

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteer for the...

Festival of the Sugar Maples

February 27 – March 11



Volunteers look forward to this popular event held outdoors at Coral Woods each year during late winter when the sap begins to flow. Volunteers are needed to lead tours through the sugar maple grove; teach visitors how to identify maple trees in winter; demonstrate tree tapping; dress in period-appropriate costume and interpret the traditions of syrup making; and work in the sugar house where the syrup is made.

Sign-up for the Festival of the Sugar Maples on Nov. 17 at the Education Winter Quarterly Gathering. After Nov. 17 call Volunteer Coordinator Denice Beck at (815) 338-6223.

SAVE THE DATE: New volunteer training session
Saturday, February 25, 9 a.m.–12 p.m.
Coral Woods Conservation Area



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Education Volunteers

Quarterly Gathering

Thursday, Nov. 17, 7–9 p.m.

Prairieview Education Center

RSVP: (815) 479-5779

NOTE:
Festival of the Sugar Maples
volunteer sign-up begins
at this meeting.

Topic: Winter Constellations. Who is Orion and what is his story? Have you heard of the Seven Sisters? How are their stories intertwined? We will identify major winter constellations and learn the stories behind them. After signing up to volunteer for your favorite winter programs, we'll go outdoors to enjoy a little quiet stargazing. Be sure to dress for the weather!



Thank you to all 320 Trail of History Volunteers!

We couldn't have done it without you!



HABITAT RESTORATION One day Volunteer opportunities available year-round

Do you want to help save the environment—but only have a couple hours to spare? Individuals, students, small groups, and families with children over age six can contact a Site Steward from the list below and participate in restoring native habitat at conservation sites. No experience necessary. Wear sturdy footwear and clothing appropriate for outdoor work and weather. Some sites offer service opportunities for larger groups—contact the Volunteer Coordinator at (815) 338-6223 or DBeck@MCCDistrict.org to learn more.

	LOCATION	SCHEDULE	SITE STEWARD – CALL AHEAD
SATURDAYS	Boger Bog, Bull Valley	Fourth Saturday of each month, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.	Ders Anderson (815) 455-1537
	Grundstrom Woods, Wonder Lake	Second Saturday of each month, 9:30 a.m.–12 p.m.	Chuck and Ann Dubsy (815) 728-9199
	Harrison Benwell, Wonder Lake	First Saturday of each month, 9:30 a.m.–1 p.m.	Pat and Emily Heald (815) 575-1684
	Glacial Park, Richmond	Third Saturday of each month, 1–4 p.m. Meet at Lost Valley Visitor Center.	Ed Collins (815) 678-4532
	Pioneer Fen/Dutch Creek, Johnsburg	Third Saturday of each month, 9 a.m.–12 p.m.	Robert Roe (847) 668-8559, rlroe66@gmail.com ; http://sites.google.com/site/dutchcreekvolunteers/
SUNDAYS	Alden Sedge Meadow South, Alden	Third Sunday of each month, 1–3:30 p.m.	Judy and Jack Speer (815) 648-1372 or smwaters@intergate.com
	Cotton Creek Marsh, Island Lake	First and third Sunday of each month, 1–3 p.m.	Mike Bouska (815) 759-0731
	The Hollows, Cary	Resumes in spring.	Margie Szymanskyj (815) 479-0988
VARIABLE	Alden Sedge Meadow, Alden	Variable	Dan Wilson (815) 236-9749
	Coral Woods, Marengo	Variable	Kathleen Roberson (815) 245-4093
	Fel-Pro RRR, Cary	Variable	Nancy Williamson (815) 459-0931
	Fox Bluff, Cary	Variable	Connie and Paul Ridl (847) 854-5109
	Lake in the Hills Fen, LITH	Irregular Saturday/Sunday schedule, 9 a.m.–12 p.m.	John Scott (847) 658-6241
	Pleasant Valley, Woodstock	Nov. 25, 10 a.m.–2 p.m.; Dec. 3, Jan. 15, Feb. 11, 9 a.m.–Noon	Greg Rajsy (815) 814-5055 or quirkaceae@yahoo.com

Get to Know Our Volunteers

Greg Rajsky

*Pleasant Valley Conservation Area Site Steward
“Bringing back the light”*

Twenty-one years ago Greg Rajsky responded to an appeal from The Nature Conservancy’s Volunteer Stewardship Network (VSN) for citizens to assist in the ecological management of the Chicago Wilderness region’s natural areas. His passion for nature has since led him to become involved in numerous projects related to environmental advocacy and stewardship. Greg appreciates the biodiversity of Northern Illinois ecosystems and he believes that our understanding of the environment should be interpreted within the context of a complex system based on the relationship between wildlife and plant communities.

