ON A BRISK AND BRIGHT WEDNESDAY MORNING IN OCTOBER, FOUR TREEKEEPERS GATHER

at Sycamore Park, a pocket park and playground in Hyde Park on Chicago’s South Side. After a short stretch and review of the plan for the day, they get out their safety glasses, work gloves, saws, and pruners, and get to work. They prune trees in the park and along the neighborhood street, occasionally asking each other for feedback on which branch should be pruned. As the workday winds down, they gather, count the number of trees pruned and report back to Openlands.

For Nancy Joseph and many TreeKeepers like her, she leaves with a lot more than she came with, “We all feel so good when we leave a workday—that we’ve left the trees in significantly better shape than when we got here. And that’s just so rewarding—that in today’s world, three hours’ time gives you such fulfillment. It’s pretty exciting.”

Openlands TreeKeepers events like that in Hyde Park have increased over the last five years, with the creation of local TreeKeeper Chapters. Active chapters exist in ten different communities in Chicago and the suburbs, and more are in the works for neighborhoods like Little Village and towns like Prospect Heights. Now in its 30th year, the TreeKeepers program is a national model for engaging people with their neighborhood trees. For Openlands, it is a program that continues to develop with passionate volunteer leadership and civic partnership.

### 30 YEARS OF TREEKEEPER IMPACT

TreeKeepers began in 1991 and graduated the first 60-person class of volunteers educated in tree care and dedicated to caring for the urban forest. Today, over 2,000 people have trained with Openlands and are certified to prune and care for trees in the region. After graduating from the course, TreeKeepers are encouraged to participate in 20 hours of activities annually. Events and activities range from pruning, planting, inventorying, and mulching events organized by Openlands or TreeKeepers to continuing education and advocacy-oriented opportunities with Openlands and its partners. Over the years, Openlands and TreeKeepers have led the charge in monitoring and defending Chicagoland’s trees, including being the only non-municipal group to help monitor the Asian Longhorn Beetle outbreak in 1998 and most recently, successfully advocating for the creation of a Chicago Urban Forestry Advisory Board.

### SEEING ALL THE WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN HYDE PARK

For Nancy Joseph, who began the first TreeKeeper Chapter in Hyde Park, what started after she took the course in 2013 has now become her passion. She began by joining workdays around the city with more experienced TreeKeepers, building her confidence in pruning trees. Now in its 30th year, the TreeKeepers program is a national model for engaging people with their neighborhood trees. For Openlands, it is a program that continues to develop with passionate volunteer leadership and civic partnership.

ABOVE: TreeKeepers plant, prune, and learn tree identification in Downers Grove, neighborhoods in Milwaukee, Hyde Park, North Park Village Center, Edgewater, and West Lawn in Chicago throughout 2021.

PHOTO CREDITS: Emily Reusswig, Lucia Whalen and Maren Robinson
In 2018, Nancy, with other interested Hyde Park TreeKeepers began coordinating events with Openlands that gathered volunteers from all over the region. A popular event among TreeKeepers and Hyde Park residents alike, the Chapter hosted one event a month up until COVID-19 hit. At the time, Openlands, the Chicago Park District, and many others were forced to pause all events. For Nancy and others, it was frustrating not to be out working, but when permission was granted to restart very small workdays with safety precautions in place, they began running more events than ever. “It was really exciting. We pruned a huge stretch of the Midway and we pruned a lot around Washington Park which we hadn’t spent a lot of time in. It was just a really nice respite for all of us—it was work that we could do when we were all so frustrated that our lives had changed so dramatically. We were able to get out and really work on something meaningful. And there’s always work to be done.”

Over the past two years, the Hyde Park TreeKeeper Chapter has met like this over 35 times, partnering with Jerome Scott, District Forester at the Chicago Park District and in coordination with Openlands, to prune and care for their neighborhood’s tree canopy. Their work has contributed to a record-breaking year of tree care for Openlands.

In 2018, Nancy, with other interested Hyde Park TreeKeepers began working to start a local TreeKeepers Chapter. The establishment of a local TreeKeepers Chapter benefits more than just the chapter members. It allows TreeKeepers and Hyde Park residents to work together on a regular basis and brings a sense of community to the neighborhood. “It’s really nice to get out and help each other,” Nancy says.

Treekeeping is more than just pruning trees. It involves protecting and caring for neighborhood trees in various stages of growth. Nancy says, “In 2019-20, TreeKeepers contributed to a record-breaking year of tree care for Openlands. In 2019, TreeKeepers pruned over 4,000 trees, and in 2020, they pruned over 8,000 trees. In 2021, they have pruned over 6,000 trees. This is not a record-breaking year, but it is still a significant contribution. TreeKeepers have made a meaningful impact on the tree canopy of Hyde Park and the surrounding areas.”

