

# FRIENDS Connection

THE NEWSLETTER OF FRIENDS OF THE KICKAPOO VALLEY RESERVE • (608) 625-2960 • kickapoofriends.org • Volume 18, Issue 2

## KVR's New Director: Coming Home

**Scott Walter sees his biggest challenge "to know why things are going so well and provide the support to keep it going in that direction."**

Scott Walter didn't grow up in the Driftless but he and his seven brothers and sisters often visited their grandmother Lillian at the family's seven-generation farm outside Viola.

The new Kickapoo Valley Reserve director says he always wanted to return. "My dad was the first to move away," he says. It was the Depression and the family moved to Marshall, a small town east of Madison where his dad had a better chance at making a living. His grandfather, who dairy farmed, had died, but his grandmother held on to the farm for four decades.

"I fell in love with the woods, streams and hills," Walter recalls. "Everyone in the family appreciated the land, but their lives were elsewhere." When he left grad school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1999 with a Masters and PhD in wildlife ecology, he was offered a research position at the University of Nebraska. His dad was supportive but said, "Just so you know, if you're going to Nebraska, we're going to sell the family farm."

"I understood," Walter said. They were paying taxes on the land and keeping it up and not earning anything from it, but it hit hard and forced me to think about what I wanted to do. I turned down the Nebraska job and accepted a job teaching science and natural resource management at UW-Richland."

He met his wife Erica, who's from Spring Green, on a blind date and convinced her to move to the Driftless. They have five children: her daughter Elizabeth, 25, who he has adopted, and their children Connie, 18; Delburn, 15, named after his father; Arlon, 13; and Chloe, 12. Erica is retired from teaching and runs a commercial maple syrup operation at the farm.

In a way, the farm feels the same as it did when he was a kid because he still feels "that deep connection to the family and the farm," Walter says. "But it's more work now because it's home, not a quick visit to grandma's house," he admits.



And times have changed. "When I was a kid, we were surrounded by other family farms that had been there for generations," he says. "Now most are absentee land-owners. They rent out the cropland. We're good friends, but there's been a loss of community. My grandfather knew all the neighbors. They'd gone to school together and had shared memories. Now the owners are weekend people; their community is elsewhere."

"The staff is incredible," he says, "skillful and passionate about what they're doing, so to a large extent my job is to stay out of their way. My goal will be to balance the wonderful opportunity here for people to experience the Driftless with the need to protect and manage the land and wildlife."

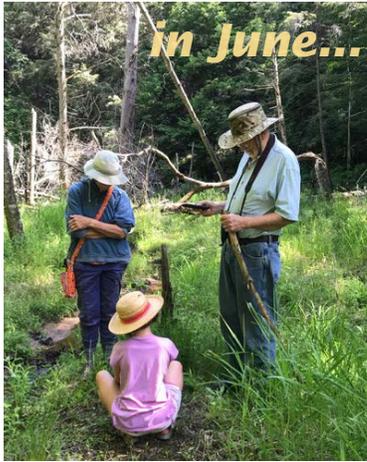
The KVR job differs from his previous position as Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources area wildlife supervisor for La Crosse and Black River Falls though both are state agencies Walter says. "The local people understand the issues and they are independent to make policy that supports the mission. It's much harder to do when you have to go through many levels, each further away from the situation."

Walter understands there's still resentment here over the condemnation of farms for the dam project that never happened: "There are certainly reasons for lingering resentment and even anger. I have thought about this in context of our family farm. If someone had tried to take it, I would not have gone down without a fight."

He remembers the day his grandmother took him and his sister into La Farge to visit her sister who lived up on the ridge. "She stopped the car. I have the image of the dam tower in the background. My grandmother, who was very quiet and soft spoken, was very animated. I don't remember a time when when she was that agitated. Her arms were moving as she talked. I don't remember exactly what she said. But it wasn't good."

*Friends Connection editor Joan Kent is a retired journalist living in La Farge*

# A Summer Season of Friends Activities



**National Trails Day Celebration** from left: Pat and Dave Fisher and granddaughter Lydia on the trail; Joanne Shird, Janet Kruk and Joan Peterson; Steve Hall and Mark Katz



**Staff Appreciation Dinner** The Friends board toasted and thanked more than 20 KVR staff, family members and guests who attended the annual Staff Appreciation Dinner at the Visitor Center Aug. 12. Everyone enjoyed lots of conversation and a dinner of brats, hotdogs, sides, and cookies prepared by Friends.



