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Lake County forest preserve trails have some tales to tell



Sophie Twichell, executive director of the Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods, shows off a panel on a new walking and reading trail Friday at Ryerson Woods Forest Preserve near Riverwoods. The panels are taken from the children's book "Miss Maple's Seeds."

Steve Lundy | Staff Photographer



Mick Zawislak

A new educational program debuted Friday at the Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods near Riverwoods.

Presented in Spanish and English, Trail Tales/Caminando con Cuentos is a walking and reading trail featuring seven illustrated panels and book excerpts.

The project, which has been a year in the making, involved a

collaboration between the Lake County Forest Preserve District, the Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods and the Waukegan Public Library.

Officials were on hand to mark the occasion and walk the trail. A similar ceremony is planned for Tuesday to formally open a second Trail Tales at the Greenbelt Forest Preserve near North Chicago.

The first offering features the eccentric Miss Maple, a character from "Miss Maple's Seeds," a new book by Eliza Wheeler. Miss Maple's generous and loving attitude toward nature is designed to instill in young children a love of books and an interest in nature.

"This is a book that's fairly new and probably not as well known to people," said Nan Buckardt, director of environmental education and public affairs for the forest district. "It's beautiful and has real good science to it."

The panels are 24 inches by 42 inches and include a little box that contains an activity called "trail time" that kids can pursue along the trail loop, she said.

"The book is about seeds, so all the trail time activities are related to seeds," she said. Youngsters, for example, may be instructed to find a partially eaten seed.

The looped trail at Ryerson is about a half mile, and the one at Greenbelt is about a mile and a half.

At the end of each trail is a Little Free Library, a small structure filled with books from which visitors are encouraged to "take a book, return a book."

The Vernon Area Public Library District is collecting the books for the Little Free Library at Ryerson Woods and will be in charge of regularly restocking it.

The initial offerings will be children's books with a nature theme, Buckardt said.

"For us, it's a great combination. It deals with nature, it's aimed at families with small children, it gets them outside" and has a literary element Buckardt said.

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