



Friends of the Sangamon Valley

Fall 2024 Newsletter

FOSV lands major grant to protect unique property

\$92,000 for sand prairie, oak-hickory woodland

We are thrilled to announce the Friends of the Sangamon Valley has received a grant of more than \$92,000 to support conservation efforts at Walden West Nature Preserve, a fascinating parcel of land in Mason County.

The 43-acre Walden West features a woodland of oak and hickory as well as sand prairie that is home to rare (for Illinois) species, including cacti.

The Natural Areas Stewardship grant will let the Friends reclaim the prairie, remove invasive species and install fire breaks. Equipment purchased through this grant will increase our stewardship capacity greatly. **(Continued on page 4)**



Farewell to a friend

FOSV suffered a painful loss over the summer with the death of President Dick Poynter. Dick was 74, but he brought a youthful enthusiasm to everything he did. He matched that enthusiasm with sound judgment, financial and administrative knowledge and an amazing personal network he could tap into when the Friends needed help. It all combined to make him a true force for conservation in the Sangamon Valley.

The Friends offers its condolences to Dick's family and many, friends. It's a testament to how much people loved Dick that they have donated significant amounts to **(Continued on 6)**

Letter

from the Executive Director

By Angela Funk

Wow, what a busy summer!

We hosted "A Sangamon Summer Evening" at Long Bridge Golf Course in late July. It was a chance to gather members, volunteers, and our board together to celebrate our accomplishments and share future plans. Nearly 70 people joined us for a wonderful evening!

At this event we also unveiled our Enduring Oak Society (EOS) an important sustaining fundraising effort. We'll be mailing membership renewal and EOS invitations in the coming weeks. Thank you to everyone who believes in our mission!

In August hard work came to fruition when I was notified that multiple grants that I had applied for were awarded to The Friends of the Sangamon Valley! Read more information about these exciting projects in this newsletter and, keep an eye out for updates as we move forward.

I was so excited to share the news of these successes with our then President, Dick Poynter. The day after notification of these awards (August 10), Dick suffered a massive stroke and passed away a few days later. I never did get to tell him. He would be so pleased with the positive forward momentum of the Friends of the Sangamon Valley. Like so many I was shocked and saddened by this sudden loss.

Dick's leadership and support in my first



The Dick Poynter memorial oak

17 months with the organization was integral to the positive momentum we sustained.

We want to offer deepest condolences to Dick's family. We also give our most sincere thanks to everyone who has donated to the Friends in Dick's name. It shows just how beloved and respected he was.

We have planted a Chinquapin Oak in Dick's memory at Gudmundson Wildlife Sanctuary. I know we'll all love watching it grow and thinking of fond memories of our time with Dick.

A note from the **Acting President** **Stepping into big shoes**

By Becky Croteau

Our dear friend, Dick Poynter, has left some very big shoes to fill. He worked tirelessly to support and expand the FOSV. It is with great sadness over his passing that I take on the role of acting president. At the same time, I am excited to serve in a bigger way.

I have been a member of the FOSV since its beginning, and I am deeply committed to the important work that we do. I have been asked to introduce myself, and my background, to the membership.

I have been deeply in love with the Earth since I was a young child. I spent many long, beautiful days in the woods with my Cherokee grandmother hunting mushrooms and gathering other wild foods. She often said, "All life is sacred, don't ever think you are separate from any of it." Sharing this awareness has become the central purpose in my life.

Naturally, I pursued degrees in Biology, studying at Lincoln Land Community College and Sangamon State University. My early jobs included monitoring water quality for the Illinois EPA, studying fossil pollen records for the Illinois State Museum, and serving as site steward at Carpenter Park Nature Preserve for The Nature Conservancy. I also became the TNC Regional Steward for West Central Illinois, surveying and identifying high quality natural areas needing protection.



I wanted to do more to reach others and help them understand the importance of environmental issues. I obtained my teacher certification and taught at Ursuline Academy and Springfield High School.

Then I moved to Bloomington in 1995 to pursue graduate work in plant ecology at Illinois State University. My research focused on ephemeral wetlands in Mason County.

Upon completing my degree, I returned to Springfield, serving as a biology professor at Lincoln Land for 20 years. I was also a member of the LLCC Sustainability Team, and I sponsored the Environmental Club. I am proud to say that many of my students have become environmental lawyers, environmental educators, biologists, botanists, nature restoration specialists, and environmental justice activists.

After my retirement two years ago, I joined the FOSV Board and have served since then, along with John Justice, as co-vice president. I intend to continue my lifelong work of connecting people with nature. I hope to build deeper public awareness and expand our volunteer community; while generating the economic support we need to protect the Sangamon Valley watershed.

Walden West grant (cont.)

The grant was awarded by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The money comes from the state's Natural Areas Acquisition Fund, which was established in 1989 and is supported by a transfer tax on property sold in the state. Learn more [here](#).

