

January 11, 2021

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Board of Commissioners

From: Lisa Sprinkle, Marketing Coordinator

Re: January Staff Report

**Executive Director (Mary Ellen Wuellner)**

- The Friends Foundation approved a new board member at its January meeting. Matt Hausman comes to the board with a background in non-profit management and fundraising. He is currently the director of the local non-profit organization, Feeding Our Kids, and oversees the family farm in Pesotum. He joins Merry Mitchell as the second new board member in the last two months.
- Also at its January meeting, the Friends Foundation board reviewed a new strategic ‘road map’ that will guide its work over the next five years. A copy is attached to this report. The plan includes a two-year set of goals and objectives.
- The CAC also met in January and agreed to take up two new projects to assist the District. Once the District assumes ownership of the five-acre Hazen Bridge property, I have asked a CAC subcommittee to develop a plan for care and management of the historic structure. The plan would include a summary of the structure’s history and importance to the community, a condition summary, the potential for grants and fundraising to provide for future maintenance, and the programming and recreational opportunities it offers to the District.
- The second CAC project would provide assistance to the District’s sustainability committee in collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data related to our carbon emissions and offer recommendations for reducing them. When conditions allow, the CAC will continue its assessment of the Tomlinson Cemetery headstones as well as the outreach activities it typically undertakes.
- I continue to serve on an IPRA working committee to examine how the organization can better serve conservation and forest preserve districts. A series of focus groups were held in late December and included mid-level staff at CCFPD who are not currently members of IPRA. Tammy Bruehl, Sue Gallo, Peter Goodspeed, Pam Leiter, and Bridgette Moen participated. The IPRA will assess the feedback from the focus groups and compile recommendations for the IPRA board and leadership team. My thanks to the staff who participated.

**Planning and Construction Department (Mike Daab and Mike Fry)**

- The Swiss Valley Shelter has been removed.
- Mike Fry led a discussion with the Pennsylvania Parks Maintenance Institute to discuss multiple aspects of our Dark Sky Park. The focus was on the construction and planning of lighting, acquisition of sustainable materials, and general maintenance considerations of the fixtures.
- The Construction department assisted Lake of the Woods operations with ice storm damage clean up. There were a total of 14 dump-truck loads of large tree limbs.
- The Construction department installed new LED light fixtures in the Lake of the Woods cold storage building, and Middle Fork Activity Center.
- We also replaced two infrared heaters in the Lake of the Woods’ West Maintenance building. The new heaters replace units from 1986. The new units will operate more efficiently, and more quietly.

- Bridgett Moen completed the Certified Playground Safety Inspector exam to recertify, and participated in IPRA Forest Preserve and Conservation Task Force workshop. Mike Daab attended the Illinois Invasive Species Forum.
- A preliminary punchlist has been completed for the Rankin Collections Care Center. The contractor is ahead of schedule with anticipated completion in late January/early February.
- A survey was completed of the new Heron View Forest Preserve in order for border signs to be accurately installed. Construction, Planning, and Lake of the Woods Operations staff met on site to review the borders and proposed parking areas at the new preserve.

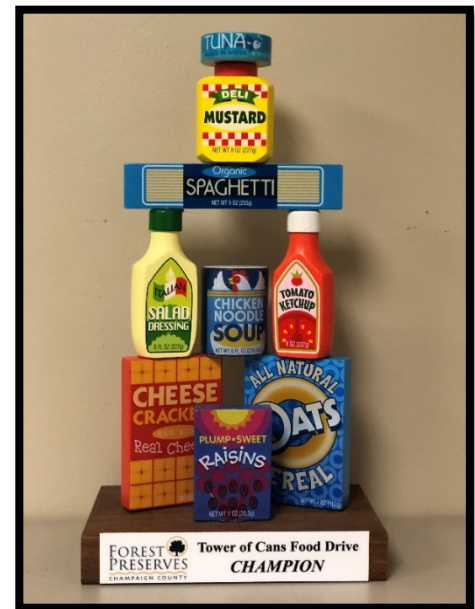
### **Business and Finance (John Baker)**

