



Community Engagement Department Memorandum

To: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director
From: Laurie Metanchuk, Community Engagement Director
Date: 10/14/2025
Re: September 2025 Report

Executive Summary

Community Engagement strengthens public support for the Forest Preserve District's mission by connecting residents to their forest preserves through communication, education, and outreach. These efforts benefit the District by building public support, expanding stewardship, strengthening awareness, and inspiring the next generation.

In September, the Community Engagement team:

- Expanded **digital reach by 2.2%**
- **Received 243,079 impressions (up 38.8% from August) on social media**
- Reached **2,157 individuals through programs and nature center visits**
- Engaged **1,135 attendees in environmental education initiatives**
- Successfully hosted and helped generate **\$24,678 in net proceeds from at Kane Forest Preserve Foundation Golf Outing** to help support the nature play space project at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve

Communications & Marketing

DIGITAL MEDIA

- **Follower Growth:** +2.2% over August (Facebook +302, Instagram flat, +75, LinkedIn +37, Twitter/X +75, TikTok +15 and YouTube +73)
- **Impressions:** 243,079 (+38.8% from August)
- **Top Monthly Posts by Engagement:**
 - 9/4 Facebook Post: *Today marks the start of the Great Orb Hunt:* 8,555 views, 458 engagements, 12 shares
 - 9/9 Facebook Post: *Ribbon-cutting celebration in Sugar Grove:* 4,922 views, 429 engagements, 2 shares
 - 9/22 Facebook Post: *Head out from Sept. 4 through Sept. 30 for your chance to find and keep a hand-crafted orb:* 4,564 views; 415 engagements, 5 shares
 - 9/22 Facebook Post: *Thank you, volunteers (Fox River Day clean-up):* 5,042 views, 333 total engagements, 5 shares
- **Video/Reel Content:** 6 videos produced (5,457 views total)
- **Website Traffic:** 15,596 users, 37,251 page views

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TREE LINE NEWSLETTER

Our current print subscribers total 5,415 (+0). Current email subscribers total 15,723 (+6), for a combined total of 21,138 subscribers (+6). As always, free subscriptions to *The TreeLine* newsletter are available at: http://bit.ly/ForestPreserve_Email.

EVENTS, CONFERENCES, MEETINGS & TRAINING

3CMA Conference: On Sept. 3-5, Director Metanchuk attended the City-County Communications & Marketing Association (3CMA) Conference in Las Vegas. Sessions attended included: leveraging technology for effective public outreach, incorporating artificial intelligence into the design process, navigating misinformation on social media, social media and artificial intelligence as tools for public good, communications and community support, creating a plan to implement accessibility requirements on your website, local government storytelling that builds connection, and advances in risk and crisis communication.

FPDKC Volunteer Appreciation Dinner: On Sept. 10, Director Metanchuk and Environmental Education Manager Barb McKittrick represented the Community Engagement department at the District's Volunteer Appreciation Dinner in North Aurora. Manager McKittrick presented the Education Program Volunteer of the Year Award to Nancy Hannah and Nature Center Host of the Year Award to Bob Brill. We are so grateful to all of our environmental education volunteers! It was amazing to hear about their collective annual efforts, including 811 workdays and events and workforce contribution valued at \$530,303.97.



Environmental Education



SEPTEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Our annual Harvest Fest has been a fixture in the Aurora area for over 20 years, providing family-friendly, fall fun. At this year’s Harvest Fest on Sept. 28, more than 170 attendees enjoyed live folk music, harvest-themed crafts and games, pumpkin painting, seasonal refreshments, touch-a-tractor activities, educational stations and fishing in Lake Patterson. Thank you to all the departments that helped us make this festival such a success, especially South Operations and Public Safety.



Kids, and adults, of all ages got into the spirit at Harvest Fest, playing interactive musical instruments along with performers from the Old Town School of Folk Music.

PROGRAM REACH & REVENUE GENERATION

Programs	Programs Completed (Monthly)	Attendance (Monthly)	Avg Attendance Per Program (Monthly)	Programs Completed (Total FY)	Attendance (Total FY)	Avg Attendance Per Program (Total FY)
Public	15	461	31	45	1367	30
School	9	309	34	15	398	27
Scout	0	0	0	1	20	20
Community	5	240	48	17	560	33
Outreach	1	125	125	4	350	88
Learn from the Experts	0	0	0	3	77	26
Virtual Public*	1	n/a	n/a	3	n/a	n/a
Virtual School	0	0	0	0	0	0
Program Totals	31	1,135	38	88	2,772	33
Nature Center Visitors		1022			2993	
Total Attendance		2157			5765	
Revenues[^]	\$940					

*Note: Only webinars have live attendees

[^]Excludes LFE/KCCN partnership revenues.

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“The programming offering by KCFP is outstanding and one of if not the best benefits I receive as a Kane county tax payer. Thanks you [sp] for offering all of this amazing programming.”

— *“Nurtured by Nature” program participant*

“This was an amazing program. We were able to see so many interesting things, the moon up close, Saturn and one of its moons as well as several nebulas. The club members were so knowledgeable and friendly. Loved seeing the excitement of the children in attendance.”