"This grant will let the Friends conduct vital stewardship work on property that is truly a jewel of nature," said FOSV Executive

Director Angela Funk. "It will also benefit our work at our other nature preserves, so we're doubly grateful for this vote of confidence from the Department of Natural Resources."

The first purchase made possible by the grant will be a tractor, trailer and various implements. Nelson Land Management will begin the restoration process early in 2025.

Get to know Walden West



Walden West is in northern Mason County, next to Sand Ridge State Forest. It was donated to the Friends by Bradley University Biology Professor Dr. Richard Bjorkland, who did years of restoration work there.

Its 43 acres include 5.5 acres of sand prairie, which faces encroachment by such plants as bush honeysuckle, autumn olive, fragrant sumac, and dogwood. The woodland portion has black and blackjack oaks and several hickory species and undesirable native trees like sassafras, elm, black cherry, and hackberry.



Retired Bradley professor Jan Gehring will serve as volunteer steward for the property. She will assist with needed work on the property and also monitor the presence of regal fritillary butterflies and bird's foot violets, two threatened species that can be found at Walden West.



Clockwise from top: a regal fritillary butterfly, a sample of Walden's sandy soil, bird's foot violet, a sweat bee on lead plant, hoary puccoon.



More good news on the grant front

The \$92,000 for Walden West is not the only major grant the Friends have landed lately. We also have been awarded \$28,000 from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, which is an independent foundation with a \$225 million endowment provided by Commonwealth Edison. Its mission is to improve energy efficiency, advance renewable energy, and protect natural areas and wildlife habitat in Illinois.

The grant will pay for stewardship work at our 50-acre Boyle Woods property in Cass County.

The grant requires the Friends to spend \$7,000 of our own money to obtain matching funds from the foundation, so a huge **thank you** to everyone whose financial support made that possible!

Other recent grants include:

- \$1,500 from the Nature Conservancy's Volunteer Stewardship Network
- \$2,000 Nature Conservancy Convening Fund
- \$4,500 Tracy Foundation Capacity Enhancement Grant

Farewell to a Friend (cont.)

the FOSV in his name. If you would like to contribute as well, just click [here](https://tinyurl.com/uruz85ac) or visit tinyurl.com/uruz85ac.

The Friends have also planted an oak tree in Dick's honor at Gudmundson Wildlife Sanctuary and will continue the rubber-duck race fundraiser that he got such a kick out of organizing each year.

"More importantly, we will try to bring Dick's spirit of joy and teamwork to everything we do," said Becky Croteau, who is serving as president after his passing. "The world would be a better place if we all valued friends, family, hard work, and Mother Nature as much as Dick did."



Dick was known as "Cool Dude" to his grandchildren.

Dick Poynter, 74

Richard E. Poynter of Springfield died August 15 at St. John's Hospital. He was born on October 28, 1949, in Springfield, Ill., the son of Richard H. Poynter and Ann (German) Whalen. Dick married Sharon Suberkropp on August 29, 1971, in Mendota, IL.

Dick graduated from Athens High School in 1967 and University of Illinois in Champaign in 1972, where he earned his bachelor's degree in accounting and met his future wife at the ice skating rink. He worked for Nudo Products where he was the CFO and had a large private tax practice. Dick was a member of Laurel United Methodist Church, and Friends of the Sangamon Valley where he was the current president.

He enjoyed camping with his grandkids, mushroom hunting, pickleball, basketball, was a connoisseur of craft beer, enjoyed reading Abraham Lincoln history books, volunteered at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum, and was an avid Illini fan.

Dick is survived by his wife, Sharon Poynter of Springfield; daughters, Eve (Christopher) Barrs of Riverside, Ill., Emily (Mike) Jenkins of Monticello, Ill., and Jane (Jeremy) Zahora of Palatine, Ill.

News

Funk named to Outdoor Hall of Fame

FOSV Executive Director Angela Funk has been named to the Illinois Conservation Foundation's Outdoor Hall of Fame.

In announcing the honor, the foundation said:

"Angela Funk's dedication to Illinois' natural areas and her enthusiasm for connecting people with nature have left a lasting impact on the environment and the communities she has served. With a degree in environmental biology and more than 35 years of experience, she has played a pivotal role in environmental education, land stewardship, and conservation."

"Her leadership at Douglas-Hart Nature Center and later at Sugar Grove Nature Center, where she served as the first director, fostered a strong corps of volunteers and an ever-increasing number of participants in public programs. ..."

"Funk's approach to leadership, always 'people first,' has earned her widespread respect. She takes time to personally connect with volunteers and participants, making each person feel valued in their roles."



ILLINOIS CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

"Funk's move to the Friends of the Sangamon Valley in 2023 further highlighted her ongoing commitment to conservation."

"Her career has contributed to the protection of more than 1,700 acres of land, ensuring safe habitats for wildlife and bringing thousands of people closer to nature. Her influence spans environmental education, land stewardship, and community engagement, leaving an enduring legacy of conservation across Illinois."