- Finalized the 2020 audit engagement agreement between the District and CliftonLarsonAllen. This included reviewing audit reporting requirements under the Illinois Grant Accountability and Transparency Act to ascertain the level of audit requirements to be met. 2020 state and federal grant expenditures did not rise to the level of requiring either a separate state or federal audit. Similarly 2020 Foundation donations did not exceed the level which would require a separate audit. Instead the Foundation's financial transactions will be reviewed and incorporated in the District's 2020 audit
- Provided CliftonLarsonAllen (CLA) with documentation of financial transactions for the initial audit testing and internal controls review. Updated District internal control questionnaires.
- Finalized the biennial actuarial engagement with Lauterbach Amen (LA) to prepare the 2021-2022 post-employment benefits report for non-pension retirement benefits (OPEB). Worked with HR to prepare employee financial and census reports for this actuarial study. OPEB is the calculation of the District's implicit subsidy for retirees who continue in the District's health insurance plan after retirement.
- Began issuing 2020 audit tasks to administration and other employees in preparation for the audit field work for a full and accurate picture of District finances and obligations as of December 31, 2020. As with many other financial tasks, COVID has delayed these preparations and during the year prevented the systematic monthly transactional review normally completed by staff. With nine different hands (including temporary employees) processing 2020 District financial transactions, staff expect that a more intensive internal review will be needed to prepare for the full 2020 audit.
- Implemented year end closing procedures in our MSI financial system including transferring 2020 year end fund and account balances to the 2021 balance sheet. Posted the approved 2021 budget in MSI also.
- Worked with HR to ensure 2021 employee benefits changes in Paylocity are accurate before the first 2021 payroll. This includes changes in benefit costs and employee enrollment.
- Revised the 2021 Chart of Accounts for District liabilities and assets. Previous COA work focused on income and expense codes necessary for program budgeting reporting. Staff will be merging prior year codes for all accounts into the new codes to maintain accurate historical financial data. Staff will also update all Excel spreadsheets with the new codes, including those for utility and other payments, payroll processing, as well as updating the Paylocity and Purchasing Card general ledger codes.
- Outlined program budget reporting procedures for discussion with department heads at the January Risk Management meeting. Requested estimates from administration and other employees for expected overhead support for each of the District's program areas.

- Revised the 2021 Working Budget to incorporate administrative overhead into the program budgeting section.
- Met with Furat Ibrahim to review the District’s 2021 technology plans, District expectations for IT support from MicroSystems, and to invite him to participate on the IT committee.
- Met with Chris Edmondson and David Sebestik to discuss Golf financial projections for 2021, review the Business and Finance procedure for recording golf revenues, and explain the purpose of the Golf balance sheet accounts.
- Began reviewing 1099 requirements and their applicability to District vendors for 1099 issuance.

### Human Resources (Dara Edgington)

- The 2021 compensation and classification study is off to a great start. The kick-off meeting was held on December 18 and the project team is currently working with GovHR USA to narrow down the list of “comparable entities” that will be polled in the study. In the meantime, staff are completing job analysis questionnaires.
- Dara attended the Creating Safe Spaces Initiative Roundtable hosted by the National Wildlife Federation.
- The 2020 United Way Campaign wrapped up in December. The District’s participation rate was down from the 2019 campaign, however our total *giving amount* increased overall. A very special thanks to all staff who contributed; in this year of financial hardship for our community, your donations are that much more critical and appreciated. And thank you to Mary Beck for coordinating yet another successful campaign!
- Staff competed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Canned Food Drive and Tower of Cans Competition, ultimately donating over 300 pounds of food to the Eastern Illinois Foodbank. While COVID-19 prevented us from completing the tower-building portion of the competition this year, departments still competed amongst themselves to see who could collect the most food items. Congratulations go to Homer Lake Operations for winning this year’s competition and an awesome bragging rights trophy created by our very own construction department (picture attached).
- The annual Safe, Happy, and Healthy Holiday Challenge wrapped up last week. The aim of this challenge is to encourage employees to continue making healthy choices throughout the stressful holiday season. In this odd year of social distancing and separation, the challenge was a welcome morale booster. Thanks to staff who participated and to Mary Beck for coordinating.