“I appreciate the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the management of the natural areas that nurture my spirit,” said Rajsky. “Human beings have a profound impact on the environment; it is important that we act wisely so we leave the most beneficial impression. What we do can contribute to the vitality of the earth; to do otherwise is failure.”

In 2008, Greg received a Chicago Wilderness Habitat Project Grassroots Conservation Leadership Award for his efforts to promote a culture of conservation in Northern Illinois, which included co-organizing the Wild Things Conference, a biannual gathering of environmental professionals and volunteers to explore regional environmental topics.

“Greg is truly a leader among the community of ecological restoration in Northeast Illinois. He understands the “big picture” of the ecological significance of our remaining high-quality natural communities. His volunteer work ethic is the mentor model and his guidance and leadership to countless volunteers is his living legacy.”

—John Peters, Restoration Ecologist

From natural areas restoration and management, ecological assessment, and plant and wildlife monitoring to environmental education and advocacy,

Greg has dedicated his time toward gaining a broad understanding of the environment. He generously shares this knowledge by leading public restoration sessions and plant identification walks. He also teaches classes, like “Intro to Natural Areas Management” at the Morton Arboretum in Lisle. He is a strong proponent of life-long learning, and asserts that “nothing you learn is irrelevant, as long as you are creative.”

Greg started with the Conservation District in 2008 as a Site Steward at Lake in the Hills Conservation Area. In 2009 he shifted his stewardship to a heavily-timbered section at Pleasant Valley Conservation Area. On Mother’s Day 2009 Greg hosted the first of his “holiday” restoration sessions. Under the guidance of Restoration Ecologist John Peters, Greg embarked on a plan to engage the public in restoration and education in a section of Pleasant Valley known as “White Oak Woods”, affectionately referred to as “W.O.W.” by the volunteers who regularly assist him.



Another aspect of habitat restoration that Greg believes strongly in is building community – working together as a team, communicating the principles of ecology, and forming new friendships.

“I love working with school and community groups. Last year we had a soccer team from Woodstock North High School and a youth group from the Ridgefield-Crystal Lake Presbyterian Church. Such groups often bring great enthusiasm,” said Rajsky. “At the other end of the spectrum, we have quite a cadre of seniors who volunteer on a regular basis.”



Greg is enthusiastic about the impact volunteer restoration work has made at Pleasant Valley.

“You could see a real difference after just the first year. What was once so dark and dense and was no good for recreational use or habitat. Now the area is expanded and you can see the openness of the understory from the roadway. Where the ground layer vegetation was once bare, native grasses and wildflowers now flourish.” – WOW!

People unfamiliar with restoration are often surprised to learn that warm weather is not necessarily the best time to remove invasive brush. Really the best time to remove invasive vegetation is October through March when temperatures are cooler for this vigorous work and of course, the lack of mosquitoes! In winter, vegetation is dormant and frozen ground

“Greg has a wealth of knowledge and insight beyond just plants, lichens or animals and is certainly willing to share his time with our volunteer groups or any member of the public he meets. It seems like every month our group becomes larger and closer”.

—Chris Zeiner, Restoration Technician

allows work to be done in ecologically sensitive areas without damaging native plants we are trying to reintroduce.

Because there are no leaves to identify plants in the winter months, Greg goes out in advance and flags plant stock that shouldn’t be removed, and then on the restoration workday he introduces volunteers to winter plant identification. People often comment on Greg’s ability to identify so many plants, but he thinks there’s a simple answer, “They are my friends. How could I not remember the names of my friends?” 