

**KENDALL COUNTY FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT
PROGRAMMING AND EVENTS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
APRIL 6, 2016**

I. Call to Order

Chairman Flowers called the meeting to order at 6:06 pm in the Kendall County Board Room.

II. Roll Call

Commissioners Prochaska, Purcell, and Flowers all were present.

III. Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Prochaska made a motion to approve the agenda. Seconded by Commissioner Purcell. All, aye. Opposed, none.

IV. Citizens to be Heard

Rebecca Roulo of Plainfield recited her letter of resignation as a volunteer for Ellis House and Equestrian Center. Commissioner Flowers extended additional time to allow sufficient time to read the full letter. Rebecca Roulo expressed concerns about the professionalism of staff, staff shortages, and horse condition and care. A transcript of the letter was submitted to the Board of Commissioners.

Liz Klockars of Oswego read her letter of resignation as a volunteer for Ellis House and Equestrian Center. Liz Klockars expressed concerns about the professionalism of staff, staff shortages, and horse condition and care. A transcript of the letter was submitted to the Board of Commissioners.

Director Guritz thanked Rebecca for her service.

V. Ellis House Wedding and Rental Event Online Marketing Options

Events Coordinator Tina Villarreal presented a report on options for expanding online marketing presence with Wedding Guide-Chicago, The Knot, Rustic Wedding Guide, and Wedding Wire. Events Coordinator Villarreal reminded the Committee that Uncle Bub's had recently sponsored an ad in the Wedding Guide-Chicago, and that Ellis is listed with The Knot currently as a free listing.

Events Coordinator Villarreal described the additional storefront presence the District would have if a decision were made to expand our web presence.

The Programming and Events Committee discussed the current budget available for marketing. Director Guritz reported that approximately \$300-\$400 remains in the weddings marketing budget, with additional funds available through the District's general marketing and promotions line item. If a per month payment plan is available for the store front, it

would be a stretch, and likely require some contingency funding to pay the full cost through the end of the fiscal year. Events Coordinator Villarreal stated that all of the venues provide a payment plan option. The Programming and Events Committee reviewed the year-to-date figures for promotional expenditures.

Commissioner Flowers stated that she would be willing to move “The Knot” storefront plan forward.

The Programming and Events Committee discussed the volume of wedding events and house rentals for the year. Director Guritz stated that because we are doing better than revenue projections, this would be the year to take the risk in order to boost rental events in the current and upcoming fiscal years.

The Programming and Events Committee provided direction to request a discount for the first year subscription, and present the final proposal at the upcoming Committee of the Whole meeting.

VI. Ellis Horse Updates & Discussion

Director Guritz reported that Equestrian Program Coordinator Amy Martin was not able to attend the meeting, but reported that lessons and birthday party bookings are picking up for the year. A full report will be provided at the May Programming and Events Committee meeting.

Equestrian center staff are working on conditioning Shadow in the program. A follow-up meeting will take place next week to review progress.

Director Guritz stated that Ellis Equestrian Center staff are recommending finding a more suitable home for the mini-horse Polly. The District plans to begin putting out feelers for rehoming Polly to retire him from the program, and to also make room for the horses from Sunrise North.

VII. Ellis Equestrian Center Program YTD FY Comparison Report

The Programming and Events Committee tabled discussion of the year-to-date status for equestrian center programming to May.

VIII. Environmental Education Program YTD FY Comparison Report

Environmental Education Coordinator Emily Dombrowski presented a report on school program bookings for January through the end of May 2016, which included a comparison of bookings in 2015.

Director Guritz stated that the challenge with programming is living within our limits. The school program bookings scheduled are at capacity for what the District is able to deliver due to staff constraints.

Commissioner Purcell asked about capacity within the District's programs. Director Guritz stated that both April Morris and Emily Dombrowski must average less than 30-hours per week over a six-month period in order to stay under the threshold where the District would need to extend pro-rated benefits. Any additional program bookings would make it difficult to stay below this average. Ellis rental functions are different because the District has staff members able to extend rental event support because they are well below the 30-hour per week average.

The Programming and Events Committee discussed the balance of finding qualified individuals to fill intermittent part-time positions that carry sufficient hours for employment.

