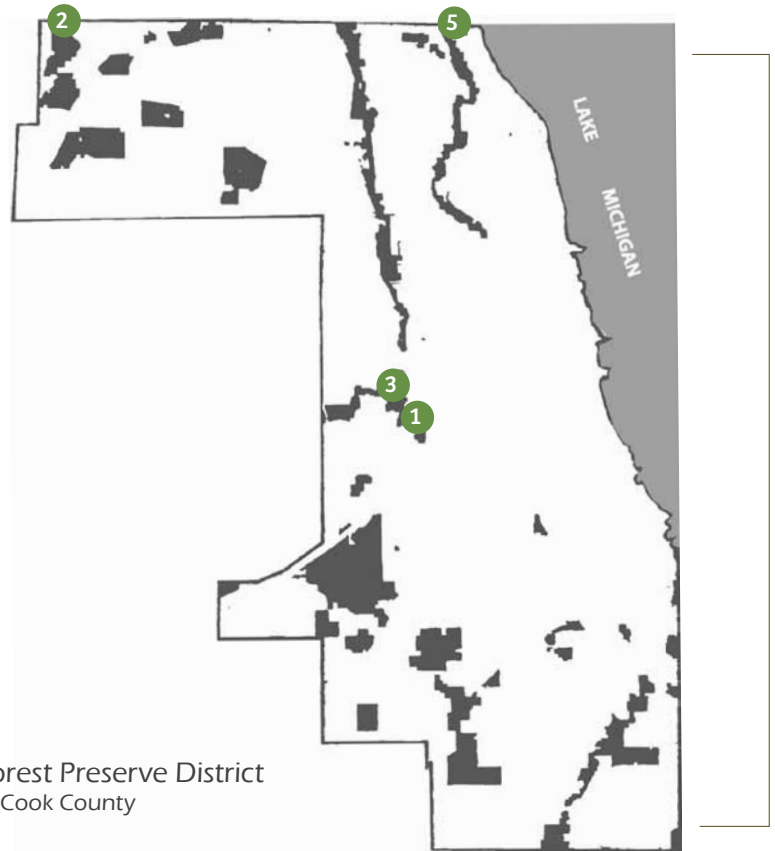
Two acres of land were acquired at the Spring Lake Nature Preserve near Barrington Hills for \$300,000. The property, which includes oak habitat and rolling topography, is immediately adjacent to the preserve and is surrounded by nature preserve.

3 Zoo “Rhino” wins Emmy

“Operation Rhino,” a film created by the Chicago Zoological Society, won an Emmy Award. The film captures the heart-warming journey of a Brookfield Zoo “rhino” that finds a new home at Misericordia/Heart of Mercy after being in storage for many years. The center provides services for more than 600 children and adults with developmental disabilities. Brookfield Zoo was the first zoo in North America to successfully breed a black rhinoceros and is a part of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums’ Species Survival Plan for black rhinos.

4 Lighting ordinance to “Save the Night Sky”

The Forest Preserve District Board of Commissioners passed an ordinance to “achieve effective and efficient lighting” while preserving the safety, security and well-being of users, protecting plants and animals, conserving energy, and allowing visual access to starry night skies. The ordinance calls for the District to “use lighting systems that minimize light pollution, light trespass and conserve energy while maintaining nighttime safety, utility, security and productivity.”



5 Key trail connection coming

Plans are underway for a one-mile multi-use trail connecting two popular trails: the Forest Preserve District of Cook County’s North Branch Bicycle Trail and the Green Bay Trail. The cooperative project between FPDCC and the Chicago Botanic Garden will connect the two trails along Lake-Cook Road. Total costs are \$1,710,490, of which \$1,154,101 is covered by federal funds, \$100,000 by the District, and the balance by the Chicago Horticultural Society, which operates the Garden.

6 District releases \$100 million capital plan

With roughly \$42 million in projects for 2012, the District is using a mix of tax, grant and other funds to implement a range of projects in its recently released Capital Improvement Plan for 2012-2016. The plan, which is available at www.fpdcc.com, covers projects ranging from walks and shelters to recreation and landscape improvements. Projects were identified by District staff, partner organizations such as Friends of the Forest Preserves, stewardship and recreation groups, and public suggestions made via the District’s outreach efforts.

