

## Why I Run

**By Dennis P. Clark**

*Candidate for President of the  
Forest Preserve District of DuPage County*

Many people ask me everyday: Why are you running for an elected office and what would you change?

My concern for the forest preserves runs deep. I spend a considerable amount of volunteer time supporting this belief by working at the Forest Preserve, Morton Arboretum and with The Conservation Foundation. This fall, I will have completed all of the rigorous requirements to earn the designation of Certified Woodland Steward from the Morton Arboretum. This training has given me even greater insight into woodland management, invasive species control, wetland restoration and development and prescribed burn techniques. No one on the current Board has these skills and I believe they are necessary to provide effective and efficient management of this organization.

Once elected, there are three initiatives I plan to accomplish:

### 1. **Honest and Fiscally Astute**

**Government.** Although environmental issues are a major concern, fiscally astute government is the number one issue. After digging through the Forest Preserve's operational files, reviewing their audited financial statements, obtaining data from Freedom of Information requests and attending the weekly Board Call and Planning meetings for over a year, it is obvious the Citizens of DuPage County deserve better management of their Forest Preserves. The routine use of no-bid contracts, the blind approval of change orders and the campaign contributions received from a majority of the vendors clearly speak of a Board that does not understand fiscal stewardship.

**2. The Environment.** The Forest Preserve is in a transition mode from buying land to management of existing holdings. This takes a different set of skills. Forest Preserve Board members, especially the Board President, should have an understanding of the objectives, techniques used and maintenance requirements needed to provide guidance and fiscal decisions for the District. The knowledge required about the various needs of forest, woodlands, savanna, prairies and wetlands and the living communities of wildlife that inhabit each of these different areas are very diverse. An appreciation of the geology of the area and its role

in the successful development of each of these areas is crucial. Understanding watershed management is essential in order to have a significant impact on the quality of water entering our rivers, streams and wetland areas. Clean water is pivotal to having a vibrant and sustainable environment. The Forest Preserve Board should work closely with organizations throughout the County to develop logical procedures that would enhance our land use and water quality. Wetlands are some of the most productive ecosystems in the world and should be at the very core of the forest preserve restoration plans. These areas act like a sponge for pollutants, sediments, organic waste and inorganic nutrients. The creation of additional wetlands could have an immediate impact on the quality of water, biodiversity and flood relief within the County.

Many areas of our current forest preserves are not receiving adequate attention. Management of the 26,000 acres is a constant task, because if problems persist too long, they can overcome the staff as they quickly multiply throughout the land holdings. Emphasis on the Board's obligation for hands-on stewardship must be a top priority.

### 3. **Transparency with the Tax-Paying Public and Efficiency of the Organization.**

The Forest Preserve is substantially supported with property taxes and, therefore, has a significant accountability to the public. Issues such as leaking landfills, the proposed Blackwell fleet service building, the proposed Woodland Hawk trail, the closing of Mallard Lake forest preserve and dog park, the Salt Creek watershed home purchase program and the secrecy surrounding a recent land sale ... have all left the public wondering if anyone at the Forest Preserve is listening to their concerns. The public deserves much more! Under my leadership, all projects will be planned and executed only after proper due diligence has been conducted and full disclosure has been made to the public. An integrated public record system, with agendas, minutes and audio/video recordings, all archived, cross linked and searchable by keywords, based on open data standards and digital documents, will be introduced. This change to electronic media storage will improve transparency for the public as well as increase the efficiency of the Board and staff. The posting of all RFP's, contracts, change orders with justification and account records will all become the standard.

*For more information, please visit:*  
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