

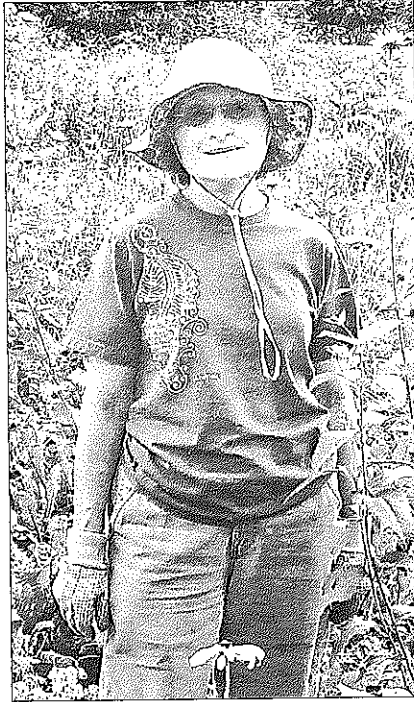
Neighbors

Eagle Nature Trail wins excellence award

By Heather Ruenz
STAFF WRITER

The Eagle Nature Trail, which has depended entirely on donations in terms of supplies, equipment and manpower the past four years, recently got a boost as it was chosen to receive an excellence award.

The trail connects Eagle Elementary School and the Alice Baker Library. The 2014 Virginia Kline Award for Excellence in Community-Based Restoration is administered through the University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum and the Aldo Leopold Foundation.



Mary Jenks gets ready to lead a guided walk on the Eagle Nature Trail July 13; the walk included face painting and coloring pages featuring native plants found on the trail. A somewhat common site on the trail is the monarch, shown on a blazing star.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS Mukwonago Times

In the application for the award, trail coordinator Jean Weedman explained that one of the goals in creating the trail was to "connect the two institutions of learning." As a group of local citizens investigated the approximate 8-acre piece of land behind the Eagle Municipal Building, many native plants were discovered, "struggling beneath 70 years of untended growth" as farming on portions of the land had ceased in the 1940s.

Continuing in the letter, Weedman wrote about the people, organizations and businesses that have made the trail what it has grown into, including committee members pursuing grants and business support, donations from Citizen's Bank of Mukwonago and Chase Bank and the donation of materials and grading for the footpath from a local law firm.

"The building of the boardwalk to the pond and the creation of an outdoor amphitheater for class activities were accomplished with a \$7,000 materials grant from the Home Depot Foundation," Weedman wrote, explaining that 45 Home Depot employees volunteered for the construction project.

Donations of seeds for the 1-plus acre prairie came from Agrecol and Prairie Nursery while donations of time and heavy equipment for the initial clearing came from two local businesses.

"Another important part of the trail's mission is to educate the public on issues, like native plants, prairie ecosystems, pond habitat, native woodlands and controlling invasives," Weedman wrote.

To assist with the removal of invasives Weedman said members of the community has helped with training and workdays, including volunteers from the Eagle Lions Club, members of the Eagle Village Board and the Friends of the Mukwonago River.

On the education side of things, Weedman explained in the award application that the trail committee has offered tours for citizens, featuring experts who discussed tree types and identifying plants.

And the involvement of youth from the greater community has been a big part of the trail's growth the past four years.



SUBMITTED PHOTO Mukwonago Times

A monarch rests on the foliage at the Eagle Nature Trail. The trail, which relies solely on donations and volunteers, recently won an excellence award. A guided walk held July 13 celebrated the award as well as the improvements on the trail since its inception in 2010.

"Student groups have helped in removing invasive plants like garlic mustard and knapweed from the woodland and prairie areas. The local Boy Scout troop, several elementary classes and the Palmyra-Eagle High School National Honor Society have all helped in the summers," Weedman wrote.

She also mentioned help that has come from field study students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and AmeriCorps teams through a connection with The Nature Conservancy.

"In 2013 alone, we have logged over 530 volunteer hours at the trail," Weedman wrote.

Due to 45 percent of the households in Eagle having children, Weedman said the trail committee believes in the importance of providing various education projects for local children. To that end, there have been discussions at Eagle Elementary School about native plants, a variety of Earth Day projects, a seed collecting day, an annual milkweed pod throw

including a lesson on the

monarch butterfly life cycle and migration.

"The Eagle Nature Trail's activities have been beneficial for our small community, bringing people from different backgrounds together for a common local achievement," Weedman said.

The trail was registered as a Monarch Waystation in 2013 by MonarchWatch.org and also became a Certified Wildlife Habitat area as recognized by the National Wildlife Federation, Weedman explained.

"Our goals of education and engagement will continue to guide us. We intend to continue our work on controlling invasives with a goal to get the trail to the point — once existing populations of invasives are gone — where annual maintenance could great new manifestations," Weedman said in the letter.

"We hope that citizens will continue to walk the Eagle Nature Trail and enjoy the work that we are accomplishing together," she said.

The \$2,000 cash prize and engraved plaque for the 2014 Virginia Kline Award for Ex-

cellence will be presented to representatives of the Eagle Nature Trail at the Leopold Restoration Award dinner Oct. 9.

A Trail Walk was held at the Eagle Nature Trail July 13, in part to celebrate the award. In addition to guides describing the work being done on the prairie, woodland and pond areas as well as pointing out the Wisconsin native flowers in bloom, the event included face painting and special coloring pages featuring native flowers.

"We are happy that the trail plantings are finally noticeable enough to be enjoyed by people. Clearly the plants are already being enjoyed by wildlife," Weedman said.

The trail is open daily to the public during daylight hours. There is parking at either end of the trail — Eagle Elementary School and behind the Eagle Municipal Building — and Aldo Leopold benches (named for Wisconsin naturalist, 1887-1948) have been placed along the way, making a walk on the trail easy for all ages and abilities.