

FRIENDS *Connection*

THE NEWSLETTER OF FRIENDS OF THE KICKAPOO VALLEY RESERVE • (608) 625-2960 • kickapoofriends.org • Volume 16, Issue 1

Ben Johnston Gets Excited About Nature



As an undergraduate at the University of Cincinnati, Ben Johnston worked one summer at a small many-generation farm outside the city. “The neighboring farms were being gobbled up,” he recalls. “The owners didn’t want their land developed so they donated it for a nature center. “We’d tell kids from the city “This is a chicken; this is a goat.””

Johnston, a go-to guy at Kickapoo Valley Reserve for everything from chain-sawing logjams to leading frog walks, doesn’t remember exactly when he became interested in natural science. Probably because a lot of experiences worked together. Maybe it was the satisfaction of showing city kids their food didn’t start in plastic packages. Or the field-trip when the leader explained how different rocks produce different types of flowers. Or when a friend let him keep his plant books in exchange for the loan of Johnston’s backpack when the friend joined the Peace Corps.

He remembers wanting to know the names of things when playing in the family’s backyard in Cincinnati, but admits he didn’t try to find out. And he admits he didn’t apply himself much in high school and that he took geology in college because he had to have a science course and he’d heard it was easy... “rocks for jocks.”

But it turned out he liked geology so he decided to major in it. On class field trips, he and a classmate picked flowers and tried to identify them using the classmate’s plant books.

While in graduate school in Maine, he decided he wanted to be a teacher, thinking he’d spend summers doing research projects in places such as parks. Meanwhile, he helped a cousin and his wife move from Dayton, Ohio, to La Crosse and stumbled into Pies Are Square in Wilton, owned by Gina Rae. The rest is history: He never left the Driftless and he and Gina have been together ever since.

Johnston eventually decided teaching was not for him. After a summer job with the Bureau of Land Management in Wyoming, KVR director Marcy West hired him in 2004. His official job includes monitoring controlled burns, clearing logjams, controlling

invasive plants and helping with events such as Dam Challenge and Winterfest. But a lot of people know him from his “citizen science” efforts, which include bird counts, frog and toad surveys, breeding bird atlas and frog walks. Except for the time spent coordinating and entering data, he refuses to be paid for them. “I consider them my hobby, not my job,” he says.

Is there any wildlife he doesn’t like? “I’m not a big fan of snakes,” he admits. “I appreciate what they do and their role in society, and I like to see them. But I want you to see it first and tell me it’s there. I hate it when I’m suddenly upon them. And I don’t pick them up. I only pick up turtles, to get them off the road.”

He’s fine with bats but realizes not everyone is. One night, he was checking the bat house next to the deck while a wedding reception was going on inside. Several people came out and were excited to see the bats, he says, but a big guy rushed right back inside. Recalling another bat encounter, he says when someone told KVR Friend Sharon Miessner a bat had landed on her hair, “she just said, ‘OK,’ like it was a butterfly and brushed it off.”

Johnston admits he learns a lot by making mistakes. “You can be fooled if you’re not careful, he says. “I’ll get excited about a new bird or plant, and then I’ll find out it’s not new.” Like when he called a friend at the Wisconsin DNR in late March to report he’d heard a tree frog. The friend said no way, reminding that frogs call in a particular order based on water temperature where they breed, and it was way too early for tree frogs, which don’t start until mid to late April.

The next day Johnston saw a redwing blackbird, and realized to his chagrin, that it sounded very similar to the tree frog. “It has helped me become more observant. It’s how you learn.”

FROG WALKS continue this spring at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve every Tuesday evening March 26-July 16. They start 15 minutes after sunset (consult a sunset table), go about .5 miles and last about an hour. The walks are free and open to anyone interested in identifying frog calls. Cancellations are made only for heavy rain or thunderstorms. For more information and location, call the Reserve (608) 625-2960 or email ben.johnston@wisconsin.gov.



