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# 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!*

