From the President

As commissioner of the Champaign County Forest Preserve District, I get the opportunity to ensure that the District provides many different types of recreation for the public. This past year, the District accomplished many of our goals for our users while insuring that we were fiscally sustainable. This was done in part by assessing our current situation and planning for future needs. In 2013, we began a strategic planning process for the District that will guide us in our priorities for the next several years. As part of that effort, we sent out a survey to better determine the needs of the residents of Champaign County. Internally, we established an employee compensation plan that will help us to recruit and retain valued employees. The Board of Commissioners is confident that these efforts will provide a positive experience for all visitors to our preserves. As we move forward, the board’s goal for this organization is to be well-positioned for the future, and continue to be innovative and dedicated to providing the best possible opportunities for our many and varied users.

Dr. Christopher White

From the Executive Director

Looking back at 2013, I am once again awed by the tremendous passion of the community that we serve and the commitment of the Forest Preserve District staff. The support from both inside and outside our agency has had a positive impact beyond our boundaries. Significant donations in education have allowed us to reach out to schools that were not part of our regular field trip schedule. Monetary contributions to upgrade existing infrastructure were the highest they have been in the history of the District. And staff worked diligently with community partners to secure a 24 mile long railroad line that will provide conservation and recreational opportunities over a broader area of the county. As we move into 2014, our commitment to our mission will continue to create positive impacts on community health, wellness, and the environment. I invite you to visit the great places and programs that the community and the District created together.

Daniel J. Olson

Board of Commissioners

Dr. Christopher White, President
Phil Hult, Vice President
Sarah Livesay, Secretary
Robin Hall, Treasurer
Dr. Andrew Kerins, Assistant Secretary

Meyer Capel Law Offices, Legal Counsel

Forest Preserve Friends Foundation

Tom Berns
Rod Beyers
Bob Espeseth
Robin Hall
Joe Lamb
Daniel Noel
Meredith Mills
Daniel Olson
Terry Rathgeber
Will Timmons
Mary Ellen Wuellner

Citizens Advisory Committee

Carl Altstetter
Gene Barickman
David Easter
Wendy Harris
Debbie Insana
George Kieffer
Robert Miller
Robert O’Brien
Pat Simpson
Nancy Snellen
Mark Schoeffmann
2013

News of Note

Kickapoo Rail Trail

► The Kickapoo Rail Trail, a 12.7 mile retired railroad corridor that spans from the east side of Urbana to the Vermilion County line, became the District’s sixth preserve in 2013. A multi-use recreational trail is planned for the rail corridor, which continues another 11.8 miles into Vermilion County. The District and the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation are now working with our project partners, the Vermilion County Conservation Foundation and the Champaign County Design and Conservation Foundation, to raise funding for the construction of the trail.

Award Winning Playscape

► Homer Lake Natural Playscape received two awards in 2013. The 2014 Great Lakes Park, Facility, and Recreation Award is given annually by the Great Lake Park Training Institute’s regents to recognize park facilities and programs that represent the cutting edge of the park and recreation profession in the United States. Illinois Park & Recreation Association’s Outstanding Facility & Parks award recognizes the Natural Playscape for its exceptional and unique achievements in design and development.

Celebrate the Garden

► In October, the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation hosted a reception to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden. It was a beautiful evening for an enjoyable stroll through the garden and waterfall/pond areas. Over $170,352 dollars has been pledged toward the repair of the waterfall and pond. Giving opportunities still exist.

Take a Child Outside Week

► The Forest Preserve District marked Take a Child Outside Week 2013 with a series of informative events and outdoor activities. Featured events included a screening of Mother Nature’s Child, a research forum, and a keynote address by Richard Louv, author of Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder.

Education Fund

► Thanks to generous donations from the Vidoni/VanDyke Educational Grant and the Hatch Family Charitable Fund, the District is now able to provide environmental and cultural education programming to underserved Champaign County school districts. Private donations will be added to their educational legacy so these opportunities can continue indefinitely.
Government and private foundation grants allow the Forest Preserve District to achieve many of its conservation, recreation, and education goals each year. The year 2013 was no exception.