The Programming and Events Committee reviewed the school programs report. Total student participation through May is estimated at 3,749 students totaling just under \$20,000.00 in total revenue. This compares to 5,406 students in 2015 generating \$12,768.00 in total revenue. Based on the number of programmable days in the fall, the District should come close to achieving budget projections for the year.

IX. Past Program Reports

(Maramech Restoration; Maple Syrup; Bridal Expo)

Environmental Education Coordinator April Morris presented the results of the Maple Syrup program. The Forest Foundation provided a \$300.00 pilot program grant for supply purchases. 18 families attended, with the breakfast sponsored by Silver Dollars restaurant.

Environmental Education Coordinator Dombrowski presented information on recent social media successes. Facebook 'likes' has grown from 400 individuals to 648. Efforts continue to reach out to Facebook parent groups in Kendall County, which is helping generate public program registrations. E-newsletter subscriptions continue to grow, with over 1,200 current subscribers.

Director Guritz reported that the Maramech restoration project was a great success. The District was featured on ComEd's website feed. All brush materials cut and treated by contractors was gathered and burned by approximately 30 volunteers over two work days. The entire slope area west of the platform has been cleared of dense brush materials.

Events Coordinator Villarreal reported on the 2016 Bridal Expo. The expo resulted in three bookings, with similar participation from venue shoppers and vendors (25 brides-to-be and 18 vendors attending) to the 2015 expo. The 2016 Expo generated just over \$1,200 in revenue, with expenses at \$150.00. The expo was advertised in the local papers.

X. Citizens to be Heard

Liz Klockars of Oswego read her letter of resignation as a volunteer for Ellis House and Equestrian Center. Liz Klockars expressed concerns about the professionalism of staff, staff shortages, and horse condition and care. A transcript of the letter was submitted to the Board of Commissioners.

Director Guritz thanked Liz for her service.

GeorgeAnne Jarecki, a long-time Ellis volunteer presented concerns about the amount of time Tina Villarreal is able to extend to support rental functions, and expressed concerns about the load of work that she and others will need to take on with the limited amount of time and support extended to these events.

Director Guritz thanked GeorgeAnne for her years of service, and stated that the District will provide the support needed for the rental events.

XI. General Discussions and Updates

Director Guritz reported that an offer for employment has been extended to a candidate that will support both environmental education and Ellis House grounds and events. This will be a year-round intermittent part time position, and will fill the role of one of the two seasonal positions at Ellis, with hours extended falling within budget restrictions.

Director Guritz reported that his interview with Anne Vickery will take place this Friday.

Sunrise North is working to confirm a move-in date, likely May 1. Ozinga has offered to donate the new concrete walkway.

XII. Executive Session

None.

XIII. Adjournment

Commissioner Prochaska made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Purcell. Aye, all. Meeting adjourned at 7:28 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

David Guritz
Director, Kendall County Forest Preserve District

Date: April 6, 2016

To: Kendall County Forest Preserve Board
Programming and Events Committee Meeting
6pm

"Hello. My name is Rebecca Roulo, and I live on Glenford Drive in Plainfield, Illinois. I am a registered voter, homeowner, and taxpayer in Kendall County.

"I have been a volunteer at Ellis House and Equestrian center since June of 2012. Many of you here will recognize me as one of the volunteers that has always spoken in favor of keeping Ellis open every time we have been faced with budget cuts. Why? Because I believed in the program that Ellis had to offer the community. I believed in the horses, the program itself, and the staff. I was proud to say I volunteered for a great facility that was available to the community.

"Because I believed in the program, I have logged in over 100 to 200 hours a year for birthday parties, camps, events, weddings, and the like. I've had the opportunity to work with great staff, and some not so great staff. I've assisted in and devoted a ton of time 'behind the scenes' in the marketing of Ellis as well...Google and Yelp? Yes, I've created those pages for Ellis. The facebook page? Yep, I've been one of the heaviest contributors for years. Marketing meetings? Check. Concessions at Friday Fun Nights. Yep. Bake sales...you've got it!!! Helping to update brochures and general communications? Definitely. I don't mention these contributions lightly or just to toot my own horn. I'm mentioning it because it is my personal time that I have devoted for what was, at one point in time, a professionally run equestrian and event center. As a taxpayer, I appreciated the limited budget the forest preserve operated on and was happy to donate my time to assist in all aspects at Ellis. I mention it because I have seen what has worked and what has not worked at Ellis.