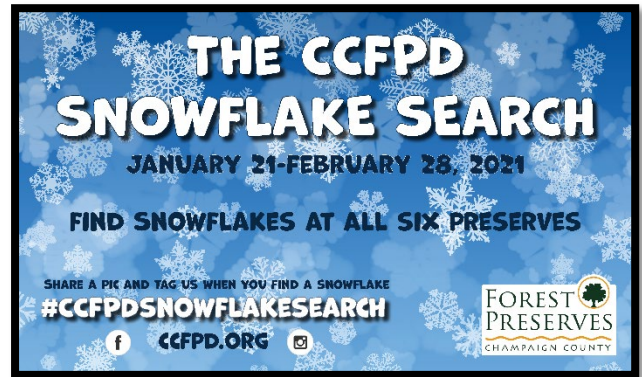


### Marketing (Lisa Sprinkle)

- The Illini Radio Group announced the “2020 Best of Champaign Urbana” winners.
  - Best Museum: Museum of the Grand Prairie (Gold medal)
  - Best Family Attraction: Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve (Silver medal)
- We won free advertising from WDWS as part of their “We Make it Happen” package used in October/November/December. Companies that purchased this package were entered into a

drawing to win forty 30-second spots 5a-7p Mon-Fri, forty 30-second spots 5a-midnight Mon-Sun, and 200,000 digital impressions to be used in the 1st Quarter of 2021!

- Brochures for golf programs, golf fees, facility rentals and the campground have all been updated to reflect 2021 fees and new amenities.
- Marketing and program staff coordinated to develop online marketing materials for the CCFPD Snowflake Search. The search will take place January 21-February 28 and encourages people to look for thirty snowflakes throughout six preserves.
- We have developed new ads for online marketing with Chambanamoms.com, Smile Politely, Mahomet Daily, SJO Daily, and St. Joseph Record.
- Media coverage last month included:



**Lake of the Woods: Out with the old, in with the new**

[https://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/parks-recreation/at-lake-of-the-woods-out-with-the-old-in-with-the-new/article\\_b70e3efb-69cd-515e-9898-ceae549abda7.html](https://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/parks-recreation/at-lake-of-the-woods-out-with-the-old-in-with-the-new/article_b70e3efb-69cd-515e-9898-ceae549abda7.html)

**Champaign County Forest Preserve District looks to the future with new shelters**

[https://www.mahometdaily.com/champaign-county-forest-preserve-district-looks-to-the-future-with-new-shelters/?fbclid=IwAR1oSKs0mHLLqZCnCUW\\_D339CcWaAusWTOpAg8VP2XIBNFgItP31qaxW\\_9w](https://www.mahometdaily.com/champaign-county-forest-preserve-district-looks-to-the-future-with-new-shelters/?fbclid=IwAR1oSKs0mHLLqZCnCUW_D339CcWaAusWTOpAg8VP2XIBNFgItP31qaxW_9w)

**Best Political Campaign: Champaign County Forest Preserves tax referendum**

[https://www.smilepolitely.com/splog/best\\_political\\_campaign\\_champaign\\_county\\_forest\\_preserves\\_tax\\_referendum/](https://www.smilepolitely.com/splog/best_political_campaign_champaign_county_forest_preserves_tax_referendum/)

**Best Pandemic Side Effect: Appreciation for outdoor spaces**

[https://www.smilepolitely.com/splog/best\\_pandemic\\_side\\_effect\\_appreciation\\_for\\_our\\_outdoor\\_spaces/](https://www.smilepolitely.com/splog/best_pandemic_side_effect_appreciation_for_our_outdoor_spaces/)

**Winter Guide Released by Champaign County Forest Preserve**

<https://www.wcia.com/ciliving-tv/winter-guide-released-with-champaign-county-forest-preserve-district/>

**Top 5 activities to do in Central Illinois this January**

<https://www.wcia.com/ciliving-tv/top-5-activities-to-do-in-central-illinois-this-january/>

How to enjoy the great outdoors in Champaign-Urbana area

<https://www.chambanamoms.com/2020/12/30/ultimate-outdoor-winter-champaign-urbana/>

- Social media numbers continue to increase.

