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Staff photo by Steve Bittinger

Don Kirchenberg is ever-vigilant about the condition of the Illinois Prairie Path and Great Western Trail, evidenced here by his disposing of litter along the Trail between President Street and Schmale Road.

Trails' health key to Kirchenberg

By David Heitz ■ heitz@libertysuburban.com

Spring is not just a time for cleaning up that winter junk laying around inside the house.

While keeping the indoors clean is important, for many local environmental activists like Don Kirchenberg of Glendale Heights, the outdoors are just as crucial to preserve.

The work of Kirchenberg and other volunteers has been instrumental in keeping the Great Western Trail and Illinois Prairie Path clean of debris.

Last Saturday, dozens of volunteers participated in the annual Trail Cleanup Day along the Great Western Trail, where trail users and residents in DuPage and Kane counties got out their garbage bags and gloves and picked up garbage on the trail.

Once an old freight railroad line, the path was converted into a 11.5-mile, multi-use recreational trail that runs from Villa Park to West Chicago.

The annual event, held the last Saturday of April in recognition of Arbor Day, is organized by Kirchenberg, who said it is important that residents not only

assist in cleanup, but in preventing illegal dumping on both the Trail and the Illinois Prairie Path.

"Every year, I am shocked and surprised to see how some people will go out of their way to dump garbage in the trails," he said. "And not just household garbage. We find things like car parts, motors, industrial waste, and lots of beer cans and bottles."

This year, much of the cleanup was focused on one area, between Schmale Road and President Street, which Kirchenberg said is heavily used by partying teens and overnight campers.

"It is important to inform residents that if they see that kind of activity on the trails to notify police immediately, and not just look away," he said. "Not only are these activities illegal, but it damages the natural settings of the trails."

Position:

Chairman of the Friends of the Great Western Trail, member of Illinois Prairie Path nonprofit corporation

Family: Single

Residence:

Lived in Glendale Heights for 20 years

Occupation:

Consultant in the logistics industry

Hobbies:

Bicycling, recreational use of trails, environmental preservation and activist

Other interests:

Organizes annual spring cleanup on Great Western Trail

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