

the river REPORTER

More Than a Walk Along the River

It is no surprise that a walk along the river in the woods is a wonderful way to spend the day. Whether on your own or with friends or family, the experience can provide the surprising sight of a great horned owl, the mystic beauty of a spring ephemeral, or just the pure satisfaction of mud on your boots, providing proof of your “everything’s bully” attitude. A day in the woods is a day well spent—and one more worthwhile reason to ensure that our natural resources are healthy and protected.

The debate over where and how we spend our public dollars often undervalues investment in the environment and our native landscapes, pitting economic growth against environmental health. A basic argument might be that “we can’t afford to....” Yet a growing body of evidence is providing reasons for why we *can’t* afford *not* to—and the benefits nature provides to public health go far beyond the physical impact of exercise.

Over the last two decades, hundreds of studies have found a direct relationship between access



Experience in natural areas such as at Mill Creek in McClaughrey Springs Woods reduces stress and provides a myriad of physical benefits.

to nature and good physical and mental health and long-term well-being. Just some of the benefits include lower stress and anxiety; reduced incidences of type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and high blood pressure; children doing better in school; lower impacts from ADHD; and improved immune function. A meta-analysis of 140 such studies involving 290 million people from 20 countries by the

University of East Anglia in the U.K. confirmed that “spending time in, or living close to, natural green spaces is associated with diverse and significant health benefits,” including most of those listed above.

Another study from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor established that nature provides improvements to directed-attention abilities;

Story continued on page 5...



WADING IN

Hope Springs Eternal

Tattered plastic fluttered in our serviceberry this morning above where a fox sparrow was scratching in the duff, a stop on his way from the American south to a northern forest. It reminded me again that no matter where we live in the Chicago and Calumet River watershed, litter is doing harm.

Yet still, as we watch the spring emerge at Friends we are feeling optimistic. Internationally, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals set the tone for global cooperation. On the national front, existing environmental rules and regulations are starting to be enforced again and new ones will be developed to better protect human and environmental health. The federal Civilian Climate Corps imitative will drive efforts to conserve and restore public lands; increase resilience, reforestation, and carbon sequestration while protecting biodiversity and improving public access to recreation. A plan to increase funding for the Great Lakes and rivers like ours means that we can do more to improve water quality, habitat, and the health of our landscape.

On a local level, there is also reason for hope. An unprecedented number of people and organizations have embraced Friends' vision for a healthy, accessible Chicago River system and now count its improvement and protection as a priority in their strategic plans.

Our volunteer numbers are growing and financial support for our work is following. Moreover, the overwhelming experience of the last year has inspired people to get outdoors and enjoy the river in numbers we haven't seen before and they are fortified by what they find there—nature, beauty, peace and wildlife. All of which contributes to creating awareness and understanding of our vital natural resources and we hope, long term support for them. All of this is underscored by a national movement toward equity and access for all.

Yet there is still more to be done. Government agencies and elected officials must commit to executing the rules and regulations laid out in the Clean Water Act and work with us to achieve the highest possible standards bringing an end sewage and litter pollution. We must develop a collective river vision that crosses traditional boundaries based upon a watershed approach. We also need to allow space and create connections setting aside as much land as possible for conservation.

As spring unfolds to summer, we invite you to join us to ensure wild species have places to live, people can find peaceful respite outdoors, and that we will work together to help my visiting fox sparrow on his way. Thank you for coming along.

Margaret Frisbie
Executive Director

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Our mission is to improve and protect the Chicago River system for people, plants, and animals.

Our vision is to make the Chicago River one of the world's greatest metropolitan rivers.

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Nettelhorst School's Poetry Jam Raises Awareness and Money for the River

Melitza Rodriguez has been named 2020 Educator of the Year for Friends of the Chicago River. Her second graders at Nettelhorst School started learning about the river last November. They learned about Native Americans and which animals and plants live in the river. They explored the effects of erosion, river pollution (at the Union Stockyards), and the river's reversal in 1900.

After a visit by Mark Hauser, Friends' ecology outreach manager, in December to talk about how we can all help the river, the students were tasked with building a better future for the river. The students also had to think about the cost to implement their vision and from where the money would come. They decided to put on a Poetry Jam to teach their friends and families what they had learned and to raise funds to help restore the river.

