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NEW GREEN BAY TRAIL SURVEY YIELDS SURPRISING INSIGHTS

Results of a the first-ever survey conducted by the Friends of the Green Bay Trail have been evaluated and show strong support for work that has been completed to date to restore the Trail's native ecology, by removing invasive buckthorn and re-introducing native flowers, bushes, and trees that support diversity of insect and bird species. According to Dev Mukherjee, Glencoe resident who designed, compiled, and analyzed survey results, "The Green Bay Trail is a hidden gem" adding that "the survey gave surprising insights into what users love and want from the Trail."

The surprise was data that showed the numbers of people who use the Trail weekly, even daily, for multiple purposes like walking, running, cycling, dog walking, and meditation, Mukherjee said. More than 60 percent of survey respondents use the Trail weekly; 40 percent said they visit the Trail two-to-three times a week, he said, adding, "Half of the survey respondents use the trail for walking or biking, while 25 percent use the Trail to walk their dogs and another 25 percent use the Trail to meditate."

Mukherjee, former CEO of Evites and now consultant to private equity firms, said the survey was sent at the request of the Friends to an email list of over 400 residents of the North Shore, primarily Glencoe residents. Respondents gave written answers detailing their use and experiences of the Trail, along with recommendations for enhancements. Against an industry "best practice" of a three-to-five-percent response rate, the Friends' Trail survey yielded more than a 25 percent response rate (115 surveys completed). "At an incredibly busy time of year [the survey was sent mid-December 2017], the response rate was off the charts," Mukherjee said, adding, "the comments and richness of content were amazing. People took the time to provide the feedback." He added, "This showed that respondents were highly engaged and perceived the trail as an asset to the community."

One respondent commented, “Keep at it. The trail through Glencoe is the most beautiful part of the trail!” Another wrote, “Continue your great efforts and inspire other groups to follow your example on other parts of the trail in other communities.” Comments ranged from appreciation of the wildflowers and butterfly hatchery to recommendations to add signs identifying flora, maps to identify locations, trash bins, and paving. Other recommendations centered around business, civic, and volunteer collaborations to support, maintain, and expand the trail restoration.

The goal of the survey, according to JoAnn Kimzey, a trustee of the Friends of the Green Bay Trail, was to determine how people use the trail and, among users, to elicit detailed comments about their likes, concerns, and recommendations. She noted that the Green Bay Trail connects the communities of Wilmette, Winnetka, Glencoe, and Highland Park and provides a gateway to Glencoe’s Writer’s Theatre as well as to its Chicago Botanic Gardens, and nearby Ravinia Festival for walkers and cyclists. “In addition to restoring the trail to support healthy native plant, insect, and bird diversity, it’s an asset to users, the neighboring communities and businesses, and to Glencoe in particular,” she said.

Kimzey said the first stage of trail restoration from Glencoe’s Scott Avenue to Harbor Street, nearly completed, is undergoing maintenance and stewardship. The next phase throughout 2018—South Avenue to Glencoe’s community garden just north of Harbor (called SOSA: South of South Avenue)—benefits from a collaboration by the Friends of the Green Bay Trail with the Village of Glencoe, the Glencoe Park District, and in-kind consultation and review by the Chicago Botanic Gardens. The Friends has committed \$100,000 to restore this next section of the Green Bay Trail to remove invasive buckthorn that prevents native plants from growing and thriving and whose berries are toxic to children and dogs. Native trees, shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers will be planted, implementing a formal plan designed by a licensed landscape architect to support both a natural habitat and good drainage.

According to a survey of Glencoe residents conducted in 2014 by the Glencoe Park District, residents overwhelmingly indicated their desire for walking, biking, and nature trails: 85 percent desired walking and biking trails and 71 percent wanted nature trails. *

- Source: Leisure Vision/ETC Institute for the Glencoe Park District