



# THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER



Summer 2020

## “The Prairie Path Has Been a Blessing...”

Let’s face it, from mid-March to late May with COVID-19 and “Shelter-in-Place”, there weren’t a lot of “regular” things to do safely in the western suburbs. Sporting events were cancelled. All schooling became “home schooling” combined with online instruction. Our communities and homes changed quite dramatically overnight. It was not uncommon to see entire families walking down our suburban sidewalks or neighborhood children riding bikes aimlessly down the street without a sporting event to rush to or a lesson to attend. Things were just different. Yes, boredom took some of us by surprise, but many also found other means, newly discovered or rediscovered ways, to pass the time and, frankly, enjoy life differently.



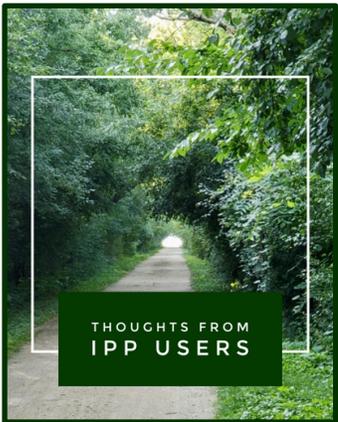
Geneva Spur – Winfield, IL

During our current COVID crisis, the Illinois Prairie Path, with its 62 plus miles of trails throughout DuPage, Kane and Cook Counties, has served many in our varied communities as a physical and refreshingly mental health option. We recently polled individuals through Facebook and our website, and here are samples of what path users told us:

*My teens started biking to neighboring towns and are now biking up to 20 miles/day. Love it! -R. C.*

*I have run on the Prairie Path almost every day during the pandemic. A couple weeks ago I did my own half marathon, from Glen Ellyn to Elmhurst. Grateful for the 7-11 that was open for a quick bottle of Bodyarmor on the way back. -K. S.*

*We have been biking the Prairie Path almost 3-4 times a week! We have a 6 and 3-year-old. The 6-year-old rides on his bike and the 3-year-old is in the trailer. We have been working on distance rides for our 6-year-old who has made it to Elmhurst and back from Glen Ellyn and all the way to Herrick Lake in the Warrenville area. He is up to 18 miles max and our goal is to get to Geneva on the path by the end of the summer!! -S. L.*



Wheaton, IL near the intersection of County Farm and Geneva Roads

*We’ve been riding our bikes down the Prairie Path almost every day! We ride to Wheaton to go to 302 and get ice cream, or we ride to Villa Park to get, well, more ice cream. -H. B.*

*I would love to chat about this! We recently relocated here from CA sight unseen and the Prairie Path has been a blessing to us at this time! -H. A.*

*I’ve been running outdoors on the Prairie Path regularly throughout quarantine. I’ve loved watching the changing plants and the emergence of spring. I run with a buddy (socially distant), run with my kids and run alone. It’s truly saved my sanity and helped me keep off at least some of the “quarantine 15.” -J. C.*

Prairie Path users: Thank you for your insights into how the path has helped you and your families in our communities during these past difficult months. Keep walking, biking, running, walking your dogs, and ... relaxing.

## Wheaton Rotary Presentation

The IPPC is pleased to work with like-minded organizations who are interested in trails and trail advocacy. In August, IPPC President Erik Spande gave a presentation on the history and value of trails to the Wheaton Rotary. This was the Rotary's first in-person meeting since the COVID-19 stay-at-home order, and the venue was the scenic Cantigny Golf Club. The key message in the presentation is that trails offer a Triple Bottom Line of health and wellness, economic improvement, and environmental stewardship. The fifteen-minute presentation ended up being 45 minutes due to all the insightful questions and comments. If a neighborhood group, homeowners association, civic group, or unit of government would like to hear more on the IPP please let us know and we would be happy to work with you!

## Elmhurst Great Western Prairie Upcoming Work Days

The Elmhurst Great Western Prairie is located within Wild Meadows Trace just north of the Prairie Path between Spring Road and Salt Creek. This area is the oldest living environment in Elmhurst. Left by chance, the existence of the prairie adds a very special ecological dimension to the community.

Volunteers are needed to help restore a part of our past to its former beauty. There are three remaining work days in 2020: September 19<sup>th</sup>, October 17<sup>th</sup>, and November 21<sup>st</sup>. Please visit [Elmhurst Great Western Prairie](#) on Facebook or email Eric Keeley ([keeley.eric@gmail.com](mailto:keeley.eric@gmail.com)) for further information.

*Visit [ipp.org/events](http://ipp.org/events) regularly for information on events that may be of interest to you.*

## Maywood Prairie Path Cleanup

On Saturday, August 8<sup>th</sup>, Vito Ippolito continued what he has been doing since April - one of his regular cleanup days of the eastern section of the Illinois Prairie Path. This time, two Illinois Prairie Path Board Members, Ken McClurg and Dennis Terdy, joined Vito in the cleanup, starting at 11th Avenue and going west.