The students created artwork and wrote poems that were auctioned off in March. All of the donations were given to Friends to support Chicago River restoration. Over \$500 was raised by Nettelhorst.



Adam, one of the Poetry Jam participants, is a gifted artist. He donated his painting to the silent auction to raise money to restore the Chicago River. It sold for \$50.

Evelyn Rocha Joins Friends

Evelyn Rocha has joined Friends as development associate, reporting to director of development, Kim Olsen-Clark.

Evelyn has been working in the development field for nearly two years and started her career at Youth Outreach Services. Before that, she attended the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) where she received her master's degree in public administration with a concentration in nonprofit management. She is passionate about improving the city and sharing resources in our communities in an equitable fashion.

Throughout Evelyn's higher education, her dedication to the world of nonprofits grew. She interned with several organizations and just knew this path would be her purpose in life. While attending UIC, her eyes were opened to the different experiences and personalities each neighborhood has to offer. She then knew Chicago would always be her home.

Originally from the suburbs of Chicago, Evelyn is a first-generation Latinx woman who is a proud Chicagoan and Cubs fan. "I am not a native, but I have lived here for six years, and I believe the river and skyline make up the beauty that is this city," said Evelyn. "Chicago has such a rich history and a lot of it revolves around the river. I could not imagine Chicago without the river, and that is why I am thrilled to be working at Friends. We make waves here."

Evelyn is excited to be a part of the spring and summer activities planned for the year. After a brutal winter, she is ready to get out her shorts and flip-flops. "I will see you at Chicago River Day," said Evelyn.



Evelyn Rocha, Friends' new development associate.

Funding Secure for Next Phase of Asian Carp Battle

State and federal funding has been secured to help move ahead the next phase of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) project near Joliet to help keep the invasive Asian carp out of the Chicago River system and Lake Michigan.

At the start of the year, the states of Illinois and Michigan agreed to work together to fund the non-federal portion of the engineering and design phase of the USACE Asian carp barrier project at Brandon Road Lock and Dam. The two states will fund a third of the anticipated \$28 million pre-construction engineering and design phase, federal funds will cover the other two-thirds.

The complete construction of the entire project is estimated to cost \$858 million. Asian carp arrived in the United States in 1963. Breeders flushed the Asian carp into canals and waterways where they began to flourish and breed, gradually expanding into the Mississippi River and throughout the massive watershed of the river across 31 states.

Friends of the Chicago River is part of the Chicago Area Waterway System Aquatic Invasive Species Stakeholder Committee. The committee includes representatives from 40 public and private stakeholders working to prevent Asian carp in the waterway system and has been advocating for the effort since 2014.

“Asian carp pose a serious threat to the ecological health of the Chicago River system, the Great Lakes, and the people and economies those waters support in both the Mississippi River Basin and the Great Lakes Basin,” said John Quail, director of policy and conservation at Friends of the Chicago River. “Friends is excited to see this project take shape as it is implemented over the next few years, in the meantime we will continue to invest in making the Chicago River system healthier. It is a critical resource for Illinois’ native fish.”

The Brandon Road Lock and Dam. Photo by USACE.



Charming as that Green River on St. Patrick's Day may be, Chicago should be Environmentally Smarter

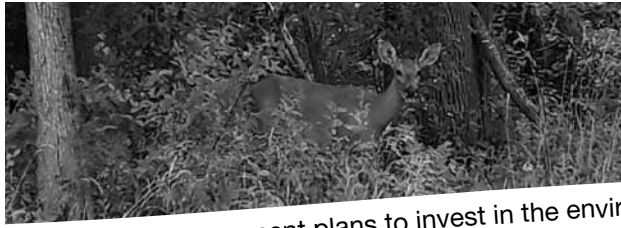
In a letter to the editor in the *Chicago Sun-Times* on St. Patrick's Day, Friends of the Chicago River, Openlands, and the Sierra Club, Illinois Chapter called on Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Plumbers Union Local 130 to forgo the annual green dyeing of the Chicago River downtown by creating a new tradition that respects the river.

