

Volunteers get new Web site

Daily Southtown, October 3, 2006, by Jonathan Lipman

The 8,000 volunteers who help the Cook County Forest Preserve District with maintenance and restoration have a new tool for recruiting members with the creation of their first unified Web site. Volunteers from the many separate organizations that work with the district had their own Web sites and maintained their own work schedules and contact information.

All of that has been consolidated at a new site targeted to district volunteers that goes online today, www.fpdccvolunteers.org.

"It finally kind of legitimizes the volunteer program for the district," said Benjamin Cox, executive director of the Friends of the Forest Preserve. "It took a long time for this relationship to develop, and now (district leaders) are taking it a lot more seriously."

The colorful site links information about volunteer sites throughout the county. It includes sections that let potential volunteers look for cleanup days in the forest preserve nearest them, as well as full descriptions of the many kinds of volunteer work available.

"Right now, volunteer information is scattered, and you'd have to know to look for it," Cox said.

Both the district and Cox's organization will have links to the new site from their own homepages.

District volunteer coordinator Bill Koenig said volunteer groups will be able to update the site with news and events on their own, independent of the district.

"The cool thing is the way it's set up. It's very flexible," Koenig said.

Cox and Koenig said volunteers are essential to the preservation and education missions of the preserves. Most of the district's 400 employees are police or maintenance workers, Cox said.

"There's not a lot of people left for ecology," Cox said.