



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Experience the Illinois Prairie Path

“Footpaths are defended with spirit by their users” - May Theilgaard Watts

May Theilgaard Watts, Naperville resident and esteemed naturalist emerita from the Morton Arboretum, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune* proposing a public footpath. In just 957 days, she and small group of talented volunteers were able to turn her letter into 12-year lease to develop her footpath.

Fifty years later, a series of recently-built trails now link her hometown with her Illinois Prairie Path. You are invited to take a journey along the Illinois Prairie Path with the founders, volunteers, members and trail users through stories, photos, music, poems, video and audio clips.

WHEN: Saturday, May 18 from 11 a.m. to Noon. This event is free and open to the public.

WHERE: The event will be held in Naperville (North Central College) at Madden Theater in Wentz Concert Hall at 171 East Chicago Avenue. Madden Theater is on the lower level.

PARKING: Parking in Naperville is free. Be sure to visit the city's Park Easy, Park Smart information <http://www.naperville.il.us/downtownparking.aspx>



HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE: Emcee, Steve Buchtel, Executive Director, Trails for Illinois; a welcome from Naperville Mayor George Pradel; a new map showing all of the connecting trails between Naperville and the Illinois Prairie Path; new photographs of the Path taken by expert volunteer photographers; a brief radio clip of Studs Terkel interviewing Mrs. Watts about the Path; a new video about the 14 founders (you'll see ALL of their photos for the first time); songs and poems related to the Path; stories of vision and resilience from Path founders, volunteers and trail users.

You'll learn about the founders who worked with Mrs. Watts to establish her footpath. You'll hear Mrs. Watts being interviewed by Studs Terkel. Photographs will help you imagine being on the path in all seasons, moving through forests, over bridges, and along rivers. Music, stories and poems will weave generations of memories together.

From a distance of 50 years, it's possible to stand side by side with the founders and the legacy volunteers and experience their idealism, passion, and courage in the face of powerful opposition and repeated vandalism. They were pioneers. With minimal resources they ventured onto a tangled path and had to forge their way through time and history. Spend an hour travelling the inner paths of many remarkable people.

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