



Legislation Text

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PROPOSED RESOLUTION

CELEBRATING HAL TYRRELL TRAILSIDE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY'S 90TH ANNIVERSARY

WHEREAS, on May 22, 1932, the Forest Preserves District of Cook County opened its first nature education facility at the building at the corner of Thatcher and Chicago Ave, in River Forest; and was given the name "*Trailside Museum of Natural History*," modeled after the New York Bear Mountain State Park's "Trailside Museum and Zoo"; and

WHEREAS, the 16 room Victorian Italian Villa style mansion was originally built in 1876, by Abraham J. Hoffman and his wife, who purchased the land from the Thatcher family where Mrs. Hoffman established two private schools in the home, and was both a teacher and the principal. The "*River Forest Young Ladies Institute*" opened in 1878, and "*The River Forest Institute*," a boy's boarding school, opened in 1881; and

WHEREAS, the young ladies' school taught the girls "all the higher branches, including German, French, Latin, Greek and Music". The "*River Forest Institute*" was a primary grade boarding school for "lads under 13." The boys slept dormitory-style in the attic, and took classes in a separate building from the young ladies; and

WHEREAS, the boarding school was later closed and the building subsequently sold to a wealthy carriage maker, Mr. Hugh McFarlane, where he lived with his family until he sold the house and land to the Cook County Board of Commissioners in 1919, when the building became the first headquarters of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County; and

WHEREAS, later, in 1932 the Trailside Museum of Natural History was created with the mission to educate the public about and to exhibit plants and animals found in Cook County; and

WHEREAS, Mary Cooper Black became the first curator of Trailside Museum and she created the first educational displays, collections, and animal mounts in the museum, with assistance from the Field Museum and the Chicago Academy of Sciences; and

WHEREAS, the Field Museum's artist Mr. Gordon Persall later became the second curator and painted the "*Local Reptiles*" exhibit that still hangs in the museum today, and he published a booklet that listed all plants and animals found in the Forest Preserves; and

WHEREAS, in 1939, Miss Virginia Moe became the museum's assistant curator, and later in 1940 became the third curator in 1941 until her death 50 years later in 1991. Miss Moe inspired many people to care deeply about wildlife. She also shifted the focus of the museum to wildlife rehabilitation. For many years, Trailside Museum was the place to bring injured and orphaned wildlife in Cook County. She wrote a book called "*Animal Inn*" about her experiences working at Trailside Museum; and

WHEREAS, the following staff served as Director of the Trailside Museum in subsequent years - Bridget Sullivan, Susan Holt, James Chelsvig, Michele Mottlowitz and Susan Dombro; and

WHEREAS, Commissioner Harold L. "Hal" Tyrell was instrumental in securing funding for an extensive renovation that materialized in 1990 and 1991, including adding a new wing. His name was later added to the Museum's name after he passed away while in office while serving his third term in office in February 1990; and

WHEREAS, today, Hal Tyrell Trailside Museum of Natural History has a renewed focus on educating the public about natural history, the local plants, wildlife, and natural habitats found within the Forest Preserves of Cook County; and in recent years extensively restored the grounds with native plant gardens, three short footpaths, and an extremely popular and evolving Children’s Nature Play area. A fun, climbable sculpture overlooking the pond, entitled “Fish” was added through a grant program involving artists and local high school students. The native plant gardens have won several awards and have been featured in local garden walks. In pursuit of making nature in Cook County accessible to everyone, the public parking lot was replaced and a new wheelchair-friendly trail was added to allow everyone access to the Museum. Additionally, the highly used area by the pond was wood-chipped and landscaped to help combat erosion, allow better access for the Greater Maywood Paddling Program, camp and pond programs, and for people who fish there and a new trail to the Des Plaines River was established to link existing trails and make a trail loop for hikers; and

WHEREAS, recent interior renovations include new educational displays focusing on the natural history of local plants and animals, and a series of beautiful and educational wall murals painted by local artist, Liita Forsyth. “The Four Seasons of Trailside Museum” celebrate the multitude of plant and animal life found in the nearby Forest Preserves; and

WHEREAS, since 2004, free educational public nature programming has increased from an average of 3 or 4 programs per quarter to an average 50 to 60 programs per quarter in 2022, and many new annual educational events and activities have been added, with thousands of participants: including the Annual Spring Festival, Migrating Monarchs Celebration and Halloween Hoot n’ Howl that is in conjunction with the River Forest Park District and the River Forest Library. Prior to the pandemic, in 2019, over 37,000 people visited or participated in programming there and it is on track to regain and exceed this number in the future.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Toni Preckwinkle, President and the Forest Preserves of Cook County Board of Commissioners does hereby celebrate and honor Trailside Museum of Natural History on its 90th Anniversary; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a suitable copy of this Resolution be presented to Hal Tyrell River Trail Nature Center, and its staff, volunteers and partners, as a token of appreciation for their service to the Forest Preserves and residents of Cook County.