**Sites & Facilities**

In 2013, the District acquired more than 12 miles of retired railroad corridor from east Urbana to the Vermilion County line with the assistance of state and federal grants administered through the Illinois Departments of Transportation (IDOT) and Natural Resources (IDNR). The IDNR provided $318,420 while IDOT’s contribution was $215,452. Additional grants are pending which, if funded, would aid in the development of the recreational trail.

Partnering with Champaign Surplus, the District received a $5,000 grant from Columbia Sportswear to add a crawl-through log feature to the Homer Lake Natural Playscape. The grant funds also provided materials for playscape programming, promotional efforts, and gear for volunteer playscape stewards.

A grant of nearly $3,000 was provided by the Illinois Department of Public Health’s We Choose Health program to the District for the purchase and installation of 13 bike racks across the preserves. Racks were added at each preserve to serve sites with heavy bicycle traffic, including the Homer Lake Natural Playscape, the Middle Fork Campground, the Museum of the Grand Prairie, and the Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden.

**Museum & Education**

A grant of $2,700 provided by the Community Foundation of East Central Illinois allowed the District to purchase a student response system and pocket video cameras for use in a teacher education workshop. The workshop’s focus was on the use of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) to teach children about the environment.
Volunteers

- The year-end tally of hours from the East Central Illinois Master Naturalist Program indicates that CCFPD is the topmost organizational beneficiary of this program. The total number of hours recorded by Master Naturalists on CCFPD sites was 1304.5 hours. The next largest number of hours (857.75) was devoted to the Master Naturalist Advisory Board and associated committees. A conservative estimate of the gross financial contribution of this program to CCFPD is $11,088.25.

- Our dedicated Trail Stewards logged more than 295 hours. Again using a conservative estimate approach, the gross financial contribution of this program to CCFPD is $2,511.75.

- Volunteer hours associated with 2013’s Freedom Fest total 146 for a gross financial contribution of $1,241.

- Volunteer hours at the Museum and Education Department this year totaled 1,455. With a record number of programs, from Owl Prowls to Take Me Fishing, we couldn’t have pulled them off without volunteers!

- Our Forest Preserve Friends Foundation, Citizens Advisory Committee, and Board of Commissioners volunteered more than 1,500 hours!

2013 Staff Transitions

- George Groschen was hired in April at the Museum of the Grand Prairie as the Museum Custodian.

- Chelsey Walsh was hired in September as the Museum and Education Public Program Specialist. Chelsey had previously worked for the District as a day camp educator and an intern.

- Katie Smith was hired in August as a Natural Resources Technician.

- Valerie Hall was hired in September as the Museum of the Grand Prairie Curator. Valerie had previously worked as a part-time Museum and Education Program Specialist.

- Cathy Barnard was hired in October as a Naturalist/Garden Specialist in the Museum and Education Department.

- Patricia Simpson was hired in November as the District’s Volunteer Coordinator.

- The District had 38 returning seasonal employees and hired 21 new seasonal employees in 2013.
The M and E Department added more than 20 new programs! We had wild success with new School's Out programs at Homer Lake and Lake of the Woods on days when students had holidays. A new emphasis on archaeology brought hundreds to a series of four lectures as well as to a day-camp for kids. Mondays were exciting as the museum offered new summer programs in the morning, and HLIC staff offered Playscape Mondays at Homer Lake in the afternoons. Other new programs included Maple Sugar Days, Fitness in the Forest, May Day and Harvest Fest.

Two of our staff were honored with statewide awards: Stacey Clementz was awarded the EEAI Non-formal Educator of the Year and the Illinois Project Learning Tree Facilitator of the Year. Valerie Hall was presented with the Illinois Archaeological Association Public Service Award for 2013.

The museum collection staff and volunteers moved, inventoried, and bar-coded 9,435 artifacts from basement storage to its new compact mobile shelving units. And in 2013, more than 450 biofacts at Homer Lake were inventoried.

