Population category: 25,001 - 30,000

AiB Participation History
2013: received 3 blooms
Special mentions for Urban forestry & Community Art Banner Project

2018 Community profile
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INTRODUCTION TO: WEST CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Similar to a “central city,” West Chicago is a microcosm of successful urban counterparts with all the benefits of being situated in the western suburbs, 32 miles from Chicago. It boasts cultural diversity, a plethora of housing options from affordable to luxury estate homes, excellent schools, commercial businesses which include several Fortune 500 companies, and dedicated open space— all surrounding a vibrant, expanding City center.

Like spokes on a wheel, all points lead to downtown West Chicago, which is currently enjoying a rebirth through the arts. Downtown West Chicago, with its beautifully preserved and restored buildings, tells the story of the community’s individual identity and personality. The City Museum serves as a dynamic history and art center that inspires and involves the community through research, programs, education and exhibits. Family-owned, ethnically diverse restaurants; small, independent retailers and service businesses that know their customers by name; and, an art gallery supported by the City of West Chicago through its Cultural Arts Commission, have served to nourish and strengthen this center of culture and community life.

Unique Transportation History
West Chicago’s claim to fame dates back to the 1850s when three railroads met to form the first junction in the State of Illinois, giving the town its first name ~ Junction. The name was short lived, however, when in 1873 the town incorporated as the Village of Turner, s. ll true to its roots in the railroad, though, as it was named after John B. Turner, a benevolent local landowner and one of the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad’s early presidents. Later, as part of the effort to attract industry, the community once again changed its name in 1896 to the Village of West Chicago. Several manufacturing plants opened in West Chicago despite a depression in the 1890s. As industry located in town and new jobs became available, the population increased. By 1906, the village reincorporated itself as the City of West Chicago.

Community spirit and pride are alive and well in West Chicago

It’s more than just the stars that are aligned in West Chicago. It is its people joining forces with a shared vision for the future that has driven initiatives which set the community apart and position it for stellar success. A Prairie Stewardship group, a dynamic special events calendar, and a Main Street art gallery are examples of what the collaborative spirit has accomplished. West Chicagoans embrace their diversity, draw strength from a rich, unified history and forge ahead with confidence into the future.
Flowers: “Color in every corner of the City”

Municipal/Commercial/Residential

Semi-annually, the City works with horticultural professionals and invests in seasonal displays for the downtown. Spring brings a coordinated color palette of a mix of perennials and annuals for the 13 flower beds and 14 flower planters. Late fall into winter brings seasonal greens and an assortment of natural embellishments including pine cones, white birch bundles and berry sprigs. Seasonal help is hired during growing season for daily watering. Attention is given to height, texture, and sustainability. Community volunteers are engaged to plant beds. Boy scouts, service club members and individual community volunteers rally to lend a hand to beautification efforts, as well as come out in the fall to help senior citizens rake the leaves at their homes, to keep the neighborhoods beautiful. And the City provides pizza following each service project!

This year, thanks to collaboration on the America in Bloom initiative, Ball Horticultural Company, solved a chronic problem the City had with hanging baskets downtown, eventually causing the City to discontinue the program due to the poor performance of the display. Ball donated Bloom Masters baskets, from True Leaf Market, which are meant for municipal or commercial use because they hold large amounts of soil, which prevent them from drying out as quickly as regular baskets. The holes on the sides of the baskets allow for a quicker “trailing” effect from the plants, which creates a bigger floral impact in the long run. The appearance of the basket is meant to be minimal so that it eventually hides behind the floral display, making the flowers the main focus and not the basket itself. Ball planted two different flower varieties, Petunia Easy Wave Neon Rose and Petunia Easy Wave Plum Pudding Mix. The award winning Wave Brand of Petunias is the number one selling petunia in the country and has been around since 1995. Easy Wave Petunias are fast growing, bloom all season in beds or containers, and don’t require any trimming. They are very low maintenance for a city setting, they tolerate both heat and cooler conditions, they have a mounded habit which fits the basket habit chosen, and they will tolerate municipal watering habits very well, as they don’t like to have super wet foliage. Nature’s Source, an oil seed extract based fertilizer, (which means it’s sustainable plant nutrition for plants, from plants!) will be used with regular watering. We are very excited about bringing hanging baskets back to the community.

West Chicago businesses take pride in their facilities. They also know it’s good business to provide aesthetically pleasing surroundings for their customers and employees. Many stand-outs include McDonald’s, Main Street Dental, and Supermercado Tampico.

One word comes up frequently when speaking of Supermercado Tampico – quality. Residents reference the high quality selection of the market’s fresh meats and produce; and the friendliness, helpfulness and care its quality staff provides. This family-owned business contributes to the overall quality of downtown West Chicago by taking extra effort to beautify the east gateway to West Chicago’s downtown through seasonal gardens and gorgeous flowering pots. Outstanding use of deeply colored coleus, lavish canna for height, hearty dragon wing begonia, colorful impatiens and cascading lime potato vine create a show-stopping display. The business does a magnificent job of maintenance and the display looks stellar even as the summer wanes.
Flowers cont’d.

West Chicago’s pedestrian-friendly downtown is enhanced by the many containers, hanging baskets, and flower boxes that are well-maintained by local businesses. **Main Street Family Dentistry** does a great job of creating an appealing floral enhancement to their exterior by combining colorful foliage, robust growers and effective placement. The hanging planter was designed to coordinate with the two large ground planters flanking their entryway. Impactful!

When was the last time you went to a fast food restaurant, pulled up to the drive-up window and said “Wow”! That’s what customers of the **West Chicago McDonald’s** on Neltnor Blvd. say regularly about the fabulous flower displays in and around their building. Knock-out roses, boxwood, Russian sage, hydrangea and more - all surrounding a lovely fountain display turn a mundane drive-up window into a botanical showpiece for the community. Planning, upkeep and pride make this display of flowers a showstopper. This year, the facility is having an interior make-over, but not at the expense of its outdoor displays, which are in full bloom.

**Pride of ownership** comes in many shapes and sizes in West Chicago. From apartments and townhomes to single family starter homes or from historic homes to contemporary estate homes, West Chicago has a great diversity of housing stock. The common denominator is the pride residents feel for their home and community as displayed through their gardening pursuits.
Flowers cont’d.

Driving around West Chicago neighborhoods will confirm the love affair residents have with flowers. Whether container planters, hanging baskets, or window boxes, residents display flowers around their homes in many creative ways. Each spring (in early May) residents flock to downtown West Chicago to stock up on plants and shrubs offered for sale at the City’s signature spring event, Blooming Fest. Many of the plants purchased from the West Chicago Garden Club’s plant tent, are well acclimated to the growing conditions found in the Western Suburbs and are vigorous additions to existing gardens. Also for sale are a variety of annuals, including flowers and vegetables, mostly grown from seed. Proceeds of this sale go into the Club’s programming budget (see write-up on the monthly presentations offered in the Community Vitality section). Other vendors, including the West Chicago Community High School Horticulture Club and various local greenhouses provide a one-stop shop for a great assortment of plants.

Three unique flower displays from random gardens in West Chicago illustrate the range of styles and preferences of plant material and application. The result is a community in bloom.
Landscaped Areas  Policies and guidelines championed by the Historic Preservation Commission to maintain the historic integrity of the community have inspired decisions on the style of wrought iron trellising, shape and size of planters and placement of public art. Additionally, City policy places an emphasis on the importance of green space and landscaping within its Sign Ordinance and development agreements which require standard setbacks for landscape application.

Municipal/Commercial/Residential

A City Hall beautification project which incorporated a thoughtful variety of plants and shrubs transformed a drab building façade into an inviting place in which to conduct business, softened the frontage of the parking lot entrance and honored the unique character of the City by incorporating the City’s Official Flower, the purple coneflower, and provide a natural habitat for pollinators.

Recognized by the American Council of Engineering Companies, an award-winning rehabilitation project of the Main Street pedestrian tunnel, originally constructed in 1915, has created a safe, inviting underpass which now serves as a downtown gateway to the City. Among other improvements like realignment for added accessibility, improved drainage and upgraded lighting, the project created open space with landscaping and plaza area to serve as a gathering area for community events. Enhanced aesthetics of the entire corridor included installation of decorative walls, brick pavers, and natural landscaping.

Elsewhere, the City improvements to parkways and medians during IDOT reconstruction projects have been made within the corporate limits of West Chicago along Route 64 west of Atlantic Drive and Route 38 west of Kress Road up to and including the grade separation at the Union Pacific tracks.

