



The Illinois Prairie Path Newsletter

Fall Edition (September - October 2013)

Reflections of 50 Years of the Illinois Prairie Path

From **Betty Nemec, a founding member**

Betty Nemec, the only living founder of the Illinois Prairie Path, wrote this note to honor the 50th anniversary of the Illinois Prairie Path. Betty served as Historian of the Path. She is 91 years old and lives in an independent retirement community. Her residence is surrounded by oak woods, a frog pond and walking paths. Her husband Bill Nemec served as President of the Board. He passed away in 2001. Learn about the founders at www.ipp.org/history.



Betty and Bill Nemec

“My husband, Bill, and I and our two daughters were fortunate more than 50 years ago. May Watts and her husband, Raymond, embraced our family in friendship, through an initial introduction at the Morton Arboretum. It was in this context that May included us as founders of the Illinois Prairie Path.

These were not simple times. We went through difficult legal processes to acquire myriads of rights of way. We met before municipal and county governments along the old commuter lines seeking their support and assistance. In details, we had to plan for parking sites, signs and maps, among many start-up needs. The strength, dedication and determination of this group and the dozens of volunteers who whole-heartedly believed in the project manifested itself the day we were making a presentation to the Wheaton City Council. When the councilmen entered their chambers building, they were greeted in packed hallways by dozens of little old ladies in tennis shoes who were determined to have a Prairie Path.

Another highlight for me was when, in 1971, Mrs. Watts was recognized in Washington, D.C., for her efforts at launching the rails-to-trails concept and in seeing the Illinois Prairie Path to its fruition. Bill and I and Helen Turner were honored to accompany May to this event, which included a presentation by the then Secretary of the Interior.

It doesn't seem possible for 50 years to have passed by. Yet I delight in the knowledge that today there are 100s of rails-to-trails programs throughout the United States, from large cities to small villages. And I am humbled that the Prairie Path in 2013 is as beloved as it was in 1963. I congratulate all of you on this special day.”

Happy Trails, **Betty Nemec**

September 28, 29, 30 - Use the Illinois Prairie Path Days

WHEN: Saturday, September 28 through Monday, September 30

WHERE: Use the Illinois Prairie Path on any or all of its 62 miles. Maps are available at www.ipp.org.

WHAT: Late mornings on Saturday, September 28 and Sunday, September 29, members of the Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation (IPPC) board will be at Volunteer Park at Mile Marker 0 in Wheaton, handing out bottles of water and greeting trail users. Drop by!

WHY: Monday, September 30, 2013 is the 50th anniversary of the proposal to establish the Illinois Prairie Path as the first rail-to-trail in the United States developed by volunteers.

HOW: Enjoy any or all of the 62 miles of the Illinois Prairie Path while celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Path. Some suggested activities include: take a bike ride, run or walk; set up an easel just off the path and paint or draw a picture; look for wildlife and their tracks; take pictures of wildflowers and trees; sit next to the path and read or write, or walk to your favorite restaurant or picnic spot using the path.



Photo of the Path in Wayne. Copyright Dulcey Lima, volunteer photographer.

Sunday, September 29 - Trail users celebrate 50 years of sharing the Path

On Sunday, September 29 at 9 a.m. the Trail Riders of DuPage (T.R.O.D.) is inviting bicyclists, horseback riders, joggers, and families to meet in Warrenville along the Illinois Prairie Path just west of the Warrenville Public Library to talk about safety regarding sharing the trails and spread goodwill between other trail users.



Following the 30 minute "meet and greet," several different rides will take place. Bill Weidner, Warrenville Alderman will lead a **bike ride to Wheaton** which will make several stops to discuss areas of historical interest along the way. Terry Witt, event organizer for the day, will lead a **family bike ride as well to Volunteer Park in Wheaton** to join the Illinois Prairie Path's 50th anniversary event. The horses will go on their own ride through the **Cenacale Property** recently acquired by the Forest Preserve which leads into Blackwell Forest Preserve. For more details about this event call Connie at 630-234 3029.