Other members of the Outdoor Hall of Fame include writer/photographer Les Winkeler; Peter Murphy, president of the Illinois Association of Park Districts; Brent Manning, former director of the Illinois Department of Conservation; and former Gov. Jim Edgar.

Save the date!

We plan to hold the next annual meeting on March 15, 2025. We hope you'll join us. We're still looking into locations and special programming, so stay tuned.

We can say that we're looking into presenting a short film we think you'll really enjoy. We'll also elect new officers, of course, including a new president.



Workday to honor George Rose

On Nov. 2, at 10 a.m., we will hold a workday at Washington Park in honor of longtime volunteer and ecologist George Rose. George was instrumental in leading the FOSV's transformation of an overgrown trail to a restored home for spring wildflowers and an urban deer population. This area is due for maintenance and, weather permitting, we will target invasive species,

including bush honeysuckle. Please bring gloves. We will provide tools. Meet south of the Rose Garden Parking at Leland House Summer Kitchen.

*This activity requires the ability to work outside on uneven surfaces and cut, lift, or drag cut honeysuckle.



PORTA teens prowl the Wolf

Students at PORTA High School recently got an early dismissal. Instead of heading home, a great group from the Petersburg school's Key Club made a beeline to the Wolf Preserve.

They spent the afternoon prowling the property to pick up trash and gather recyclables along Boy Scout Trail Road.

Thanks, PORTA Bluejays! We appreciate your community service.

We also appreciate the generosity of the donor who provided the litter grabbers but wants to remain anonymous.



Fighting the Invaders

Mediterranean grass takes root in America



By Mike Kennedy

Considered by many to be one of the top ten invasive plants in the world, Johnson grass (*Sorghum halepense*) could be a poster child for invasive plants.

A native perennial grass of the Mediterranean region, it can now be found on all the continents except Antarctica. Originally brought to the southeastern part of the United States as a livestock forage, and in spite of having a preference for warmer climates, it has since spread across most of the United States. Ironically, under certain growing conditions Johnson grass produces hydrogen cyanide which can be fatal to livestock.

Like many other invasive plants, Johnson grass likes disturbed areas and can be found along the edges of



fields, roads, woodlands, and floodplains. It grows best in full sunlight and in good soils with a wide range of moisture levels. Johnson grass grows in clumps and reaches 8 feet in height. It spreads by both seeds and rhizomes (underground stems). The seeds are viable for up to 20 years and the ability to spread by rhizomes allows it from thickets which choke out native plants.

Identification of Johnson grass can be tricky so it's advisable to use a good identification resource. Control of Johnson grass can be achieved using a glyphosate herbicide (like Roundup™) at the recommended label rate in late summer or fall of the year when the herbicide will be passed down into the rhizomes for more effective control.

Learn more: [U of I Extension Service](#)

Spotlight

Persimmon Paradise



Persimmon



Teasel



Common Dewberry

One of the properties protected by the Friends is a little triangle of land next to a military cemetery just northeast of Springfield. This time of year, its most eye-catching feature is the wealth of vivid persimmons hanging from the trees.

The Carver Yocum Easement is an 8.8-acre parcel on Old River Road, directly east of Camp Butler Cemetery. The property is owned by Sangamon County, which has a agreement with the Friends to manage the site.

It is part of the bottomland floodplain of the Sangamon River. The eastern portion of the property is a dense stand of mature silver maple trees. The western portion of the property is a sedge meadow struggling to compete with invasive bluegrass, Chinese yam, and Japanese hops.

Tree species of importance on this site include all oaks except shingle, all hickories, Kentucky coffee tree, black walnut, persimmon, white walnut, redbud, hawthorns, and white pine.

This site requires annual management to control teasel, and some areas are extremely difficult to walk through due to large patches of common dewberry.



Persimmon Drop Cookies

from Becky Croteau
(This one's for you, Dick!)

- 1 cup melted butter
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 cup persimmon pulp
- ¼ teaspoon cloves
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
- 2 cups flour (whole wheat pastry flour or gluten free substitute)

1. Cream together the butter and sugar.
2. Add eggs and persimmon pulp, then blend.
3. Mix the flour and spices, then gradually add it to the wet ingredients.
4. Mix well, then stir in the pecans.
5. Drop by teaspoons on a lightly greased cookie sheet.



6. Bake for 10 minutes at 350 degrees.

{This recipe makes 4 dozen cookies.}

Note: After a dry growing season, persimmon pulp can lack moisture. If that is the case, add ¼ cup milk or apple cider to this recipe.



An evening of food, fun and friends

Thanks to everyone who joined us for our "Sangamon Summer Evening" event! It was wonderful to enjoy delicious food with so many people, give away a few raffle prizes, and talk about what's next for the Friends. Special thanks to folks who took an interest in our "Enduring Oak Society." We appreciate your support for this initiative!



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A CROOK MAPSTERPIECE William Crook, a wonderful artist and founding member of the Friends, has created this lovely map of the Sangamon Valley watershed and the properties we manage. We're looking into making it available as a print or postcard. For now, we just wanted you to see his work. Thanks, Bill!