Business recognition programs like the Brilliance in Business Awards recognize businesses that are improving the overall image of West Chicago through a formal ceremony at City Hall, a visit from the Mayor to congratulate the entire team, and publicity efforts through the City’s website, social media accounts, resident E-news blasts and media relations, for the business. Resident and volunteer efforts are also recognized at City Council meetings throughout the year.

In 2017, the West Chicago Garden Club members spent between 450-500 hours in the Kruse House Garden maintaining and beautifying, resulting in a beautiful community garden in which to rest, reflect and enjoy. Alderman Lori Chassee presented the Garden Club with thanks and accolades at a recent meeting where all members were in attendance.

City Council member recognizes WC Garden Club for Kruse House Gardens.
Landscaped Areas cont’d.

Commercial - From small family-owned businesses to mid-sized to global giants, West Chicago steps up in creating an environment

Egg Yolk Café has developed a strong and loyal following since opening, no doubt due to the great variety of fresh, high quality dishes and friendly, helpful service, but also because its building’s exterior provides a terrific first impression to the countless cars that navigate Illinois Route 59; and once people enter the refurbished, beautifully redecorated interior, they know they have chosen the right place to dine. A combination of evergreens, staged perennials for long-lasting seasonal interest, and annuals for pops of color illustrate the business’ careful planning and attention to detail. This business received a Brilliance in Business Award for elevating the image of the community.

Kramer Tree Specialists has grown in stature since 1974 as a family-owned business committed to its philosophy of empowering the consumer in the role of caretaker of their trees for the benefit of future generations to the internationally recognized leader in the arboricultural industry that it is today. Owner, the late Joe Kramer, and family have built a state-of-the-art facility at 300 Charles Court that has advanced the image of the West Chicago business community and captured the attention of the International Society of Arboriculture which hosted its international conference tour at its facility in 2010. The beautifully landscaped grounds provide inspiration and convey hospitality for its customers and a quiet respite for its employees during breaks and lunchtime.

Roy Diblik, garden consultant from Northwind Perennial Farm, is a recognized perennial plant expert, grower, designer, speaker and author. He assisted the team at Ball Horticultural Company to design a more naturalistic meadow-style gardenscape in the business’ front gardens. Diblik incorporated and showcased Ball plants creating, as an artist, a mix of annuals and perennials. A 100 sq. ft. space at the building’s entrance is left open for a mixed annual planting, to display new products from Ball, changing frequently to showcase the assortment the company offers. Then a 3- to 4-ft. transition zone uses Seslaria ‘Greenlee’, Echinacea Pixie Meadowbrite™ and Monarda bradburiana, which like drier conditions but still produce colorful blooms. At the edges, Diblik suggested Geranium sanguineum ‘Max Frei’ to feather into the beds, along with pink varieties creating “an impressionistic look.” At the corners, Veronica lettermannii ‘Iron Butterfly’ and Solidago sphacelata ‘Golden Fleece’ offer color for later in the season. White liatris and Little Bluestem, plus Coreopsis Golden Showers and Prairie Dropseed. This meadow-like design was a change from the tall prairie plants installed a few years earlier. The overgrown grasses and sedges became a security and maintenance concern for workers making their way to the parking lot. The older design also failed to embrace the aesthetics of the Ball building or the colorful products being sold and developed inside it.

From the educational standpoint, Ball hosts an annual Field Day and Landscape Day in which the Company invites its hundreds of customers for a day of educational sessions and guided tours of The Gardens at Ball. Visitors get a look inside the Ball Premier Seed Lab and interact with tent displays. There’s a special area for kids, as well as music, food and more. Company leadership personally welcomes each visitor. The Gardens are designed to inspire visitors and spark some fantastic ideas through exciting and innovative displays that encourage creative applications for home gardens and commercial settings. Ball will celebrate its rich history of 85 years in 2018. They are the evaluation and proving ground for the world’s most celebrated garden color. Over the years it has been full of FIRSTS and continues to make history in the world of horticulture. What began as a row trial garden for seed varieties has grown to encompass over 9 acres of display beds for annuals, perennials, cut flowers and vegetables, including the newest plants from the industry’s leading breeders and marketers.
Landscaped Areas cont’d.

At the DuPage Airport Flight Center in West Chicago, leadership wanted to accomplish beautifying the grounds with plenty of color, dry creek beds and various rock formations. Emphasis has been put into reducing labor times by incorporating more perennial flowering vegetation with aspects of annual flowers mixed into the various beds. Perennial plants and grasses that are indigenous to the area, plus a splash of colorful flowers for the season, include knock-out roses, daylilies, hostas, and coneflowers. A variety of shrubs to fill out the landscaping include lilacs, three different spireas, forsythia, ninebark and dogwoods. The goal was to simplify maintenance and attract pollinators to the landscaped grounds. A natural setting was the goal. As well as the plants listed above, staff has also included numerous other varieties such as bee balm, phlox, centaurea, delphinium, sedum, canna lily, hibiscus, coreopsis, ferns, loosestrife and potentilla. All rocks used in the beds and surrounding vicinities were all reclaimed from the airport-owned property and outlying farm fields. In the fall, the annual flowers are replaced with three different colors of hardy mums.

Prairie Landing Golf Club is situated along the furthest western edge of West Chicago and set in the atmosphere of the historic 1868 McChesney Home. The house which was relocated (from 2 miles east of the property) and placed during construction in 1991 serves as the center-point of the clubhouse. It is a complete banquet, business meeting, and golf outing facility. In 2014 the clubhouse landscape underwent a complete renovation/restoration including all new perennial plantings, trees and shrubs. The new landscape was planted in a fashion to accommodate some sort of formality for banquets and weddings but also to integrate with the prairie setting it resides in. Renovations are ongoing as staff continue to update and improve our parking lot and surrounding area plantings with native grasses and wildflowers.

Surrounding the clubhouse and encompassing more than three-hundred and fifty total acres is one of Chicagoland’s top golf courses. Designed and built by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., in 1992 and opened for play in 1994, the Scottish-links style course offers a unique perspective on the game of golf for the Midwest. The fairways and playing surfaces are not flat but quite undulating, and with sixty-five acres of bentgrass mowed at less than a half-inch, it truly requires a different shot-making ability and strategy to score well. The Championship design plays to seven-thousand yards from the tips but offers many different tees to accommodate. The property also includes almost ten-acres of practice facilities including one acre of chipping/putting/bunker practice-area, driving-range and two regulation par-four practice holes. Prairie Landing, as the name would suggest, doesn’t have many trees but is outlined with lots of native grasses, fescues, native wildflowers, several small lakes, protected wetlands, and a waterway which meanders and comes into play through most of the golf course. They strive to let nature do its thing, but also maintain the naturalized areas with cultural practices and controlled-burns when allowable.
Landscaped Areas cont’d.

“Walnut Trees, Shade and Clay….Oh My!! All gardeners have challenges and the 4 resident gardens selected for the AIB review are no exception.” ~Barbara Bizzarri, Resident & West Chicago Garden Club President

Walnut trees are the biggest challenge for the two neighbors, both with shade and clay tossed in for good measure! The Bizzarri garden has come full circle after many failed attempts. Now you’ll find color and flowers throughout the gardening season despite the toxic Juglone that the black walnut trees produces. Spring comes early in this garden with native perennials including: Solomon Seal, Jack-In-The-Pulpit, Trillium (these plants all came to this garden on their own) and daffodils, bleeding hearts, hellebores, squill and forsythia. Hostas form the framework and Pagoda dogwood, red bud along with bottle brush buckeye add structure and interest. In Summer you’ll find astilbes, spider wort, daylilies, phlox and ligularia.

The Jackson's garden too, have had to work around black walnut trees. After removing several Emerald Ash Borer diseased trees, the Jackson garden has turned into a restful garden retreat. Despite heavy shade and clay and many years of tending this garden, grass, hostas, and a variety of blooms welcome their family and guests. And oh yes, their prized garden visitors, hummingbirds.

The gardens of Jeff and Louise Handel was transformed with hard work and determination. The big challenge was mounds of clay. Jeff removed over a yard of clay and then added 2 yards of mushroom compost throughout his garden. His home is surrounded by 5 distinct gardens. One is found in back under the heavy shade of an Oak tree. The stars of this garden are hostas and astilbe; both shade loving plants. His lily gardens steal the show with a large variety of lilies including some specimens over 4 feet tall. A touch of serendipity shows itself in a trailing pumpkin vine which has made itself quite at home. A horticulturist at heart, Jeff has a test garden which he experiments with. He’s successfully stepped up to the challenge of growing lilies from seed...no easy feat. Jeff willingly shares his gardening expertise and is always generous with his ‘extra’ plants.