**Friends Bid Farewell to Marcy West** from left: Brad Steinmetz presents commendation from Gov. Evers; Marcy, friends and quilt gift from the Ho-Chunk Nation



**A Sampler of Gardens** clockwise from left: Mary Shird's village garden; Cathy Chybowski's organic vegetable garden; Sam Reidl greets tour visitors; Pam Saunders with Peter Schmidt



**Volunteer Gardeners** clockwise from top left: Todd Muller, Dave Theis and Steve Hall; Geri Hall, Kim Wahl and Sheila Johnson



## Forest School Welcomes First Students

The Kickapoo Valley Forest school is an innovative new partnership between the La Farge School District and the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. The mission of the school is to honor outdoor nature immersion, child centered practices and environmental stewardship in our youngest learners. KVFS opened its doors September 1, and will serve 32 4K and Kindergarten students in its first year, expanding to first grade in year two and second grade in year three.

KVFS works with the understanding that extended periods of time in nature are beneficial to children academically, physically and emotionally. KVFS curriculum uses

experiences in nature to broaden and develop necessary life skills, personal resilience and a lasting connection to and respect for the natural world.



## Annual Meeting and Dinner

The KVR Friends Annual Meeting and Dinner will not be held due to the pandemic. As allowed by the bylaws, the Friends board will elect new members at its Oct. 18 meeting. Friends members are welcome to attend in the Visitors Center: 4 pm Annual Meeting followed by monthly board meeting.

### BOARD CANDIDATES

*The nominees for a three-year term are:*



**Tom Miron** lives on the Western edge of the Reserve and enjoys walking and biking there several times a week. He believes community support as represented by

Friends is critical to Reserve success and progress. Tom is running for his second term. He has served as Friends Board President for the last two years.



**Beth Unger** and her husband Craig were attracted to the beautiful Driftless Region and settled here in 1992. Beth is retired from CROPP/Organic Valley and enjoys walking the many trails of the KVR. She has spent many hours of volunteering at Friends activities and is very excited to serve on the Friends board.

## Lots of Hands on Deck!

The Kickapoo Valley Reserve has expanded education facilities with the addition of the Prairie Springs Classroom, a gift from local donors and Prairie Springs: The Paul Fleckenstein Foundation. The classroom, which will be used by the KVFS, has been the ultimate volunteer project.

More than 40 people contributed 1500-plus hours on construction, and many others helped with design, architectural drawings, site prep, interior shelving and cabinetry. Sustainability was a driving force throughout the process beginning with a super-insulated design and including use of some repurposed wood. The building sits on a diamond pier foundation system which required minimal disruption of the surface soil, and blends well with the design of the current buildings.

The Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve will officially transfer the building to KVR. In October a dedication ceremony will be held to honor the volunteers and donors. Watch the website – [kickapoofriends.org](http://kickapoofriends.org) – for details.



## Holiday Happening December 4

**Cookies, baguettes and wreaths will be available for purchase, and the KVR Gift shop will be open. See Friends website for time!**

This event will be a great opportunity to find holiday treats and gifts for family and friends. Due to Covid resurgence in this area, Friends who haven't been vaccinated need to wear masks inside the Visitor Center, and all are encouraged to wear masks and social distance.



**THANK YOU** to Rooted Spoon, which raised \$550 for the Friends at its August First Thursday dinner!

## Discovery Center Update

After many months of discussion, research and planning, the design for the new Discovery Center has received approval from the State of Wisconsin.

The next step is to get bids from fabricators to craft the exhibit pieces, with construction at KVR beginning this winter.

The design team at FEH Design, Lord Cultural Resources, and WeatherstonBruer Associates has created a plan that includes upgraded visuals, nature sounds from KVR as well as touchable displays. The exhibit will include portions dedicated to the themes of the river, sky, plants, animals and people. The rock wall and the flood pole, visitor favorites, will stay. Additions include opportunities for visitors to record what they have seen as well as tips for what to look for during your visit. The current story fire area will house the new

Dark Sky exhibit complete with a water vapor campfire. The Ho-Chunk language will be featured in several areas.

These mockups suggest what you can expect when the project is completed. Watch for details on a grand opening in this newsletter and on our website ([kickapoofriends.org](https://kickapoofriends.org)).

