VIP AWARDS: HONORING PARK VOLUNTEERS & STAFF

This past October marked Friends of the Parks’ 20th Annual VIP Awards Reception. Since 1995, Friends of the Parks has honored the outstanding volunteers, community groups, and city and county employees who have made significant contributions to their parks. VIP awardees are nominated by community members in the City of Chicago and it is a great honor for us to share their stories and honor these individuals and groups. See the full details about this year’s winners on our blog (www.fotp.org/blog) and photos on our Facebook page, and read the profile below on the Brown Park Advisory Board VIPs.

STEWARDSHIP AWARD
Daniel Ebel (Indian Boundary Park)

PARK ADVISORY COUNCIL AWARD
Brown Park Advisory Board (Brown Memorial Park)

COMMUNITY GROUP AWARD
Prairie District Neighborhood Alliance (Women’s Park)

INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEER AWARD
Gary Morrissey & Tom Murphy (West Ridge Nature Preserve)

ADVOCACY AWARD
Morgan Halstead, Charlie Billups & Grassroots Illinois Action (Humboldt Park)

INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEER AWARD
Gary Morrissey & Tom Murphy (West Ridge Nature Preserve)

OUTSTANDING PARK DISTRICT EMPLOYEE AWARD
Angela Jackson (Dawes Park) & Carmen Rodriguez (Unity Park)

“SMOKY SAKURADA” FRIENDS OF FRIENDS AWARD
Tom Drebenstedt & Jason Quaglia

Led by a collaborative core of volunteers, the Brown Park Advisory Board has recently become known as models and leaders in the community and even the PAC world.

It was not too long ago that the organization was able to boast two major accomplishments. First, the Board has recently been successful in advocating for an adjacent vacant parcel to be added to the existing park. Second, this year [would have] marked (if not for the rain) their second annual Picnic in Brown Park, a celebratory and honorary event recognizing Sidney Brown, the first fallen African American firefighter in Chicago, his family and families of the other 12 African American Firefighters who lost their lives in the line of duty since Brown’s death in 1983. Firemen’s bagpipers, honorary guests, entertainment, music and much more have made the event a very special and unparalleled one over the past two years.

In addition to these recent accomplishments, they’re working on small beautification projects in the park to continue to make it a lively and safe space in the community. They have also taken on the goal of fundraising and planning for a two-story field house for community members in the park.

The Board holds a unanimous fervor, dedication and tenacious vision to make this park a magnanimous space and staple for the community. The group not only values and understands the importance of each board member, but they understand the important role of working with other people, groups and entities as critical to getting things done and building strong relationships. There is little doubt to those who know them or know of their work, that this group will accomplish their goals; big developments lie in the near future at Brown Memorial Park.
In 2000, Friends of the Parks initiated the Seed Grant Program to award small grants to park advisory councils, park partnering organizations and open space stewards for direct projects to improve Chicago’s parks. Since then, Friends has awarded over $150,000 in grants for cultural programs, movies in the parks, mural projects, recreation equipment, education programs, garden development, just to give you a few examples. Right: Kenwell Park beautification and gardening project in 2000.

Whether you delight in the winter weather or will take the time to hibernate, the Chicago winter is right around the corner. This is the perfect time to think about the activities and events your group can put on to keep park neighbors excited and engaged in their local park, particularly while outdoors.

- Sledding races or contests — The winner gets a gym membership at the park! (As a possible prize perhaps.) Or if you have a dog park a dog-sledding contest too!
- Snowman contest or a snowman day — Let’s fill the park with snow-people & have hot chocolate afterwards! If you want to further promote the creativity, make it a snow sculpture contest.
- Make pinecone bird feeders—Hunt for pinecones in your park and return to the craft table to make a bird feeder.
- Winter Movie Night—If you have a white wall, can borrow someone’s projector and have a laptop that can play a movie, then what’s stopping you?!
- Family story reading night — Pick a season-relevant children's book and set up crafts tables for a family friendly night.
- Winter Olympics or carnival— snowball bullseyes, snow-hurdle jumping, Bozo bucket-style snowball tosses, and so many other options!
- Outdoor snow painting—Use food coloring as your paint and the snow as your canvas. Search snow paint for how-to's.
- Other ideas: Snowangel day, tree lighting and decorating, caroling, wreath decorating, gingerbread house making competition, hunt for animal tracks, winter walk-a-thon, crockpot recipe contest, clothing drive, candy-cane hunt, and so much more!

Many of these ideas can be mixed and matched. What’s your great idea on how to get your community involved in your park and outside this winter?