The flagstone trail beckons one to step inside June and Mark Luther’s garden. The paths pull you into a magical space where time slows down. White hydrangeas, variegated hostas, a conifer and ferns welcome you to relax and cool down. Whimsical garden accents are scattered around the garden….all you have to do is take the time to look. Although 3/4th of the garden is shade with all its challenges, June and Mark have incorporated a well designed enclosed vegetable plot in the sunnier corner of the garden. They are sure to enjoy the harvest of their home-grown produce this Summer.
Urban Forestry “West Chicago believes that trees provide many benefits and environmental services. These include improved air quality, energy cost savings, decreased storm water runoff, and intangible aesthetic values. When individual trees and whole tree populations are actively and properly managed, we anticipate that they will live longer and provide the most benefit to our Park District and public spaces in the surrounding community.” Gary Major, Executive Director, West Chicago Park District

Municipal/Commercial/Residential

The West Chicago Park District has arranged with its Tree Care Contractor/Urban Forestry Consultant to perform updates on its existing Tree Inventory. The original tree inventory was performed in 2009, and indicated that it had approximately 2,200 trees at that time. The forest composition was very diverse and at the time the District had 80+ distinct tree species. After its proactive tree planting initiative which began in the fall of 2012, it now believes to have over 100 species, potentially qualifying the District for Arboretum status.

The tree inventory was originally captured in a Geographic information Systems (GIS) format. The Forestry Consultant used ArcGIS as a platform for viewing tree data, and managing the tree population. After this next update, Parks Department staff will be able to perform periodic updates to the tree inventory to ensure that the tree data will stay current. The purpose is to better manage urban forestry efforts by eliminating high risk trees, prioritizing cyclical tree pruning operations, and identifying new areas for tree planting and future species selections. Efficiencies gained through the prioritization of work is expected to save the District money in the long term.

The West Chicago Park District values its wooded areas as recreational and educational. The Dyer Nature Sanctuary provides a half mile trail throughout for walking, biking, or for a serene stroll to appreciate all nature has to offer. Maintaining these types of areas can be a chore, however, the District is committed. Recently the District cleared out a 40'x40' area to make way for 20 young indigenous trees. The District will continue to clear the path by cutting back trees and unwanted growth. With the help of the Fire Protection District of West Chicago, the Park District will be performing prescribed burns through the Dyer Nature Sanctuary as weather allows. These prescribed burns help to manage overstocked wooded areas. Fire disturbances will enhance and maintain the Dyer Nature Sanctuary’s quality not only by eliminating overstocking but also keeping out any invasive and undesirable plants. Tree thinning will take place in 2018 as the forest is overstocked at this time. Thinning is needed to improve growth of the forest’s canopy and help eliminate invasive species.

The Arc Center detention basin was planted with native Illinois wetland species at the time of the Arc Center's Construction. Basic maintenance has been in place since it’s inception. There is a fairly well established native vegetation cover which is estimated around 80-85%. There are some invasive and aggressive species encroaching on the area. In 2017 observations noticed a reduction in Reed Canary Grass and an increase in the other high quality natives on this site. The site also was over dominated by switchgrass. This site was burned in the fall of 2017. In the 2018 season, early, mid and late season herbicide will be applied with knowledge of species-specific herbiciding. Selective mowing and hand-pulling may take place. Installation of live plugs and/or over seeding may be necessary. Weather permitting, prescribed burns will occur with the help of the West Chicago Fire Protection District and/or mowing of the area to maintain high quality growth and control invasive species.

Reed-Keppler wetland area was converted from a mud volleyball pit to a native area some time ago and is now essentially a sedge meadow or wet prairie. The objective is to keep and maintain this area to become a high quality, well established native vegetation cover. As of the fall of 2017, the native vegetation cover was estimated to be around 75-80% native vegetation cover. In 2017 there was reduction in Reed Canary grass and increase in other high quality natives on this site. During the 2018 growing season the goal is to continue to control early, mid, and late season herbaceous species with herbicides. Herbicides will be applied with knowledge of species-specific herbiciding. Installation of live plugs and/or over seeding areas which require additional plant material. Weather permitting, prescribed burns will occur with the help of the West Chicago Fire Protection District and/or mowing of the area to maintain high quality growth and control invasive species.
Urban Forestry cont’d

In July 2012, West Chicago experienced a dynamic storm and several microbursts. The net effect for the West Chicago Park District was extreme damage to the 90-acre Reed-Keppler Park along with several ancillary areas of damage. Back to Reed-Keppler, over 200 oak trees of significant age were destroyed or downed in a scene very similar to tornado or hurricane damage. Before the cleanup, and need to repurpose a forested area, the Park District recognized the significant emotional damage this had done to longtime residents of the community. That is, an area of dense-oak trees which people had grown up with and walked amongst were now tragically gone. How was this reality going to be addressed?

The Park District quickly moved to harvest these fallen trees and were provided an avenue to have the trees milled, and processed wood appropriately stored. Shortly after the initial efforts of clean up, sawing and milling, storage, the District put into action a two pronged plan to repurpose the wood and redevelop the area of Reed-Keppler Park which was so heavily damaged. The intent was to reimagine the forest, but to also somehow save the memories of these trees.

At this same point in time, the West Chicago Park District was beginning plans for a new 70,000 sf recreation center. Immediately, the thought was given to designing areas which could accommodate some of the repurposed wood. To that end, the Park District worked with a local architect and fabricator and brought the following wood adornments to the newly constructed recreation center:

All lockers in the children’s play area, table and chairs in the main entry area, chair rail in the main office and child's area, benches used in all activity rooms, a magnificent 10’ pure walnut conference table in the office area. All in all, over fifty pieces of furniture, chair railing, lockers, benches and conference table were incorporated into the final design of the new facility.

Next, the District worked with the architect who also taught a college industrial arts class, and students designed repurposed wood creations were exhibited at the City Museum and sold at the end of the semester at West Chicago’s local arts festival. This effort was performed for the next three festivals. And, this became the impetus for the Staff of the District to present these ideas and creations at the Illinois Parks and Recreation State Conference.

What had become a quick black mark on the community, became a long standing tribute to the resiliency of the community reflected in the repurposing of fallen oak trees. To this day, the park continues to evolve and be reimagined. A performing arts area, new pathways, new sculptures and a new presence of trees now has redefined and redeveloped the spirit and realities of Reed-Keppler Park.

These works of art are located at Reed-Keppler Park. The grouping is called The Wood Spirits by Bill Baker.
Urban Forestry cont’d. The West Chicago Prairie serves up nature at its best. As one of northern Illinois’ premier natural areas, the 358-acre site contains over 600 plant and wildlife species and is home to the 126-acre Truitt-Hoff Nature Preserve, one of eight state-designated nature preserves. Many of the nine walking/hiking trails that meander through the site connect to the Illinois Prairie Path, which extends past preserve boundaries into Reed-Keppler Park.

A natural treasure, the West Chicago Prairie has a long and interesting history. In pre-settlement times, the preserve was prairie, scattering timber and marsh. The land containing the preserve was purchased around 1850 by the Galena and Union Railroad, now the Union Pacific, and maintained by them until it was sold for development in the 1960s. During the railroad era, a small stockyard was established, and some grazing was apparently allowed throughout what is now the prairie. The remnant prairie was purchased by the Forest Preserve District and the City of West Chicago in 1979. Additional parcels were purchased in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Today, the 358-acre West Chicago Prairie is one of the region’s premier natural areas. It contains over 600 species of native plants and animals. Many volunteers invest their time and energy to help protect the ecological health of this rare Illinois ecosystem, offering the Forest Preserve District assistance in caring for the natural area. The West Chicago Prairie is different from other DuPage County forest preserves in that it contains no large picnic areas or fishing lakes. Instead, it offers visitors the unique opportunity to enjoy a tranquil walk through one of the state’s rarest — and richest — prairie ecosystems.

In addition to wetlands and upland oak savannas, the preserve is home to one of the most biologically diverse sites in northeastern Illinois, the 126-acre Truitt-Hoff Nature Preserve. It is one of eight state-designated nature preserves in DuPage County owned and operated by the Forest Preserve District. The Truitt-Hoff Nature Preserve has historically contained native vegetation from the Northeastern Morainal Division, a section of moraines and related features from the Wisconsin Glacier. In fact, this remnant ecosystem has provided rare and specialized habitats to some 622 plant and animal species, several rare or endangered. The area is named for Richard Truitt, the former mayor of West Chicago who discovered the site, and Melvern “Mel” Hoff, who donated over 20,000 hours as volunteer site steward to help manage it. Because state law prescribes that progressive efforts continue to protect and manage the Truitt-Hoff Nature Preserve and surrounding nature preserve land, the District has designed and adopted a detailed natural-areas management plan. It specifies rules that are consistent with the Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act and collaborates with joint rules for management of state nature preserves, including the proper use of the area by scientists, educators, and the public.