Over these several months, Vito has provided his special path cleanup to the Cook County section of the Path on more than ten different occasions including evenings and Saturdays. When asked why he is doing it, he said, "I ride my bike regularly down this section and thought I would just offer to clean it up a bit."



*Vito Ippolito, Illinois Prairie Path volunteer and now Board Member, with his own "special cleanup kit"*

With undoubtedly more regular traffic on the Illinois Prairie Path during the COVID-19 crisis, his work is well appreciated by the path's daily users. If you see Vito some evening or early Saturday morning, be sure to thank him for his dedication!! Vito's passion for the Path does not stop there, we are excited to announce Vito Ippolito as our newest member on the IPP Board of Directors!



*Special Note:* Individuals are always welcome to clean litter on the path on their own at any time. However, be sure to wear gloves, long pants, and sturdy shoes. Also, leave full trash bags near a waste container or at the intersection of the Prairie Path and a major road.

*If you are interested in other volunteer opportunities, please send an email to [info@ipp.org](mailto:info@ipp.org).*

*Pictured Left: Ken McClurg, IPP Board Member, at 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the Prairie Path*

## The Four New Commemorative Illinois Prairie Path Signs (Part 4)

The following is the fourth and final brief article highlighting Illinois Prairie Path signs, which were installed last summer. As mentioned earlier, the signs were funded through a grant from REI's Stewardship Grant and a complementing grant submitted to Commonwealth Edison's Openlands Grant program through DuPage County.

This final sign, the Maintainers, is located on the Illinois Prairie Path near the intersection of Powis Road and Army Trail Road on the Elgin Branch near Mile Marker 9. The Maintainers sign represents the consortium of volunteers who adopted, cleared, built, and maintained this segment of the Path including families, scout troops, schools, churches, and businesses; and are much like the network of volunteers that support the Path through the IPPc today.



*Erosion control blanket (right) prevents topsoil from sliding and supports propagation of grass*

**LET'S BUILD AND MAINTAIN A PATH!**

In 1966, the Path signed a lease with DuPage County to develop 27 miles of abandoned railway. One year later, the Path's first sign was posted.

The founders didn't have the money or materials to build the Path - so, they provided guidelines and encouraged all entities (cities, organizations, families) to build and maintain their small segment of the Path. In three years, 80% of the Path was assigned. Over 55 "Maintainers" volunteered.

Communities came together to remove thousands of pounds of rubbish, using their own tools and trucks.

Able by mile, individuals volunteered to clear the Path along the 27 miles in DuPage County.

Groups raised money to buy crucial equipment for the trail. Neighbors used their tools to level the Path. Two groups - the Whisman Friends of the Path and the Elmhurst Friends, completed the first miles of the Path.

DuPage County Boy Scouts cleared 11 miles of trail - called the Red Caboose Trail - along the Elgin Branch. In two years, 1,000 Scouts earned a Red Caboose Trail patch.

The U.S. National Trails System Act of 1968 established a national system of trails. The Path submitted the very first National Recreation Trail application.

U.S. Department of the Interior inspectors walked all the miles that had been developed in five years by the Maintainers, to ensure the Path's compliance with national safety and continuity standards. At first only 12.1 miles were approved, but within year, all 27 miles in DuPage County became a National Recreation trail. Path founder May Watts addressed the first National Trails gathering on June 2, 1971.

info@ipp.org [www.ipp.org](http://www.ipp.org)

*This issue's featured sign, located near the intersection of Powis Road and Army Trail Road, highlights the "Maintainers"*

*Interested in sharing your photos of the path?*

Please post your pictures to the Illinois Prairie Path Facebook page and your submission could be featured in an upcoming newsletter!

# TALKING WITH TRAILS | DUPAGE COUNTY



**Aurora Branch Tunnel under I-88:** the tunnel is now open! Tollway will continue to work on the removal of the bridge into 2021, and there will be intermittent closures between now and when the bridge reconstruction project is completed. The next anticipated closure is scheduled after Labor Day weekend for a period of two weeks. We ask for your patience and cautiousness when moving through the area as there will continue to be construction workers nearby for the foreseeable future. County would like to thank the



*Aurora Branch Tunnel under I-88 has LED lights throughout and is wide enough for path users and maintenance vehicles to access*



*Users are enjoying the new tunnel*

**Illinois Prairie Path** for working with us to spread the word about the status of the underpass, and we would especially like to thank you, the **IPP Supporters**, for your patience with us during this construction project.

**Elgin Branch over IL Route 59:** the bridge is open again! County has completed resurfacing the asphalt approach to the bridge and the bridge deck. We also repaired some of the fencing.

**Elgin Branch over Klein Creek:** the Elgin Branch bridge over Klein Creek will be repaired later this summer. Stay tuned for more updates.

*Follow us on the DuPage Trails App and the DuPage Bikeways website to plan around intermittent closures.*

2020

April • May • June • July



*Your membership and donations are used to provide services and fund improvements benefitting Illinois Prairie Path members and users.*

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Susan Knisely

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