

## Featured Volunteer Work: When they “Get It”

I am retired from a 40-year career doing sales and marketing in the IT industry. Talking to people was always one of my strong attributes, and that continues to be my favorite activity as a Master Naturalist - especially when working with young people. As a parent, I did a lot of coaching (baseball, softball, basketball, soccer and tennis), and I was also a Boy Scout leader. Seeing that moment when a young child “gets it” and it’s because of something you had said or done is very rewarding.

The Cook County Forest Preserve Nature Centers are closed on Fridays, and to offset that and to continue to create positive nature experiences for the public (especially young people), local Master Naturalists implemented the “Fridays in the Field” program. This program had a weekly theme (Fish, Reptiles & Amphibians , Prairie Plants and Local Trees to name a few), and involved 3 or 4 Naturalists with tables under a tent outside the Nature Centers. We provided interactive experiences for the visitors , such as handling a frog, identifying fish parts, doing crayon leaf rubbings and finding local plants.

Many visitors were originally disappointed when they found the Nature Centers were closed, but that quickly changed as both parents and children became more engaged with the activities we provided. I had the opportunity to work the first event and worked three others later and saw many of the same people return because they so enjoyed the interactive experiences.

The Forest Preserve District of Cook County loves the work we do and encourages our participation in other child friendly events, and I try to work those as often as possible. They are the most rewarding activities I perform and sign up for these when I can.

-Len Piersialla, Cook County Master Naturalist Intern

