Openlands Lakeshore Preserve Podcast

Access to Nature

NARRATOR: As you go south on the trail along the bluff, with expansive views of Lake Michigan on your left, you cross two bridges. The first, at Van Horne Ravine, has quotes by Aldo Leopold. The second spans Schenck Ravine and is called the “Henry T. Chandler, Jr. Bridge”.

Adelmann: “When we took over the Lakeshore Preserve, we knew we had a very special opportunity here with this unique landscape to make it accessible and enjoyable for people of all backgrounds, ages, and abilities. Harry Chandler was committed to both conservation as well as accessibility and he was a great guide for us.”

NARRATOR: That’s Jerry Adelmann, President of Openlands.

Since its founding over 50 years ago, Openlands has acted on the principle that access to nature is vital to everyone. Harry Chandler served on the Board of Openlands and consulted in the design of the Lakeshore Preserve. Harry was a quadriplegic who used a wheelchair after a surfing accident in college. He came from a family with strong environmental values. To honor his memory and his work, the bridge over Schenck Ravine is named after Harry.

Chandler: “When we have open lands close to where a lot of people live, the opportunity is better for someone who is disabled.”

NARRATOR: Harry’s father, Henry Chandler, Sr. served on the Board of the Illinois Nature Conservancy and was President of the Lake Michigan Federation, the forerunner of the Alliance for the Great Lakes. He’s understandably proud of his son’s accomplishments.

Chandler: “I’m very proud of him. We had a lot of fun together, and he had a good spirit, and he had some very good friends, and he made his mark. I mean, he did a great deal more than lots of other people who are not disabled.”
Bristo: “The one part of becoming a wheelchair user that was hard for me was the things out in nature that I couldn’t do.”

NARRATOR: Marca Bristo is co-founder and President of Access Living, an organization in Chicago that helps people with disabilities take charge of their lives and live independently. Before joining Openlands, Harry Chandler worked with Access Living.

Bristo: “Harry was my very dear friend. I love him and I miss him so much. When they recruited Harry, his quid pro quo was, ‘I’ll come join you but you know my primary focus is going to be to look at all the stuff you’re doing and make sure that it’s usable by people like me.’”

NARRATOR: Of course there are challenges to making all aspects of an outdoor landscape accessible, but Openlands was committed to incorporating accessibility into the design of the Preserve from the beginning. Nearly all of the multi-use trails at Lakeshore Preserve are paved and wide enough for wheelchair users to enjoy the artworks in the ravine and the view from the bluff.

And luckily, nature also helped out—Bartlett Ravine has a natural slope that allows its trail to comply with the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Bristo: “These are so liberating. They open up so many new opportunities for just the experience and fun of it, but also the health benefits that come from being able to participate in these things.”

NARRATOR: Most of us enjoy getting outside because it’s relaxing and refreshing. After all, modern life is often crowded, noisy, and stressful.

But does nature offer more than just a peaceful escape? In fact, scientific research shows a definite connection between exposure to nature and human health throughout our lifetimes, beginning in childhood.

Suk: “When it comes to the development of children we know that being outside and being exposed to nature makes them smarter; it increases concentration, self discipline, language and collaborative skills, and awareness, reasoning, and observational skills.”
NARRATOR: Dr. Michael Suk, an orthopedic surgeon, is one of the nation’s top experts on the correlation between health and outdoor recreation. He spoke at Openlands’ 50th Anniversary Luncheon.

Suk: “We also know that it makes kids stronger. We know that advanced motor fitness, coordination, balance, and agility all come with the simple ability to go outside and play. And finally I think it makes them better. It makes them better in that it reduces or eliminates bullying, it enhances positivity, independence, and autonomy. We know that the studies are definitely out there that show this.”

NARRATOR: In addition, recent scientific studies have found that veterans showed improvement in several areas of psychological well being following camping and hiking; contact with nature restores attention, and promotes recovery from mental fatigue and the restoration of mental focus; people who jog outside feel more restored, and less anxious, angry, and depressed than those who do the same workout at the gym.

And several studies in Chicago found that the presence of trees outside apartment buildings correlated with many benefits, including less crime and violence, and better social relationships.

This is not surprising when you consider that for most of our existence, humans lived as part of nature, not separate from it.

So while you’re listening to the birds and waves, following the turning of the seasons, and enjoying the artworks, the Sun Central overlook with its interactive sundial, and other features of the Lakeshore Preserve, you can take comfort in knowing that being outside in nature is one activity that’s both pleasurable and good for your health at the same time.

Jerry Adelmann.

Adelmann: “Increasingly we realize that access to nature enriches our lives in so many ways. There are huge health benefits; there are psychological and educational benefits. Just the simple pleasure of being out in nature has such positive impact. Openlands has always been committed to creating as many opportunities as possible to allow people of all ages and backgrounds that wonderful connection to nature that we see as an essential element of the quality of life.”

Openlands thanks The Boeing Company for its generous support of the podcasts.
The Openlands Lakeshore Preserve audio tour was written and produced by Ed Herrmann. Editorial supervision by Lisa Roberts and Glenda Daniel. Thanks to all artists, scientists, and others who shared their expertise through interviews: Jerry Adelmann, Sharon Bladholm, Marca Bristo, Dale Bryson, Henry Chandler, Sr., Aimee Collins, Jerry Dennis, Kate Friedman, Kurt Hettiger, Ken Klick, Susanne Masi, Bob Megquier, Olivia Petrides, Lisa Roberts, Jonathan Rosen, Jim Steffen, Dr. Michael Suk, Ginny Sykes, Vivian Visser, and Jerry Wilhelm. Narration by Shawna Tucker and Ed Herrmann. Original music and sound design by Ed Herrmann. Special thanks to Doug Carroll for his recordings of barking and panting dogs and laughing monkeys, and to Tom Nunn for his skatch box sounds.