Contributor Joan Kent is a retired journalist who lives in Stark township with her husband Don and their cats Liza and Misty.

Friends Pitch in at Fall, Winter Events



Behind the Scenes at Another Successful Pasta Supper!
from left: Molly Gough, Karen Theis and chef Joanne Shird;
Loni Weber; Sally Colacino, Peg La Martina and Diane Hanson



Friends Make the Holiday Happening Happen! from left: Janet Kruk's silk scarves, Monica Jagel's artwork, Deb displays Echo Valley products



Lack of Snow doesn't Stop Winterfest Fun! clockwise from top: Ellie Hoel of Sun Prairie roasts a marshmallow; snow sculpture "Nature in Flight" by Mike Martino; Penguin Races off the Visitor Center deck; Sue Rego, Sue Blanchard, Marcia Bader and Peg La Martina



FRIENDS EVENTS

Spring Fling

Saturday, April 27 3:00 pm-Star Gazing
Hikes, talks, great food, music, animals, silent auction! See kickapoofriends.org for full schedule.

Tromp & Chomp Trail Run

Saturday, May 11 9 am
8-mile and half-marathon trail run courses, and a post-race meal of local seasonal foods. Proceeds benefit the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Education and Events Program. Volunteers are needed! Contact KVR at 625-2960 or kickapoo.reserve@krm.state.wi.us.

Drive the Old Hwy 131 Trail

Thursday, July 4 Noon-4 pm
Open house at the KVR: enjoy a leisurely drive on Old Hwy 131. One-way traffic from south to north – to enter, follow Seeleyburg Rd. to Corps Rd. Stop in for cookies and lemonade at the Visitor Center.

2nd Annual Rustic Raft Rally!

Saturday, July 27 Noon-Star Gazing
Vote for your favorite before the launch, follow their progress along the river, then celebrate at the finish with food and family-friendly activities.

Dam Challenge Weekend

Pasta Supper: Friday, Oct. 4
Race: Saturday, Oct. 5
Over 100 volunteers are needed to support the race and the Pasta Supper. Mark your calendar now to be part of this great event.

Annual Photo Contest

Entries Due Oct. 14
Submit photos of the KVR Sept. 1-Oct. 14 at the Friends website, www.kickapoofriends.org. Judges select 12 finalists; vote for your favorite Nov. 2-27 with People's Choice winners announced at the Holiday Happening.

Appreciation Dinner and Annual Meeting

Saturday, Nov. 2 6-8 pm
Connect with other Friends members! A brief meeting to review the past year and elect new board members will be followed by food and celebration.

Holiday Happening

Saturday, Dec. 7 1-8 pm
Cookie walk, local musicians, crafts for sale by Friends members, silent auction of holiday arrangements, and a soup and salad meal for purchase. Photo contest winners announced.

Everyone Can Use More Friends!

Channel your inner HUCK FINN!

Build a raft of natural materials that can float from Bridge 12-14 on Saturday July 27th! Adventurers young and old are invited to participate. The raft must hold at least two people; both must be at least half on the raft as it crosses the finish line to share in the prize money. Contact Jackie at jackie.yocum@wisconsin.gov for details. Come watch this fun and inspiring event along Old Hwy. 131!



Like to PLAY IN THE DIRT?

KVR gardeners meet every other Tuesday at 5:30 pm to keep the perennial gardens at the



Visitor Center and Star Valley looking great. Come join us! Learn from other gardeners while you make the world more beautiful.

Every session ends with refreshments

and conversation on the deck. Contact Joan at donjoan@mwt.net for dates and times.

Joan is also looking for someone who can complete a small concrete project to house a memorial plaque in the garden. Can you be the hero handy person to complete this job?

Are you good with a CAMERA?

Seeking photographers to capture the action at Friends events! Sign up to cover an event like Spring Fling or Holiday Happening. You could also share photos of your friends and family as you enjoy the Reserve. Contact Julie at julievoel@icloud.com if you have photos to share or would like to be an official event photographer.