The West Chicago Prairie Stewardship Group is a volunteer organization formed in 1982. Its main purpose is to aid in the management and preservation of the West Chicago Prairie Preserve. It is part of the Volunteer Network established by The Nature Conservancy and works as a Support Group in cooperation with the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, which is responsible for the overall management of the Prairie. The Group is an affiliate of The Conservation Foundation, a non-profit land and watershed protection organization. The Stewardship group also contributes time at The Nature Conservancy’s Nachusa Grasslands near Franklin Grove, Illinois, in recognition of the assistance provided by The Nature Conservancy in its initial purchase of the West Chicago Prairie Forest Preserve, as well as its ongoing work to support conservation through the Volunteer Stewardship Network.

Volunteers of the West Chicago Prairie Stewardship Group provide a significant part of the natural areas management for the West Chicago Prairie. They remove invading woody growth, eliminate alien weeds, collect seeds of native grasses and forbs, and sow collected seeds in recently restored areas and adjacent old-field areas. The Forest Preserve District does the necessary prescribed burning as well as other large-scale management. Knowledgeable leaders conduct field trips and birding trips on the Prairie. Individuals with the appropriate skills monitor and survey birds and flora in specific habitat areas.
Environmental Efforts...because we only have 1 planet

Municipal/Commercial Residential

The Green Disciples work closely with the City of West Chicago Environmental Commission to promote awareness of nature conserva. on throughout the year. One new and exciting program brought to the community through this volunteer effort is a **Pumpkin Compost Event** to help divert pumpkins from landfills by providing locations for residents to drop off jack-o-lanterns in early November. Working with SCARCE, (School and Community Assistance for Recycling and Composting Education), and promoting the event through City communication channels, West Chicago collected 100 pumpkins and plans to continue to build on the effort in 2018.

A program coordinated by the West Chicago Environmental Commission with Elgin Recycling, has kept thousands of pounds of incandescent and LED holiday lights and extension cords out of landfills. The **Holiday Light Recycling Event** invites residents, businesses, clubs, churches and organizations this service from late November through mid-January. Six locations, including City Hall, the First United Methodist Church of West Chicago, Murphy Ace Hardware, the West Chicago Water Treatment Plant, the West Chicago Public Library and the ARC Center of the West Chicago Park District are official drop-off sites. This is a great program that helps keep the holidays “green”.

Since 2011, West Chicago City Hall, through the work of its active Environmental Commission, hosts an annual **On-site Paper Shredding Event**. Accurate Document Destruction, Inc. of Elk Grove Village provides the shredding service. Last year, 13,660 pounds or 6.83 tons of paper were destroyed. Trained professionals destroy confidential materials on the premises in a matter of minutes while those taking advantage of the free service can watch. The process ensures that personal and financial documents are destroyed in a safe, secure and environmentally responsible manner.

The West Chicago Environmental Commission conducts an annual **Rain Barrel Sale** which is heavily promoted through City communication channels. This active group of volunteers wants fellow residents to know that a quarter-inch of rainfall on an average home is estimated to produce over 200 gallons of water. A rain barrel is an easy and environmentally-friendly way to collect clean water for outdoor use, including watering plants and washing your car. The barrels are repurposed, industrial-sized food containers that would otherwise be shredded and possibly sent to a landfill. The tops are modified to keep mosquitoes and other pests out while letting the water flow freely into the barrel. A spigot is installed to make water easy to access. Rain barrels are offered for sale through a partnership between the West Chicago Environmental Commission and The Conservation Foundation. Available barrels hold 55 gallons and come in multiple colors. Prices start as low as $60. There is also a 50 gallon barrel available for $55. Rain barrel accessories and composters are also available.

Mayor Ruben Pineda proudly signed the **National Wildlife Federation’s Mayors’ Monarch Pledge** as a means to bring awareness and to promote action in West Chicago to save the Monarch butterfly. Since that time, 25 Butterfly Milkweed (Asclepias tuberosa), 38 Common Milkweed (Asclepias syriaca), and 38 Swamp Milkweed (Asclepias incarnata) were planted at City Hall. Additionally, 22 Indian Blanket (Gaillardia pulchella), 35 Purple Coneflowers (Echinacea purpurea), and 38 Joe Pye Weed (Eupatorium purpureum) plants, 3 Virginia Sweetspire (Itea virginica) and 1 Summer Sweet (Clethra acnifolia) plants filled in the bed that faces Main Street. The garden plan was carefully considered to maximize benefit to the Monarch population, and qualify it as an **Official Monarch Waystation** by the Monarch Watch organization, a cooperative network of students, teachers, volunteers and researchers dedicated to the study and conservation of Monarchs. The native Milkweed is the only plant the caterpillars will eat, the nectar plants are for butterfly nourishment and the planting density is for cover/protection from predators. Residents, volunteers, naturalists, Garden Club members and general butterfly enthusiasts gathered at City Hall on Monday, July 10, 2017, to watch as Mayor Ruben Pineda unveiled signage designating the newly planted garden as an official Monarch Waystation.
Environmental Cont’d

Municipal/Commercial/Residential

One of the priorities of The GardenWorks Project is to mobilize households and communities to grow vegetable gardens for the simple purpose of having greater access to fresh fruits and vegetables. With every household that enrolls, it invites them to participate in its membership-based program, The Food Growers Network. This network is an annual membership-based program that offers 10 educational events and additional opportunities to connect with other food growers and gardeners within the DuPage County area. The Project hosts these at the West Chicago Resource Center. This is a program that is revenue-generating; however, it works to include all individuals interested in food growing. Therefore, anyone who receives a home garden within the program will be eligible for a free membership. This year’s programs include workshops such as Seed Saving, Composting 101, Community Gardening, and Beekeeping.

In addition, a partnership between a local church, St. Michael’s United Church of Christ and People Made Visible and Healthy West Chicago, has resulted in a West Chicago Community Garden. This garden has 20 beds available for the purposes of growing veg-ettes and donating all proceeds to the local food pantry. This project is not only sustainable by local grassroots organ-izations, but also a clear use of open land for the purposes of generating local food.

Environmentally friendly practices keeps the flower gardens thriving for Bea Kowalski, a West Chicago resident for 20 years and the gardens keeper at St. Andrews Golf Course for the past 10 years. The gardens have 250 flowers - perennials and annuals. They are washed by Bea with a mixture of 1/3 Dawn and the rest water. This is a method her grandmother used to take care of her own gardens. This mixture not only washes but protects the plants with a coating so no insect gets attached or fungus grows. She also applies a banana to the base to give the plants potassium to fight disease. When the flowers have slugs she uses stale beer and cocoa bean mulch to take care of the issue. The hanging baskets she put together are hand-watered, everything else is watered by the irrigation system. The weeding and dead-heading are done by hand. The grounds also have zebra grass native to South Africa and the landscapes have been created by taking little limbs and dividing the plants and flowers.

The Cottage Garden of Judith and Michael Horsley is a great example of what residents can do toward conservation efforts. This distinct style of garden combines informal design, traditional materials, dense plantings and a mixture of ornamental and edible plants. Judith, a Master Naturalist, and Michael, a Master Naturalist and a Master Gardener, are committed to the environment and have incorporated both a rain barrel to conserve water and a composter to create natural fertilizer with which to amend their soil. The garden is modified with native plants. Space is a challenge as the lot is long, but narrow, shaded for most of the grounds but sun for one garden. The couple grow both summer and fall crops to maximize the growth of food in a small space. They can or freeze everything they grow, to eliminate waste. The Horsleys are active members of the First United Methodist Church of West Chicago’s Green Disciples, an environmental stewardship committee which has been responsible for many environmental programs at the Church and throughout the community. Judith has been a great champion of the Monarch’s in West Chicago. She has an active Facebook account in which she shares news and information among her friends/followers. She distributes free milkweed seeds at public events and actually provides the ideal conditions in her yard to nurture Monarch eggs to maturity. The Green Disciples oversaw the creation of a Native Garden as part of their ongoing mission as good stewards of God’s earth. Both Monarch Watch and the Conservation Foundation have certified it. The Native Garden reduces the need to water and the roots help eliminate storm water run-off. The gutter pipes direct rainwater from the roof to a box underground. When the box fills, the water slowly seeps up through the rocks spreads out through the Native Garden. The native plants will also support bees and other pollinators. There are approximately 70 different plants, sedges and grasses in the Native Garden.
Community Vitality  Creating a culture of health and sustainability.

