



# the leaf

NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHWEST COOK COUNTY GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB | AUTUMN 2007

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For the most up-to-date news, be sure to visit us on the Web:

<http://illinois.sierraclub.org/NWCCook>

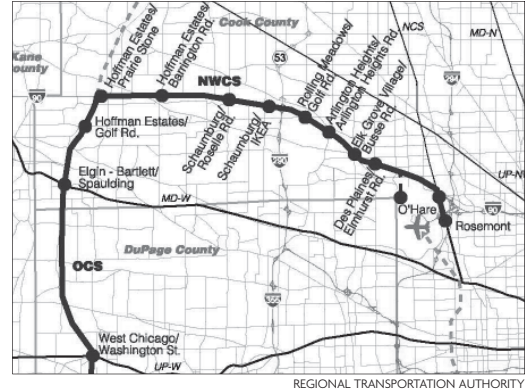
# Building a Transit Network

By Paras Bhayani

Lost in the unusually acrimonious budget battles this summer was any discussion of building more mass transit capacity, either through expanding bus routes, extending train lines, or building new ones. The debate focused instead on the enormous operating shortfalls at the Regional Transportation Authority and its three kids—the CTA, Metra, and Pace.

Indeed, with the region's mass transit system needing \$10 billion of capital investment just to get to a state of "good repair," talk of the CTA's proposed Circle and Mid-City Lines has virtually vanished. Likewise, the Metra STAR Line, which would connect the terminuses of several Metra lines to O'Hare, has been put on the backburner.

Chicago's hub-and-spokes network is great for those commuting to and from work, but it's not very useful for getting around Chicagoland more generally. Completing any or all of the three lines, which would help turn the system



into a *network*, is one of the most meaningful steps the region can take to cut pollution, gas consumption, and traffic gridlock.

The STAR line, short for the Suburban Transit Access Route, would utilize existing freight tracks to connect nearly 100 suburbs on the west and northwest sides of Chicago. Starting in Joliet, it would run north through Naperville, Aurora, and Elgin, turn west at Hoffman

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# Invading Forces Held Back ... Again

By Wendy Valentine

This spring, the Northwest Cook County Group (NWCCG) went on the attack in Schaumburg Park District's Oak Hollow Conservation Area, an oasis hidden behind subdivisions.

The all-volunteer Sierra Club army assembled to annihilate invasive plant species and reinstate those native to this area.

Soldiers in this diverse brigade run executive search firms, archives, and child abuse investigations in their civilian lives. They also fight this ongoing war to eradicate non-native plants.

The invading plants easily spread, crowd out, and kill natural ecosystems in

the few open areas that remain.

Armed only with spades, hand tools, and gloves, the company went to battle, replacing non-native plants, like garlic mustard, with aboriginal wildflowers such as Wild Hyacinth.

Dive-bombing birds chased away those who came too close to nesting areas. These birds and poison ivy posed the only real threats on the otherwise perfect spring day, made enjoyable by gentle breezes and clear skies.

Some volunteers had no battle experience, but they were accompanied by legionnaires like Greg Stolzer, who has been conserving area habitats since 2001.

Led by Stolzer and Dave Brooks, conservation manager at Spring Valley

Nature Sanctuary, the troops learned about the friends and foes of the preserve, discussing the natural habitat and history of this conservation area.

Wild Ones, an allied native plant rescue organization, donated some plants it recently saved from an Olympia Fields development, according to Brooks. Other plants were purchased or came from Spring Valley greenhouses.

Brooks told of the vast oak woods pioneers would have found in this area and explained how natural wildfires kept the vibrant oak trees separated by fields of tall grasses.

These early European settlers

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## From the Chair

Autumn days are here again and I can't wait to get out and enjoy the beautiful weather.

I love to hike in the forest preserves, explore natural areas, visit local festivals, collect signatures for candidates that I hope will win, attend our NWCCG Program Meetings and participate in restoration workdays by cutting and burning buckthorn. Take a look at this newsletter for our Calendar of Events, a Calendar of Events from Schaumburg's much beloved Spring Valley, and other special, seasonal announcements that come to you on a quarterly basis.

If you want to get the outings information quickly, read what's happening in the group, reduce our group postage and printing costs, or just save a tree, you can receive the newsletter electronically. Just send your name, membership number (listed directly above your name in Sierra magazine) and e-mail address to: [editor@illinois.sierraclub.org](mailto:editor@illinois.sierraclub.org).

I would like to thank a few quiet, but very important people that keep the group moving forward. Robin Limp and Laura Franzen are the editors of *the leaf*. In my opinion, these two have done a great job of gathering and requesting articles, keeping me on schedule, and producing a newsletter that is both informative and interesting. I am pleased that a new volunteer, Paras Bhayani, has filled the design vacancy. He brings his own style to the pages and gives *the leaf* its own identity. Thank you, all.