The letter states: “Regardless of whether the green dye is harmless...it's time to rethink how the Chicago River is being treated. It's time to start seeing it for what it truly is—a wondrous natural resource as worthy as Lake Michigan of being improved, protected and respected. Let's resolve to work together...to create a new St. Patrick's Day tradition, one that honors both the Chicago River and the proud Irish heritage of many of the Chicagoans who helped build our city.”

The dyeing of the river downtown was a surprise event after it was first canceled by the city. Unfortunately, on the same day, green dye was also dumped into the North Branch at LaBagh Woods. This year Friends organized and trained volunteer river monitors to observe the North Branch and report any green dye to the MWRD at 1-800-332-DUMP. Called an eco-sting by one reporter, the intent was to build awareness of the fact that dyeing the river downtown has negative effects on how people think about the river.

Environmental Health = Public Health

This month the Biden administration made a commitment to prioritize and invest in the nation's public health system to address health disparities that were exposed and worsened by COVID-19. Biden's National Public Health Week proclamation in April stated that "we must also address the environmental and climate factors – air and water pollution, extreme weather, and climate-related disaster events – that threaten public health in communities nationwide." Investing in healthy natural areas is part of the plan.



The federal government plans to invest in the environment to improve public health.

Story continued from page 1

the idea being that nature is full of intriguing stimuli that subtly captures your attention in a "bottom-up" fashion.

Known as Attention Restoration Therapy, being in nature allows "top-down directed attention abilities a chance to replenish." This becomes particularly important in urban areas, where

our lives are filled with dramatic stimuli and living and/or working here requires constant directed attention. Further research is finding that "blue space," i.e., rivers, lakes, and streams provide the same.

The idea that nature is good for you is not entirely new. In modern times, the Japanese government began promoting *shirin-yoku*, or forest bathing, the practice of slowly walking through a forest using all senses to absorb the atmosphere. In 2004, a Japanese study of the link between forests and human health began and further established how being in a forest reduces stress, anxiety depression and anger along with many other benefits.

This movement has become the foundation of wellness clinics and holiday destinations where nature is provided to you. Yet while some people can pay for privilege, the ideal and ethical option is to create easy access to natural areas for everyone especially in urban areas within an easy distance of home. In fact an article in the online journal, *The Conversation*, stated,



Studies show that 120 minutes in nature in places such as Beaubien Woods make people less stressed and anxious.

"For natural capital to deliver health benefits to people, it needs to be right next to them, integrated into the everyday fabric of their world."

This research is at the core of Friends' vision of the Chicago River system of connected natural open space available to people and wildlife and at this time in history is frankly an imperative for both.



Outdoor activities such as paddling are healthy—and fun.



Photos (left to right) by Kelly Aves, Loren Lee, Brian Pesta, and Louise Barrett.

Registration is Open for Chicago River Day May 8

Our annual spring litter cleanup and restoration day event draws thousands of volunteers to work at nearly 70 locations along the river system. This year activities will include the Illinois Spring Bird Count. Registration is required, and volunteers have two start times to choose from – 9 a.m. or 10 a.m. – to help practice social distancing. Masks and social distancing are required, regardless of vaccination status.

While the overall health of the Chicago River system continues to improve, litter remains a stubborn problem. Since Chicago River Day started in 1992, volunteers have carted off hundreds of tons of garbage and invasive plant material from the 156-mile Chicago River system, restoring riverbanks and open spaces. Friends will also continue the successful Summer Challenge litter clean up launched last year in response to the pandemic so volunteers can work together, but safely apart, all summer long to create a Litter Free Chicago River.

American mink

Neovison vison

Illustration by Jen Pagnini
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From left: Congressman Mike Quigley (IL-5), with Margaret Frisbie, Cook County Commissioner Bridget Degnan, MWRD Commissioner Josina Morita, and staff from 39th Ward Alderman Samantha Nugent's office for the Summer Challenge.

Pick up Litter This Summer — The Challenge is On

With generous support from the Mars Wrigley Foundation, Friends is working toward a Litter Free Chicago River by organizing litter cleanups, data collection, sharing best practices, and driving policy changes to reduce waste before it gets in the river system.