October 12 - Morton Arboretum Tour - Exploring the Illinois Prairie Path

WHEN: Saturday, October 12 - 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. in Lombard

WHO: Phyllis Mertz, Arboretum Instructor

COST: \$16 if you are an Arboretum or IPP member; \$19 nonmember.

REGISTRATION: Limit - 16. **Course Number NO74.**

Register by e-mail at Register-ed@mortonarb.org or call 630-719-2468 (M-F from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.) To qualify for the IPP Member discount, be sure to mention this IPP Member code to the registrar: "In honor of Jean Mooring."

WHAT: Explore the natural and human history of the Illinois Prairie Path (IPP). An early example of a "rails-to-trails" project, the IPP celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Hike a section of the path with an expert nature guide, discover the history of this 62 mile-long path, learn how Arboretum naturalist, educator, and author May Theilgaard Watts was involved in the creation of this trail, and discover the plants and wildlife that call the IPP home today. **NOTES:** Held entirely outdoors. Please dress for the weather and for walking on limestone and paved trails. Driving directions to this **Lombard** location will be provided for registrants.



Photo of the Finley Bridge in Lombard. Copyright Dulcey Lima, volunteer photographer

Sunday, November 3 - Annual Meeting at Memorial Park Leisure Center



Brook McDonald will be speaking about the Open Space Plan.

The Illinois Prairie Path's Annual Meeting will be held at the Wheaton Park District **Memorial Park Leisure Center, 208 W. Union Ave., Wheaton, IL** on **Sunday, November 3, 2013** at **2 p.m.** You, your family and friends are cordially invited. This has been an exciting and important year for the Illinois Prairie Path as we continue to celebrate its 50th anniversary.

Brook McDonald, President/CEO of The Conservation Foundation will speak about the Open Space Plan and its impact on the citizens of DuPage County. IPP(c) President, Erik Spande will provide a detailed recap of the past year, and will also acknowledge the individuals and entities that successfully partnered with the IPP(c) to commemorate and remember the Illinois Prairie Path legacy. There will be ample discussion time at the end for audience participation, opinions and questions. Refreshments, provided by the IPPc Board of Directors, will be served after the meeting. There are designated street parking spaces for Memorial Park Leisure Center users surrounding the building and park. Nearby street parking is also available. Additional free parking is in the city garage one block south of the center off of Wesley and Front Streets. **In October you will receive more detailed information about the Annual Meeting.**

IPP Trail Count In Progress

By Steve Buchtel, Executive Director, Trails for Illinois



Steve Buchtel, Trails for Illinois

Marble-sized spiders. Slithery ear whigs. That's what Dupage County bike/ped coordinator Dan Thomas is finding when he makes his bi-weekly rounds to the seven electronic trail counters that Trails for Illinois installed in July on the Illinois Prairie Path. Using a device called a Dock, Dan connects to an optical trail counter device that's locked inside a bland, ordinary electrical cut-out box to pull hourly and daily trail use data on the Illinois Prairie Path's Aurora, Batavia, Elgin, and Maywood branches. The boxes make cozy homes for creepy crawlies looking for shelter.

Something else Dan is finding: that the IPP is a very, VERY busy trail. Trails for Illinois, the Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation and DuPage County partnered this summer and fall to collect data on trail use and trail users from late July to mid-October 2013. The project is part of Trails for Illinois' Making Trails Count in Illinois work, which is measuring the impact Illinois trails have on the Triple Bottom Line: economic development, environmental stewardship, and quality of life. You can read more about Making Trails Count at <http://trailsforillinois.org/maketrailscount>

On the IPP, the seven electric trail counters are complimented by survey teams made up of IPP supporters and other area volunteers—more than 20 volunteers in all. The teams collect surveys from trail users in three hour shifts 2-3 days a week all around the trail. While the trail counters tally warm bodies, the surveys help us understand who those bodies are: their activity on the trail, their reasons for their trail visits, their age, their income level, their opinion of various aspects of the trail like maintenance, way finding and safety.