	FACEBOOK	+/-	INSTAGRAM	+/-	TWITTER	+/-
CCFPD	4,987	+75	2,175	+88	536	+1
KRT	3,100	+18	81	+1	126	
MGP	3,995	+46	1,139	+7	231	-2
HLIC	1,869	+45				
GC	1,610	+29	294	+12	87	+3
FPPF	312	+15				

- 2020 saw a huge increase in social media use and that is reflected by the increase of followers among all of our platforms.

	FACEBOOK	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
CCFPD	+1,485	+960	+23
KRT	+402	+81	+7
MGP	+1,095	+333	+54
HLIC	+763		
GC	+340	+71	+26

### **Volunteer Coordinator (Sue Gallo)**

- Mary Ellen, Lisa, Emily, M&Ed staff and Sue personalized about 350 holiday cards and sent them out to volunteers. Responses from volunteers has been positive, and Sue plans to gather feedback from staff in considering whether to do something similar next year. Angie has helped with updating addresses on returned cards.
- Sue analyzed volunteer engagement in 2020 using hours as a metric. The total so far (without additions from M&E and USRC) is 5,220 hours of volunteer engagement. The reported hours of volunteer service in 2019 was 6,380. The 2020 total is lower because on-site education programs, which in the past accounted for about 40% of volunteer time, stopped due to COVID after March. Nonetheless, there was a large increase in hours for volunteers associated with Natural Resources, Eagle Scout Projects and Trail Stewards. Numbers collection and analysis continues as does exploring alternative metrics.
- Sue worked with Ryan to send out an end of year fundraising email targeted to volunteers, and to discuss volunteers in grants.

### **Grants and Development Specialist (Ryan Anderson)**

#### Grant Applications

- Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation Community Stewardship Grant- 3x match- \$21,000
  - This matching grant will be applied towards restoration along the KRT

#### Grant Reports

- Lumpkin Family Foundation Land, Health, Community-Fall 2019 Post Grant Report
  - This grant provided \$16,000 for the design of the Homer Lake Interpretive Center
- Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation- K-12 Pollinator Grant
  - This grant provided \$11,000 for the restoration of a pollinator area at Homer Lake Forest Preserve and the associated event “Amazing Pollinator Camp Bag”
- Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation- Land Acquisition
  - This \$86,000 grant funded the purchase and restoration of the Cook property to expand the Old Homer Park area
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources Quarterly Reports
  - We submitted reports for the OSLAD grant at the Peninsula and the Museum grant for the Rankin Collections Care Center

#### Year-end Fundraising Goal (preliminary results; we will have a full report next month)

- Funds Raised between 6/1/2020- 12/31/2020
  - \$87,089.59
- Funds Raised between 11/25/2020- 12/31/2020
  - \$45,890.98
- Donor Retention Rate: 43%, which is right at the industry average of 40-45%

### **Natural Resources (Peter Goodspeed)**

- NR staff had the opportunity to conduct two more prescribed burns in December that included:
  - Collins Woods at Homer Lake (12 acres)
  - A woodland CRP at River Bend (9 acres)
  - A section of prairie at Buffalo Trace (5 acres)
- Woody invasive species control began in several areas throughout the preserves including Stidham Woods, the edge of Rayburn-Purnell Woods and in a few areas at Buffalo Trace. To avoid the buildup of cut woody material, staff have been cutting target species and burning them in burn piles on-site.
- In early December, the Department welcomed our newest Natural Resources Technician, Kenny Bielski. Kenny has a lot of experience in the public and private sectors of the natural resources industry.
- All staff participated in a virtual sexual harassment training via PDRMA's online learning center.
- During inclement weather days in December, staff rinsed and winterized spray tanks, cleaned out and disinfected vehicles, cleaned and disinfected the office space, performed maintenance on all of the chainsaws, and organized the NR cold storage building.
- Before the Christmas and the New Year, staff celebrated their annual accomplishments with a socially-distanced holiday luncheon.



