



The Illinois Prairie Path Newsletter

Fall 2012

50th Anniversary Celebration Year Begins!

Anniversary celebrations involve looking back, understanding where we are today, and looking forward. Looking back through archives, it is clear the development of the Illinois Prairie Path (IPP) was successful because of inspired leadership, tenacious volunteers, and successful long-term public /private partnerships. Soon the history of the Path will be posted on the website at www.ipp.org. Already available for viewing are decades of newsletters that capture the important stories about how the Path was created. Here is a brief look back at the history of The Path.

Inspired Leadership - May Theilgaard Watts



May Watts, Naturalist Emerita at The Morton Arboretum, earned the respect and loyalty of her colleagues, students, volunteers and supporters. An article titled *Mrs. Watts* by Ruth Wenner revealed, "Her understanding as a scientist, her curiosity that ranged far beyond mere botany, her love of storytelling, and her years as a one-room-school teacher lent a quality of universality to her teaching that could not be imitated." Her historic letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, published on September 30, 1963 began, "We are human beings. We are able to walk upright on two feet. We need a footpath. Right now there is a chance for Chicago and its suburbs to have a footpath, a long one." Her words ignited support from readers in the region and across the country. She shared her love of nature and her dream of a public footpath with garden clubs, schools and communities, on radio and television, and in her monthly *Nature Afoot* column in the *Chicago Tribune*. In 2011, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy noted "Watts' vision of recycling out-of-service rail lines for recreational use was remarkable for being far ahead of its time. Heralded as one of the first successful rail-trail conversions in the United States, the Prairie Path laid the blueprint for thousands of rail-trails that would follow." *PHOTO of May Watts courtesy of The Morton Arboretum.*

Tenacious Volunteers and Supporters



For three years, a handful of volunteers dedicated their time, talent and efforts to secure the abandoned Chicago Aurora and Elgin railroad right-of-way land for a public path. In 1966 DuPage County granted the Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation (IPPC) a 12-year lease and volunteers immediately began to build the Path - *without any local, state or federal funding!* *Hundreds of volunteers* removed tons of rubbish from the right-of-way. *Hundreds of volunteers* - school children, individuals, families, churches, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, civic organizations, garden clubs, and entire communities spent time raising money - dollar by dollar - to purchase: limestone screenings to *make* a trail surface; flowers, shrubs, bushes and trees to *beautify* the Path; and bridge building materials to *connect* segments of the Path. Over time, specific groups of volunteers agreed to manage a defined segment of the Path and by 1971, 70% of the right-of-way in DuPage County was in the care of volunteers! Path volunteers met monumental challenges. When vandals and floods destroyed projects that had taken months of hard work and fundraising, volunteers redid many of the projects. When a decisionmaker tried to block the development of the Path, volunteers made phone calls to fellow supporters that generated letters and attendance at important meetings. Their passionate voices were heard. *PHOTO of volunteers courtesy of the Paul and Jean Mooring Collection.*

Public and Private Partnerships

When volunteers and decisionmakers were adversaries, Path Advisor, Gunnar Peterson, Executive Director of Openlands was able to mediate significant differences. Today, volunteers, home owners, cities, villages, counties, state and federal officials are working together to promote the environmental, economic, transportation and health benefits of public trail systems. The roots of these relationships grew from the integrity of May Watts and Gunnar Peterson. *PHOTO of Gunnar Peterson courtesy of Openlands.*



Join the Celebrations

There will be many opportunities for you to learn about, enjoy and experience the Illinois Prairie Path in the coming year. The best way to find out what's happening is to visit <http://ipp.org/upcoming-events>.

OCTOBER

Wednesday, October 3 - 50th Anniversary News Conference - 11 a.m. Volunteer Park, Wheaton (Liberty Drive and Carlton Street). Inclement weather location: County Board Room, The County of DuPage, 471 North County Farm Road.

