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FEATURE STORY

Get Inspired!

Celebrate Spring
with Art in Wilder Park



By Janet Hosey | Photos by Kimberly Felten Photography

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In the Midwest, spring fever tends to hit around the beginning of May, give or take a week or two.

Getting outside becomes a top priority after months holed up against icy wind. Combine that urge with a favorite warm weather attraction – outdoor festivals – and you'll have no shortage of people eager to dive in.



The Elmhurst Art Museum, a longtime beacon of creativity and enrichment in Elmhurst, offers the ideal outlet for your first outdoor jaunt of the season.

Art in Wilder Park, a 27-year tradition in Elmhurst, will fill Wilder Park May 4-5 with more than 125 artisans selling one-of-a-kind treasures, food and a kids' court.

The event, produced in partnership with the Elmhurst Park District and RGL Marketing for the Arts, has had different organizers throughout its history, but for the last few years the Elmhurst Art Museum has taken the lead on hosting. The event is coordinated on the museum staff by Sam Sugrue, the museum's manager of events and community outreach.

"It's the first event of the spring, so you'll see a lot of people come out," said John McKinnon, the museum's executive director. "For many people

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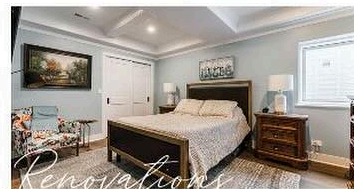
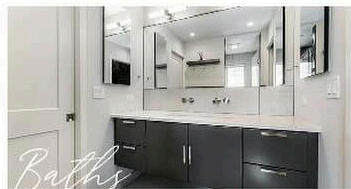


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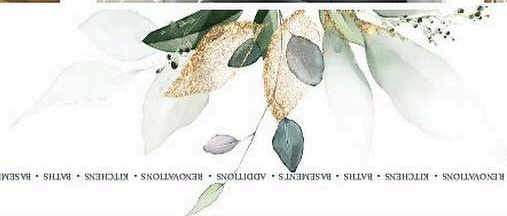


Spring: A Time for Renewal

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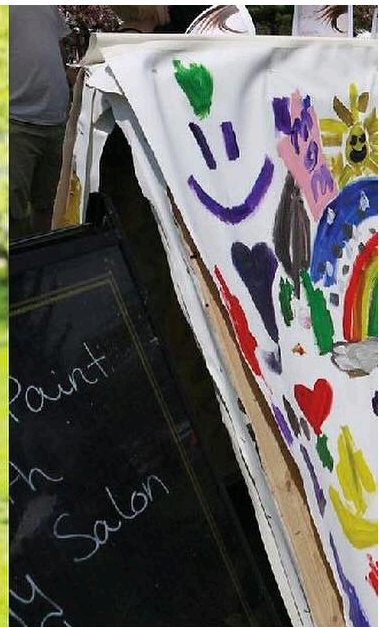
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FEATURE STORY



HUGTASTIC
by [unreadable]

it's been this annual tradition of going outside and seeing the trees starting to bud. As a Midwesterner, it's the kind of thing you live for."

It's also the kind of thing parents of young kids live for. This year's event features a new public art installation that will be of particular interest to kiddos, "Monsters in Wilder Park" by artist and illustrator Dave Pryor.

The six large-scale cutout sculptures were inspired by select monster drawings submitted by over 300 local kids.

"Conrad Fischer Elementary School children submitted more than 200 of the 300 drawings," McKinnon said. "The kids are eagerly waiting to see if they were among the six chosen to make into public art pieces."

Last year, the event drew over 11,500 visitors, browsing items like one-of-a-kind jewelry, paintings, sculptures, ceramics, prints and fiber arts.

The timing of the event couldn't be better, as McKinnon points out, landing on the weekend before Mother's Day.

"That often plays out with families finding a gift for mom, or having mom point out something she might want," he said.

HOW IT STARTED

The Elmhurst Art Museum was first established in 1981 by a group of teachers, artists and community organizers who believed art could inspire anyone and everyone to view the world through a different lens.

Their goal to foster community and make art accessible to everyone has built nothing

but support through the years, expanding the museum's presence and community connections.

It started with exhibits by local artists, which is still a focus. But the museum has also added higher profile artists who carry national and international recognition.

As it grew with community support, the museum also grew in physical size.

In the early 1990s, the Elmhurst Fine Arts and Civic Center Foundation purchased McCormick House, a unique home designed by German architect and designer Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (who was commonly referred to as Mies) and built at 299 Prospect Ave. in Elmhurst in 1952 for Robert Hall McCormick III. Mies has been referred to as one of the most influential architects of the 20th century and a leader in modernism.

One of only three homes Mies built in the United States, the house was moved from its original location to the museum campus in 1994. It was last owned by former Elmhurst Mayor Ray Fick and his wife, Mary Ann.

Soon after, the museum commissioned a new facility designed to complement and incorporate McCormick House as well as include space for education, exhibitions and administration. The current museum building opened in 1997, the same year the Elmhurst Art Museum was granted nonprofit status.

HOW IT'S GOING

The museum has made good on its vision to become a leader in the Chicago area for art education, contemporary art and mid-century modern architecture.



The museum cycles through three exhibition seasons, alternating to highlight an art installation, an architectural exhibit or an interactive, family-friendly exhibit.

Along with the Monsters exhibit this spring, a scavenger hunt and hands-on activities provided by the museum will help promote an upcoming summer exhibition, "Designing Donkey Hodie: From Make-Believe to Someplace Else."

The exhibit, which will open a few weeks after Art in Wilder Park, will delve into the evolution of the character Donkey Hodie, first introduced on "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" in the 1960s and is now the star of the PBS KIDS puppet show "Donkey Hodie," produced by Fred Rogers Productions and Spiffy Pictures.

"It's a really cool piece that has legacy elements of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," McKinnon said. We're looking forward to hosting that and having a number of family programs through the summer."

The exhibit, "Designing Donkey Hodie - From Make-Believe to Someplace Else," will open May 18 and run through Aug. 11.

Every season is busy on the museum campus, with art classes, camps and family art days on the calendar, along with the exhibits. The Elmhurst Artists' Guild has a gallery at the museum that features four member shows per year as well as invitational shows for significant Chicago area artists.

In May, the museum will host a reception for student artists from 11 elementary and middle schools in Elmhurst Community Unit District 205.

Visitors can also participate in making art, as the museum usually has an interactive community art project on display.

"Sometimes it's as small as an activity book that families can pick up to do a scavenger hunt in the galleries. Sometimes an artist will be commissioned to make something bigger," McKinnon said. "It's a goal to have something that will break a barrier so you can feel like you're part of the project."

ART IN WILDER PARK

The 27th Annual Art in Wilder Park will be held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, May 4, and Sunday, May 5, rain or shine, at 175 S. Prospect Ave. in Elmhurst. Admission is free.

As you're marking your calendar, keep in mind that volunteers are vital to the success of large-scale events like Art in Wilder Park. Anyone interested



in participating as a volunteer can learn more about it on the Elmhurst Art Museum website, elmhurstartmuseum.org.

"We will take any volunteers we can get," McKinnon said. "It takes a lot of people to help us run the event, and we're grateful for their help."

McKinnon also expressed gratitude for the event sponsors, local businesses and nonprofit organizations that participate, making Art in Wilder Park a truly community-supported event.

"Our total collaboration includes more than 50 businesses, so there's a lot of local support from the business community," McKinnon said. "It takes all of that to keep it going, and we're grateful to have their support and collaboration."