### **Lake of the Woods Golf Course (Chris Edmondson and Joie Torres)**

- December of 2020 continued the trend of unseasonably nice weather, which was a benefit to the course. We had 720 players in December and the course was open until December 23<sup>rd</sup>. This is easily the most players for the month of December going back 10 years. It is also the latest the course has been open in that time frame. Two days specifically stick out for the month – the 9<sup>th</sup> (110 players) and the 10<sup>th</sup> (175 players). The temps were near 70 degrees both of these days. These are certainly the highest player count days in December that I have seen in my time here.
- For the year, we finished with 33,620 rounds played. This is the highest round total since 2009. Making this number more impressive is the fact that we had no play in April and very limited play in May, under the COVID restrictions.
- December revenue was also up in comparison to the past several years with the increased play and the volume of pass sales. We finished the month at \$85,360, of which \$69,510 were Anniversary (2-Year) and Platinum (One Year) pass sales. Through the end of the month/year, we have sold 831 Anniversary Passes and 54 Platinum Passes. We expect to have the Anniversary Pass sale concluded sometime in January.
- We were allowed to open the Golf Simulator in December, but on a very limited basis. Under Tier 3 Mitigations, we are only allowed to have one person at a time using the Simulator (2 people if same household), unless it is one on one instruction with David or Jason. Because of these restrictions, we only set up one machine this season. The Sim is open 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily and a tee-time is required. This also does not allow us to hold any sort of league this season. For these reasons, Simulator revenue will be very minimal this winter.



- The Golf Committee held a virtual meeting on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. We discussed golf course finances, season pass sales, budget requests and approvals, grounds and project updates and volunteer workday planning for the spring. It was good to get feedback from committee members on how they thought the year went and what they are looking forward to in 2021.
- The maintenance crew ran a drainage tile on hole #6, filled it with pea gravel, and covered the top layer with 6 inch stones.
- During the winter, the maintenance crew continues to work in the shop power washing and servicing equipment, and painting tee blocks.
- The crew will begin grinding mower reels this month.

### **Museum and Education Department (Barb Garvey and Pam Leiter)**



- The Museum of the Grand Prairie got the Best of Champaign-Urbana (Illini Radio Group) gold medal this year! This was announced December 10.
- WCIA covered the building of the Rankin Collections Care Center on the evening news on December 16.
- Pam Leiter appeared on WCIA's Morning Show segment, *Whys Guys*, to talk about fun ice experiments and winter in the preserves.
- Initial conversations with the Foundation about developing fundraising strategies for the new Interpretive Center are underway.
- Barb Garvey attended a pre-punch meeting for the Rankin Center with Mike Fry and Bridgette Moen. The building is very close to being done. This month doors and windows were installed, Barb Garvey and George Groschen coordinated schedules with the sprinkler system, security and electrical workers this month to assure proper hookups.
- Barb Garvey received the initial email regarding the museum's self-study for American Alliance of Museums accreditation. The review process will begin in March and end in early 2023.
- Education staff will likely be able to get vaccinations in Phase 1B.
- Pam Leiter applied for the 2021 Leadership Illinois Fellows program.
- HLIC got an award for Department Participation in the United Way staff giving campaign – many thanks to everyone who gave!
- Jennifer Wick got 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the staff wellness challenge, and won a drawing for repeat donor for the United Way campaign. Barb Garvey earned 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the staff wellness challenge.
- Pam completed layout/design & edits for the Grand Prairie Friends' 2020 Annual Report booklet, and continues as Vice President for another year.
- The Earth's Features Exploration Kits went out to Champaign Unit 4 schools in December. They will be using these kits after the New Year. This is a partnership between CCFPD and Urbana Parks District, with Stacey Clementz as the CCFPD staff lead.
- Planning for the next kit for schools is well underway. Stacey is continuing her partnership with the Urbana Park District on these, and a grant from the Community Foundation of East Central Illinois for \$6500 was received for a 2<sup>nd</sup> Exploration Kit. Topic and grade-level for this second kit are to be determined. Thanks to Ellen Kirsanoff at UPD for applying for the grant.
- Cathy Schneider brought in more Animal Advocate donations this year than ever before! She has been recognizing donors on social media, with their prior consent.
- Stacey Clementz developed a Winter Activity Guide, which was posted on the CCFPD website to download, and hard copies on-site will be available Jan 4 – Feb 26 at Middle Fork, Lake of the Woods and Homer Lake.