— *“Moon and Star Party” participant*

“Barb [Environmental Education Manager Barb McKittrick] is outstanding. The programming offered by kcfp is simply outstanding.”

— *Participant in “Knock out the Noxious” program*

IN-PERSON PROGRAMS

- **Public Programs** – Each season, the naturalist team custom-curates new seasonal programs that interpret our local ecology, with the goal of inspiring connections with nature. Of the seven new public programs launched this month, of special note were:

- In the 4th session in a series of successful *Open Fishing Clinics* at Oakhurst, partners from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Urban and Community Fishing Program joined Naturalist Erica Lemon for an evening at Oakhurst Forest Preserve. Anglers practiced their casting and harvesting techniques and learned about the fish native to Illinois waters.



Beginning anglers enjoyed catching bluegill and learning about aquatic ecology.

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- In partnership with the Kane County Department of Environmental and Water Resources, Environmental Education Manager McKittrick designed an evening of nighttime fun and learning in support of dark sky protection. The 44 participants in *Wildlife under a Dark Sky* traveled to different educational stations at Creek Bend Nature Center to learn about the different animals that come out after dark and the ways that light pollution threatens their existence. They enjoyed wildlife-themed games and crafts at stations manned by volunteers and local Dark-sky International delegates, ending with a night hike to look and listen for nocturnal animals and a campfire gathering, complete with s'mores!



Wildlife abounds in our forest preserves after dark and most of these animals depend on deep, dark nights to thrive.

- Teaming up with Volunteer Steward Nikki Matthiscyk, Environmental Education Manager McKittrick led *Knockout the Noxious* at Les Arends Forest Preserve. She explained the differences between native and non-native plants, described how noxious weeds infiltrate and degrade our ecosystems and pointed out examples of local invasive plants. After a short hike to explore the preserve for examples of invasive species, the 20 participants got started practicing invasive plant removal with Nikki. This was an extremely effective partnership that grew the volunteer base at Les Arends Forest Preserve, and we hope to team up with Volunteer Stewards at other preserves on similar programming.



Invasive plant species not only degrade biodiversity of the plant community, they reduce habitat and food sources for native wildlife.

- In our effort to support “cradle to grave” nature programming and attract people of all ages to our natural areas, we expanded our youth offering this month with a new monthly program for

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children in kindergarten to 2nd grade. Led by Naturalist Lisa O'Brien, *Twigs to Trees* extends our popular pre-school *Little Saplings* program. During each session, children investigate seasonal nature themes as they explore the woods and wilds with nature-based play. In its inaugural month, nine children (many of them Little Saplings graduates) gathered at Creek Bend Nature Center for a focus on *Prairies, Spiders & Insects...Oh, My!*

- **Community & Outreach Programs** – A significant portion of the naturalist team's efforts involve traveling to and educating community groups, school classes and partner library patrons. Community programs are given at or for private organizations like garden clubs, service organizations, church groups, private school/day care centers and senior centers.

In September, Environmental Education Manager McKittrick traveled to the Huntley Sun City location to present a program on *Witness Trees* for 175 members of the Sunflower Garden Club. Naturalist Josh Libman welcomed 20 Awesome Life Academy special needs adults to LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve for a *Discovery Hike*. Naturalist Amber Ross welcomed 32 special needs folks from two different Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association centers to Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve for a Geocaching/Orienteering program. Participants learned to use a compass and then practiced their newfound skills on a fun orienteering course. Naturalist Lemon lead a *Wonderful Prairies* program at Dick Young Forest Preserve for 14 patrons of the Messenger Public Library.

Outreach programs are given at public schools, day care centers and libraries. Naturalists Ross and Lemon visited 125 4th graders at Country Trails Elementary (D301) with a *Traveling Naturalist: Nature Detectives* program, using pelts and skulls to teach students about the native wildlife of Kane County.

- **School Programs** – Partnering with colleagues from Friends of the Fox River, we co-lead a conservation field day for 50 South Elgin High School (U46) students at Tyler Creek Forest Preserve.



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Naturalists Lemon, Libman and O'Brien taught field session on *Soils, Woodlands, and Prairies*, while FotFR got students into Tyler Creek to study stream ecology.

Large school field trip season is back! Howard B. Thomas (D301) bussed 125 students to LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve for a full-day field experience. Naturalists Libman, Ross and Lemon each led stations on the *Wonderful Prairie*, while school teachers taught other ecology stations during a rotational travel day. The GeoAdventure Club from Wredling Middle School (D303) joined Naturalist Lemon for a *River Study* at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve. The 24 students enjoyed collecting macroinvertebrates and learning about water quality, as well as the impact of mammals (beavers!) on waterways. Naturalist Libman led two *Homeschool Hikes* for a total of 73 kids from four different homeschool networks at Tyler Creek, Otter Creek, Lake Run and LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserves.

Rental Facilities

BARBARA BELDING LODGE AT BREWSTER CREEK FOREST PRESERVE

Students used kick seine nets and dip nets to collect macroinvertebrates from Tyler Creek.

In September, the lodge hosted four meetings and one special event, totaling \$1,100.

CREEK BEND NATURE CENTER AT LEROY OAKES FOREST PRESERVE

In September, Creek Bend hosted three special events, totaling \$9,000.