The Museum and Education staff offered three professional workshops this year: “Don't Leaf Out Technology: Environmental Applications of STEM in the Classroom”, an Artifact Handling and Care workshop for area museums, and a Wildness Living Skills Workshop, held at Middle Fork.

We had the help of a record nine interns including our first ever cultural history education intern, two interns from the UI Museum Education program and a service learning student from the UI Rhetoric Program.


Attendance at the museum, as well as proceeds from the gift shop, experienced a steady rise this year.

Homer Lake Interpretive Center
Excellence when it comes to service and education continues to be the main emphasis at the Homer Lake Interpretive Center. This year, the Center joined the American Alliance of Museums’ Pledge of Excellence program. The Center’s impact in the community continues to grow, through exhibits, programs and partnerships.

Visitation and Programs Expand

Visitation at the Interpretive Center once again broke records in 2013, topping 3,100 for the year...more than double the visitation of five years ago!

New programs, including the School’s Out program series and Playscape programs, nearly doubled the number of people participating in public programs at Homer Lake.

New Exhibits Keep Visitors Coming Back

“Life on the Prairie” explores settlers’ experiences of the Grand Prairie, District prairie restoration techniques, and the wildlife species that are making a comeback in the region.

Two new displays, entitled “Explore Homer Lake” and “Homer Lake: The Early Days” welcome visitors as they enter.

A beautiful metal sculpture of a great blue heron (donated by local artist Tim Summerville) now graces our exhibit about Homer Lake aquatic life.
The scenic beauty of the Audubon-certified golf course sanctuary brings players back to the tees. A total of 25,518 rounds of golf were played in 2013. Tournaments remained popular and we received over $30,000 in revenue from tournament participants. A second indoor golf simulator was installed in the clubhouse and was quickly recognized as a great way to keep your skills sharp during the winter months. Over 5,000 holes of golf were shot in 2013.

Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden

We began celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden at Lake of the Woods, with a “Celebrate the Garden” fundraising effort. Forty years ago, H.I. Gelvin set aside ten acres of land to establish the very scenic Botanical Garden. Today, the garden is one of the most visited and photographed places in the District. We are dedicating the funds raised over the next year to renovate the beloved waterfall and pond area in the Garden. At the end of 2013, over $150,000 had been pledged to the effort from very generous donors. Our celebration of the garden will continue throughout 2014.

The garden is a beautiful setting for events and weddings. In 2013, a total of seven weddings and four events, including the Garden Concert Series, attracted hundreds of participants.
In 2013 the District received $4,715,539 in revenues 68% of which came from property and replacement tax revenues. The District expended $4,816,342 with general government expenses at 24% being the largest share. The District expended $100,803 more than it gained in revenues.

**Major capital and land expenditures for 2013 included:**

- $622,824 to acquire the Kickapoo Rail Trail
- $183,889 to acquire capital equipment
- $67,692 for Kickapoo Rail Trail engineering
- $64,266 for completion of the Museum of the Grand Prairie Education Center

**Champaign County Forest Preserve District - 2013 Revenues**

- Total 2013 Revenues: $4,715,539
- Revenue Categories:
  - Taxes: $200,645
  - Golf User Fees: $180,318
  - Grants & Donations: $93,527
  - Merchandise, Food, Beverage: $473,152
  - Other User Fees: $525,338
  - Miscellaneous: $25,538

**Champaign County Forest Preserve District - 2013 Expenses**

- Total 2013 Expenses: $4,816,342
- Expense Categories:
  - General Government: $1,133,984
  - Recreation: $872,286
  - Environment: $809,450
  - Capital: $771,672
  - Facility Operations: $669,912
  - Education: $351,015
  - Debt Service: $208,023
  - Miscellaneous: $80,000

Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve | Mahomet
Middle Fork River Forest Preserve | Penfield
Homer Lake Forest Preserve | Homer
River Bend Forest Preserve | Mahomet
Sangamon River Forest Preserve | Fisher
Kickapoo Rail Trail | Champaign to Vermillion County