- Stacey put up the first StoryWalk at the Middle Fork location, *Over and Under the Snow* by Kate Messner; it was up Dec 16-Jan 6 and was very popular!
- Jennifer Wick did a beautiful video, *Winter Solstice Walk*, (pictured below) to celebrate the winter solstice and encourage visitors to get out and hike even in the winter.
- A new self-guided activity webpage on the CCFPD website gives people a one stop place to find things to do at the preserves. <https://www.ccfpd.org/Museum-Education/Self-Guided-Adventures>



- Jennifer Wick's Homer for the Holidays craft kits flew off the table! (pictured at right)
- Katie Snyder assembled give away bags filled with New Year's Eve activities for area families. Made from materials already on hand for onsite programs, 60 kits were gone within 90 minutes.
- Missing our ability to put up indoor holiday decorations, museum staff made an effort to decorate the inside of the schoolhouse and put up some extra outdoor decorations at the museum this year.
- All staff are working on a variety of plans/scenarios for summer programming/summer camps as the uncertainty of COVID has disrupted the normal schedule of planning, registration, hiring and marketing.
- The great snowflake hunt is on! During the holidays, Museum and Education staff and staff throughout the district painted tree cookies with snowflakes for a scavenger style hunt throughout the preserves, January 21 – February 28. Pat Cain, Jennifer Wick and Cathy Schneider are working together to make this happen.
- The museum is beginning to shift its gift shop to a new, potentially contactless, more detailed POS system. Mel Wiegel has completed the store inventory.
- Museum volunteers and staff continue to transcribe letters from the Busey Collection.
- Barb Garvey filed the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area annual report for Champaign County and attended the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area Steering Committee meeting. Pat Cain was invited to that meeting to introduce them to our Clio project. Clio is the app that has allowed the museum to create an online guided tour.
- George Groschen has finished remodeling the women's restroom in the annex. Pat Cain will be moving into his new office shortly.
- George Groschen will be creating chair rails in the education room and in its closet to prevent damage to the walls from the movement of tables and chairs.
- Volunteers for the Museum and Education Department received holiday cards from the CCFPD signed by the folks within the department who know them best. We had many lovely responses.



- Mark Hanson continues to process Tomlinson Cemetery documentation. He and Jennifer Grove are working on continued cataloguing backlog.
- Jennifer Grove is also working on renewing loans from individuals and institutions that rotate on an annual basis.
- Barb Garvey and Pat Cain attended the Institute for Museum and Library Services, “Museums and COVID: How to Use the Latest Research to Your Advantage” webinar.
- Mark Hanson submitted the Conservation Assessment Program Site Review Questionnaire; the program accepted the questionnaire and assessor contracts.
- Barb Garvey is putting together a Facility Management Manual for the ME Department including all the systems, inspections and maintenance that must take place to keep things running smoothly.
- Sandy Osborne and Jennifer Wick will join with others in the Champaign County Museums Network to do a colors program for Tolono public library this summer.
- Pat Cain was re-elected as the president of the Champaign County Museums Network.
- Pat Cain spoke as part of a webinar on Illinois History, run by the Illinois Marathon and hosted by Visit Champaign County on December 8.
- Mark Hanson finished a Northern States Conservation Center course, Preservation Environments, which will undoubtedly assist in the new environment being created in the Rankin Center.
- Barb Garvey, Jennifer Wick and other social media contributors met about promoting the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation Facebook page
- Barb Garvey and Pam Leiter sent an update to Museum and Education Department donors, detailing how we have adapted and found new ways to reach our audiences since the pandemic.
- Katie Snyder attended an *All About Owls* webinar offered by Will County Conservation District.
- Mark Hanson and Jen Grove worked on new large artifact relocation plans.
- HLIC Facebook stats, Dec 1-31: Average Daily Organic Reach: 1300 (Sum: 40,299); Average Daily Page Engaged Users: 57 (Sum: 1,775)
- MGP Facebook stats: Dec -31: Average Daily Organic Reach 2082 (Sum 64,556) ; Average Daily Engaged Users 60 (Sum 1847)