Openlands supports Chapter creation and engagement in a multitude of ways, from helping to do outreach and promoting Chapter events to hosting a TreeKeepers course to train new volunteers in a municipality, sharing resources, and directly supporting events with personnel and tools.

The TreeKeepers course and program focuses students on the importance of young tree care because of Openlands’ relationship and collaboration with many municipalities in the Chicago region. With cyclical budget limitations of local governments, pruning young trees is often one of the most impactful things TreeKeepers can do to improve the urban canopy, and a cost-effective alternative to the damage unmaintained older trees can have on taxpayers. Openlands forestry team, with TreeKeepers and volunteers of all ages, have pruned 7,500 trees since 2013, mulched, watered, and pruned over 15,000 more trees, and provided countless residents with the benefits of a tree near to their home. With the growth of TreeKeeper Chapters and leadership from individuals like Nancy and Mike, Openlands hopes this community-driven impact will continue to grow.

Why Prune Young Trees?

While many municipalities devote resources to planting, pruning younger trees is often the first to be cut due to budgetary constraints.

Structural Pruning of Young Trees is an essential step to establishing the health and longevity of trees. As TreeKeeper Nancy says, “you have to think about what you want the tree to look like five years from now.” Good pruning focuses the tree’s energy to grow branches that are healthy and structurally sound. For example, if there is a branch that is growing low towards the street in a way that might block cars in a year or two, a TreeKeeper may want to prune the branch now, so it does not get damaged by cars or people in the future. With that potentially hazardous branch pruned, the tree can put its energy towards the structurally functioning branches that will make it beautiful and healthy for many years to come.

Through working with Openlands, a local partner can decide on what type of stewardship it wants TreeKeepers to focus on. This can evolve over time, as the comfort level of working with trained volunteers increases, objectives are accomplished, or priorities shift. Throughout the last year, Openlands’ TreeKeepers helped municipalities with anything from tree mulching and pruning to creating a neighborhood tree inventory and sparrowheading education and advocacy.

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The Openlands 2021 Annual Luncheon Celebrates Civic Action and Policy Impacts

FOR THE LAST 58 YEARS, Openlands’ work in the Chicago metropolitan region has centered on connecting people to nature and engaging them in the future protection of our land, water, and wildlife. This work takes persistence, collaboration, and agility. It also takes people—residents, conservationists, business leaders, and elected officials coming together to create the kind of systemic impact that ensures a more equitable and livable future.

It was in that spirit that Openlands welcomed over 600 people in person and online for its 2021 Annual Luncheon. The event celebrated the conservation legacy of U.S. Senator Dick Durbin and raised over $400,000 for Openlands’ mission and work in the region.

The Luncheon was co-chaired by Ambassador Fay Hartog-Levin (Ret.) and Commissioner Debra Shore, with Anne Roosevelt serving as Honorary Chair. The co-chairs kicked off the ceremony with a land acknowledgment and Commissioner Shore was also celebrated for her recent appointment by President Biden as Regional Administrator for EPA Region 5.

Openlands President and CEO Jerry Adelmann spoke of the insights our world has gained over the past year and a half, and the heightened importance of preserving the natural spaces in our region at all scales: “I would argue that the last two years have been the most challenging of our generation. There has been a trifecta of health, social, and environmental crises that we’ve never experienced before. But what we have done is turned to nature in unprecedented ways, and why? Because nature gives us solace. It provides benefits for our personal and community health. Nature is not a luxury; it is essential, and it needs to be part of our lives, close to where we live.”

Jerome Scott, District Forester at the Chicago Parks District and TreeKeeper #452, ended the program with a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the TreeKeepers program and its impact over the last five years, with the creation of TreeKeeper Chapters and the monumental increase in pruning Chicagoland’s trees.

The event centered on the 2021 Conservation Leadership Award Recipient, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois, whose environmental impact spans not just Illinois but the nation and world. From conserving Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge and spearheading the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to proposing the Bronzeville Black Metropolis National Heritage Area and driving forward the RENEW Conservation Corps Act—both with Congressman Bobby Rush—Senator Durbin has been a champion for nature and people.

In his remarks, Senator Durbin spoke of the continued need to push conservation policy and protections forward. “I don’t view this recognition as a reward, but I view it as a reminder—that there is more work to be done in our nation. We need to leave for future generations a better world.”

