

WINTER 1992

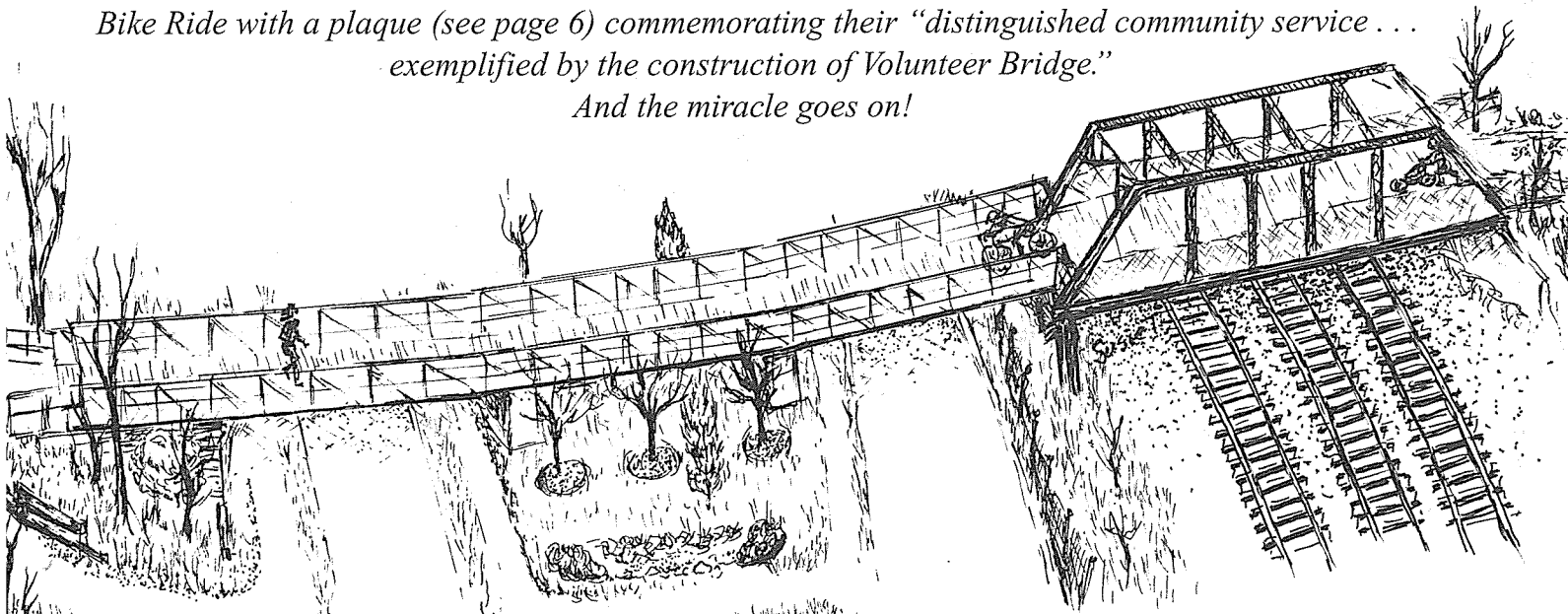
THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

What to look for — and appreciate — Volunteer Bridge in Wheaton

It seemed like a miracle. Eighty-nine ordinary men and women and several classes of high school students — volunteers all — restored with their own hands a historic 160 foot-long iron truss railroad bridge over one of the nation's busiest railroads. Not content with that, they built and installed three additional 70-foot spans to extend the bridge over two city streets and a small park. When the volunteers undertook this monumental job in 1982, they had two things going for them: boundless determination and Phil Hodge, a structural engineer and vice president of The Illinois Prairie Path board of directors, who planned, directed, and personally labored on every phase of the project from beginning to end. Major tasks included: building a permanent ramp on the cinder embankment at the north end of the bridge; raising money, some \$25,000; obtaining donations of materials and heavy equipment, such as a crane to pour concrete; securing permits from the City of Wheaton, DuPage County, the Chicago and NorthWestern Railroad, Commonwealth Edison and Illinois Bell; removing rotten timbers from the old bridge; replacing them with steel beams welded in Phil's garage; topping the beams with wood plank decking; installing chain link fencing along both sides of the entire 370-foot-long bridge; completely removing one useless concrete pier and capping the two remaining piers with concrete to raise the new spans some three feet; fabricating three new Cor-Ten steel spans (job done by three high school welding classes at DuPage Area Vocational Education Authority); and installing the new spans. When the project was virtually complete in 1983, the DuPage County DOT built the ramp at the south end of the bridge.

At the grand opening ceremony in 1984 Wheaton Mayor Robert Martin congratulated the volunteers of The Illinois Prairie Path for their remarkable achievement. Now eight years later the DuPage County Board and the State of Illinois have honored the volunteers at the first annual Governor's Bike Ride with a plaque (see page 6) commemorating their "distinguished community service . . . exemplified by the construction of Volunteer Bridge."