Municipal/Commercial/Residential

Healthy West Chicago (HWC) is a collaboration on of community leaders in local government, education, healthcare, social services, faith-based congregations, businesses, and non-profit organizations who have organized to increase nutrition and physical activity in the City of West Chicago. Healthy West Chicago is committed to making permanent changes by enacting policy, systems and environmental changes to allow the healthy choice to be the easy choice. The Healthy West Chicago Community Action Plan (which may be found on the City’s website) addresses a number of community health and wellness topics including environmental quality, healthy food systems, public safety, sustainable transportation, parks and recreation, healthy urban design, and education about the importance of good nutrition and physical activity. Mayor Ruben Pineda has taken an active leadership role with the initiative and has been instrumental in forming partnerships with the American Heart Association, Northwestern Medicine and the National Forum for Stroke and Heart Disease Prevention, which invited him to deliver a keynote address at its annual meeting on the topic of Creating a Culture of Health in his community. Mayor Pineda leads weekly 5K walks with Team Pineda and participates in the Forum’s Move with the Mayor Campaign in September. West Chicago has won the friendly competition between other cities (some much larger in population) the last two years.

The Peace Garden at St. Michael’s United Church of Christ was established in 2008. Central to the garden is the four-sided peace pole which states “May Peace Prevail on Earth” in four languages: English, Spanish – chosen because 51% of the residents of West Chicago are Latino, German – chosen because the Church was founded in 1869 and built in 1870 by German immigrants, and Arabic – chosen because of the hope for peace in the continued conflict in the Middle East. The peace pole was a gift to the church from Rev. Sherrie Albrecht and Roger Kim in memory of Curt Koehler, who was the husband of St. Michael’s pastor at the time, Rev. Denise Griebler. The peace pole is surrounded by a garden. Half of the garden is anchored by perennials that bloom at various times from spring to fall. The other half of the garden is flowering annuals that bloom until the first frost. The Peace Garden is a living symbol of the awesome beauty of the Earth, to follow Christ’s message to love our neighbors, and to work and pray for peace. The Peace Garden was dedicated on September 21, 2008, the International Day of Peace celebrated every year on that date. A neighborhood Peace Festival was held at the Church that afternoon, and a Peace Proclamation from the City’s Mayor, the late Michael B. Kwasman and the West Chicago City Council, declaring September 21, 2008 as West Chicago Peace Day was read.

Mexican Mothers’ Day Celebration through District 33 and Healthy West Chicago is a celebration of and for all Pre-school mothers. For the past two years, the celebration in West Chicago has incorporated a health aspect to inspire the mothers to pay attention to their own self-care and learn tips to provide easier access to a healthier household for their families. During the first-year mothers and their preschoolers took part in a Zumba class together and learned heart healthy tips while staying active and enjoying some family time. In the second-year mothers made their own fruit infused water, a healthy alternative to sugary-sweetened beverages, and leaders from the parent education class taught attendees about the dangers of hidden sugars. This year the mothers created their own herb gardens, and learned about the role of fruits and vegetables on overall good health. Each year’s event also includes a healthy meal and give-away to help mothers make easy healthy choices. Close to 200 mothers have attended this event each year.

City of West Chicago, Illinois
Community Vitality cont’d.

HWC partners with The GardenWorks Project, a not for profit organization which recently moved its resource center to West Chicago, to provide community members with garden to table food demonstrations. Through this education they are encouraging participants to embrace seasonal flavors by incorporating home-grown vegetables and herbs into their cooking. Ingredients for these demonstrations will come straight from West Chicago’s Community Garden plots. Demonstrations will feature seasonal produce and herbs while exploring health benefits and cooking tips. The objective of this program is to increase the knowledge of residents on nutrition and cooking healthy meals and snacks. These healthy cooking demonstrations will be available to our community members through the spring, summer, and fall months incorporating per season produce and herbs. The classes will be presented by registered dietitians and professional chefs. Bilingual support will be provided for demonstrations as well. With this education community members will have a better understanding of the benefits of eating locally grown produce along with the cost effectiveness of eating in season.

HWC is partnering with Jewel-Osco to provide West Chicago residents free grocery store tour education with registered dietitians. Participants will join in a one-hour interactive tour where they are empowered with key skills in the grocery store. These skills include shopping on a budget, comparing unit pricing, healthier options in the grocery store, how to find whole grain foods, and three ways to purchase produce. Following the tour, each participant will be given the opportunity to participate in a $10 grocery store challenge. The challenge will be used as an additional tool to reinforce the skills they have learned from the education. All participants will walk away with fresh produce, adding up to $10, in their new reusable grocery bag. With this education HWC aims to provide our participants with the skills they need to shop on a budget and to identity and compare their food options to make the healthier choice.

Through after-school cooking classes HWC aims to provide nutrition and cooking skills that our youth will be able to use in choosing healthier meal options for a lifelong impact. HWC, People Made Visible, WeGo Together for Kids in District 33, and St. Michael’s UCC have all come together to present two very successful after-school cooking class series, Cooking Skills and World Cuisine and Small Bites. Due to popularity, private donations have spurred to continue the program if the grant funding ever goes away.

Common Threads presents the Cooking Skills and World Cuisine after-school cooking program. This program engages students in a global exploration through healthy meal preparation. With the support of community volunteers and a trained chef, students from 3rd to 8th grade will expand their nutritional knowledge as they learn to follow a recipe and prepare low-cost healthy meals. The class is two hours in length and runs for ten sessions.

Small Bites after-school cooking program. This program empowers elementary and middle school students to choose healthier snack options. During this in-classroom nutrition education program (eight 60 to 90-minute classes per session), trained teachers engage students in connecting math, language arts, and science concepts to hands-on nutrition lessons each of which includes preparing a healthy snack. Lessons are aligned to core concepts by grade level. Our Small Bites curriculum has also been adapted for implementation by trained youth workers during other organizations’ out-of-school time programs.
Community Vitality cont’d.

The West Chicago Park District offers a myriad of activities centered around the overall health of community members. Seasonal programs include classes and events tailored to improve physical, mental and emotional health. Some of the programs that improve physical health include fitness classes, swim lessons, sports leagues, gymnastics, team sports along with a community fitness center and indoor walking track. Mental and emotional health is enhanced in programs such as martial arts, yoga, art classes, social gatherings, day trips and family special events.

A collaboration between the West Chicago Park District and the City Of West Chicago yielded the development and programming of an outdoor venue, The Shell, nestled in Reed-Keppler Park. Families come together for free summer events including: a concert series, movies in the park, outdoor fitness classes, youth entertainment series and much more. Additional partnership efforts include an alliance with Healthy West Chicago, a city wide health initiative dedicated to promoting a healthier lifestyle among residents; and the National Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. These relationships established events such as Screen-Free Week to encourage families to turn off screens and unplug to play, explore and get active.

The GardenWorks Project promotes organic suburban agriculture to improve the well-being of our community, the environment, and those facing food insecurity. They empower, educate, and support all food growers in their efforts to nourish their families and neighbors in need. The GardenWorks Project has been working to build community vitality within the City of West Chicago through its partnerships and programming. The organization is mainly volunteer-driven, with over 250 volunteers participating in projects throughout the year. In addition, it receives approximately 30% of revenue from Corporate Sponsorships, and several of these sponsors are local to the area, such as Ball Horticultural Company. The GardenWorks Project’s Home Gardening Program teaches clients how to grow vegetables at home to supplement the offerings they receive at the food pantry, which is often shelf-stable, highly processed, and high in fat and sodium. The GardenWorks Project partners with 34 food pantries to identify clients who are both in need and wish to learn home food production skills. Its volunteers, alongside each client, build a 4’ x 8’ raised bed garden (or balcony container if yard space is not available), plant seeds and seedlings, maintain the garden, and harvest the food.

