

Forest Preserve District of Will County
Isle a la Cache Brigade
Outstanding Volunteer of the Year Award
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One of the missions of the Forest Preserve District of Will County is cultural and historical preservation, interpretation and education. In 1984, the District opened Isle a la Cache Museum in Romeoville, devoted to the fur-trade era of the mid-18th century. At that time, a group of local re-enactors formed to support the museum and called itself the Isle a la Cache Brigade. To promote the new museum, the District sponsored the Island Rendezvous, a two-day festival that featured voyageur, Native American and colonial re-enactors, demonstrations of skills and pastimes practiced in the Illinois wilderness of the day, and live period music. Participating in this first Rendezvous was the Isle a la Cache Brigade.

This past June, the Forest Preserve hosted the 31st Island Rendezvous, and the Brigade continues to be an important part of the program. This active group of 15 re-enactors, under the guidance of Captain John Nerren, took on more responsibility than ever before in assisting the District in preparing and running the festival.

The Brigade continually recruits new re-enactors and trains them in the life ways and character development of 18th-century voyageurs. They serve as ambassadors for the District and the museum by attending other re-enactment events where they promote the Island Rendezvous. They also have created the Living History Encampment program that happens the month prior to the Island Rendezvous to encourage public attendance. During the Island Rendezvous, the Brigade works closely with staff assisting as a liaison to other re-enactors. They serve as judges and master of ceremonies for re-enactor contests. They are even a part of the Rendezvous entertainment, recruiting re-enactors for a fashion show and weapons demonstration.

The Isle a la Cache Brigade has become an integral part of the Island Rendezvous, extending the ability of the District to run a multi-faceted event that is a crowd pleaser and is well respected and appreciated by the re-enactment community. This year, the Brigade helped to promote the Island Rendezvous by marching as a unit in a local parade, greeting the public and handing out fliers.

Throughout the year, the Brigade also staffs and schedules monthly Living History Demonstrations, which are held at the museum. These free public programs feature demonstrations of skills required of voyageurs, such as food preparation, fire starting and footwear and clothing making.

Brigade members also assist at other Forest Preserve programs, including Home School Days, Wabdan Wednesdays and Native American Scout Day. This year, they eagerly took on the responsibility of offering an internship to a student studying Native American history to develop a character that will add a Native perspective to the Brigade.

At the urging of Captain Nerren, brigade members attend character development classes to keep their characters fresh and engaging.

For a partnership that has spanned decades and the invaluable assistance they provide to historical interpretation, the Isle a la Cache Brigade is nominated by the Forest Preserve District of Will County for the IAPD's Outstanding Citizen Volunteer of the Year Award.