



# Lake Bluff Open Lands Association

www.lbola.org

Fall-Winter 2009

LBOLA Warmline 847-234-2860



*Tyler Buddell, Mr. Simone, George Trausch, Brian Barker and Henry Trausch celebrate the completion of the new riverside bridge at the Skokie Preserve.*

## Eagle Scouts Build New Bridges

Young Eagle Scout **Henry Trausch** was in need of a worthy subject for an Eagle Scout project. As it happens, LBOLA has been searching for years for an Eagle Scout to build a bridge to our heretofore, secret riverside path to the Skokie Preserve. It was a perfect match.

As all Eagle Scouts must, Henry developed a plan for bridge construction in advance, designed the bridge, developed a budget, raised necessary funds, organized his work crew and directed their efforts.

The bridge is solid as a rock and will remain an asset to users of the Skokie River Preserve for decades. Thanks for your efforts, Henry!

## Health Care Plan for our Preserves

By Dave Szaflarski

Lately it seems our nation is abuzz with the talk of health care. While we do not take a position on this hot topic, we are strongly in favor of full coverage for all of our natural areas. And indeed, shocking as it sounds, we are striving to holistically treat and restore these areas through a network of "localized health care plans" that have been created for each of the LBOLA managed preserves. For you see, LBOLA has "doctor's orders" to revitalize and restore the natural areas of the preserves it manages.

The "doctor's orders" for the LBOLA managed preserves have come to us from over the years and were commissioned

## Join us for LBOLA's 3rd Annual Winter Solstice Celebration at the Skokie River Preserve

It's true. Our first celebration really didn't happen as it was snowed/sleeted/rained out, and our second featured temperatures around 3° which limited turnout to only the most robust, most well equipped, most crazy attendees, but we look forward with great anticipation to this year's celebration being a bit more tolerable.

The word Solstice combines the Latin *sol*, or sun and *stat*, to stand. During the winter solstice, the sun reaches its southernmost point below the earth's equator, usually on December 21, then just stands there for a bit before beginning its return northward along the celestial sphere. The winter solstice marks the shortest day, the beginning of winter and the longest night. (It can only get better from here!) Historically, people have sought relief from this, the darkest and coldest night, by lighting candles or making fires to warm their bones, their spirits and their souls (and maybe their soles too).

Please join us as we create our own warmth and camaraderie in the stark, natural beauty of the winter prairie at the Skokie River Preserve just before sundown 4:00 on Sunday, December 20<sup>th</sup>.

Parking for the Skokie Preserve is just east of the Mariani offices, just west of the water plant. For additional information, please call the LBOLA warmline at (847) 234-2860.



*Only the bravest of souls could tolerate last year's 3° temperatures at the Solstice Celebration*

in part from your generous donations in the form of ecological assessments and management plans. These plans and assessments were used to collect and consolidate new and existing environmental and biological information in the various preserves. They form a basis that catalogs the many plants, birds (and other critters, too), and the various habitats and natural settings that are found in the preserves. And most importantly, they direct us how to restore and manage the preserves, guiding us to tip the balance back in favor of the natives as these plans contain specific recommendations as to how to manage the preserves.

Unfortunately, as is typical in most of the natural areas of Lake County that we live in, the preserves have experienced significant disturbances over the years from human impacts and they truly need our help. We are sure many of you have strolled through one of the preserves and might wonder what the basis is for all of the cutting and sawing that is going on. Well, to answer these questions, we are trying to follow the “doctor’s orders” and get our preserves in a state of good health.

It was early on in LBOLA history that the need for an ecological assessment and management plan was first identified. Twenty eight years ago, just after the founding of LBOLA, Carolyn Goetz, the founder of LBOLA had great foresight and commissioned a study of the area we now know as the Skokie River Preserve (then described as the “West Lake Bluff Property”) that was completed in 1982 by the esteemed Dr. Wayne Schennum. From that study, would you believe Dr. Schennum identified over 160 plants in the Skokie Preserve, indicating that this natural area had a high and significant diversity worthy of preserving as a natural area? Well, we think we all know the answer to that question.