A great source of vitality and garden wisdom for the community comes from the West Chicago Garden Club, whose purpose is to increase interest in gardening through sharing ideas and knowledge, promoting and participating in community beautification and protecting and promoting a clean environment in which to live. For a minimal fee of $15 annually, which goes back into programming, this active Club provides monthly presentations by garden experts, workshops, and field trips. The following is the 2018 schedule of programs: Laura Christensen, a landscape architect with a Master’s degree in City Planning from Northwestern University spoke on the topic of Design with Nature; Cindy Anderson, a Master Gardener and volunteer at the Chicago Botanic Garden spoke about Native Plants for Four Seasons; Wally Schmidtke, Garden Solution Specialist (retired) at Lurvey’s Garden in Des Plaines, IL has a regular column called Ask a Master Gardener, and speaks throughout the Chicagoland area on garden topics; Jim Nau from Ball Horticultural Company talked about the most efficient tools and dynamic growing solutions; the month of May brought an outdoor program, Making a Succulent Planter, in the lovely gardens of the Kruse House Museum; June will be a field trip to a renowned garden in Niles, IL; July is the annual President’s Picnic which will be hosted in the Fabyan Japanese Garden; August is Dividing Perennials by Beth Botts who works at the Morton Arboretum and is a columnist for the Sunday Chicago Tribune; September is Bulb Bingo, October is a presentation on English Gardens and November is the Garden Club pot Luck Dinner and Silent Auction. What a lineup!
Community Vitality cont’d.

Last spring, a group of business leaders, City officials, Community School District 33 administrators, staff and students gathered in a hallway at Turner School in West Chicago for a photo in front of the newest addition to the building – a water bottle filling station.

Through the coordinated efforts of the City of West Chicago’s Mayor Ruben Pineda and District 33 Administration, every elementary school building now has one water bottle filling station and the Middle School has two. Brent Lautenbach Project Manager of the West Chicago branch of Ch2m donated all of the stations, while Tom Loos, owner of Action Plumbing, Inc., of West Chicago and Guy Seemans of Associated Electrical Contractors, LLC., of Woodstock, made donations toward the installation of the necessary plumbing and electrical. Other individuals and groups that were instrumental to this effort, Maria Lenzi, of Ch2m, Healthy West Chicago, an organization dedicated to making West Chicago one of the healthiest communities in the region, and the American Heart Association, were also present.

As Community School District 33 moves to adopt an updated Wellness Policy and the City of West Chicago supports the work of Healthy West Chicago, these water bottle filling stations are a huge step in supporting healthy choices by encouraging students and staff to drink more water and less sugar sweetened beverages.

“For our students and staff, these filling stations facilitate drinking water throughout the day which we all know is an important, healthful habit. We are grateful to Mayor Ruben Pineda and the business owners who helped make this possible,” stated Dr. Charles Johns, District 33 Superintendent, in a recent press release.

Community High School District 94 has made a strong commitment to “growing the next generation of garden enthusiasts. Corrie Stiegelitz has been the teacher sponsoring the Horticulture Club for 17 years, after inheriting it from Carol Walkslor. The greenhouses have been in operation at the school since the 1970s. The Club provides opportunities for students to meet after school and work with annuals and perennials under different growing conditions such as using different soils and managing the amount of lighting needed to provide ideal growing conditions. It has partnered with Ball who has supported both the club and the Botany class by donating plugs that would have otherwise been recycled. The students learn the difficulty in growing from seed but have success when transplanting the plugs.

Not only are students learning how to grow the plants, they are seeing the business and marketing side as well. They took a field trip to Ball this April and learned many of the different facets of being a grower. The Club had specific difficulty in its greenhouse with pests such as aphids and students learned some of the ways to manage pests without the use of pesticide. The community supports the Club by purchasing plants at Blooming Fest so students do not have to pay dues to be in the Club. It also sells plants to the High School for Mother’s Day and provides centerpieces for special events held at the school. There is little doubt these young residents are positively impacting their individual homes and neighborhoods through their passion for horticulture. Currently, D94 is making improvements to the greenhouse for a new crop of student horticulturists.
Celebrating Heritage  “This community has strong roots in gardening, dating back to the 1870s when John Neltnor opened up nurseries on the east side of town, launching a profitable fruit, flower and vegetable garden business. When West Chicago became home to the Ball Trial Gardens in 1933, the community was put on the national and then international gardening map as Ball Horticultural Company grew. Residents such as the Kruse family, whose women started and cared for the beautiful gardens around their Main Street homes in the early 20th century, also contributed to the long tradition of gardening in West Chicago. One of the Kruse family homes still stands as the Kruse House Museum, at 527 Main Street; the historic gardens have been restored and are maintained by the West Chicago Garden Club. Other families used gardening to provide for their families, like Emeteria Zarate, who sold produce and flowers out of the family’s garden in the boxcar camps that existed on the west side of town in the 1920s and 1930s; she not only supplemented the family’s income but also saved enough money to purchase their family a home in West Chicago proper in 1947.”

~Sara Phalen, Director of City Museum

The West Chicago City Museum is a division of the City of West Chicago; it is a dynamic history and art center that inspires and involves the community through research, programs, and exhibits. Founded in 1975, it is housed in the former 1884 Turner Town Hall, the original City Hall building, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. The over 33,000 piece permanent local history collection and railroad collection is held in the public trust and exists for the pub lic’s informational and educational benefit. The Museum is also home to an expansive research collection with over 20,000 documents related to local families, local homes and structures, and local businesses and organizations.

The City Museum hosts numerous talks, tours and educational programs throughout the year in the Museum and throughout the community, as well as offering traveling exhibits to schools and other local venues. The City Museum is an active participant in the Kane DuPage Regional Museum Association which produces the Passport to Adventure booklet for families that lists over 60 cultural institutions throughout the two counties and allows for visitors to get a stamp when they visit each institution. The City Museum also spearheads Voices of DuPage, a county-wide oral history initiative that seeks to highlight previously collected oral histories and spur current oral history gathering.

The City Museum’s most recent outreach project is a collaboration with Healthy West Chicago, DuPage County and the DuPage Forest Preserve to add educational signage to the Prairie Path trail that runs through West Chicago. These informational signs will include historic images that also point viewers to our free mobile walking tour, and create a Rail Trail, in which the public can explore West Chicago’s rail history along the Prairie Path that was once the Chicago Aurora & Elgin trolley railcar line. This work will also allow the City Museum to point members of the public to other historic areas of town, highlighting West Chicago rich history and the diversity of stories that shape our community.

The City Museum works closely with the City of West Chicago’s Historical Preservation Commission. As the holder of all records on the community’s two historic districts, the residential East Washington Street District and the commercial Turner Historic District, the Museum supplies expertise and guidance for exterior work being done on historic structures. The City Museum also helps guide preservation projects in the City, most recently a Historical Preservation 2017 grant to assess the structural needs and potential uses of the 1869 Northwestern Railroad depot and the restoration project of 200 Main Street, the original railroad hotel, which has been used as a local co-op art gallery since 2005, and will be able to host three floors of arts programming once renovations are complete.

The Ripley Hotel, located at 200 Main Street, was built in 1878 by Albert Hills, the English immigrant carpenter who built many of the first buildings in Turner, the original name of West Chicago. Owned by William and Jane Ripley, this hotel housed 24 rooms that could be rented for between $1.00 and $1.50 a day. Amenities included a dining room and kitchen on the first floor, a dance floor on the third floor and steam heat throughout. The Hotel was also used for community events and gatherings.
Celebrating Heritage cont’d.

Operating in a bustling railroad town in the 19th and early 20th century, the Ripley Hotel welcomed numerous guests from all over the world who were coming to West Chicago to make a new home, visit a friend or relative, or stop for a rest on a longer journey through the Midwest. The Ripley Hotel was a meeting point in the community where residents and visitors alike could share stories and gain new experiences together. Over time the building was used as an apartment building and fell into disrepair until it was acquired by the City of West Chicago.

In 2005, through a public and private partnership, the first floor of the historic building was turned into Gallery 200, a local artist co-op, and the basement renovated to host community cultural groups and events, such as Local Music Night. The building was again filled with a variety of viewpoints, expression and passions that enriched the downtown. In 2016, the City of West Chicago and People Made Visible, the local arts and culture non-profit, committed to a reno-vation and rehabilitation of the Ripley Hotel. When complete the building will again house Gallery 200, cultural events, and welcome traveling contemporary art exhibits and People Made Visible’s Artist-in-Residency program, which to-date has welcomed 14 international artists and Chicago-land artists to West Chicago to take part in contemporary social art projects. Expanding the art center to all four floors of the Ripley Hotel, with one room being restored to an original historic hotel room, will provide an augmented space for sharing and community creation, harkening back to the day when world-wide travelers mingled with residents and exchanged views enriching downtown West Chicago.