... District budget

Continued from page 1

on a spreadsheet. They reflect our principles and our priorities.”

If that is the case, Friends is a bit concerned. While the District is making tangible improvements in many ways, the following urgent priorities don't merit a line in the 2012 budget:

1. The District's ecosystem management program for its 55,000 natural acres continues to lag behind. Even though seven positions are being added to the severely understaffed Resource Department (responsible for ecological restoration), the existing position of lead ecologist has just been filled after a year and the land manager position is still vacant after the same amount of time. In our experience, not much gets done without leadership.
2. Where is the long-promised master plan for ecological restoration of the District's natural lands?
3. What has happened to the District's stormwater manage-

ment plan that should protect these lands from literally being washed downstream?

4. Engagement with partner organizations and volunteers has suffered. These partners bring millions of dollars in services and outside grant money to the preserves each year. But now, good, creative initiatives are getting bogged down in bureaucracy and turf battles.

We do not doubt the principles, sincerity and quality of the reform leadership that the President has put in place. It is now a matter of implementing that reform at the operational level, where the work gets done on the ground.

There are two fundamental steps the District can take to fulfill its mission of natural land for the education, pleasure and recreation of the public.

1. Restore its lands to health. Buckthorn thickets filled with invasive species help neither people nor wildlife.
2. Make lands more accessible to compatible recreation.

We are working to make sure that the District's good intentions turn into action. And that those actions get results.

... Save Open Space

Continued from page 1

lost, a coalition of neighborhood groups is also concerned about increased stormwater runoff, increased air pollution from greater vehicle congestion and an over abundance of already developed vacant land in the immediate area.

The proposed development is just two blocks north of The Plaza Shopping Mall at 95th Street and Western Avenue, with a Wal-Mart and Sam's Club in between. The Plaza is nearly entirely vacant, bank-owned and scheduled to be demolished and rebuilt into something similar to the proposed development at the golf course. Not to mention the empty lot where a Ford dealer closed west of The Plaza, the shuttered Borders Bookstore to the east, and the extensive number of vacant storefronts in the area.

The developer hopes to bring big box stores Meijer and Menards to the development. Friends and The BIA say the stores should occupy the nearby vacant and abundant commercial land and leave the precious green space alone.

Fervor has built in the neighborhood to save the land, and the effort is growing. Now the entire Beverly/Morgan Park area is involved with the addition to the coalition of the Beverly Area Planning Association and numerous other smaller neighborhood associations, as well as Friends of the Parks and local environmental groups.



Show your support: download a sign at TheBIA.org for your home, office or car.

Signs reading, “We Won't Shop, If They Chop - at Meijer and Menards” are popping up in yards. One family created a moving YouTube video (available on Friends' website at www.fotfp.org) that clearly outlines the impact on people who live there. Two protests have taken place. Hundreds of petitions have been collected and mailed to both retailers, more than 25 elected officials and others. Friends and The BIA have been raising money to spread the word through media and community organizers.

This is what advocacy for the forest preserves looks like, and Friends does it every day. One issue, one small parcel, a few trees at a time. Here's how you can help:

STEP 1. Call or write Meijer and Menards. Tell them to move to nearby vacant retail space, and that you won't support any of their stores if they build on the golf course. If either the Meijer or Menards pull out, the whole development stops.

STEP 2: Call or email your representatives. Tell them to not allow any taxpayer money to be used for road improvements near the development. The developer **MUST** pay for any changes to 95th Street or Western Avenue.

STEP 3: Call or email the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. Tell President Toni Preckwinkle and your Commissioner you want the District to buy the land and preserve it for us and future generations.

STEP 4: Donate to this effort at www.fotfp.org.

Birkelbach Leaves Friends, "refocusing"

Mary Kaiser, Development Manager

In January, Friends' board president Carl Birkelbach retired from the board. He wants to spend more time smelling the roses (or the mountain mint), which we certainly understand. We wish to recognize and thank Carl for his stellar service on the board for the last 14 years, with four as president.