The successful Summer Challenge, launched last year in response to the pandemic, continues this year encouraging and supporting safe, independent or small group litter cleanups. A Litter Free Chicago River system takes all of us working together to stop litter from fouling our river and to help clean up our streets, parks, and neighborhoods.

If you are interested in organizing a litter cleanup, check out our Litter Free Chicago River Toolkit, available on our website, chicagoriver.org. Friends can support you with organizational guidance and resources such as gloves, bags, and trash grabbers. In response to an increase demand for litter cleanups, Friends is working to set up Litter Free Supply Stations where groups can borrow supplies. Stay tuned for details.

For more information about organizing your own Summer Challenge litter cleanup contact Friends' Volunteer and Events Coordinator Annette Anderson at aanderson@chicagoriver.org.

Support Limits on Single Use Plastics and All Polystyrene

According to the International Solid Waste Association, the consumption of single-use plastics including medical equipment is estimated to have increased by as much as 250% to 300% during the pandemic. Microplastics which come from larger plastic items when they break down are prevalent throughout the river system. If you're a fish in the Chicago River, there's a nine in 10 chance you've got plastic in your system.

Friends supports the proposed federal Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act and a proposed Chicago ordinance that would ban polystyrene containers, require reusable dishes for dining-in, and mandate recyclable or compostable containers for to-go orders. Please contact your federal representatives and local Chicago alderman to voice support of these vital proposed laws.

Tips for Your Litter-Free Workday

- Dress appropriately. Wear closed-toe shoes, long pants, and a hat to keep your hair out of your face.
- Use a litter grabber or old kitchen tongs.
- Watch out for sharp items, fishing line or other potentially dangerous litter. Only pick up what you feel comfortable collecting and report any other items to local authorities.



Friends of the Chicago River joined Alderman Scott Waguespack (32nd) and a host of environmental groups in January 2020 to announce an ordinance to combat plastic pollution.

Baer and Kolbert Join Inside, Out & About

Geoffrey Baer and Elizabeth Kolbert are among the guests to appear this month on Friends' new podcast.

To deepen our relationship with nature and increase awareness of our natural areas, Friends has launched a new initiative – Inside, Out & About – that takes people on a journey along the Chicago River system. With a podcast and other educational resources, Inside, Out & About promotes the use of natural areas, encourages stewardship, and helps people understand that being outside in nature is good for physical and emotional health.

The monthly podcast, hosted by Friends' Executive Director Margaret Frisbie, features natural areas throughout the watershed and includes interviews with noted environmental experts, acclaimed authors, and community leaders. Among the guests are Geoffrey Baer, award-winning public television writer, producer, and program host; Elizabeth Kolbert, Pulitzer-prize winning author of *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*; and Ben Goldfarb, award-winning environmental journalist and author of *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Lives of Beavers and Why They Matter*. The podcast is available on Friends' website – chicagoriver.org – and other popular podcast platforms.

Other resources on Friends' website include self-guided tours, interviews, art, and music for hours of entertainment and information about the river, local wildlife, and history; all to deepen the outdoors experience of the river system. Natural areas featured include the Chicago Portage National Historic Site in the southwest suburb of Lyons; the beautiful Kickapoo Woods along the Little Calumet River in south suburban Riverdale; and the South Fork of the South Branch of the Chicago River in Chicago, more familiarly known as Bubbly Creek.



WTTW's Geoffrey Baer speaks with Margaret Frisbie on the Inside, Out & About podcast.

RIFFLES & CURRENTS

MUSSEL HABITAT PARTNERSHIP

Urban Rivers has partnered with Molson-Coors and the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County to build artificial mussel habitats to support Illinois native species along the Wild Mile. In January, Urban Rivers volunteers collected a gravid female mussel from the North Branch, and delivered it to DuPage's Urban Stream Research Center. There, they will raise the juvenile mussels, which will eventually reside in the new habitat structures in the Wild Mile.

Key Partners Onboard for Overflow Action Days



Across the watershed we work closely with key partners to raise awareness about how to reduce combined sewer overflows (CSOs) and their impacts when the volume of stormwater and wastewater exceeds our sewer system capacity.

Edward Warden (pictured), conservation stewardship coordinator at the Shedd Aquarium, said "As an aquarium we have a deep connection to our waters and aquatic life that call them home. And detrimental impacts, like CSOs, are a huge concern for us." Warden urges everyone to sign up for Overflow Action Day alerts at Friends' website, chicagoriver.org.