Although West Chicago is no longer unique in its large Latino population in the suburbs of Chicago, it is unique in that it has a celebrated history of 100 year of Mexican immigration to our community. The first Mexican migrants came to West Chicago in the 1910s to work on the railroad and live in boxcar camps that were located on the west side of town. These camps held workers from all over the world, but within a decade of their establishment were almost completely made up of workers from Mexico and their families. These Mexican families created a community that established the basis for future waves of Mexican immigrants. A second large wave of Mexican workers came to West Chicago starting in the late 1940s to work and live at Campbell’s Soup Mushroom Farm. The company town had a population of around 200 and workers would slowly move into West Chicago proper as they saved up money. The Campbell’s company town was the longest running company town in the State of Illinois and was shut down in the early 1980s. Today, Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans make up over half of our community’s population and have contributed to local culture and commerce in numerous ways. West Chicago had the first Mexican American Police Chief in the State of Illinois in the 1950s, Joe Buenrostro who grew up in the boxcar camps, and currently we have our first Mexican American Mayor, Ruben Pineda, who first came to this area with his family as migrant farm workers. Many commercial areas of town are supported by Latino owned businesses. All of these contributions are highlighted each year in the City’s long-standing Mexican Independence Day Celebration, which is now run by the Mexican Cultural Center of DuPage, which also has its home base here in West Chicago.

The festival is a dazzling feast for the senses, offering delicious food, non-stop music, colorful and vibrant folk dances, Miss Mexican Herit-age and her court, dancing horses, breath-taking authentic costumes representing the different states of Mexico and, of course, a parade. A particularly significant and emotional part of the celebration is the reenactment of El Grito de la Independencia or The Cry of Independence, which commemorates the ringing of the bells that signaled the beginning of the revolt against the Spanish rule. The climax of the festival, and the children’s favorite, is a 13’ burro piñata created by local craftsman Victor Arellano which is hoisted 30 feet in the air by a crane before the string is pulled and the streets showered with candy and toys.

The First United Methodist Church of West Chicago began in the home of Charles Gary at Gary’s Mill and was established by 1835 when the circuit-riding missionary, Rev. William Royal was stopping at the Gary home every eight weeks as one of his twenty-six preaching stations. The Methodist Church is the oldest and longest continuing church in West Chicago. The Methodist bell was forged in 1869 and placed in the church tower. It was later moved to the new building at 204 Church Street. A new facility was built at 643 E. Washington St. and the bell was put in storage. The First Congregational Church of West Chicago was established May 1856 and is the second oldest church on West Chicago. The Congregational bell was forged in 1986 and was placed in the church tower. A new facility was built at 525 N. Neltnor Boulevard and the bell was put on display. In 2004, the two churches began worshiping together and in 2006 dedicated the new building at 643 E. Washington St. It was decided to create the Heritage Bell Plaza to stand as witness of the two oldest congregations in West Chicago coming together under one roof for worship. The Native Garden and the Heritage Bell Plaza were dedicated on October 19, 2014.
Celebrating Heritage cont’d.

The West Chicago Historical Society oversees the care of the **Kruse House Museum**. The Kruse House is a 1917 four-square home depicting the Fred Kruse family life style. The house is furnished in period furnishings and collections including china, quilts, jewelry, toys, cut glass and Chicago and Northwestern Railroad history. The Kruse House is open for tours during the summer season, May through September, and features a unique theme display each year. The Kruse House grounds are maintained by the West Chicago Garden Club, which has restored the gardens to their historic character, once cherished and cared for by the Kruse family women. The grounds are open from sunrise to sunset and are a beautiful oasis in the middle of downtown West Chicago. The Historical Society hosts an Old Fashioned Ice Cream Social on the grounds each year and held its 2nd Annual Art in the Garden event this June featuring musical entertainment, artist demos and refreshments.

**Kline Creek Farm** is located on the farm of Casper Kline, one of the earliest pioneers in this area. Today it presents 19th-century farm activities such as baking, canning, planting, harvesting, sheep shearing and ice cutting, through programs designed for individuals, families and groups. "A Day At The Farm" is an educational program that allows students to see how families lived more than a century ago. The field trip provides opportunities for students to participate in a wide variety of farm activities. During the summer, children ages 7 – 12 can participate in the "Farmhands" day camp, where they’ll experience life on an 1890s farm, including chores, domestic activities and games.

The farmhouse was the center of domestic activities and today contains original artifacts and reproductions that enhance its homelike atmosphere. House tours start on the hour from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. and present topics from baking, canning, quilting and spring cleaning to preparing the house for special celebrations. Depending on the time of year, staff and volunteers plant heirloom fruits and vegetables in the kitchen garden, tend to the orchard, work in the wagon shed or cure sausages in the smoke house. Percheron work horses help plant and har-vest crops of corn, oats and other small grains; and resident livestock, such as the farm’s Southdown sheep, Shorthorn and Angus cattle, and chickens, occupy the farm’s coop, barn, fold and pastures.

Beekeeping is also a longstanding tradition at Kline Creek Farm. Since 1984 volunteer beekeepers have managed the farmstead’s apiary by caring for the bees, extracting and processing honey, and leading educational programs and tours that focus on the honeybee’s role as primary pollinator for two-thirds of all U.S. crops. The sale of honey at the Timber Ridge Visitor Center helps to support farm programs and operations.

Inside the Timber Ridge Visitor Center, seasonal exhibits present elements of the 1890s and the agricultural heritage of DuPage County. The center has modern restrooms, a drinking fountain, general forest preserve information and a center store where visitors can purchase beverages and snacks. Unique gifts are also available such as locally produced honey and soaps, Victoriana, children’s toys, games and books.

Kline Creek Farm’s volunteers assist heritage interpreters to teach about life on a DuPage County farm during the late 19th century. They help interpret domestic arts, blacksmithing, agriculture and carpentry. They may plant the kitchen garden, can vegetables in the summer kitchen or collect eggs from the chicken coop. Some may care for livestock, assist with tours of the barn and outbuildings, work at the farm’s gift shop or entertain guests during seasonal-themed special events.

The purpose of the Volunteer Services Program at the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County is to engage volunteers who are willing to donate their time, talents and resources to support the programs and staff in carrying out the mission, purpose and guiding principles of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County and its volunteer programs.
Overall Impression  *Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter*

Mayor Ruben Pineda’s record of public service began in 1998 when he was appointed to fill a vacant seat on the City Council in West Chicago’s Third Ward. He has been Mayor since 2012. He was the first Hispanic alderman in the City of West Chicago, and is now the City’s first Hispanic Mayor. He has contributed to such initiatives as the state-of-the-art wastewater treatment facility, the waste transfer station, Educare, Habitat for Humanity, several annexations and the establishment of the Quiet Zone through a negotiated agreement with the Canadian National Railroad. He has served as a champion for a sustainable, healthy community through his support of the Healthy West Chicago initiative, a Team Pineda weekly walking group, the National Wildlife Federation’s Mayors’ Monarch Pledge, the National Forum for Stroke and Heart Disease Prevention’s annual Move with the Mayor and World Heart Day Celebration and much more.

The City of West Chicago’s **goal with its Code Enforcement** Division is to improve the appearance of business and residential areas and create a community where all those who live, work or visit can experience a sense of pride and well being. Enforcement of the Code assures that residents and owners maintain their properties in conformance with the International Property Maintenance Code. “The residents and business owners in this town expect the City to uphold a certain quality of life, and while the City will be customer-friendly, we will hold people to reasonable standards and work to get compliance as quickly as possible.”

- Mayor Ruben Pineda

A drive around the neighborhoods of West Chicago is the best way to get a sense of the pride and investment residents and businesses have made in their community. As a result of these efforts, combined with those of intergovernmental agencies and community service clubs and organizations, the overall impression is one in which the entire community takes great pride and pleasure. The changing seasons bring a different beauty to the community through events, activities and changing landscapes. The purchase of a dozen new Artisan designed cast stone planters created by Henri Studios from a local retailer since our last AiB judging has really bumped up the overall impression on Main Street for the enjoyment of the entire community. City staff coordinates the seasonal displays that are switched out twice a year, spring and fall. Public works crews prioritize daily watering (in summer) and scheduled fertilizing, as well as keeping City streets and public right-of-ways clean. A strong **Adopt-A-Highway Program** brings citizen volunteers into partnership with the City to pick up trash and keep our roadsides clean and the **Prairie Stewardship group** assists the Forest Preserve District of DuPage tend our treasured prairie land.
Overall Impression cont’d

In 2017, the West Chicago Garden Club spent between 450–500 hours in the Kruse Garden maintaining and beautifying it. The community benefited and was rewarded with a beautiful garden to rest, reflect and enjoy.

2017 civic events held in the Kruse House Garden included:

People Made Visible - Sponsored an “Art in the Garden” event.
Historical Society - Held their annual “Ice Cream Social”
Kruse House Museum - May - October, Open House Saturdays
West Chicago Garden Club - Annual June meeting in the Kruse Garden

The Kruse House Garden is a casual sanctuary for an untold number of visitors and the birds and the pollinators thank Garden Club members for providing home and food for them as well! The Kruse House Gardens significantly impact the overall impression of our community’s beauty, history and giving spirit.