*Julie Hoel is campaign co-chair for Discovery Center fundraising*



## Friends of KVR Membership vs. KVR Annual Fee

This past year, some people including longtime Friends thought they were paying membership fees when they paid user fees online. As a result, they didn't receive notification of events and volunteer opportunities.

This occurred when the KVR added an online payment option for annual pass fees.

A Friends of KVR membership is available online at: <https://kickapoofriends.org/> or in person at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

A Friends of KVR membership must be renewed annually and includes your annual KVR pass for trail use and river access parking.

Annual Friends membership fees:

- \$35 Individual
- \$50 Family
- \$55 Business



The KVR has received a donation of a tractor mounted prairie seeder, which will be used on the property and available for use by Friends members in the future. For information contact KVR property manager Jason Leis.

## Where Does the Money Go?

A very active KVR Friend recently asked, "So doesn't all the Garden Walk money go to the gardens?" No, the money, which is raised in several ways, goes into a pot and is distributed among several KVR projects.

Sources are memberships, donations, the gift shop and several fund-raisers including Winterfest concessions, Spring Fling, Garden Walk, Pasta Supper, Trails Day, Holiday cookie sales and Holiday Happenings soup and salad supper. Due to Covid, several of these sources have been canceled or reduced.

Funds raised support annual projects and events at the KVR, and may also be used for special one-time projects.

### Distribution of Funds

#### KVR Programs

- Education
- Land Management

#### Sponsorships of KVR Events

- Winterfest
- Dam Challenge
- Nuzum Talks

#### Garden Maintenance

- Visitor Center and Star Valley Gardens

#### Friends Events

- 4th of July Hospitality Table
- Photo contest
- Holiday Happening
- Poetry contest/Earth Day
- KVR Staff appreciation
- Friends Volunteer/Member appreciation

#### Special Projects

- Discovery Center renovation
- Outdoor Classroom

## COMING UP!

### Winterfest

Saturday, January 8

### Volunteer Appreciation Celebration

February or March

## Everybody Needs a Friend

The Friends of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve is a non-profit organization of people dedicated to assist the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board in its mission to preserve and protect the lands entrusted to the reserve by raising funds and public awareness, and providing volunteers for needed projects. If you are interested in volunteer opportunities, joining the Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve is a great way to get involved and to provide support.

### Kitchen Creator?

Good food is a tradition at the Reserve. The array of dishes prepared by Friends always elicits oohs and aahs of appreciation. Appetizers, salads, soups or desserts. Sign up on the next Event spreadsheet to make your special dish.

### Like to Play in the Dirt?

Volunteer gardeners maintain the gardens at the Visitor Center and Star Valley every other Tuesday during gardening season. They begin at 5:30 pm and end with refreshments and conversation on the deck. Learn from other gardeners while you help keep the Reserve a beautiful place.

### Want to Take Photos?

The Reserve needs photographers to capture the action at Friends' events. Sign up on the Friends' website to cover an event and submit your photos for the next newsletter.

### Like to Meet People?

The Friends always needs volunteers to help serve food and beverages and greet people at events. It's a great way to meet new, fun Friends.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** [kvr.state.wi.us](http://kvr.state.wi.us) or [kickapoofriends.org](http://kickapoofriends.org)

## Rare Plants Spotted in the KVR

With flowers lasting a day or so, and plants ranging in height from 4-12 inches, the Nodding Pogonia or the Three-birds Orchid (*Triphora trianthophora*) can be easily missed by the casual observer. It is found in rich hummus soils and associated with sugar maple (mesic) forests. Although considered rare, populations may be locally abundant, and late summer flowering appears to synchronous within a given site. In Wisconsin, Nodding Pogonia is listed as a species of special concern.

The UW-Herbarium lists the earliest record for Vernon County from 1973 (V. Kline). Brad Hutnick found a few plants during early KVR forestry recon days (circa 1999-2000). In 2019, a team of volunteers revisited the site of Hutnick's report and surveyed 450 some plants. Two additional sites of Nodding Pogonia have been

discovered in the KVR this year (2021), with each site containing only a few plants. Additional surveys in the KVR may reveal additional populations of this and other rare plants. To learn more about finding and reporting rare plants, consider joining the Wisconsin Rare Plant Monitoring Program.