The data from the trail counters gets sent to Making Trails Count partner Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, who provides analysis and projections to estimate annual trail use. The survey data is coded and analyzed by the University of Illinois Office of Recreation and Park Resources at Urbana-Champaign. Together, these two data sets allow trail supporters and organizations to show the popularity of trails across a wide range of users and uses, and to get beyond an anecdotal discussion of trail benefits—finally, we start speaking in numbers, just like road builders, mall developers, and all the other interests competing for public dollars.

Trails for Illinois will publish the results of the IPP study by December 2013. The report will be a powerful tool for getting more resources, both public and private, for the trail's improvement, programming and maintenance. It will also help IPP communities attract development and identify opportunities to capture more benefits on a Triple Bottom Line.

And we guarantee, Dan, that the report will be bug-free.



Eagle Scout projects enhance the Path



(Left) Eagle Scout **Daryl Drake** built a kiosk and bench on the Great Western Trail at Swift Road. (Right) **Steven Stantz, Troop 35, Wheaton** replaced a bench, planters, and reset some of the flagstone at County Farm Road and Geneva Road. Thanks Daryl and Steven!



Fox River Trolley Museum hosts Illinois Prairie Path Day



(L to R) Welcoming visitors to IPP Day were Susan Degnan, IPP Director; Ed Konecki, President, Fox River Trolley Museum; and (in the stairwell) Conductor and Guide, Robert Bresse-Rodenkirk.

On Saturday, June 29, 2013 the Fox River Trolley Museum (FRTM) in South Elgin hosted an *Illinois Prairie Path Day* in honor of the IPP's 50th anniversary. The Illinois Prairie Path is located on the land that was once used by the Chicago, Aurora and Elgin (CA&E) electric rail cars. IPP members were whisked away on a 111-year-old preserved CA&E rail car, Number 20 Number 20 was built in 1902, started running on August 1, 1902 and continued to run until its last day of service, July 3, 1957. A surprise guest, Mr. Peter Weller, co-author of the acclaimed book, *The Living Legacy of the Chicago, Aurora and Elgin*, attended the event. Members of the Weller family rode all of the rail cars and talked with guests about the history of the CA&E. "The staff was wonderful," commented Susan Degnan, IPP Director. "They made it a fun day for everyone who attended."



(L to R) Ed Konecki, President, Fox River Trolley Museum talked with author Peter Weller.

Local students awarded IPP Scholarships for Path project ideas



The 50th Anniversary Scholarship program sponsored by the Illinois Prairie Path was announced in January 2013 and open to junior or senior high school students living in DuPage, Kane or Cook counties. Applicants were required to develop a program to increase awareness of the Path and its environment and encourage path usage. A panel of judges reviewed the applications and selected the winners.

"The Illinois Prairie Path has a long history of growth and improvements over the past 50 years," noted Erik Andersen, IPP Director and manager of the scholarship program. "The scholarship was designed to generate ideas from younger path users that can be used to continue this growth going forward. We were especially interested in identifying programs that could appeal to families with children. This will help ensure future path users will feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for this wonderful gift, the Illinois Prairie Path."

First Place (\$2000) went to **Michelle Woods, Waubonsie Valley High School** for designing a program called "Prairie Partners" that includes a fun booklet for children to complete as they learn about the history and environment of the Path. Second Place (\$1500) went to **Emily Deahr, Naperville North High School** for designing a marketing plan that encourages a new generation of Boy Scouts to earn a hiking or cycling merit badge with a checklist specifically designed for use on the Illinois Prairie Path. Third Place (\$1000) went to **Ryan Joyce, St. Charles North High School** for designing a "Grow The Path Event," a children's day on the Path where children plant seeds and/or plants, and learn to take care of them.



IPP Scholarship Winners (L to R) were recently honored at the July 2 meeting of the board of directors of the Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation: - **Emily Deahr, Michelle Woods** and **Ryan Joyce**.

Thanks for being an IPPc member! Invite your friends and family to become members and/or volunteers. More information is available at www.ipp.org and Facebook. Contact the IPPc at president@IPP.org or call [630-752-0120](tel:630-752-0120), or write The Illinois Prairie Path, P.O. Box 1086, Wheaton, IL 60187.