His leadership has steered us confidently through a period of weed-like growth from a small grassroots organization into the regional leader on forest preserve issues that we are today. An avid bicyclist who often rides forest preserve trails, Carl championed Friends' work to turn the preserves around for all those who use them, whether for recreation or natural habitat.

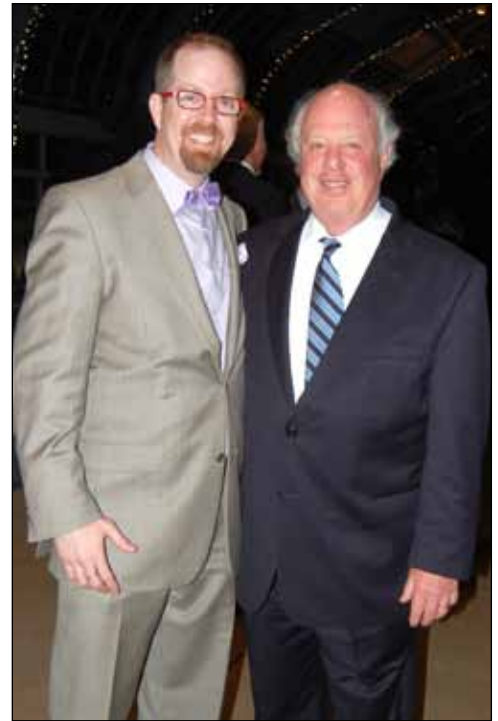
When asked about how retirement is going (he recently sold his business), Carl said, "I don't like the word retired. I'm refocusing!"

Then he gave an extensive list of upcoming trips to see family all over the continent, including a driving trip to Alaska.

"I can't wait to see the last great frontier of open space while it lasts," Carl said.

"Never forget: Once you lose it, it is lost forever," Carl said of his motto for Friends' work. "Once you save it, you have to continue to save it."

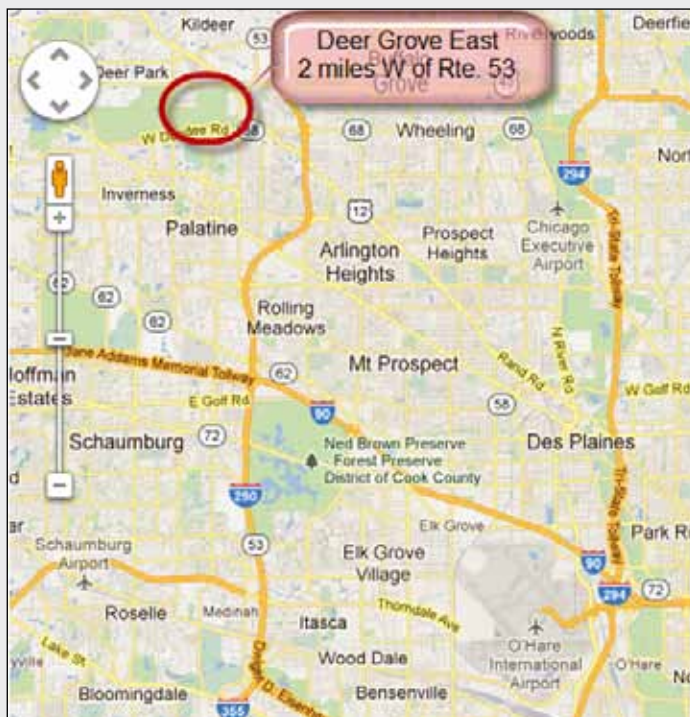
His enthusiasm and laughter will definitely be missed around the board table. But Carl, you're not entirely off the hook. We do plan to see you at your favorite Friends' events!



Darryl Fowler

After serving 14 years on Friends' board of directors and 4 as board president, Carl Birkelbach (right, with Benjamin Cox, President & CEO) retired from the board. He will be missed, but he won't get far.

Join Friends to celebrate Earth Day at Deer Grove



Join Friends, along with the Forest Preserve District, Sierra Club and several other groups at Deer Grove Forest Preserve, the site in Cook County where the forest preserves began and that is still one of the largest and most beautiful preserves.