You can view the Conservation Leadership Award video at Openlands.org/CLA

LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: Ambassador Fay Hartog-Levin (Ret.) and Commissioner Debra Shore at the Annual Luncheon; Openlands Board chair, JoAnn Seagren, Senator Dick Durbin and Openlands President CEO Jerry Adelmann, leaves in Downers Grove; BELOW: Ryerson Woods

PHOTO CREDITS: above, Sarah Larson; at left, Maren Robinson; below, Stacy Meyers
Get Outside: Savor the Trees

FALL IS NOT THE ONLY TIME TO TAKE IN THE BEAUTY of trees. Winter can provide a fun and challenging way to test your tree identification skills. For experts and novices alike, visiting local arboreta throughout the year is a great way to increase your knowledge and enjoyment of trees. Distinct from a forest, nursery, or park, an arboretum is like an outdoor museum of trees. It is a place where many varieties of trees are grown for research, educational, and ornamental purposes, and where trees and shrubs are cultivated for exhibition.

While not all these featured locations are arboreta, each has special tree species, woodlands, savannas, or stands that make enjoyable and interesting places to get outside.

### Blackwell Forest Preserve
9600 Blackwell Road, Warrenville, IL 60555
Blackwell’s gently rolling hilly terrain features oak and hickory woodlands, including a rare dry-mesic gravel woodland, and attracts a variety of native wildlife, including wild turkeys, deer, bald eagles, great blue herons, coyotes, red foxes, and muskrats.

### Braidwood Dunes and Savanna Nature Preserve
5000 S. La Grange Road, south of W 135th Street, Orland Park, IL 60462
Cranberry Slough & Spears Woods
24329 IL-113, Braidwood, IL 60408
Braidwood Dunes and Savanna in Braidwood is interesting and extraordinary in any season. There are a couple of natural surface trails through the sandy-soil communities including white and black oak dominated savannas.

### Bunk Hill & Sidney Yates Flatwoods
500 Hickory Nut Grove Road (South side of the street), 500 Hickory Nut Grove Road (South side of the street), Bolingbrook, IL 60490
500 Hickory Nut Grove Road
1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, IL 60022
Cranberry Slough and Spears Woods
9600 Blackwell Road, Willow Springs, IL 60480
Cranberry Slough and Spears Woods have some of Cook County’s highest quality oak-hickory woodlands, and with a little bit of topography, you can easily forget you are so close to an urban center.

### Dam 1 Woods
621 W Dundee Road, Wheeling, IL 60090
Dam 1 Woods, part of the Des Plaines Trail System, is a great place to view sugar maples throughout the year, but especially in fall. The drive through the grove is over a mile long and the trees in many spots form a tunnel, giving you a cathedral like feel over the roadway, and inspiring awe.

### Downers Grove Park District Arboretum
2455 Warrenville Road, Downers Grove, IL 60515
The district’s diverse urban canopy features 92 species including a large number of maple and oak species in addition to Baldcypress, Serviceberry, Hackberry, Kentucky coffee tree, Douglas fir, and Alder trees.

### Elmhurst College Arboretum
190 Phlox Street, Elmhurst, IL 60125
Elmhurst College Arboretum 850 trees and numerous varieties of shrubs and perennials, including several exotic species in addition to campus favorites like magnolias, redbud, and maples.

### Glacial Park
6190 Route 111, Ringwood, IL 60072
Glacial Park is McHenry County Conservation District’s most treasured open space holding, characterized by its rolling prairie, delta kames, oak savanna and the tranquil presence of the meandering Nippersink Creek.

### Goodnow Grove Nature Preserve
27064 Dutton Road, Beecher, IL 60401
The section of Goodnow Grove Nature Preserve south of Illinois Road in Cresskill Township has stunning woodlands and ravines, and is home to several unusual plant species. The big bridge on the main trail has a spectacular view as it passes over a ravine.

### Graceland Cemetery Arboretum
4100 North Clark Street, Chicago, IL 60613
More than 103 species of trees and woody plants grow among the cemetery’s 119 acres, which is not only a place to enjoy nature, but a valued site for art, architecture, and history, as well as birding.

### Hazel Crest Open Lands Arboretum
3000 W. 17th Place, Hazel Crest, IL 60429
The arboretum has many tree species native to Illinois including: Baldcypress, Marmo maple, Persian ironwood, Wireless zelcova, Pear, Butternut, Bitternut hickory, Sassafras, Giant sequoia, Blue ash and Schumard, White, Black, Bur, and White oaks.

### Hickory Creek Preserve
10537 W La Porta Road, Mokena, IL 60448
The trail through Hickory Creek Preserve in New Lenox/ Mokena starting at Schooshouse Road and heading east is lovely in the fall. It goes through nice oak-hickory woodlands, savanna, and prairie openings across rolling terrain. There are a couple of unusual stands of Kentucky coffee trees, including one near the western bridge that crosses Hickory Creek.

### Hickory Grove Highlands and Lyons Prairie and Marsh
500 Hickory Grove Road South (South side of the street), Cary, IL 60013
Hickory Grove Highlands serves as a refuge for northern Illinois wildlife and provides visitors with opportunities for hiking and horseback riding through beautiful woodlands.