Do you know that we have a group website? Joyce May has volunteered in many positions in our group and has designed and maintained our website for many years. Thank you, Joyce for your continuous sharing of your time, talent and expertise. Our website: [www.illinois.sierraclub.org/NWCook](http://www.illinois.sierraclub.org/NWCook) is always up-to-date and professional. Check it out and I am sure that you will agree with me.

Have a great fall season!

—Donna Hriljac

## SIERRA CLUB CALENDARS

Nature's Infinite Beauty is Once Again Captured

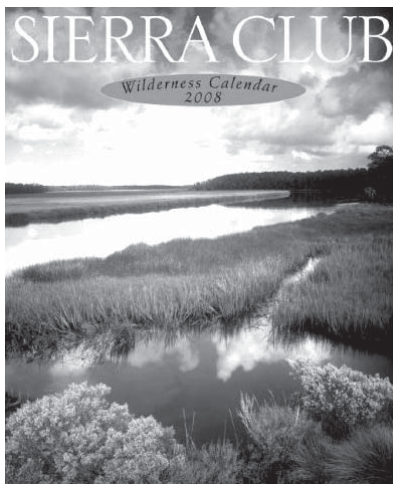
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2008 WALL CALENDAR



2008 ENGAGEMENT CALENDAR

## TO OUR MEMBERS

If you're looking to get involved with our group and can offer some time (as little as just a few hours a month!), we have a great hands-on opportunity to learn firsthand how we work to preserve, protect and enjoy our precious local environment and neighborhoods.

The Nominating Committee for this year's Executive Committee (Ex-Com) election is seeking candidates.

Candidate submissions are due by Nov. 5, 2007. The Ex-Com, which manages the NWCCG, is comprised of seven members elected at-large from the local NWCCG group. If you would like to be a nominee for the Ex-Com for a two-year term, the only stipulation is that you must be a Club member in good standing. If you would like to nominate someone else, he or she must also give their consent before the nomination.

If you have any questions or wish to propose yourself or another person as a candidate, please contact Donna Hriljac at 847-967-7835 or by e-mail at: [misky272000@earthlink.net](mailto:misky272000@earthlink.net).

# Spring Valley Events

The Schaumburg Park District's Spring Valley Nature Center & Heritage Farm offers numerous educational programs and events that help people forge connections with the natural world and learn about local history.

**Friday, Sept. 21 — 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.**

**Friday, Nov. 9 — 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.**

## **Nature's Night Life**

A perfect way for adults to increase their knowledge of the natural world. Participants engage in activities and explorations along Spring Valley's trails and conclude the evening around a campfire with refreshments, readings from selected authors, and informal discussion.

\$8/resident or \$12/non-resident.

**Sunday, Oct. 7 — 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

## **Autumn Harvest Festival**

Spring Valley's most popular event, the festival features demonstrations of 19th century farm life at the Volkening Heritage Farm as well as a re-enactment of frontier life at a pioneer encampment. Activities include cider pressing, woodstove cooking, blacksmithing, and horse-powered threshing. Pioneer era activities include fire starting, campfire cooking, and musket firing. Children's crafts and games, live music, hayrides, and sales of refreshments will be available throughout the day.

\$3/person; children 3 and under admitted free.

**Friday & Saturday, Oct. 26/27 — 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.**

## **Halloween Ghost Jaunt Woodland Mystery Theater**

Groups of 15 will be guided along a trail of magic and adventure, populated by various costumed characters who interact with the guide. All ages welcome, but the program is most suitable for children between the ages of 5 and 10. Pre-registration is encouraged but walk-in registrants will be accepted. Pre-registration: \$5/resident or \$6/non-resident; walk-in is \$7/person.

**Sunday, Nov. 4 — 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.**

## **Hoghouse to Smokehouse**

Get a true taste of an autumn tradition on a traditional German farm.

This event explores the concept of sustainable food sources on traditional farms, and will feature demonstrations of root cellar vegetables, pickled meat, and sausage making. The Farm's authentic 19th century smokehouse will be in operation, smoking ham, bacon, and sausage from the previous year's growing season. Hayrides, crafts, and refreshments will also be available at this event.

\$1.50/person; children 3 and under admitted free.

**Saturday, Nov. 17 — 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.**

## **Owl Adventure**

After a walk to the woods, a naturalist will attempt to call in Spring Valley's resident screech owls or the great-horned owl. Participants will then learn some fascinating owl lore while enjoying refreshments by the fireplace in the log cabin. \$6/resident or \$9/non-resident.