Later on in 1995, management plans were developed by P. Clifford Miller for LBOLA for both the Carolyn Goetz Wetlands Preserve and the Prairie Preserve. And then in 1999, Dr. Schennum completed a study of the Lake Bluff Forest Preserve property. But as with any health care plan, the road to good health is a long one. While some of the management plan’s objectives are easy to spot such as cutting down buckthorn to “liberate” the oak trees, other goals are more difficult to achieve. But they all take time and persistence. And we are thankful to count on you for your support through your generous donations and also by volunteering at our workdays for these LBOLA efforts

The management plans have been of immense help to the numerous, mostly volunteer restoration efforts that have taken place since these plans were written. So the next time you see us in one the LBOLA managed preserves and come across a restoration workday you’ll see our “health care plan” has got just the right coverage.

## Adopt-a-Highway Efforts Continue

For more years than anyone is willing to admit, LBOLA has been involved with the State of Illinois’ Adopt-a-Highway program as a result of uber-volunteer Nan Wick’s persistent efforts.

A 1.5 mile stretch of St. Mary’s Road between Lake Bluff and Vernon Hills is faithfully patrolled by Nan and her merry band of dedicated citizen volunteers. The semi-annual pick-up is yet another way LBOLA members find to contribute to the community.

Many thanks go out to Nan for continuing her service through the Adopt-a-Highway program. To assist Nan with the highway pick-up project, please call the LBOLA warmline at 847-234-2860.

In addition to being a founding member of the LBOLA Board and our current Board Secretary, Nan is also the steward of the Carolyn Goetz Wetlands Preserve, which manages to look better each year!

## Envisioning Lake County's Future

Over the past several months, representatives of Lake Bluff Open Lands Association have been meeting with leaders of 16 other Lake County groups involved in land use, conservation and planning. Coordinated by the Liberty Prairie Conservancy, the group is named the Land Conservation Partners of Lake County and our efforts have been directed at formulating a unified plan among consortium members for the preservation of open spaces in Lake County.

Currently, only 13% of Lake County's space is permanently preserved with development of the remaining open spaces continuing at a rapid pace.

The Board of Directors of Lake Bluff Open Lands Association has unanimously adopted the following "vision statement": "To realize a Lake County landscape where, by 2030, at least 20% of the County is preserved forever as natural areas, parks, trails, farmland and scenic views".

As other members of the consortium sign on to the group's vision statement, we expect momentum to grow towards the preservation of at least 1,000 acres per year over the next 20 years. Additional information about this project is available at [LibertyPrairie.org](http://LibertyPrairie.org).

The LBOLA Board includes the following volunteers:

Larry McCotter, Nan Wick, Bo Harper, Liz Leutwiler, Dewey Caton, Scott Gulson, Laura June McCotter, Christabel Frederick, Bill Nordeen, Janet Murphy Ryan, Pat Booth and Dan Angarola

## Central Woods to be Renamed

Central Woods was, of course, named after beautiful Central School. Given the recent demise of Central School, wise people determined that Central Woods needed a new name. Recent research by Cathy Spencer and Dr. Mike Peters into early settlers William and Mary Dwyer on this property has sparked renewed interest in the historical place this property holds in Lake Bluff's past and so... Dwyer Woods was selected as the new name for the woods located just west of Green Bay Rd. on W. Washington Ave.

It has been seven years since LBOLA's initial clearing of the one-acre oak-hickory woodland to the south of what was then Central School. At that time, fifty students and parents joined LBOLA volunteers to clear a tremendous amount of buckthorn that had been choking the woods for years.

Today, after three prescribed burns, several pounds of native woodland seed and persistent buckthorn eradication, the woods look great.

The School District agreed to LBOLA's request to exclude the woods from any construction plans and the preserves managed to escape the construction process with little damage.

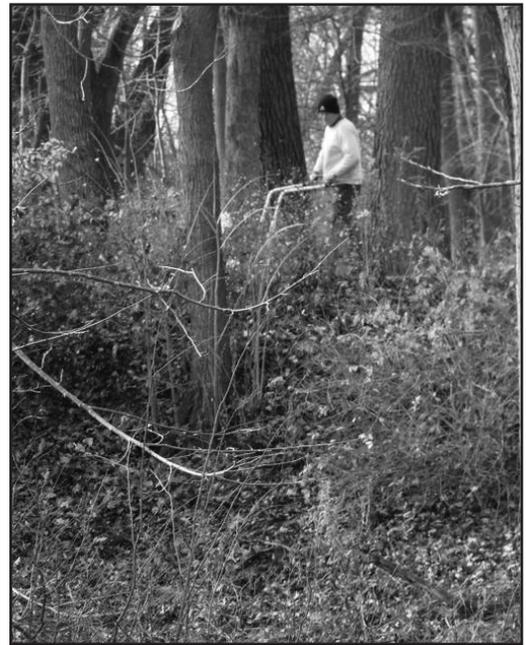
The District plans to increase use of our 'outdoor classroom' for science and other classes and we have recently added an extension of our woodchip trail from the 'classroom' looping through the eastern portion of the woods as well.