Forest Preserve District President Toni Preckwinkle will speak, and lunch will be provided. Come ready to work, so you can help with the work underway to return the land to ecological health.

Be sure to wear long sleeves, long pants and sturdy shoes. Tools and gloves will be provided, and no experience is necessary. We hope to see you there!

When: 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Saturday, April 21, 2012

Where: Deer Grove East Forest Preserve, Grove 2, Dundee Road, near Palatine

Cost: Free! (lunch provided)



A fisherman enjoys a paddle in his kayak on Busse Lake in the Ned Brown Preserve (Busse Woods).

On compatible recreational use

Benjamin Cox, President & CEO

Friends of the Forest Preserves applauds the District for creating a new capital improvement plan! This is the first blueprint of its kind in decades. It funds things that will create a better experience for all who use the forest preserves, and will inspire the next generation of Cook County nature lovers. The capital plan calls for important improvements like:

- New and better bathroom facilities
- Better signage
- Improved trails and new links between trails
- Refurbished picnic shelters and boat launches
- Educational programming for kids and adults
- ... and so much more.

Friends does admit to having a bit of a problem with the "... and so much more" part. The District may have become a little overexcited about recreation, because some capital improvements call for "amenities" that are not compatible with the plants and animals that make the forest preserves home, and could potentially harm them.

Compatible recreation includes activities like wildlife and bird-watching, family discovery trips, nature photography or just a plain relaxing walk. Other compatible uses include picnicking, canoeing, hiking, bicycling, fishing and

other activities you might do in nature without disturbing it, whether that be in the mountains of Utah or right here in Cook County.

However, the District's capital improvement plan calls for things like a concert venue, dog park, zipline and sculpture park. These opportunities are very nice for a community, but they are park-district type uses. The public already pays its towns and cities for parks.

But we pay the District for nature, its care, and the ability to enjoy it in its wild state.

Friends certainly agrees with the spirit of the capital improvement effort, just not the letter of it. We agree that the best insurance for the health and longevity of our forest preserves is the people who use and love them. The more people who love them, the better, and recreation is so often the way that people first come to know the forest preserves and appreciate them.

Kids especially need adventures in the natural landscape. We applaud the Administration for exploring the resurrection of the District's youth summer camp program and rebuilding the Districts' old camp facilities. But the bar is still set much too low. Every child in Cook County deserves the opportunity to enjoy nature and muck around in it. The current vision is a step up, but our children deserve much more.

Recreational uses that have the potential to destroy the very ecosystem they inhabit are not the answer. Instead, the District needs to let people know about the excellent

But we pay the District for nature, its care, and the ability to enjoy it in its wild state.

outdoor opportunities and educational programs that already abound. It needs to expand participation and awareness of the forest preserves as our community's very special natural resource. It needs to communicate in every way possible, from clear signs and maps to social media and apps about where and how people can enjoy our shining Illinois woodlands, prairies, creeks and ponds.

Adult interns: Report from the field

Alice Brandon, Conservation Director



Brenda Elmore



Alice Brandon

As part of their training, the intern crew visits Cook County's only canyon at Camp Sagawau (Palos area).

Interns Xochitl Lopez, Jessica Rosenthal, Brian Mann (crew leader), Brenda Elmore (assistant crew leader), and Ryan Bourgart pose in Kickapoo Prairie where they are clearing invasive species.

A special crew of interns will be on the job in the Calumet region for two years. In the last newsletter, Friends announced a \$518,000 government grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to establish the Calumet Invasive Species Conservation Corps. The crew, led by Brian Mann, is now hired, trained and, as Brian reports below, hard at work. This is a special crew because they will be on the job for two years (rather than eight to 12 weeks like our summer and fall interns), making a real dent in the natural health of four preserves in the Calumet region. Brian sent in this report from the field.

Five months in and the Calumet Invasive Species Conservation Corps internship has been going great for interns Jessica Rosenthal, Ryan Bourgart, Xochitl Lopez, assistant crew leader Brenda Elmore and crew leader Brian Mann.

The weather has been cooperating, and the interns have already gained plenty of essential restoration experience using hand tools, chainsaws and brush cutters to remove invasive species from four high quality sites in the Calumet region. Every day they learn more and more about the invasive species that threaten our natu-

ral areas. The work is difficult, but morale stays high.

