

## **RITA in Action!**

### **Brickyard Nature Park: Public Access to a Prairie in Montgomery County**

**By Hanna Garriott**  
**Mentor RITA Tech 7**

Montgomery County's Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is always on the lookout for exciting new community projects, and they have recently found the perfect opportunity. The city had owned a particular piece of land for about 20 years and initially planned to clear it for new businesses. Instead, they decided to create a walking trail for the community. Once funding was secured, the project has moved forward smoothly, leading to the completion and official opening of Brickyard Nature Park in November 2024.

Last spring, Montgomery County's SWCD and the State of Indiana Cooperative Invasive Management (SICIM) conducted an invasive species survey at a potential site. The staff discussed many opportunities this new nature park could offer, such as "weed wrangles," community hikes, and, most importantly, the planting of a prairie. The Nature Park features two vacant agricultural fields with walking paths surrounding them. The Montgomery SWCD aimed to utilize an increase in Clean Water Indiana (CWI) funding to support additional conservation projects in the park.

They presented their survey results to the parks board to gauge their interest in the project. The parks board had contemplated a similar initiative for the fields but lacked the necessary funding. Once the board approved the SWCD's proposal, the SWCD, along with RITA and NRCS staff, visited the prairie to determine an appropriate seed mix for the area that local farmer, Kenny Cain, could plant. After confirming that the project was feasible, the SWCD placed an order for the seed mixes, which comprises 12 different grasses and sedges, as well as 57 flowering plants (forbs).

The next step for the SWCD is to begin planting in the upcoming months. This project goes beyond just establishing a prairie; the SWCD plans to install educational signs along the trails to inform park visitors about prairie ecosystems and their benefits. Additionally, they hope to set up a chronology/monitoring station available for public use throughout the year. Currently, there are no public prairies in Montgomery County, and the entire staff is enthusiastic about bringing this vision to fruition.