



# There is no place like home

by Scott R. Lebin

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The worst of the winter is over. Slowly, our winter hibernation will end as spring and summer loom before us. It is a time of year when we see some neighbors who we haven't seen in months. How fortunate we are to have homes and neighborhoods filled with patios, porches, parks and places to promenade. As our suburban communities grew and housing took up more space, our city planners had to set aside land for parks, biking trails and open spaces.

We can be thankful for our park district's efforts to provide swimming pools, picnic sites, playground facilities and bike trails for our summer activities. Even though we have all these physical enhancements to our way of life, the key component is that they provide the opportunity of sharing our lives with our family, neighbors and friends in our own community.

Spending time with family and friends in play, exercise and laughter is the essence of community spirit where citizens share time together. It takes a commitment to make sure we take advantage of these important opportunities; it's too easy to move outside with our cell phones, iPads and videos while merely creating the same solitary indoor space we occupied in the winter. It is much easier to keep following the same habits and rituals, thus missing the unique opportunities that summer and warm weather provide.

The very nature of having outdoor space caused the great migration from city life to suburban life some 60 years ago. We take much of what we have for granted. After all, we live near Chicago where there are approximately 1,974.61 acres of large and small parks within the city limits—a city where our ancestors planned for museums, band shells and outdoor places to gather. We have the opportunity in the summer, whether locally or traveling 39 miles into Chicago, to have quality time with our family and friends in a magnificent outdoor playground.

In these outdoor spaces there are programs for citizens of all ages. Many of these programs create jobs for students and adults throughout the Fox Valley. We can join neighbors in play whether on a local baseball, swimming or tennis team. We can also decide to gather with our family and neighbors to ride the many bike trails available along the Fox River.

In some cases, we will join other parents as spectators watching our children who are participants in various park district programs. We can also take advantage of the many walking and running paths. This use of our available open space is exceptionally valuable to a healthy way of life.

We need to make a purposeful effort to create good habits. It's positive, healthy and beneficial to our family and community to get engaged in many physical and social activities. As spring arrives, it's a good time to evaluate the opportunities close to home and create a customized summer plan.

If you don't plan your summer activities, there's a chance that one season will roll into another and the real opportunities of summer in the Fox Valley and the Chicago area will be over as fall and winter return. If you set aside dates in your calendar now, there will be a greater chance that you will get to experience the many benefits of living in this community.