

Tower Lakes: Fun with Future Stewards

Once May rolls around, sailboats, kayaks, paddleboats, and rowboats make regular appearances on the lakes, along with returning geese and ducks. Cyclists and skateboarders vie for road space with runners and walking groups out to enjoy the fresh spring air. Gardeners are readying beds, and children are doing anything just to be outside.

Tower Lakers promote outside activities, particularly for resident children. Some are structured, like the day the library bookmobile arrives and has a reading on Toy Island. Other outdoor activities, while less structured, offer value. Children learn much about nature while digging at the beach, exploring the parks, or planting a flower bed. Those experiences accomplish good for the community and result in the creation of the future stewards of our community.

Every April, Tower Lakes holds its annual Arbor Day celebration and tree sale. Dozens of saplings are distributed to village children with instructions for the planting and care of the tender trees; the parents selected larger growth trees to be delivered and planted in the fall. Tom Hannagan, volunteer tree commissioner, managed this program years ago and is now back at its helm. Tom believes in teaching our residents the differences between various trees and shrubs that grow in our area. One of Tom's missions is to teach everyone how to identify and get rid of invasive species such as buckthorn. Tom's son and daughter-in-law, Patrick and Carol, also live in the village. Their sons, Thomas, Sam, and Trevor, often assist their father and their grandfather in their efforts and are already helping to teach Tom's lessons.

Longtime resident Pat Covek heads up grounds beautification for the village and Tower Lakes Improvement Association (TLIA). Every spring Pat orders hundreds of plants and, together with her army of volunteers, plants and maintains the garden beds and planters in the village. Pat has



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taught children to plant flowers, create a pleasing arrangement, and to nurture the blooms through the course of the summer, including watering and deadheading. The children learn that it is hard work caring for a living thing, but they are always pleased when their plants look great for the Fourth of July. The children know that when "Mrs. Covek" calls, there is a project for them to do. Pat must do something right — all three of her children have moved back to Tower Lakes to raise their own families and continue their parents' tradition of giving back.

Every May, TLIA sponsors a lake cleanup day. Dozens of volunteer workers, old and young, established and new, bring their tools and wheelbarrows down to the beach to be assigned a project area. There is a project for everyone: pulling weeds, trimming shrubbery at the shoreline, picking up garbage in the parks, raking new sand at the beach, or fishing some "non-fishy" thing out of the lake. This is an opportunity for neighbors to get to know one another while working together. It also teaches children how to accomplish difficult tasks with many hands by working with their elders. At the end of the day, everyone's hard work is rewarded with a lakeside barbecue.

The real reward for all this hard work is our annual Fourth of July celebration. In most communities, families look forward to the return of their older offspring for the winter holidays. But in Tower Lakes, Fourth of July is the event that brings everyone home. Organized by the TLIA social committee and run by volunteers, Fourth of July family activities are kicked off by a parade led by a fire engine from the Wauconda Fire Department. Families and neighbors gather to enter as contestants in the parade. Categories include best decorated bike, most patriotic dog, or best neighborhood float. Those residents who are not in the parade pull up their lawn chairs to the side of the road to watch.

As the parade winds through town, people fall in behind so that everyone ends up on Rest Island for the raising of the flag, singing of the National Anthem, and reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance. This holiday weekend best demonstrates how the lessons of the years were taught and have been learned by the children of this community. Because as they come back, first with their friends and then with their own families, Tower Lakes children demonstrate respect for their environment, they assist their elders, and they give back to their community. And all without being asked. U