Flood CLEAN UP

The August 18 flood left debris on the banks and surrounding areas near the river that still needs to be removed. Call the Reserve at 608-625-2960 if you are able to help. KVR staff will set up work days to get things back in order, and will contact you with dates.

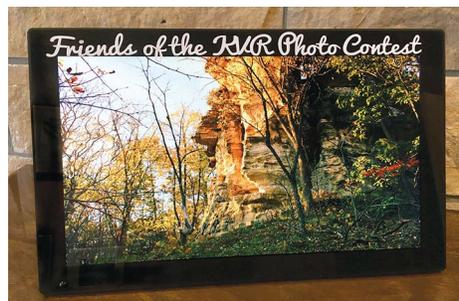
Like to COOK?

Good food is a tradition at the Reserve – talented Friends donate items from appetizers to desserts for numerous events. To join this crew of home cooks, contact Sally at sallycolacino@hotmail.com. Too many cooks never spoil an event! Next up is the Spring Fling. We'll be needing salads and desserts!



Like to ORGANIZE?

Years of gorgeous photos submitted for the Friends Photo Contest are installed in a digital display. It tells a compelling story of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve and has traveled around the county at banks, libraries, clinics and businesses. We need someone to schedule this traveling goodwill ambassador (set up involves just finding an outlet near a table.)



If you might be that person, contact Julie at julievoel@icloud.com.

How about a BOOK CLUB?

Would you like to read about nature and the environment? Let's organize a monthly group to read and discuss! Contact Sally at sallycolacino@hotmail.com or 608-627-1961.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Friends are grateful for all renewing memberships – your continued support keeps education programs strong.

We wish a warm welcome to the following new members (Sept. 2018-Feb. 2019)!

Robert Barrow
Pete & Catherine Beckstrand
Steve & Karen Brandt
Richard Calvetti
Mary Cortesi & Dan Sebranek
John & Erica Cronk
Scott & Sue Dobbs
Caroline Druschke
Bernal & Helen Ewing
Mark Johnson
Jeff Bye & Kjerstin Lang
Eric, Sara, Oliver Lommen
Reggie & Shawna Nelson
John & Joann Scribbins
Wes & Brenda Siemandel
Mary Fitzwater & Debbie Stewart

Enthusiasts Needed!

The Friends Board will need two new members starting in November. They meet bi-monthly on the second Monday of the month. Board members help organize events and advance the mission of the Reserve. If you have interest and enthusiasm for this job, contact Julie at julievoel@icloud.com.

Newly updated!
www.kickapoofriends.org

2018 Photo Contest!

The Friends of the KVR appreciate all who entered and voted in the Annual Photography Contest. To view all the entries go to kickapoofriends.org.



Congratulations to Mark Yanny, Adult Division Winner, for "Kickapoo Bridge 5 Sunset".

Spring Fling!



Saturday, April 27, 3pm
Kickapoo Valley Reserve

Hikes • Talks • Food • Silent Auction • Animals
Music • Family Activities • Star Gazing
For full schedule visit www.kickapoofriends.org



For more info phone the KVR:
608.625.2960



CLIP AND SAVE AS YOUR REMINDER! NO OTHER REMINDERS WILL BE SENT.

Poetry Contest Deadline is Friday, April 12!

Students: Enter an Earth Day Poetry Contest!

Any type of poem related to the theme 'Nature in Flight' is acceptable. A panel of judges will select Poets of Merit in each of these age groups: grades 3-4, grades 5-6, and grades 7-8. The judging team will look for originality, imagery, application of the theme and writing conventions (spelling and grammar).

Visit www.kickapoofriends.org for more information and complete entry instructions.



2018 Poets of Merit from Sacred Heart School in Cashton enjoy the day after their Reading at last year's Spring Fling.