### **Lake of the Woods (Doug Sanders)**

- Lake of the Woods currently has its annual Christmas tree recycle area set up near the RT 47 service drive. This drop off area will remain open until January 17. As in years past, the Natural Resources department will use the trees to create fish structure in the lakes, if conditions allow, and the remaining trees will be chipped and used in landscaping.
- Botanical Garden staff are busy with several projects, including plant propagation in the greenhouse, holiday decoration storage, and preparing for the 2021 EGGSTRAVAGANZA. New this year will be Mario Brothers, watermelons, and Mother Goose’s Golden Egg.
- Staff continue to perform service and repair of equipment. This is part of the department’s annual preventive maintenance program.

### **Middle Fork River (Matt Kuntz)**

- With the New Year's Day ice storm Middle Fork staff spent several days cleaning up mostly downed branches, and some loss of trees inside user areas. Due to icy preserve road conditions that did not respond to salt application, we closed the gates early that day.

- Middle Fork staff continues invasive clearing throughout the preserve. We have focused on areas near the Miner's Trail (Odle addition) removing honeysuckle and mulberry stands. We have also cleared a two acre section west of the maintenance facility starting the first phase of prairie restoration for that area.
- Working with our reservation software provider, I have updated our reservation webpage that the public uses to make reservations. It is more efficient for the user. I will also be updating our webpage photos and descriptions.
- Thanks to Stacey and the environmental education staff for the StoryWalk program that was placed on a trail inside the campground area. We got to see a lot of visitors using the story walk and we hope to see more in the future.
- With the help of the Construction department, we have installed new LED recessed lights inside the Activity Center foyer that will run on an occupancy sensor.
- The campground host position has opened for applications for the upcoming season.

### **Homer Lake (Brian Taylor)**

- Staff completed the installation of boundary signs at the newly surveyed Cook property / Old Homer Park extension.
- The weather early in the month allowed us to conduct a few prescribed burns in addition to the larger areas that the Natural Resources crew did.
- We assisted Museum and Education staff by cutting tree cookies that will be painted to resemble snowflakes for an upcoming program.

### **Kickapoo Rail Trail**

- For the new parking area planned for St. Joseph, soil testing has now been conducted. ERA is drafting IDOT specifications for review.
- The Planning department met with Champaign County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD) regarding the St. Joe Wetland improvements it is planning adjacent to the trail.

### **District Cultural Competency Initiatives**

- The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion working group is studying the Pulitzer Prize winning 1619 Project, which was printed in The New York Times Magazine in 2019. The project includes a series of podcasts outlining the history of slavery and how it shaped our country's racial legacy. Members of the DEI group are also viewing and reading multiple resources on how to create safe space in nature for persons of color and underserved populations.
- The News Gazette ran an article December 13 entitled "How We Tell the Story at the Museum of the Grand Prairie" in its *Inside Out* Series. It featured the museum's Doris Hoskins archive.
- Barb Garvey, Mary Ellen Wuellner, and Ryan Anderson met with Kevin Hamilton, Dean of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Illinois about the potential for a grant to create greater accessibility to the Hoskins Archive.
- Pat Cain was contacted by Desiree McMillion from African American Studies Department at the U of I about potential collaborations. A group from the University of Illinois will be attending our Martin Luther King Day celebration, a re-release of our *Civil Rights in Champaign County* panel discussion from 2019.