"Since I began, Ellis has gone through 2 directors, 6 barn managers, and 8 barn support staff. Obviously, as is indicated by the high turnover, what is currently happening at Ellis Equestrian Center is not working. We've tried, and we have failed on the equestrian front. And, quite honestly, Ellis has become a two-bit operation for which I no longer wish to donate my volunteer time or tax payer dollars.

"Board, please consider what I am saying to you here tonight carefully. Ellis Equestrian Center is no longer a professionally run equestrian facility. You cannot expect to run a professional equestrian center utilizing part time barn hands, interns, and the occasional volunteer. The position of Equestrian Program Manager requires a seasoned professional that can organize and retain volunteers to communicate, teach, train, and safely introduce and educate the public about horses. Kellen is an excellent instructor. Michelle is at Ellis at the drop of a hat. Unfortunately, they have jobs outside of Ellis. They are great support staff, but their time on site is limited. Not since Deb or Becca left have I felt that I have gained any type of equestrian knowledge from the staff, or that volunteer time is appreciated, as is what Ellis has to offer. As a volunteer, we have become 'free labor.'

The horses at Ellis are suffering. In my opinion, they are in poor overall condition, and some are repetitively becoming lame due to too much use. So, we look for another horse. Unfortunately, the most recent addition to the herd, Shadow, should never have been brought on site. A barrel racing horse that has been trained to make quick starts, quick stops, quick turns, and run really fast in between is NOT what you want for a safe lesson horse. It is an accident waiting to happen. A professional horse-person with the safety of a beginner rider in mind would know that. Poor Polly. Ever the "poster child" for Ellis, her use in the program has become limited because 'She nips'. This never used to be a problem. And, it isn't when being handled by staff that knows what to look for, or volunteers that have been trained correctly.

Ellis House has been run by Tina with the assistance of Elaine since I began volunteering. Through their professionalism and communication, I have heard nothing but great things about the events they have been in

charge of. 5K's, Bridal Expos, Murder Mystery Dinners. All have had raving reviews. Oh, and let's not forget the weddings. Since Tina began, Ellis has gone from hosting just a couple weddings a year to already 16 or 17 this year, with 6 already contracted for next year. Do you think the house, the forest preserve, or the grounds at Ellis House did this? No, because, quite honestly, the grounds are in nowhere near the condition they once were. It has been through Tina's direction, initiatives, and customer service that the increase in the number of weddings at Ellis has occurred.

A poorly run venue will not keep bringing in the weddings or other events – with nearly \$50 grand in revenue already under contract for 2016, I'm not quite sure how you decided that the Event Coordinator position should be reduced to 4-8 hours a week. Reducing house staff hours will not continue to bring in weddings. Customer service is going to suffer with her reduced hours, which ultimately will result in less bookings. How do you expect brides to communicate with Ellis staff when they constantly have to leave a message? How do you expect communication with staff or customers to continue if you only have house staff available four hours a week? Do you think a part time intern is going to do all that Tina does? I see that the next item on the agenda for tonight is Ellis House Wedding and Rental Event Online Marketing Options. What or who are we going to refer them to? Who is going to answer the phone when someone calls? The answering machine?

"I understand that Sunrise Therapeutic North is coming to Ellis. If all parties, Ellis and Sunrise, have been honest with each other regarding their programming and the quality and capabilities of the horses, this could be a great thing for Ellis. However, I have my reservations. I'm concerned that the FP board is looking at this as an 'answer to our prayers' with what to do with Ellis. However, without professional equestrian staff on duty at Ellis, I worry that the board, the taxpayers, or Sunrise will be disappointed.