One of the big takeaways from the City’s involvement with America in Bloom in 2013 was the recommendation to enhance the City’s gateway signs with landscaping. When the signs were originally installed at a great financial investment to the City, they were a huge improvement and enhancement in themselves and the decision to keep them as low maintenance as possible was decided. After revisiting the judges comments with of our 2018 AiB Committee, a round-table discussion yielded a tremendous result. Two community partners, the West Chicago Park District and Ball Horticultural Company, stepped up with a compelling offer.

The Park District offered its staff to create beds around each of the six gateway signs and Ball offered to create a landscape plan that would incorporate low-maintenance native plants and grasses and donate and install all the plant material, with City staff handling water and weeding going forward. Overall the plants chosen are hardy perennials and woody shrubs that create great fill-in for sign spaces like these, plus bear the brunt of most Midwest weather extremes. Some varieties are native and “prairie” in nature, fitting with the local environment while remaining low-maintenance, colorful and attractive. The stars were aligned and the result is a marvelous upgrade which has created a more welcoming first impression for visitors and increased pride for residents.

A dramatic gallery of botanical art was created for Main Street and surrounding neighborhoods.

Site furnishings in parks and other places are well-maintained. One example of this is the memorial garden at Reed-Keppler Park which was dedicated to all first responders on the anniversary of 9/11. A beautiful bronze sculpture is surrounded by benches for quiet meditation. The Park District maintains a Memorial Tree and Bench Program, which is a great way to honor a loved one and also be friendly to the environment and enhance the aesthetics of the District’s Park system. This spring, the addition of 36 stunning images of single blooms on a black background were added to the City’s streetscape. The blooming banners will provide beauty and inspiration for novice and master gardeners, as well as for those that just enjoy the natural beauty of flowers. The botanicals also bring awareness to the City’s efforts to win national status as an America in Bloom City, as well as its annual Blooming Fest.
Overall Impression cont’d.

A creative movement which has grown quietly, yet steadily, is reaching something of a crescendo in West Chicago, Illinois. Combining talent, enthusiasm and government partnership, the arts (and the artists) are shaping the community’s image and confirming it as an arts destination. A ten person Cultural Arts Commission was established by the City of West Chicago in January 1993 with the mission of enriching the lives of all West Chicago residents through the active support of cultural arts activities in the City. The Commission sponsors public art programs, workshops, art exhibits, community art projects, and other special events.

In 2009, a local arts nonprofit, People Made Visible (PMV), was formed to augment the work the City had been doing through the Cultural Arts Commission and the City Museum. PMV, with the support and collaboration of the City, hosts pop-up art installations and exhibitions in vacant city spaces and to complement community events. PMV also runs an artist-in-residency program which has hosted 19 artists to date, many of whom are from outside of the United States. The residency is focused around community, social practice art that involves community members and brings individuals together on a personal level as they work with the artist and the specific project. The projects also involve local schools and organizations, most recently a partnering with the Mexican Cultural Center DuPage to create specific pieces that were displayed at the annual Mexican Independence Day Celebration and are now on semi-permanent display at the local art gallery.

PMV is now the parent organization for Gallery 200, the local co-op art gallery which features the work of 30 local artists. The co-op artists display and sell their work out of the gallery, as well as host a rotating monthly art show that brings in the work of other regional artists as well as both the local elementary and high school districts. The Gallery also hosts art classes, workshops and demonstrations, as well as other local cultural groups for special meetings and rehearsals. Gallery Theater, a local storefront performing arts group, is also housed within PMV, providing further access to a variety of cultural opportunities for residents that not only enrich their lives but bring community members together around unique experiences.

West Chicago is proud of its public art collection, which serves to beautify the community and inspire its imagination. West Chicago’s Public Art tells the community’s many stories, serves to document the past and present, and creates a sense of place that is uniquely West Chicago. Preliminary work has begun by the West Chicago Cultural Arts Commission on a Public Art Master Plan. The nine-member volunteer Commission, which serves to promote and advance the arts in West Chicago and acts in an advisory capacity to the Mayor and City Council in matters pertaining to artistic and aesthetic aspects of the City, believes the addition of displays of public art throughout the community greatly enhances the quality of life for all who live, work and visit it by adding beauty and creating a distinctive identity.

“A built environment that includes public art plays a critical role in shaping first impressions and lasting memories of a community, and was identified by a wide range of community stakeholders in the West Chicago Strategic Plan as an objective over the next 10 years,” said Cultural Arts staff liaison Rosemary Mackey.

Installations like the annual Community Banner Art Project, which incorporates art from local and area artists on street banners that hang downtown from May through September, In this – together, an outdoor mural hanging at 103 W. Washington Street, and Signa Rotae a mosaic mural created on a cement podium upon which sits a weathered train wheel which was part of the City Museum’s collection, are examples of recent efforts by the Commission to add art to the cityscape.
Overall Impression cont’d.

The City will dedicate a new piece of public art created by renowned Chicago artist Matthew Hoffman this summer. Following a process of research and discussion of possible projects, Commission members determined the work of Chicago artist Matthew Hoffman to be most reflective of the values of West Chicago as a warm, welcoming and caring community, and is especially meaningful given the national discord contained in daily headlines and news outlets. Matthew’s simple yet profound message of “loveevenmore” conveyed in his approximate 9-foot vertical sculpture is a powerful and timely one. It is representative of an entire body of work commissioned throughout various states, dedicated to positive and uplifting messages.

Volunteers lead the way every year in mid November to assist the community’s senior citizens with the huge task of raking leaves in their yards, which also helps to keep the community clean and attractive. The event is an annual community service project coordinated by the West Chicago Police Department. Some of the groups who have participated in the past are:

- West Chicago Park District
- Boy Scout Troop 33
- Renewal Church
- Mexican Cultural Center
- West Chicago Community High School – Interact Club/Horticulture Club/Future Business Leaders of America
- Vietnamese CMA Church of Wheaton
- Community Fellowship Oasis Junior High School Group
- Leman Middle School
- District 33 DREAM After School Program

Additionally, various individuals not associated with a particular organization or club show up to help. “We live in an amazing community filled with people who care about other people,” said Mayor Ruben Pineda. “Thank you to all who generously gave of their time and effort to help the seniors of West Chicago.” Volunteers enjoyed 60 pizzas at the Fox Community Center following their hard work.

Citizen volunteers are invited to partner with the City of West Chicago to pick up trash and keep road sides clean through the Environmental Commission’s Adopt-A-Highway Program. The program provides businesses, service clubs and civic-minded organizations the opportunity to make a significant contribution to the quality of life in their community. Currently, four roadways are being maintained by community-conscious volunteers.

Responding to citizen concerns about the nuisance and eyesore created by unsubscribed-to periodic publications being dropped at residences, the City passed an Ordinance for the purpose of securing residents of the City their right to privacy within their homes and residences by authorizing them to determine and prohibit the delivery of such unsubscribed to newspapers, magazines, journals, or other periodic publications. The City provides a standard sign template that residents may post as notification in this instance. This is an example of the care people in our community have for the aesthetics of their hometown and the responsiveness in City government in taking action to engage, explore, discuss and resolve an issue of concern.
The Best Idea

Unexpected things happen when you get a room full of people who love the community, together. The current momentum to beautify West Chicago began in March 2018 with the first meeting of the America in Bloom committee. Since then, amazing things have been happening, are in the works, or are being planned for the future.

Probably the best idea came with the round table discussion of AiB Committee members reviewing the comments of judges from the City’s 2013 evaluation. The City’s gateway signs were identified in the 2013 document as a missed opportunity for the City’s beautification efforts. This led to a lively discussion with two community partners, the West Chicago Park District and Ball Horticultural Company stepping up with a compelling offer. The Park District offered its staff to create beds around each of the six gateway signs and Ball offered to create a landscape plan that would incorporate low-maintenance native perennial plants and grasses and donate and install all the plant material. City staff committed to handling the water and weeding going forward. Overall, the plants chosen are hardy perennials and woody shrubs that create great fill-in for sign spaces like these, plus bear the brunt of most Midwest weather extremes. Some varieties are native and “prairie” in nature, fitting with the local environment while remaining low-maintenance, colorful and attractive.

The stars were aligned and the result is a marvelous upgrade for the community which has created a more welcoming first impression for visitors and increased pride for residents.

Thank you America in Bloom for being a catalyst for such a major citywide improvement for West Chicago!

Before

One of six gateway signs that were planted through the collaboration of many.

After