*Spring Valley is located at 1111 E. Schaumburg Road, just west of Meacham Road. The site's grounds and 3+ miles of trails are open every day from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. through October. Starting Nov. 1, the site closes at 5 p.m. For more information on facility hours and other programs, please call 847.985.2100 or visit [www.parkfun.com](http://www.parkfun.com). Pre-registration is encouraged for many Spring Valley programs, since some do fill up quickly.*

# Group Calendar

**Thursday, Oct. 11, 2007**

## **Glaciers to Wildflowers**

Please join us as author and biologist/geologist Raymond Wiggers takes us a mere twenty thousand years into the past when much of northeastern Illinois was a forbidding ice desert. This talk explores how, at the end of that glaciation, the Prairie State's landscapes, soils, and plant communities evolved into their present forms.

**Thursday, Nov. 8, 2007**

## **Protecting Alaska's Wilderness**

Please join us as Sean Babington from the Alaska Wilderness League presents the beauty that is Alaska's wild lands and talks about the efforts that are underway to permanently protect them.

**Saturday, Nov. 17, 2007**

## **NWCCG Restoration Workday**

Help us continue our restoration work for Spring Valley Nature Sanctuary in Schaumburg. Helping to restore native habitat is our way of saying thanks to Spring Valley for letting us use the nature center for our program meetings. Meet in the Spring Valley parking lot at 8:45 a.m. We will work until 11:30 a.m. or so. Gloves and tools provided.

**Thursday, Dec. 13, 2007**

## **Holiday Potluck Dinner**

Join your fellow Sierra Club members for a relaxing evening of food and friendship. Please bring a dish or dessert to pass.

Watch future issues of *the leaf* and your e-mail for details on our early Winter Programs, our Spring Open House, and our much anticipated April Program meeting, Coyotes with Chris Anchor.

*Program meetings are held on the second Thursday of the month, September through June, at the Spring Valley Nature Sanctuary at 1111 East Schaumburg Road in Schaumburg.*

*Meetings start at 7:00 p.m. and the program, focusing on natural history or environmental issues, starts at 7:30 p.m. Meetings are free and open to all. For more info, contact Greg Stolzer at [gstolzer@hotmail.com](mailto:gstolzer@hotmail.com) or 847.561.5004.*

*See the Outings section of Lake & Prairie for more information on events.*



## the leaf

Autumn 2007

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[www.illinois.sierraclub.org/NWCook](http://www.illinois.sierraclub.org/NWCook)

# Our Endorsement Process

By Amy Kuchuris

Unique among environmental advocates, the Sierra Club works hard to protect our environment both globally and locally. One way we do this is by endorsing political candidates.

As election filing time approaches, we develop a questionnaire to ask both about the candidate's positions on environmental issues and record of environmental leadership.

Once the candidates complete and return the questionnaires, local groups like the NWCCG schedule interviews with the candidates. Our Interview Committee consists of four individuals, some of whom are individuals familiar with the endorsement process and others of whom are their constituents.

After interviewing the candidates, the committee determines which nominees to recommend for endorsement. Among the factors the committee considers are the candidate's proven track record on environmental issues; the track record of the candidate's opponents; and the candidate's viability.

The committee then forwards its recommendations to the local group's Executive Committee, which comprises

seven individuals who are elected by the general membership. Two-thirds of the committee must vote in favor of the endorsement to be submitted for approval.

Finally, there is the stipulation that endorsements must be approved at two levels. If the election is local or state, the local group and Illinois Chapter approve the endorsement, and if it is for Congress, sign-off must be sought from both the Chapter and the home office in San Francisco.

If you would like to help strengthen our ongoing political efforts, we are always looking for people to sit on both the Interview and Political Committees. No prior knowledge or experience is necessary.

Finally, while most endorsements are for state and federal races, we are always looking to become involved in municipal races. If you know of a mayoral race, for example, where environmental issues are relevant, feel free to bring it to our attention.

—*Amy Kuchuris worked in the environmental industry for over 10 years and now focuses on wellness education and promotion.*

—*Thank you to Political Chair Barbara Hill for explaining the endorsement process.*

## Building the STAR Line

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

Estates, and run through Schaumburg before terminating at O'Hare.

Many transit experts argue that the cost of the line—estimated at \$1.1 billion—is too high, and that expansions should only be built in areas of high population density.

These critics do have a point, but it's worth noting that the line will only be built with significant federal funds, and

that different proposals will be studied—including building only a section of the line, for instance, from Elgin to O'Hare.

No matter the eventual outcome, what's clear is that Chicagoans need a transit system capable of getting them somewhere other than the Loop. The STAR Line would be a significant step in making this a reality.

—*Paras Bhayani is the designer of the leaf and a former intern with the Illinois Chapter.*

## Oak Hollow Restoration

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

brought non-native plants with them.

Now, controlled fires set at Oak Hollow every three to four years kill buckthorn and other invasive species, giving native grasses and sedges a chance to survive.

The NWCCG sponsors several volunteer workdays each year, rallying this militia back to combat, or at least to time spent outdoors with like-minded earth-friendly allies.

—*Wendy Valentine is a freelance writer living in Palatine, Ill.*