They have been working alongside contractors with a brush removal project at Kickapoo Prairie in Riverdale. This project aims to restore a high-quality remnant prairie, a two-acre wooded area running through the middle of the prairie, in danger of becoming overgrown with aggressive woody species.

Work also continues at Beaubien Forest Preserve to expand the prairie's perimeters, and Eggers Grove Forest Preserve has also been receiving much needed restoration work. The interns have also participated in several prescribed burns with the FPDCC all over the southern region of the county.

- Brian Mann, Calumet Conservation Corps Crew Leader

The forest preserves need more leaders like these folks, with experience, passion and energy. This is Brian's third position with Friends and Brenda's second in the conservation field. The internship gives our interns a green career pathway, educating them more deeply in environmental restoration issues. We have high hopes that they will continue to lead the way in forest preserve conservation well into the future.

2012 Friends Events Calendar

Save the Dates - please join us!

Events

Summer Fest

Saturday, June 23rd

1:00 - 6:00p

Location: Busse Woods forest preserve near Schaumburg

Bring your family out for some fun and games and share the natural beauty of the forest preserves.

Ignite The Night

Saturday, September 29th

5:00 - 10:00p

Spring Creek Forest Preserve, 361 Bateman Rd, near Barrington Hills

A night-time fall festival for all ages with Ignite the Night's fabulous bonfire.

Holiday Party

Saturday, December 1st

6:00 - 9:00 pm

Mars Gallery, 1139 W. Fulton Market, Chicago

An evening of cocktails, hors d'oeuvres and live music to celebrate the holidays with friends - and Friends.

Tours

Friends offers relaxing, educational tours in various preserves that have undergone remarkable ecological restoration work. Led by our energetic naturalists, these tours are offered free of charge to all members.

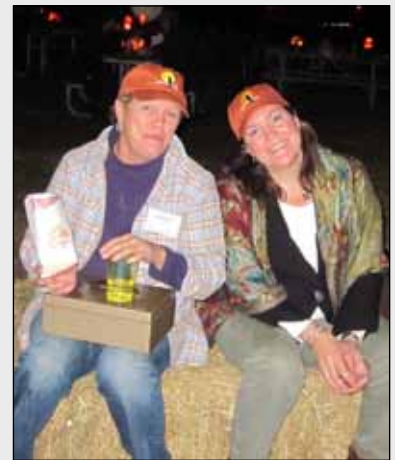
Spring Tours

May 6th - Sagawau Environmental Learning Center

May 20th - Theodore Stone Woods

June 3rd - Somme Prairie Grove

June 10th - Spears Woods



Fall Tours

September 9th - Spears Woods

September 23rd - Theodore Stone Woods

October 7th - Somme Prairie Grove

October 14th - Harms Woods

Want to get more involved?!

There's so much you can do to help the forest preserves besides wielding a saw and muddy boots. (Although there's plenty of that, too.) Consider helping us by volunteering for an event, hosting a cocktail party, facilitating a tour ... and the list goes on... Just give us a call and we can tailor a fun volunteer experience that will be very beneficial to our mission work. To get involved or obtain more information about any of our events and/or sponsorship opportunities, please contact Keith Williams, Events Manager, at 312.356.9990 or keithw@fotfp.org.



Friends of the Forest Preserves
28 E. Jackson Blvd., Suite 1102
Chicago, IL 60604-2330

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Chicago, IL.
Permit #2053



Printed with vegetable ink on recycled paper with 30% post-consumer content manufactured using renewable biogas energy.

Send us your reunion photos!

Believe it or not, picnics are the number one use of the forest preserves. Please send us your photos from your reunion or picnic!

OK, not all of them, just the good ones that show you and your loved ones enjoying the preserves on your picnic day. Please tell us the year and the preserve you were in.

We might use your photo in future communications from Friends of the Forest Preserves. Of course, we will credit the photographer.

Please email them to info@fotfp.org or mail them to our address above.



We all know you can do better than this gem of a photo. So please send us your best shots. Thanks!