*Ben Johnston, KVR Staff*



Photo: Jasmine Wyatt

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Thank you to all new and renewing members – Friends of KVR membership is at an all time high!  
(New members April-August 2021)

Jacklyn Fuller & Mike Stabenow  
Kris Kidwell  
Keith Lewis  
Susan Murray  
Lynette Owens  
Dennis Schlueter  
James Trost  
Dennis Schlueter

## Grant Proposal Support

The Friends of KVR board voted Aug. 16 to give \$1000 to support the KVR's proposal for a grant to manage oak stands on the property.

The proposal seeks funds from the National Wild Turkey Federation for timber stand improvement and crop tree release. Cost of the project is expected to be around \$33,000, with half coming from the KVR through staff time and equipment.

"This is priority forest management work, given our goals of diversity and the successional trends away from oak and toward more mesic communities (largely sugar maple)," KVR director Scott Walter said. "The project will also include efforts to increase the density of oak seedlings in these stands, primarily through planting and direct seeding of acorns. We would hope to hire contractors for this work using grant funds."

## There's Still Time to Enter the 2021 Friends Photo Contest!

Entries are being accepted for the 13th annual Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve photography contest.

The deadline to submit is Oct. 10 at 5 pm.

Twelve images will be selected as finalists and displaced on the KVR Friends website. Place your vote for Best in Show by emailing [info@kickapoofriends.org](mailto:info@kickapoofriends.org) throughout November. Winners will be announced on the KVR Friends website Dec. 2.

## Kickapoo Pearls: Rediscovered

Kickapoo Pearls, a book of newspaper articles chronicling the history of the Kickapoo Valley, has been reprinted and is available for purchase at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve gift shop.

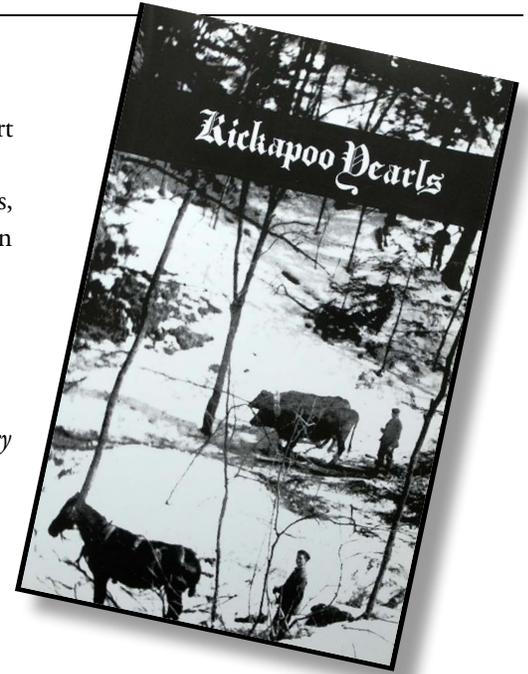
The original Kickapoo Pearls was produced periodically as newspaper-sized editions. Eventually these editions were put together into one “book” held by a clip. By 2010, not one copy was available for sale anywhere. The Friends of the KVR rescued some well-preserved copies, and scanned, reprinted, and bound them into a real book. Now those have all been sold out. But, thanks to Michael Bushilla, the producer of the 2010 book, all of the digital files were retrieved.

Dana Van Hosen, one of the Pearls creators, described herself and the History Project crew as “them hippies”! For days, they came together in a church basement to create and assemble the Pearls in a newspaper

format, cutting and pasting borders, clip art and photos as each person saw fit. Despite pressure by advisors to “clean up” the pages, these quirky illustrations would continue in all editions of the Pearls.

Articles in the book include *Herbal Medicine*; *What’s behind Kickapoo Town Names*; *They Saw It Change in Ontario*; *Railroad Abandonment*; *Kickapoo Century Farms*; *Starter Bread and Silo Lightning*; *Gays Mills Hydroelectric*; *Early History of Viola*; *Kickapoo Magnetism by Dale Muller*; *Big Wheel Rollin’ in Readstown*; *Tales of Rattlesnake Tom* and *Old Coats Made into Rugs*.

“In its relatively short life, the Kickapoo Pearls, and in some ways, the people who created it, have become something of a legend in the Kickapoo Valley,” local historian Brad Steinmetz said in the 2010 edition. “It is as meaningful today as when



first published thirty years ago. The Kickapoo Pearls remains a treasure for the telling of the Valley’s history.”

*Chuck Hatfield, former Friends of KVR Board member and current Friends member*