RIFFLES & CURRENTS

GRANTS FOR TREES IN CHICAGO, SOUTH SUBURBS

If you live in the City of Chicago or the near south suburbs, then you are eligible to get free trees planted in your neighborhood through a grant program from our partners at Openlands. The Openlands TreePlanters Grants encourage resiliency through both planting trees and creating or reaffirming a network of neighbors to work together. Grant applications submitted in the spring are for the fall tree planting season.

Visit Openlands website – openlands.org/trees – for details and information on how to apply for a TreePlanters Grant.

American mink

Neovison vison

Illustration by Jen Pagnini
www.mooloco.com



white on the chin and throat. Their fur is soft and thick and covered with oily guard hairs that make the mink's coat very warm and waterproof. Because of these traits, its fur is prized for clothing, more popular than silver fox, sable or marten. The fur trade, of which the mink was a driving force, sped the settlement of the Midwest.

The American mink has slightly webbed feet, making them good swimmers. Mink can swim for up to three hours at a time while hunting. They are formidable predators of muskrats, which they will pursue underwater and even into their own burrows. When on land, they use a bounding gait to run quite quickly. They can run over four mph and can be difficult to catch.

"It was an early, overcast morning, and aside from the occasional cyclist there wasn't too much else moving along the North Branch Trail. We had stopped to take a closer look at some large mussel shells on the river's edge when we noticed a rustling on the opposite bank. There he sat, brownish-black and skinny staring back at us—a mink! Seconds later the mink ran into the long grasses overhanging the river and out of our sight. The mussel shells were cool, the red-bellied woodpeckers we saw were beautiful, but seeing the mink felt like an extra prize for being in the woods that day."

The above mink encounter was had by Jen Pagnini, our newsletter illustrator and friend of the river. Inspiration for her nature-based artwork is gained through first-hand experience. Mink are an important part of the native ecosystem in Chicago. A sighting of a top predator like a mink is always memorable. It is a species that needs space if it is to thrive and coexist with humans.

Mink are members of the Mustelid family (which includes weasels, otters, wolverines, martens, badgers and ferrets). The American mink will live in a wide range of habitats and is common throughout the contiguous United States, Alaska, and Canada.

The American mink prefers forested areas near rivers, lakes, and marshes. They are very territorial. Males will fight other minks that invade their territory, which they mark with their scent. They are not fussy over their choice of den, as long as it's protected and close to water. Mink construct dens with multiple entrances and twisting passages for safety.

They sometimes inhabit vacated burrows dug by muskrats, badgers, or skunks.

The American mink is carnivorous, feeding on rodents, fish, crustaceans, amphibians, and even birds. In its natural range, fish are the mink's primary food source. Mink inhabiting wetlands and marshes will also prey on frogs, tadpoles, and mice.

The mink has a long, sleek body about two feet long. They have short legs, a long neck, small ears and eyes and a long thick tail. In fact, one third of the mink's length is its tail.

They have brownish-black fur with a little patch of

HIGH Water Marks

Friends of the Chicago River gratefully acknowledges all the ways members, donors, and partners helped us achieve our mission to improve and protect the Chicago River system for people, plants, and animals from January 1, 2021, through March 15, 2021. Individuals, businesses, and organizations who have given or pledged \$250 and above are listed below.

The Otter Society

The Otter Society is Friends' giving society and recognizes individuals, businesses, and foundations that contribute \$1,500 annually to the General Operating Fund or the Voice for the River Endowment. Chicago River Legacy members, who are thoughtfully providing for Friends in their estate plans, are also recognized as Otter Society members.

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*deceased

We apologize if any names have been omitted, misspelled, or otherwise incorrectly listed. If you feel an error has been made, please contact Evelyn Rocha at erocha@chicagoriver.org so that we can correct our records.

Calendar of Spring and Summer Events

Chicago River Day: May 8

The 29th Annual Chicago River Day is Saturday, May 8. Join Friends for this festive litter clean-up and restoration day which also kicks off the Litter Free Summer Challenge with individual and small group clean-up activities across the watershed all summer long. Registration is required. Visit Friends' website – chicagoriver.org – to register and learn more.

