

## DIRECTOR'S DATELINE By Kenneth F. Konsis

The recent blizzard officially closed our county parks for 3 days while our staff "dug out". This also put our maple syrup operation back a week, but now we are rolling along. The Maple Syrup Open House is not only our first major event of the New Year, but also one of our largest. Therefore, plan to visit Forest Glen on Sunday, March 18 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. for our famous pancakes and syrup (no blizzards please!).

Being cooped up in an office when there is a foot of snow on the ground and biting temperatures outside is not my cup of tea. I'm usually out doing something. However, it is a good excuse to clean the office. In fact, our entire Visitor's Center at Kennekuk is undergoing a transformation. New carpeting is laid and the entire natural history room exhibits are being replaced. We began this project last year by refurbishing the 1000-gallon aquarium.

In the previous issue, I mentioned our wonderful volunteers. If you would like to consider joining our Volunteer Corps, but are unsure of the commitment or types of opportunities we offer, I encourage you to come to our Volunteer Fair on Sunday, April 1 from 1-4 p.m. Staff members will be present to answer any questions you may have.

Are you interested in learning more about native plants? Our Forest Glen Chapter of the Illinois Native Plant Society schedules meetings and field trips throughout the year. For information, call 662-2142. The Illinois Walnut Council is also headquartered at Forest Glen and will be sponsoring a hands-on shiitake mushroom workshop in Douglas County on Saturday, March 24. This workshop will be conducted by Jeremy Parish of our staff. Pre-registration is required.

Finally, this is our annual issue with the pull-out Calendar of Events. Post it somewhere so it's readily available for reference. Visit our website at [www.vccd.org](http://www.vccd.org) for any changes that may occur.

Hold on, I have to go now. I just took a quick peek out the window and the snow is about gone and the sun is shining. I think I hear daffodils popping up!

## IN MEMORIAM

Long-time volunteer Delores Miller recently passed away. She could be found volunteering at the Kennekuk Visitor's Center on Sunday afternoons and at the BHHA on Saturday afternoons. Delores even volunteered at special events numerous times. Always ready to lend a hand, Delores will be greatly missed.

## DISTRICT Q & A

Did you ever have a question about the Vermilion County Conservation District, but never bothered to ask? Whether it is general, park maintenance, conservation education, administration, or research projects, this section is for you. Simply send your question to our park headquarters or e-mail us at [vccd@vccd.org](mailto:vccd@vccd.org). We will print what space will allow without revealing your name. All questions will be personally answered even if not selected. The question for this issue is "Why can't I hunt turkey or deer on the property south of Kennekuk anymore?"

The property in question is 1,000 acres of land owned by the Dynegy Corporation, formerly of the Illinois Power Company. The V.C.C.D. leased this property for many years, using it exclusively for hunting purposes. Two years ago, the Dynegy Corporation notified the Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources (IDNR) that they intend to donate this land to them. This was finalized last year when we (V.C.C.D.) received official notification that the lease has been terminated. Therefore, we do not control the land anymore and cannot give permission for hunting. Questions about this property should be directed to the IDNR office in Springfield or Kickapoo State Park.

## IN THE WORLD OF VOLUNTEERS...

By Lara Darling

Finally - winter came! My 21-month-old daughter actually got to use her sled and snowsuit! But I think we all feel we had our fair share of snow this year and now I'm ready for spring-like temperatures and the color of green. Not only does the warmer weather mean the start of school field trips, but also the start of another wonderful volunteer season! 2006 was a great year, and I know our faithful and dedicated volunteers will be back out at the parks for a great 2007.

Our first volunteer event for the year is the **Maple Syrup and Pancake Dinner** on March 18 at the Forest Glen Gannett Center from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Every year, a core group of volunteers work this event, but if there is anyone who would like to help out with any remaining openings, please give me a call!

Since the Volunteer Fair was a great success last year, the V.C.C.D. will again host a **Volunteer Fair and Open House** on April 1 at the Visitor's Center in Kennekuk County Park. Over 15 new volunteers were recruited from the event last year. So here's hoping for another great recruiting day! The Volunteer Fair will encourage people to learn about the exciting volunteer opportunities with the V.C.C.D. All current volunteers are invited to attend to encourage others to join the family of District Volunteers! More information on the Fair can be found in this issue.

The Volunteer Corps will continue to "adopt" **West Newell Road and Heron County Park** for litter cleanups in 2007 as part of Keep Vermilion County Beautiful's "Adopt a Spot" program. The dates for this year are: April 14, July 14, and September 29. Each cleanup begins at 9 a.m. at the Heron County Park parking lot and lasts 2-3 hours. Gloves, trash bags, pickup sticks, and refreshments are provided.

To kick off the 2007 Summer Volunteer Season, a **Volunteer Cookout** will be held on Sunday, May 20 at the White Oak Barn at Kennekuk. All volunteers and their families are invited to attend. More information will come to you in the mail, but be sure to mark it on your calendars now!