And the miracle goes on!





Rustic fence at Taylor Ave., Glen Ellyn, protects prairie. Background: NorthWestern R.R. underpass.



Great graffiti paint-out at Volunteer Bridge south abutment. Dick Wilson reaches high.



The job is done. Painters, from left: Nancy Becker, Jim Stewart, John Kacich, Paul Mooring.

Celebration; the Governor's Bike Ride; major downtown Path improvements in both Wheaton and Glen Ellyn, paid for by the two municipalities; blacktopping of the south ramp at Volunteer Bridge by the DuPage County Division of Transportation; decorative plantings at Volunteer Park in Wheaton and fencing to protect the prairie at Taylor Avenue in Glen Ellyn, both paid for by The Illinois Prairie Path; the spring cleanup; the great graffiti paint-out at Volunteer Bridge; logo sign installation; and the relocated Geneva Spur now taking shape as it bypasses the new runways at the DuPage County Airport. Several pictures of dumping and an actual trail blockage showed that our major problem area in Cook County is still the Bellwood-Maywood section. The Commonwealth Edison high-tension power line proposal remains an unresolved



Susan Wisniewski, Paul Mooring, and Len Chabala plan IPP spring cleanup in Bellwood. Trail is blocked by logs and broken concrete.

issue in DuPage County. The show wound up with scenes from several connecting trails and pictures of various types of Prairie Path users, from cross-country skiers to dog-walkers.

The meeting concluded with the traditional cider, cakes and cookies donated by board members and spouses. The table centerpiece, flanked by Jean Mooring's arrangement of colorful pumpkins and gourds, was the handsome plaque

from DuPage County and the Illinois Department of Conservation honoring our volunteers. Throughout the meeting Office Manager Karen Stewart presided at the table where Rails-to-Trails Conservancy calendars and Prairie Path note cards, T-shirts, hats, maps, "Guides", and patches were available for sale.

FIRST NATIONAL RAIL-TRAIL CELEBRATION BREAKS NEW GROUND



Geoff Howard and Josh Lueptow in lightweight racing chairs have just checked out limestone side trail through the marsh to Harrison Street entrance.

Rail-trails made headlines around the country on October 3. The nation's 500th rail-trail, the Minuteman near Boston, had its grand opening; while the nation's first, the venerable Illinois Prairie Path, celebrated with a new event, a "Wheelchair Ramble". According to Jean Mooring who developed the idea, this was designed not to be a race but rather more like a walk on wheels to demonstrate that rail-trails are accessible to people with disabilities. The Path is generally level, smoothly-surfaced with limestone screenings, and easily accessible at most intersections because the curbs are cut.

The five participants in the wheelchair ramble included three members of the Marianjoy Rehabilitation Center athletic team, the "Free-Wheelers": Geoff Howard of Wheaton, Josh Lueptow of Glen Ellyn, and Lupe Vela of West Chicago. Because their chairs were hand-powered, they decided to stick to the hard, limestone-surfaced Path and easily made the 4½-mile round trip between Lincoln Avenue and County Farm Road. All agreed the Path was a fun place for a workout. The other two ramblers were Anne Ford, executive director of DuPage Center for Independent Living in Lombard, and Victoria Morrissey, president of the DuPage Chapter of the Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities in Willowbrook. After proving



Wheelchair ramblers: (Front) Anne Ford, Victoria Morrissey and Geoff Howard. (Back) Michael Morrissey, Jean Mooring, Paul Mooring, Maureen Mausser, Mark Newell, Milli Posh.

that their motorized chairs had no problem with the limestone, the women thought it would be interesting to try out the trails in the marsh, which are softer because they are surfaced with wood chips. To everyone's delight the motorized chairs, unlike the hand-powered ones, performed as well on the wood chips as on the boardwalks; and so Paul Mooring was able to lead the group on a regular nature "hike" through the marsh to Goose Island. Adventurous spirits combined with ideal fall weather made this a memorable day on the Path.

Five other events rounded out our rail-trail celebration: a 12-mile hike on the Elgin Branch led by Dick Wilson, which attracted twenty-five participants; a horseback ride in Wayne led by Joan Hamill; an open house at the Villa Park Historical Museum; a prairie walk and seed-planting in Elmhurst led by Keith Olson; and a bicycle repair clinic at the Hillside Schwinn Cyclery presented by Jim Abenante. A final note: Hal Hiemstra, staffer of the National Rails-to-Trails Conservancy in Washington, D.C., attended several of our events and also found time that weekend to ride a rented bike on all three main branches of the Illinois Prairie Path, which he called "impressive".



Victoria Morrissey rolls along boardwalk in Lincoln Marsh.



Geoff Howard, returning from County Farm Road, passes Dick Wilson's hikers.



Hal Hiemstra, from National Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Washington, D.C., admires our Rails-to-Trails sculpture at Volunteer Park.