Already making good use of the woods is **Leah Fietsam's** 5<sup>th</sup> grade ecology club. Club members help beautify the woods by keeping it clean, but they have been busy creating brushpile 'blinds' from whence they will secretly observe local wildlife whose habitat is Dwyer Woods itself.

*Ravines in Crisis...cont. from page 4*

It's a big problem with an expensive solution. We, as a village, must decide to preserve our ravines and stop the destruction - both environmental and property - by finding a way to deliver stormwater to the lake in underground pipes or developing an appropriate aesthetic lining system for the ravine streambeds so that the aggressive erosion rates can be dramatically reduced.

Fortunately, federal grant money may soon be available to assist in initiating some of these projects. Political will is coalescing around the need to improve Lake Michigan water quality. Ravine property owners are (or should be) alarmed by the loss of a huge and expensive asset. The time is coming where we simply must act to prevent the loss of more of our precious ravine slopes to our 19th century method of stormwater management.



*Blowing leaves into the ravine. Don't do this at home!*

## Tree Sale Overview – Over 2000 Trees Planted in LB!

Next spring's tree sale will mark our 10<sup>th</sup> year of working to restore Lake Bluff's native woodland. Early records of Lake County do not record the presence of Norway maples, they mention nothing of Chinese ginkos or Colorado blue spruce. Though the modern nursery trade loves to force these and other alien species on the market in the name of "fast growing" street trees, one look at Lake Bluff's most impressive trees - the trees that made your jaw drop the first time you arrived in Lake Bluff - one look tells you that our native trees are Red Oaks, White Oaks, Bur Oaks and Shagbark Hickories.

We are proud to be able to claim that, as a result of our efforts to promote native trees and shrubs over the past decade, over 1,900 young natives have joined our aging giants to help establish our future forest.

Are you ready to "Go Native"? Stay tuned to this newsletter for next Spring's Native Tree and Shrub sale.

For the past decade, the tree sale has been a huge success due to *The Tree Lady*, **Vanessa Balbach Clarke**. As Vanessa passes the torch to **Scott Gulson** and **Bo Harper**, we would like to thank her for her tireless efforts on behalf of Lake Bluff.

# Lake Bluff's Ravines in Crisis

By Larry McCotter

Believe it or don't, ten thousand years ago, Lake Bluff was covered by a glacier a mile high. As the climate warmed and glaciers melted, runoff water carved crevices in the land as it made its way towards the Lake, resulting in a network of ravines still evident from Racine to Winnetka.

Our ravines are an extremely unique ecosystem featuring fragile soils composed of 'glacial till' and a microclimate resulting from cool, moist lake breezes creeping inland along the bottom of the ravine, supporting vegetation typically found only in more northerly climates.

Often ignored, unexplored and inaccessible, many portions of our ravines harbor rare and unusual native species that survive long after others were eliminated from the Lake Bluff landscape through our overuse of turf grass and asphalt.

LBOLA has preached for years about the hazards of trampling the steep slopes, picking the wildflowers and blowing a yard full of leaves over the edge of the ravine in the hopes that the rotting leaves would 'make soil'.

As important as it is for ravine homeowners to understand their responsibility for stewarding these fragile ravines, it is increasingly evident that the primary cause of the worsening destruction of our ravines is our long-standing Village policy of delivering storm water to Lake Michigan through them.

It is an unfortunate historical fact that our ravines are used as storm sewers conveying ALL rainwater from hundreds of surrounding acres, through concrete pipes, into the ravines, scouring tons of fragile soil from the sides of the waterways, and into the Lake. Record rainfalls and ever increasing quantities of stormwater runoff associated with continued development in the ravine watersheds is accelerating the erosive destruction of the ravines.

A week of constant rain in April resulted in catastrophic collapses of many of our ravine slopes. As failure occurs at the bottom, or toe of the ravine, stresses are inevitably transferred up slope in a 'rolling failure' until the entire slope has 'sloughed' with damage to trees and wildflowers along the way and tons of soil stripped from the banks and sent out to Lake Michigan where it severely impacts water quality.

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Winter Solstice Celebration  
December 20th

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