In the upcoming months, volunteers will also be receiving information about volunteering as a Building Host or Trail Steward for the summer. All trails at Kennekuk and Forest Glen will need Trail Stewards to let staff know of trail conditions (fallen trees, broken steps, mowing conditions, etc.). The Homestead Cabin and Nature Center will be open at Forest Glen and the BHHA Historic Buildings will be open at Kennekuk starting Memorial Day weekend. Watch your mail for more information!

For more information regarding the volunteer opportunities at the V.C.C.D., please contact Lara Darling at 442-1691 or [ldarling@soltec.net](mailto:ldarling@soltec.net). We would love to add you to the growing list of volunteers so you too can become a part of the V.C.C.D. family!

## VOLUNTEER FAIR

Do you like being outdoors and meeting new people? Would you like to become a part of one of the premier park districts in the state? Then make plans to attend the Vermilion County Conservation District's Volunteer Fair on April 1 at Kennekuk County Park's Visitor Center from 1 to 4 p.m. V.C.C.D. employees will be on hand to explain the abundant volunteer opportunities available, including trail stewards, historical building hosts, secretarial, and special event volunteers, like Haunted Happenings. Come out to Kennekuk County Park on April 2 to enjoy the beauty and to learn how you can begin your journey as a District Volunteer. Refreshments will be served!

## TREES OF ILLINOIS By Ken Konsis

Narrow-leaved crabapple, *Malus angustifolia*, is also known as southern crabapple or simply "wild crab". The small tree, only attaining a height of 20 feet in Illinois, but 30 feet farther south, is very rare in Illinois, only found in Pope and Hardin counties along the Ohio River and in Randolph County along the Mississippi River. It is equally rare in Missouri, likewise found in two southern counties.

We recently celebrated President's Day and the narrow-leaved crabapple was a favorite of George Washington. He noted the great fragrance of these small trees when in bloom and therefore dug up many trees from the wild and transplanted them at Mount Vernon. It is also believed that this crabapple may have been one of the first native crabapple used as a rootstock to graft the "exotic" apple. Pioneer orchardists as early as 1610 are said to have planted these trees on their home sites in Virginia and graft their apples to the rootstock. Over time, their apples would completely replace the small crabapple fruits, while their apples are benefiting from the hardy rootstock of the native tree.

The small tree may be found growing in most woodlands in Illinois, but is found also growing in thickets on ridge tops in Missouri. Farther south, narrow-leaved crabapple may be found in fencerows, edges of forests, and old fields.

Narrow-leaved crabapple has a spreading crown, and a trunk diameter of up to 9 inches. The bark is reddish-brown in color, deeply furrowed and scaly. Twigs are slender and either reddish-brown or paler in color, smooth, but sometimes developing spurs (not thorns). The leaf scars are alternate and narrow and contain 3 bundle traces. The buds are round, brown in color, finely hairy, and only 1/16 inch in diameter.

The leaves are likewise alternate, simple, and are elliptical to oblong in shape. Leaves are rounded at the tip and become narrower at the base and are up to 2 inches long and only half as wide. The leaf margins are toothed but may be shallowly lobed, and the leaves appear green and smooth on the upper surface and paler and smooth or sparsely hairy on the lower surface. The leafstalk is slender, about 1 inch long and may also be smooth or hairy.

The flowers are very showy and fragrant, and are the characteristic which attracted George Washington. The flowers are 1 inch in diameter and appear on long stalks with 3 or more flowers in a cluster. Each flower contains 5 rose-colored petals, which appear during May and June. The resulting apples are small, only 1 inch in diameter, yellow-green in color, and very hard. The fruit ripens in August through September, and is edible, but is sour and may have a bitter taste.

Therefore, if eaten, it is usually made into preserves, jellies, or cider. This is a very important wildlife tree, providing food for quail, grouse, pheasants, rabbits, squirrels, opossums, raccoons, skunks, foxes, and deer.

The wood of narrow-leaved crabapple is very hard, heavy, and close-grained. The small diameter of the tree limits its uses to woodenware or small tools. The range of this crabapple is basically the southern states from Tennessee east through North Carolina, south to northern Florida, west to Mississippi, and diagonally north back toward Tennessee. However, there are small pockets of this species found in Virginia, New Jersey, West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. It is probably considered state-endangered in most of these states.

The genus "*Malus*" is the Latin name for the apples; however, some botanical publications include crabapple in the genus "*Pyrus*", which is the genus for the pears. Therefore, if you have trouble locating the tree by the reference "*Malus*", try "*Pyrus*". The species name "*angustifolia*" refers to the Latin "*angust*", meaning narrow and "*folia*" for leaf.

The best characteristic for identification of this crabapple is its narrow leaves. We do have 2 specimens of this tree in the Michael G. Reddy Arboretum in spite of its rarity. They are very slow-growing because of the colder climate and are only about 3 feet tall, but otherwise very healthy. If you have one of our arboretum guidebooks, they may be found in the blue section of the arboretum. The arboretum receives the most visitations in the fall because of the leaf collecting and colorful foliage. We encourage you to take a walk through in the spring and see the many trees in full flower. It's quite impressive!

