

Signs now are planted along trail

Eden Prairie plans dedication ceremony at Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area

By Stuart Sudak

Vicki Pellar Price's three-year journey down the path of the **Elizabeth Fries Ellet Interpretive Trail** forked in many directions.

From historian and naturalist to planner and fundraiser, Pellar Price wore many hats as she crisscrossed Eden Prairie attempting, as chair of the non-profit group Writers Rising Up, to drum up support for the trail and money to make signs there a reality. The trail's concept was simple: it would serve as an outdoor science and history lab of sorts, where children and adults could learn about nature and the area's past.

The fruits of Pellar Price and her group's labor can now be seen in the form of six signs, with a seventh on the way, recently installed by the city along the nearly mile-long trail in the 125-acre Richard T. Conservation Area, on the southwestern edge of Eden Prairie off Highway 212. The city plans a dedication ceremony for the new signs at 6 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 2.

In December 2003, the City Council gave Price and Writers Rising Up the green light to start raising money to create the trail. The mission of Writers Rising Up is to promote writers who portray place, natural habitat and wetlands in their work.

"You could spend a lot of time looking at them," said Pellar Price, whose group raised about \$35,000 from donations for the project, of the signs. "There are lots of things to read and see."

Indeed, the large, bright signs — Pellar Price looks at them as art, how she said former Parks Director Bob Lambert described them — are chock full of information.

Signs are posted near the native habitat, such as prairie or bottomland forest, it highlights; two are also located at each entryway into the area (off Highway 212 and through Settler's Ridge).

In all, there are 95 species of insects, birds and animals and 37 plant varieties represented on the signs. Also included on the signs are aerial shots, panoramas, close-ups and vista shots.

Each also offers historical information on Elizabeth Fries Ellet, the author and *New York*

Signs

Continued from front

Times correspondent credited with naming Eden Prairie, and other contributors to the area's historical legacy.

"Those signs were piecemeal on my basement floor for 1½ years," she said. "[They were] swatches of different images that we moved around trying to figure out how many we could get on [the signs]. To see it come through to this point, it's wonderful. But the most wonderful part of this is that people will get use out of this. That was the purpose."

She is especially optimistic children can learn much from the trail's setting.

"The hope is that they will learn something about nature that I think kids are not learning in a park with a plastic swing set," she said. "We also hope we can add to the Web site a lot more information, a lot of interactive games that will be fun for kids."

Dedication ceremony

The city plans a dedication of the new signs lining the Elizabeth Fries Ellet Interpretive Trail.

When: 6 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 2.

Where: Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area, off Highway 212 about a sixth of a mile west of Lions Tap Restaurant.

For more information on the trail and the signs, visit www.efeinterpretivetrail.org, or e-mail efeinterpretivetrail@comcast.net.

Writing a book

Though the signs are up, Pellar Price is far from finished with Ellet. She continues to research her life, hoping to eventually write a book on her.

"It's not like it's over for me," she said. "Just another part of it is starting."

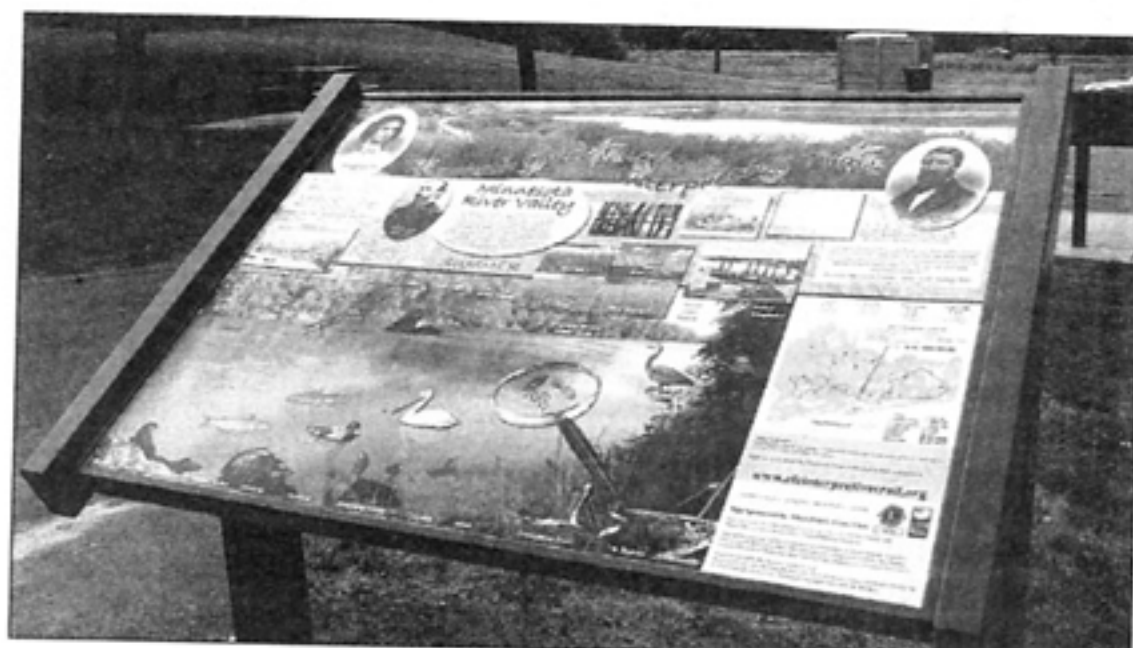


PHOTO BY STUART SUDAK

This Elizabeth Fries Ellet Interpretive Trail sign, highlighting the Minnesota River Valley, can be found at the entryway into the Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area from Highway 212. It and five other trail signs were recently installed, while a seventh is expected to go up soon.

As the story goes, Ellet, born in 1818 and died in 1877, was traveling along the Minnesota River in 1852 when she climbed a river bluff to see the prairie in bloom. Ellet gushed that the area reminded her of the Garden of Eden. Returning to St. Paul, she urged the area be called Eden Prairie.

But, through her research, Pel-

lar Price has learned much more, though much of Ellet's life still remains a mystery. She continues to dig through letters, writings, anything to unlock another door into Ellet's world.

"When I walk through the woods, because I'm researching, I constantly think about what kind of person she was," she said.