### Maple Grove Forest Preserve
Downers Grove, IL 60515
The sugar maples are abundant at Maple Grove Forest Preserve and provide beautiful color in the fall.

### McGregor Ridge
2411 N. Route 23, Marengo
Marengo Ridge Conservation Area contains over 818 acres of oak and hickory woodlands interspersed with spruce, aspen, ash, and sumac groves.

### McCloud Slough
5 La Grange Road, south of W 135th Street, Orland Park, IL 60462
McCloud Slough is better known as a great place to spot waterfowl and shorebirds, but tree enthusiasts will love it even more for a small stand of very large bald cypress trees. Somewhat hard to find, you can find them by looking off the walking path with binoculars.

### McKinley Woods
26932 River Bluff Drive, Channahon, IL 60410
In the spring, head to McKinley Woods in Channahon for a spectacular redbud display. In addition, there are a few trails that meander through the high-quality woodlands on the bluff overlooking the Des Plaines River and I&M Canal.

### Meacham Grove Nature Preserve
5 Circle Avenue, Bloomingdale, IL 60108
The 255-acre Meacham Grove Forest Preserve in Bloomingdale features woodland groves, meadows, wetlands, the meandering Spring Brook Creek, and the Meacham Grove Nature Preserve.

### The Morton Arboretum
4100 Illinois Route 53, Lisle, IL 60532
A quintessential stop for any tree novice, The Morton Arboretum features plant collections and gardens amidst natural landscapes of woodlands, prairie, lakes, and streams. Its living collections include 222,000 plant specimens representing 4,650 different kinds of plants. Additionally, guests can enjoy 16 miles of hiking trails, a Children’s Garden, exhibits, and more!

### Old School Forest Preserve
28256 St. Mary’s Road, Mokena, IL 60448
Large oaks dominate Old School’s woodlands that blend with small prairies. This landscape resembles what Lake County looked like when it was first settled.

### Pleasant Valley
13315 Pleasant Valley Road, Woodstock, IL 60098
Pleasant Valley in Woodstock offers 5 miles of trails within 1,777 acres of beautiful woodlands, savanna and prairie.

### Edward L. Ryerson Conservation Area
21950 North Riverwood Road, Riverwoods, IL 60015
Rare species, rare communities, and exceptional natural areas combine to make this a very special preserve. More than half of the land is so ecologically valuable that it is dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve and benefits from special protection rules.

### Waterfall Glen Forest Preserve
9000 Limestone Drive, Lemont, IL 60439
At Waterfall Glen Forest Preserve there are large acres of pine plantations (Red, White, and Jack pine) that were planted in the 1950s when Argonne National Laboratory owned the site. The southern portion of the preserve has high-quality music woodland and savanna.

### Captain Daniel Wright Woods
24830 St. Mary’s Road, Mokena, IL 60405
Situated just east of the river, Wright Woods supports a rich oak and maple woodland. With large stands of maples found at few other places in Lake County, Wright Woods is a great place to view autumn colors.

### The Dr. William M. Zales Arboretum
1215 Houbolt Road, Joliet, IL 60431
The 11-acre Joliet Junior College Arboretum was started in 1975 and is located on JJC’s 368-acre Main Campus. The college arboretum concept was originated by Dr. William M. Zales in 1975 as part of a master campus use plan.

### Get Outside Map: Savor the Trees

Visit Openlands.org/GetOutside for more details on these locations and hundreds of other places to enjoy in the region with Openlands Get Outside Map.
To fully appreciate these spaces, having a basic understanding of tree identification can be helpful:

- **Grab Your Field Guide**: Having a pocket field guide or using iNaturalist or Seek apps can help you easily identify trees in a park, preserve, or in your neighborhood. Make sure you’ve got one handy before venturing out!

- **Know Your Location**: Where you are can give you clues as to what trees will flourish—is the ground wet? Are you in the city or woodland?

- **Deciduous or Conifer**: You can classify a tree into one of two groups: a conifer that holds its leaves or needles year-round, or a deciduous tree that drops leaves annually.

- **Observe the Tree**: What does the bark look like? Is the branching pattern alternate or opposite? Does the bud or leaf have hairs? All this information can help you identify a tree with or without leaves. Binoculars can also help you see the tree from far away or use a magnifying glass up close.

- **Examine the Shape of the Leaf**: Lastly, the leaves on a tree can be a strong way for even a beginner to identify a tree. For example, oaks often hold on to their leaves long into winter.

Wherever you venture, please remember to recreate responsibly: carry out what you carry in to leave no trace, stay on the trails, and don’t forget water, sunscreen, and hat!