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Cleanup crews return to the White River

Volunteers' annual efforts cut the amount of trash, produce community pride

*By Betsy Reason
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Each year, it becomes harder and harder to find trash in and along the White River in Hamilton County.

That's thanks to the efforts of the nearly 1,000 volunteers who annually pencil on their calendar the second Saturday in September.

"For me, I look at it as an opportunity to give back and help restore something that is important that for many years had been neglected," said Austin Mace, 17, Noblesville.

In Scouting since first grade, the Noblesville High School junior has canoed the White River countless times and feels a responsibility to be a good steward. His troop, 101, sponsored by Noblesville United Methodist Church, brings about 75 to 100 volunteers to the cleanup efforts.

In its 15th year, River Clean-Up 2009 is Sept. 12. Volunteers can still sign up.

"It is an amazing community effort each year," said Austin's scoutmaster, Rich Tardy, 47, Noblesville.

"The pride that this project has developed in our community has definitely made all of us better stewards of this valuable resource."

The troop has volunteered for 10 years. At the start of clean-up day, his Scouts are "clean and raring to go." At the end of the day, they're "wet, dirty and tired, but full of stories," Tardy said.

The troop has found license plates, radios, antique bottles and a 1920s-era cash register.

"Probably the most interesting was a tire that had about a 30-year-old tree growing up through the tire," said Tardy, a Noblesville attorney. "We had to cut the tire so as to not damage the tree."

This year, cleanup efforts will begin at the dam in Riverwood just north of 206th Street and go south to 96th Street, said River Clean-Up organizer Allen Lind, 48, Noblesville.

During a five-hour river excursion two weeks ago, Lind and his crew found the most concentration of trash -- bicycles, metals, tires, aluminum cans -- at public-access points from Conner Street bridge south to Cicero Creek inlet.

He said the Clean-Up's efforts, which escalated after a massive White River fish kill in 1999, "brought a community awareness to a resource that was taken for granted for many, many years."

The fish kill destroyed about 88 tons of all species of fish in a stretch 40 miles downstream from Anderson, according to The Indianapolis Star archives.

The following year, Steve Schwartz, owner of Schwartz's Bait and Tackle in Noblesville, and John

Bundy, a Hamilton County waterfowl decoy maker, organized White River Rescue 2000 in an effort to restock the river.

"Overall, the river within this community is substantially better than other municipalities and communities around," said Lind, president of River Clean-Up since 2007 and who has been involved for 12 years. He said the Clean-Up has grown to nearly 1,000 volunteers and \$10,000 in in-kind donations of services, equipment, food and more.

Lind said this year's campaign would be the largest in history, with communities along the White River, from Delaware County to Marion County, joining the efforts on the same day.

"Because of turnout and consistency we've had, the other communities are trying to make it a bigger event to help everyone," Lind said.

In 2008, volunteers removed 20 tons of trash and two tons of recyclable materials as well as 220 tires in Hamilton County, said Tim Stottlemeyer of Noblesville's wastewater utility.

Each of the three Hamilton County municipalities along the river -- Noblesville, Fishers and Carmel -- have mandated storm sewer programs and are required by law to protect local waterways and engage the community with outreach and education, Stottlemeyer said.

Next week, all three communities have proclaimed Sept. 6-12 as Water Awareness Week, with an array of activities planned.

"Although it is a great thing to get the visible trash out of the river, we also have pollution that we cannot see and can reduce that pollution by changing our habits with fertilizers, pesticides and pet waste," said Stottlemeyer, the chief operator for Noblesville Utilities' storm water division.

"We provide a place for the trash to be processed and some assistance in transporting the trash after it is piled up at each location."

Several employees from the utility and street departments work the day of the event. "The Hamilton County Jail provides guards and inmates to do the hard work of sorting and processing," Stottlemeyer said.

For the third year, he's site coordinator at Noblesville Moose Lodge, the largest of three volunteer command points along the White River in Hamilton County.

The two other locations are at Renner's Body Works in Noblesville and the 116th Street Public Boat Launch in Fishers.

Gary Duncan, assistant city engineer, and John Thomas, storm water inspector for the city of Carmel, are coordinating the Renner's location. Jason Armour, storm water engineer for the town of Fishers, is coordinating the boat launch site.

Annually, Fishers spends about \$4,000 in out-of-pocket expenses associated with portable toilets, banners, equipment and in-kind labor, which includes about five paid employees, Armour said.

Carmel provides two dump trucks, one loader, one backhoe and seven paid employees, Duncan said.

Additional Facts

White River Clean-Up still seeking volunteers

River Clean-Up 2009 is from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sept. 12 and will be coordinated from three locations

along White River: Moose Lodge, 950 Field Drive, Noblesville; Renner's Body Works, 8190 E. 146th St., Noblesville; and 116th Street Public Boat Launch, northeast corner of 116th Street and White River Bridge in Fishers. Volunteers receive lunch, T-shirt and gloves. To preregister your group or find out more about volunteering, contact organizer Allen Lind at (317) 402-7811 or hcrivercleanup@yahoo.com

Water Awareness weeks planned

» **Water Awareness Week** is Sept. 6-12 in Noblesville, Fishers and Carmel:

» **Water Education Day** is Tuesday. Events will be from 8 a.m. to noon at Noblesville City Hall, 16 S. 10th St., and 8:30 a.m. to noon at Fishers Town Hall auditorium, 1 Municipal Drive. Learn about sources of water and pollution. Individuals may bring their old prescription medications and deposit them into a sealed container at Noblesville.

» **Hamilton County Household Hazardous Waste Center Day** informational activities will be from 8 a.m. to noon Wednesday at Noblesville City Hall.

» **Water Quality Monitoring Day** is from 10 a.m. to noon Wednesday at Brooks School Park, 11780 Brooks School Road, Fishers. Demonstrations will be at the Mud Creek bridge access.

» **Water Conservation Day** is Sept. 10: 8 a.m. to noon at Noblesville City Hall; and all day in Fishers, where people are asked to conserve water by not watering lawns, taking shorter showers, fixing leaky faucets and more.

» **Keep Noblesville Beautiful Neighborhood Blitz** workday is 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sept. 12 in the Southwest Quadrant neighborhood, bordered by Conner, 10th, South and Second streets. Volunteers will help residents paint porches and fences, move heavy items to the curb for city pickup, pick up brush, and more. Contact Cindy Haas at (317) 710-6967 after 5 p.m. or at info@keepnoblesvillebeautiful.org
