

Keeping it clean...

THE VILLA PARK COMMUNITY PRIDE COMMISSION will conduct the 2015 Prairie Path Cleanup on the village's portion of the Illinois Prairie Path on Saturday, April 25. The cleanup will take place, rain or shine, from 9 a.m. to noon. The annual event, which will take place in commemoration of Earth Day (April 22), will begin at the Villa Park Historical Museum, located just south of the path at 20 S. Villa Ave. Garbage bags and water will be provided to all participants, who should bring their own work gloves. The photo on the right, taken Monday evening, shows an eastward view of the path near the Villa Park border with Lombard. The Illinois Prairie Path spans about 60 miles in Cook, DuPage and Kane counties. According to the official Web site of the path—www.ipp.org—the trail is the former right-of-way for the old Chicago, Aurora and Elgin (CA&E) electric railroad. The CA&E suspended its commuter operations in 1957 and stopped its freight operations in 1959. The Illinois Prairie Path, according to the Web site, became the first rail-to-trail conversion in the nation in the 1960s. Segments of the path are maintained by local municipalities, including the Village of Villa Park, the Village of Lombard and the Elmhurst Park District.

Photo by Chris Fox



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Willowbrook's Best Buddies chapter puts on its prom

Willowbrook High School's Best Buddies chapter hosted a prom on Friday evening at the Lombard Community Building. The special night featured dinner, music played by a DJ, dancing, a magician and photos for the attendees. Students from Willowbrook and other area schools—including Glenbard East, Addison Trail, Bartlett and Leyden—attended the event.

"Best Buddies is a worldwide organization that forms one-to-one friendships with individuals with disabilities, and with their peers," said Willowbrook senior Kelsey Linnig, a co-president of her school's Best Buddies chapter. Linnig, who organized Friday's prom, has been involved with Best Buddies since her freshman year.

"In our chapter at Willowbrook, we have 15 buddy pairs," said Linnig, who noted that her school's chapter holds activities every month. One upcoming event—the Best Buddies Friendship Walk at the Brookfield Zoo on May 2—will include students from several Illinois chapters.

This is the second year that Willowbrook's chapter has held a prom that took place away from the school. That event took place at the York Center Park District facility in Lombard.

Willowbrook special education teacher Tiffany Lamberty, who serves as the school's Best Buddies sponsor, said that Friday's event provides a different setting than the prom that takes place near the end of the school year.

"They [the Best Buddies students] are fully included to go to the prom, but a lot of them feel uncomfortable going," said Lamberty and Friday's event. "When they go to the big proms, it's really intimidating. This is a place where everyone feels welcome and invited and comfortable."

Lamberty said that organizations like Best Buddies, which was founded in 1989, will continue to gain attention. Best Buddies now features about 1,500 middle school, high school and college chapters.

"I think as more awareness is being built, these types of programs are going to become more popular, kind of how Special Olympics has become a national staple," she said.

Lamberty and Linnig said that one of the highlights for the students at Friday's prom is the posing for pictures. Those pictures will be



Best Buddies at Willowbrook...

Photos by Chris Fox

THE ABOVE PHOTO shows the Willowbrook High School contingent from Friday's Best Buddies prom at the Lombard Community Building. Willowbrook's Best Buddies chapter held the prom, which also included students from other high schools. The photo below shows Willowbrook seniors Kelsey Linnig (left) and Mia Railing (right), who are co-presidents of their school's Best Buddies chapter, posing for a picture with Glenbard East freshman Christian Williams (middle).

made into a slide show, which will help the students relive and remember the night.

Linnig will attend the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She plans to study to become a special education teacher.

The upcoming Best Buddies Friendship Walk at the Brookfield Zoo is one of several friendship walks that are taking place around the country this spring. According to the Best Buddies Web site—www.bestbuddies.org—more than 55,000 participants have walked in over 26 states since 2009. The walks have reportedly raised more than \$5 million. Proceeds from the walks help to fund Best Buddies programs.

For more information about Best Buddies Illinois and the friendship walk on May 2, visit www.bestbuddiesillinois.org.

