

Insider
for March 26, 2008
Cedar Falls Edition
By Kim Burger

Remember welcoming thousands of cyclists as they rolled into Cedar Falls for an overnight stop during last summer's RAGBRAI event? Well, we're making plans to welcome another similar, albeit smaller, event in June. This year our guests will be *paddling* into town as the Iowa Department of Natural Resources brings its 6th annual Project AWARE event to town to overnight in June.

Project AWARE stands for Watershed Awareness River Expedition and consists of hundreds of volunteers who spend a day or the entire week cleaning the river. Each year a different route is selected and this year's effort will concentrate on the Winnebago, Shell Rock, and Cedar Rivers. The expedition will begin in Mason City and end in Cedar Falls, lasting seven days and covering nearly 100 miles. The whole project was originally inspired by one man's effort in 1997 to clean up the Mississippi River, "one piece of trash at a time" and has since become an Iowa DNR project, aimed at cleaning all the rivers in the state. The effort is open to all ages and is held in June to celebrate National River Month. Objectives of the project are this:

- Increase awareness about water quality issues that threaten the health of Iowa's water resources, and promote advocacy and action towards their improvement and protection.
- Involve Iowa's citizen volunteers in an action project that produces a tangible, quantitative result (numbers of citizens involved and quantity of trash removed, recycled, reused, or properly disposed of).
- Emphasize the importance of partnerships by involving anyone and everyone who wants to be involved, including local, county, state, and federal agencies, business, and human-interest groups.
- Show the state of Iowa that its citizens are serious, concerned, and willing to make a difference - one stretch of river, one piece of trash at a time.

In the five-year history of Project AWARE, the expedition has enlisted 863 participants who have cleaned up over 400 river miles and 4 different lakes, removing 1,000 cubic yards of trash, 85 percent of which was recycled. Volunteers have also restored native prairie, renovated trails and enhanced recreational areas.

While the work can be tough and dirty, the expedition is really one of a kind, offering the opportunity to work for the betterment of our state's waterways by day and additional comradery among participants and educational sessions each evening. Another unique feature of the event is the creation and display of a sculpture created from recycled trash found during the clean up. Ogden artist David Williamson oversees this aspect of the

project each year and is currently seeking an appropriate indoor facility to display this year's piece.

Participants will camp at Black Hawk Park on Friday, June 20th and planning for evening events is currently underway. A closing celebration and special expedition along our area's new "water trail" (the state's first) is also being planned for Saturday. Members of the Black Hawk County Conservation Office including Vern Fish, Ed Gruenwald, and Al Weber; the Cedar River Environmental Group's Mark Miller; Water Quality Professional, Rebecca Kauten; UNI professor Kathy Scholls; City of Cedar Falls Engineer and river rat Ron Arrends; and Cedar Falls Tourism and Visitor Bureau's Carissa Skarin comprise the planning committee at this time, and others are welcome! Contact Carissa at 268-4266 to volunteer. If you'd like to join in the expedition, visit www.iowaprojectaware.com for additional details and registration forms.