## FRIENDS OF THE DISTRICT

***Larry Durbin, Newtown* - Framed red tail hawk picture**

***Jim Kouzmanoff, Danville* - Monetary donation honoring Mr/Mrs J. Kent Robinson of Rolla, MO**

***Edward Morgan, Danville* - Monetary donation for pheasant program**

***Susan/Donald Richter, Oakwood* - Monetary donation**

***Dolores Toole, Danville* - Monetary donation for Bunker Hill Area**

***Alberta Wienke, Allerton* - Monetary donation for Forest Glen Preserve General Fund**

**HERB OF THE SEASON**  
**By Susan Biggs Warner**

**“Lemon Balm”**

Each year, an herb is selected to be “Herb of the Year” and this year is no exception. But, this year’s choice has some of us thinking, maybe they are running out of herbs to pick! The choice this year is Lemon Balm. This member of the mint family is not my choice for best lemon flavor in the garden. I do have to say it is very easy for everyone to grow.

Lemon balm is a perennial herb that grows about 2 ½ feet tall and has an aggressive habit like most of the mint family. If care is not taken, balm will spread to cover your whole garden. Digging or tilling around the plant seems to help keep it in one place.

The leaves are useful in many recipes and are best harvested before flowering. The flowers are also a great attracter for bees. The flavor of lemon balm is less lemony than lemon verbena and has a twist of mint to it. The leaves make a nice addition to herbal or traditional teas. Lemon balm also works well in sauces and salads. Whatever you find to use it in, lemon balm is at its best fresh and not dried.

**FROM THE TRACTOR SEAT**  
**By Jeremy Parish**

Every year, around the first of spring, visitors may notice that we burn parts of the prairie, and many understand that this is “good” for these areas. But why do we really burn? It’s because of succession, which is the process by which an area changes in species composition over time. If we didn’t burn or disturb the prairie every so often, it would eventually convert to forest. Tree species with lightweight, wind-blown seeds such as ash, cottonwood, and sycamore, along with those species whose seeds are deposited by birds, such as black cherry and hackberry would be the first to invade. Then, some oaks and hickories (planted by squirrels) would start to come in. As those trees got larger and more numerous, shade-tolerant, or shade “loving” species like the sugar maple and American beech would begin to acquire in the understory, some eventually breaking through to the overstory. This, of course, is a broad generalization, and takes a very long time to occur.

So what kept most of Illinois in prairie long before Europeans came here? First of all, the “recently” glaciated soil over most of the state was ripe, if you will, for prairie growth. But some disturbance had to have kept it that way. Researchers believe it was a combination of grazing of bison herds and fire. Lightning-ignited fires are not common in this part of the country, so a majority are believed to have been the doing of early humans. It is well documented that native peoples living in the Eastern U.S. during colonization used fire as a tool to their benefit. Fire

thinned the forest for easier hunting and travel, increased nut and berry production, and warded off enemies. The flat open terrain of Illinois allowed fires to consume entire landscapes. Only areas near rivers, streams, and marshes resisted the fires, and even still, parts of these areas burned occasionally. This created a mosaic or patchwork of different successional cover types near the transition between the forest and prairie. This process of disturbance, whether it is a flood, tornado, earthquake, or disease outbreak, interrupting succession occurs in many ways throughout the world. Many plant species are actually adapted to follow disturbance. Several conifers (evergreens) in the U.S. have cones that will only open and disperse if they are burned. Also, many oak species we have around here are shade-intolerant. A white oak seedling in the forest will never survive unless a disturbance comes along and opens the canopy above it. This can explain why extensive logging of the Eastern U.S. in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries resulted in the oak/hickory dominated forests we have today.

Some researchers are actually afraid that late successional species (maple, beech) are on their way to taking over our forests, replacing the mid-successional oaks and hickories - this occurring due to the lack of disturbance. Either way, a person wants to look at it, when we burn, we are simply disturbing a given community in order to set back the successional clock of time.

### ***DID YOU KNOW?***

**\*We usually tap our maple trees the 1<sup>st</sup> week of February but this year we are 2 weeks behind because of inclement weather.**

**\*Ideal conditions for a good sap run are 40-50° sunny days and night temps of 20°.**

**\*If temperatures are constantly warm or cold, the sap will cease to run. Fluctuation in temperature is required!**

**\*The end of the season is usually the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of March, when the trees' buds begin to swell.**

**\*The hard maples in our area, sugar or black, are the trees of highest sugar content. It takes about 43 gallons of sugar water to make a gallon of syrup. You may visually equate this with imagining a 55-gallon drum producing slightly over a gallon of syrup. The soft maples may also be tapped, such as the silver or red maples and box elder, a true maple. However, the sugar water to syrup ratio may be as high as 120 to 1.**