

New forest chief makes good

Chicago Sun-Times, December 19, 2004, Letter to the Editor

As a Sun-Times editorial on Dec. 14 ["Another embarrassment for county government"] put it, "We're willing to spend our money to protect the preserves . . . and to maintain their legacy for our children, not to abet illegal doings, nepotism and mismanagement."

Steve Bylina, the Forest Preserve District of Cook County's new general superintendent, promised to clean up the mess, and we have been impressed by his efforts. He has already provided a major upgrade in the cleanliness of the preserves, the sanitary facilities and morale. He has erased a huge budget deficit, and the draft budget he recently released is more clear and transparent than any in memory.

The Sun-Times gave him an important nudge with your shocking story of the district employee endangering the public in a district vehicle -- and with no driver's license. We were impressed by Bylina's reaction. He conducted his own investigation and quickly learned that 13 other workers, who needed to drive for their jobs, lacked valid licenses. Bylina quickly suspended all of them and told them they'll be bounced from the staff if they don't shape up.

This is also the first time in memory that a general superintendent provided such bold, quick, and sure leadership to restore high standards to the staff. With support from the press and the forest preserves' friends, a legacy of mismanagement will be replaced by a new culture with the accountability and integrity that this important institution deserves.

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