Saturday, October 20 - Planting bulbs - 9 a.m. to Noon - Maywood - Location: 11th Avenue and the Prairie Path. Contact Loretta Brown at ljbrown243@comcast.net or call at 708-655-3984. "I have about 2000 bulbs but for three flower beds additional flower bulbs, perennial plants, extra rakes, hole diggers and edging tools would be helpful but not required."

Saturday, October 20 - 8:30 a.m. Field Trip - Pratts Wayne Woods, Wayne. Binoculars will be available but bring your own if you have them. Be prepared to be outside for about 2 hours (of course you can leave earlier if you wish). We will be looking for late fall migrants and other birds. Meet at the farthest parking lot on the west side of Powis Road, north of Army Trail Road in Wayne, Illinois. DuPage Birding Club Leaders: Susan Kaley, sekaley@gmail.com, (630) 355-7215 and Jeff Smith, mrqmagoo13@gmail.com, (331) 481-3362 (birding day cell: 630 347-3170 or 331 481-3362)

Saturday, October 27 - 7:30 a.m. Field Trip - Lincoln Marsh, Wheaton - There should be fall migrants and the appearance of winter residents as well. Follow Roosevelt Rd. to County Farm Rd., head north, staying in the right lane. Follow the binocular signs to Harrison St., which ends at the north side parking lot. See Map (<http://lincolmarsh.org/>). DuPage Birding Club Leader: John Cebula, joceb2005@sbcglobal.net, (630) 858-3767 (birding day cell: 630-640-2721)

NOVEMBER

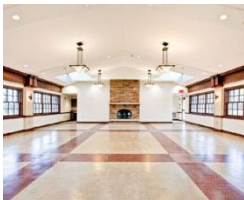
Sunday, November 4 - IPPc 50th Anniversary Annual Meeting - 2 p.m. - Cantigny Park Education Center

Saturday, November 10 - Lombard Fall Cleanup - Stop Invasive Species! 9 a.m.-Noon. Contact David Gorman, Lombard Public Works at 630-620-5740 or at publicworks@villageoflombard.org

DECEMBER

Monday, December 17 - The IPP 50th Anniversary Scholarship Announcement will be posted at www.ipp.org

IPPc Annual Meeting at Cantigny Park Education Center



Cantigny Education Center

The IPPc 48th Annual Members' Meeting will be held this year at **Cantigny Park in the Educational Center at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, November 4, 2012.** All members and friends are welcome. In an effort to continually promote the ongoing growth of the Illinois Prairie Path along with the trail ways available for public use, we are pleased to announce our lineup of speakers who will update you on past and current progress made while also keeping safety in mind. **Steve Buchtel, Executive Director of Trails for Illinois** (Topic: Making Trails Count); **Daniel Thomas, Principal Planner/Trails Coordinator DuPage County Department of Economic Development & Planning** (Topic: DuPage County Trail Updates); and **Cpl. David Kotovsky, Community Resource Unit DuPage County Sheriff** (Topic: DuPage County Sheriff Patrols). The annual meeting has a full agenda including a preview of the upcoming year-long IPPc 50th Anniversary Celebration which will be presented by Bob Sobie, IPPc President and Board Member, Mary Jo Malach. Both individuals will touch upon the exciting events along with partnering entities that will share and carry us through September, 2013. Refreshments will be provided by the IPPc Board of Directors and will be served after the meeting.

Cantigny Park is located at 1S151 Winfield Rd., Wheaton. Please inform the entrance guard that you will be attending the IPPc annual meeting to secure free parking on the grounds. Watch for the Educational Center signs directing you to the meeting location. For more information on the Illinois Prairie Path, visit our web site at IPP.org or email Bob Sobie, IPPc President at president@ipp.org. *PHOTO courtesy of Cantigny Park.*

Thanks for being an IPPc member. Contributors to this newsletter include Don Beacom, Susan Degnan, David Gorman, Loretta Brown, Bob Sobie, Martha Sobie, Erik Andersen, Rob Sperl, Mary Jo Malach. More information is at www.ipp.org and Facebook. Contact the IPPc at president@IPP.org or The Illinois Prairie Path, P.O. Box 1086, Wheaton, IL 60187.