

# EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

## Master Naturalist Pam Tomka Inspires Others to Enjoy Nature Through Her Grant Writing Skills

The opportunities are vast when it comes to inspiring others to enjoy nature. [University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist](#) (EMN) Pam Tomka uses her grant writing skills to help [Wildlife Prairie Park](#) make facility improvements, which in turn will draw more people out into nature.

Pam, a retired library director of 32 years, became a Master Naturalist in 2014, thinking she would enjoy volunteering outdoors. Pam shared, "Becoming a Master Naturalist meant I could learn about plants, animals, and other aspects of nature that would then allow me to share that knowledge with others as well as help improve the forests, prairies, and other natural environments we still have available to us. While I do spend some time occasionally helping eradicate invasive plants and planting flowers, much of my time is spent using skills gained as a librarian."

Pam has been writing and reading grants, and participating in fundraising events for Wildlife Prairie Park as part of her EMN volunteer role. She explains the park depends on visitors and membership income to provide some of the funds needed to feed the animals, pay the caretakers/staff, and maintain the park. That income can vary greatly depending on weather and other situations out of their control. As a result, alternative funding such as donations and grants become even more important.

"Part of a successful grant is to write a narrative that thoroughly explains the need for a project and the benefits that will result," Tomka explains. "Funding for special projects, like the new lodging cabins at WPP, is crucial to building a bigger and better facility which in turn draws new people into the park and increases revenue."

Roberta English, Executive Director of Wildlife Prairie Park, shared, "Pam's keen knowledge of how to appropriately tie mission to outcomes was extremely helpful in the park getting a \$189,000 tourism grant in 2020."

These efforts take time and energy which many non-profits do not have due to limited staffing. Volunteering can lighten the burden of administrators who often have many hats to wear.

Another WPP volunteer project Pam has contributed to is the brick fundraiser. Pam uses her computer savvy, writing skills, and attention to detail to help WPP maintain those records and engrave the bricks. Over several years, Pam has played an important role in the park raising several thousands of dollars through this project.

Volunteering is an opportunity to help others and also a chance to use skills and knowledge acquired through life's experiences. Whether it is physical or mental labor, many non-profit agencies can benefit from the time and efforts of volunteers.



Photo provided by Wildlife Prairie Park

*Volunteering as a Master Naturalist at Wildlife Prairie Park looks a little different for Pam Tomka. Because of her skill base, Pam has assisted the park in raising funds through special projects and grant writing. The brick fundraiser is just one of the projects Pam has helped with at the park.*

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