"So, board, as a taxpayer, I am here tonight to urge you to make the right decisions to either 1. Have a professional staff to facilitate the programming at Ellis, or 2. Don't do it at all. Poll the equestrian community in the area, if we haven't already burned those bridges, to see what it takes to be a respected program. We've made these recommendations before, but they have gone in one ear and out the other. For the house rentals, be sure you have staff available to facilitate the customer service that is required. I understand that budgets play a part in all of this. But, a poorly run facility, with poor customer service, and un-professional staff that does not have the best interests of the facility or the public at heart is a waste of my time and my taxpayer money. I keep hoping things will change for the better, but to date they haven't.

"It is hard to say goodbye to what was once a great, professional facility with great communication and programming: a facility that I fought to keep open. It has been and is hard to say goodbye to so many great staff members that have come and gone. It is hard to say goodbye to the horses that I've come to know and love here at Ellis. But, I've come to realize that I need to devote my time to an organization that is appreciative of what it has to offer, from the board down to the volunteers. Ellis is no longer any of that. Based upon past experience, I don't see things changing for the positive, and they only continue to get worse.

"As a result, it is with deep regret that as of tonight, I am resigning my position as a volunteer with Ellis House and Equestrian Center.

"Goodnight."

Rebecca Roulo
Plainfield, IL

Date: April 6, 2016
To: Kendall County Forest Preserve Board
Programming and Events Committee Meeting

Good evening,

My name is Liz Klockars of Oswego. The last time I came before the Kendall County Forest Preserve Board, I came to you as a DuPage County resident and long-time Ellis volunteer.

Fast forward to today and I am now a registered voter, homeowner, and taxpayer in Kendall County. I have been a volunteer at Ellis House and Equestrian Center (EHEC) since its inception back in May of 2009. Over the past 7 years, I have spent hundreds of hours of my free time at Ellis, participating in the many great events and activities that have occurred there.

During my tenure at this County facility, I have witnessed continuous turnover in staff, volunteers, and equine residents. I have observed both the joy and happiness of the many children and families who visit the facility, as well as the less-than-desirable and questionable actions of various staff members.

One of the most valuable lessons I have ever learned came from a former, respected boss: Companies and organizations do not fail because of their people; they fail because of their leadership. As a horseperson myself and owner of one of Ellis's original lesson horses, I have continually witnessed Ellis make poor decisions about the acquisition and care of its main attraction- the horses that call it home. Last month, I volunteered at a children's birthday party at Ellis. What I witnessed and observed was immensely discouraging and frustrating; not only as a seasoned volunteer, but as a taxpaying citizen of this County. The remaining horses are in poor condition and the program lacks experience, knowledge, leadership, and safety. The newest horse "Shadow" has no business being part of a beginner lesson program or at an educational facility like Ellis. I question the reason she was purchased and why she still remains there. I also question how and why a facility of Ellis's stature is supposed to run on minimal, inexperienced, part-time staff and why those who are true professionals have had their hours reduced to a meager four per week. You simply cannot run a wedding venue and equestrian program on such limited staff. It has and will continue to suffer, regardless of the revenue it is projected to pull in.

Let's face it; Kendall County is a tight knit community full of equestrian enthusiasts. People talk and reputation is everything. I can say with confidence that Ellis's current reputation is less than stellar and frustrations with the state of the program are widespread.

So I come to you today, as a taxpaying citizen and ask you to please 'pull the band aid off' once and for all. If you cannot support the program the Board chose to start and you are not willing to provide adequate funding and staffing, then I urge you to put political agendas aside and do what is in the best interest of the general public, the horses, and the taxpayers of this County.

I simply cannot stand by the continuum of poor decisions made in regards to this facility. The tax payers in this County, including myself, feel that the County Board has failed miserably in this endeavor. By neglecting what every good business man knows: "you have to spend money to make money" and continually choosing an even less qualified candidate to pilot the boat, reducing staff and pay, holes have started to appear and remain unplugged. Sadly, we are now left with left this stunning and 2 potential lucrative asset ready to sink.

Kendall County citizens are being short-changed by Board mismanagement as are the children who benefit from lessons, the brides and grooms who enjoy the draw of a working stable, and the missed opportunity to provide taxpayers a noteworthy outlet of education and recreation. Effective today, I will no longer offer my time as a volunteer to Ellis House and Equestrian Center.

Thank you.