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MY VIEW

Byron Forest Preserve District community's well-managed gem

The Board of the Byron Forest Preserve District is extremely proud to serve our community. It is also proud of the work being done by the administration and staff of the organization. While the staff and board have been busy planning for an exciting 2015, we understand there have been some questions lately that we feel are important to address. When presented with facts, taxpayers will be as confident in this staff as we are.

BFPD holds operations to a high standard of quality and accountability, consistently balancing support of our mission, fiscal responsibility and excellent customer experiences. All programs, facilities and staff members are supported and held accountable for demonstrating value for our visitors. This dedication to excellence is why we can tout more than 2,000 acres of pristine natural areas, an observatory, an excellent preschool program, a free natural history museum, quality family programs and a Golf Digest four star-rated golf course, among other amazing features for a district our size. The BFPD is also a committed community partner, hosting events and supporting



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organizations such as the Byron Park District, Byron School District, Rock Valley College, Boy Scouts and others.

BFPD operates with the highest standards of fiscal responsibility, transparency and excellence. Our long-term financial stability and A+ rating from Standard & Poor's allows us to pursue land acquisition and preservation efforts, present more than 100 free or low-cost family programs to the public and operate one of the best championship golf courses in the region. Our staff is secure in the knowledge that policies and procedures regarding their professional review, development and compensation are fairly and consistently applied and aligned with peer organizations. In fact, any hiring, firing or progressive discipline is handled through prescribed processes and reviewed and approved by the board, Human Resources and legal counsel. We abide by all mandates for public

entity operations, including open meetings, access to information and board-approved policies and procedures.

Our strong foundation and rich history has paved the way for exciting plans in 2015. We've planned a two-year, \$750,000 investment (including matching dollars from potential grant sources) in upgrades to the Jarrett Prairie Center Natural History Museum to make it a regional destination for school trips and tourism. For golf enthusiasts, the PrairieView Golf Course will feature a renovated Pro Shop, electric golf carts with Visage GPS Systems to enable communication with our staff, and enhanced food and beverage service. Our new golf pro, Andy Gramer, will be launching a PGA Junior League and player development programs utilizing the V1 digital coaching system.

These and other additions will make the golf course more family-friendly and community-minded than ever. Starting this summer, guests will enjoy a new experience in the Heritage Farm Museum thanks to a plan developed in partnership with Beloit College. For nature lovers, BFPD is adding trails to the Prairie State Conservation Coalition hiking app.

The smart phone app uses text, audio, photographs and video to highlight the plant and wildlife encountered on hikes through the district.

The board continues to evaluate opportunities presented to us to acquire and preserve natural spaces, provide educational programs and offer recreational activities that meet the needs of our residents and visitors. A group of citizens has raised concerns about the BFPD, all of which are based on misinformation or half-truths. We, as a board, are proud of the significant achievements of the BFPD and are excited about our future. Our staff's impressive work and willingness to go above and beyond expectations ensures that the district continues to provide the taxpayers with quality experiences and services.

We invite you to visit us — take a hike through our trails, explore our museum, gaze at the stars in the observatory, or prepare for a round of championship golf — and see for yourself what an amazing gem the Byron Forest Preserve District really is.

— Trevor Hogan is president of the Byron Forest Preserve District Board of Commissioners.