Sounds of the Chicago River: May 30

Join Friends, the Fifth House Ensemble, and the American Indian Center-Chicago for back-to-back live performances of Sounds of the Chicago River at 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. Sunday, May 30 at the Bridgehouse Museum located on the Chicago Riverwalk. The live performances are the culmination of a series of six virtual performances and workshops using deep listening as a tool for observation and increased awareness of our environment, integrated with Native practices. Visit chicagoriver.org for event details.

Canoe and Clean Paddles

Save the following dates for upcoming canoe and clean paddles scheduled this summer and fall:

Chicago Botanic Gardens: July 10 and 11
Full Moon Paddle at the Skokie Lagoons: July 24
North Branch Wilderness Paddle: September 11
Halloween Paddle at River Park: October 30

Times for each paddle will be posted to Friends' website as soon as they are finalized. More paddles are being added so please check back for updates.

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|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
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| <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000 | Wild Mink | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 | Tiger Salamander / Family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 | Great Horned Owl | <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 | Chorus Frog / Individual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 | Yellow-headed Blackbird | <input type="checkbox"/> \$10 | Prairie Dropseed / Volunteer, |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$156 | Black-crowned Night Heron | | Teacher, or Student |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$156 | Tributary Member (Emerging Leaders) | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ | I/we wish to only make a donation at this time. | | |

Contact your employer's Human Resources department today to find out if they have a matching gift program.

Name _____

Company (if applicable) _____

For recognition purposes,
please list my name or company as _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Preferred phone _____ Email _____

- ☐ My check made payable to Friends of the Chicago River is enclosed.
- ☐ Charge my credit card (circle one) American Express Discover MasterCard Visa
- ☐ Yes, please charge the 3.25% credit card transaction fee to my card so that 100% of my membership/donation goes to Friends.

Card # _____

Exp. Date _____ Security code _____

Cardholder's name and billing address (if different than above) _____

- ☐ I/we wish to be anonymous. Please do not list my/our name.
- ☐ I am curious about: ☐ volunteering ☐ sponsorship ☐ planned giving
- ☐ Please DO NOT add me to your email communications list.

Your generous support directly impacts Friends' efforts to improve the Chicago River's health and vitality in three important areas: education and outreach; on-the-ground projects; and public policy and planning.

Members receive:

- Free general admission plus discounts on bridge lift, tour tickets, and merchandise at our McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum,
- Discounts on our canoe trips,
- A subscription to *The River Reporter* newsletter,
- Volunteer bulletins, email alerts, and other opportunities for hands-on involvement, plus
- Invitations to special events such as Chicago River Day, Big Fish Ball, and Summer Cruise, and
- Listing in Friends' Annual Report.

Otter Society members represent Friends' most important philanthropic partnership. In appreciation of their generous support, they enjoy unique benefits at three levels of giving. To learn more about how you can participate as an individual, household, or business, please contact kolsenclark@chicagoriver.org or call (312) 939-0490, ext. 19.

Interested in joining our monthly giving club? Support Friends year-round through automatic monthly contributions as small as \$10 per month. Contact membership at friends@chicagoriver.org or call (312) 939-0490, ext. 10.

Friends of the Chicago River is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Please send this form and payment to: Friends of the Chicago River at 411 South Wells Street, Suite 800, Chicago, IL 60607, or join online at www.chicagoriver.org/get-involved/membership.

Friends of the Chicago River



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BE A FRIEND OF THE CHICAGO RIVER!



Friends' Bridgehouse Museum Opens May 8

The McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum will open for the 2021 season on May 8. The five-story historic landmark Michigan Avenue Bridgehouse located on the Chicago Riverwalk, explores the complicated history of the river from glacial formation through modern revitalization.

The museum also celebrates Chicago's world-famous movable bridges and allows visitors an up-close look at the massive gears and inner-workings of the bridge. For details on dates and hours of operation, please visit the museum's website, bridgehousemuseum.org.



The River Reporter is printed on recycled paper.

Membership opportunities on page eleven.

Please visit our website, www.chicagoriver.org, for more information on getting involved.