

FRIENDS Connection

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Julie Van Aman Hoel: This Volunteer Wears Many KVR Hats

I want to create ways for people with limited outdoor experience to enjoy nature safely and with awe.

Julie Van Aman Hoel is passionate about education: education for kids, education for adults, and lifelong learning for herself. KVR provides a myriad of ways for her to pursue that passion, benefitting thousands of people in the process.

After retiring from a lengthy career as a K-12 teacher in Burnett County, Julie and her husband Gil Hoel moved to Ontario to the farmhouse her parents bought in 1970. Planning to stay for one year only, they arrived during the historic flood on the weekend of June 7, 2008. Undaunted by that inauspicious welcome, they have lived in Ontario ever since.

Julie's first connection with KVR was a transformative personal education

Jonel Kiesau, KVR's Education Coordinator, has worked closely with Julie over the years and describes her as

"a powerhouse of action and inspiration. From writing curriculum to teaching, organizing events for the Friends and KVR, collaborating with the Ho Chunk Nation on important projects such as the implementation of the Land Acknowledgement Statement, and sourcing ANYTHING the Forest School needs from garage sales, Julie is truly a dedicated and skillful volunteer. I always say, 'If you need something done well and creatively, ask Julie Hoel!' She has helped shape so many of the amazing initiatives at the KVR and we sure hope she will do so for many years to come."



experience. She participated in a five-day Cultural Class and Tour led by Brad Steinmetz and Chuck Hatfield. The course introduced her to the creation of KVR after the failed dam project, the area's significance as the ancestral grounds of the Ho-Chunk Nation, the local geology, and more. "The course gave me a sense of place and enabled me to settle into the community," explains Julie. "As a first-time landowner, the course also instilled a deep responsibility for stewardship of my personal land, the KVR, and the environment in general."

Since that course, Julie has immersed herself in just about everything KVR. She serves as an instructor for many KVR education programs, is co-chair of the campaign to renovate the Discovery Center in the Visitor Center, and has been instrumental in the development of new events, including National Trails Day, the Poetry Contest, the Friends of KVR Garden Tour, and the Ancient Wisdom

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SCOTT WALTER: "A Tough Decision"

When Scott Walter became director of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve in June, 2021, he says "it was a dream job and I thought I would be doing it for 15 years."

But in May he gave notice that he was resigning to take a part-time teaching position at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville.

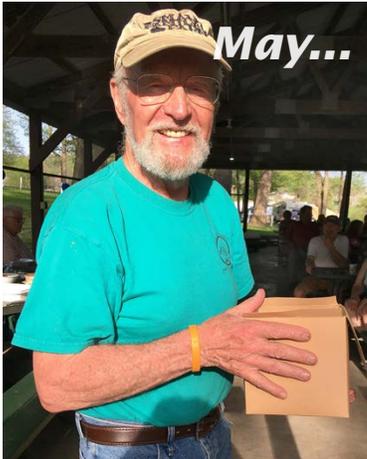
Scott says the decision to resign was a tough one for him and his wife Erica, and that it's rooted in their desire to keep their 140-acre seventh-generation family farm between Viola and Readstown for their children.

The same love of the farm drove another tough decision for him in 1999. When he received a PhD in wildlife ecology from University of Wisconsin-Madison that year, his brothers and sisters already had lives away from the farm. "My dad was supportive when I told him I'd been offered a research position at the University of Nebraska," Scott recalled. "But he said 'just so you know, if you're going to Nebraska, we're going to sell the family farm.'" Scott turned down the Nebraska job and accepted a teaching position at UW-Platteville's Richland Center campus.

After he assumed the KVR director's job, Erica began a maple syrup business. "We wanted to develop this for the kids so they could have a viable means of keeping the farm," Scott says. "But time was getting so compressed that it was clear we had to change something. When UW-Platteville offered me the teaching position, we had many late-night discussions and lots of hand-wringing and decided that would be best for the family. So the family farm is still driving the decisions."

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Spring, Summer Work and Play with Friends



Volunteer Appreciation Dinner clockwise, from left: Chuck Hatfield; Patty and Dan Kinsey; Sheila Johnson; Brad Steinmetz; Scott Lind, Barb Sydnor, Jan Gremban, Joan Peterson, John and Rita Hoffman



National Trails Day At the refreshments table, from left: Pam Saunders, Beth Unger, Tom Miron, and Marcia Bader



Third Annual Garden Tour clockwise from left: Ed and Barbara Martinez; Peg LaMartina; Barb Sydnor; Skrupky garden detail; Bjorn Bergman with garden visitors; Daryl Skrupky



Volunteer Gardeners from top: Geri Hall; Barb Sarnowski, Kim Wahl and Jean Beck below, from left: Pat Fisher, Jean Beck, Joan Kent, Sally Colacino, Karen Theis, Barb Sarnowski, Kim Wahl and Sheila Johnson



Second Classroom Building Underway

Ground was broken for the second stand-alone classroom building at the KVR in late August. This building, funded by the generous Paul Fleckenstein: Prairie Springs Foundation, will be almost identical to the classroom building constructed with all volunteer hours last summer. August Hagen LLC is the contractor doing the work this year with a completion goal of mid-late October.

These buildings, while small, are super insulated and highly efficient, allowing much solar gain through their large south facing windows. They will provide warm

sheltered spaces for the Kickapoo Valley Forest School (which will lease them during the school year) and will be used for summer camps and other programs during the summer. A final building, which will include two small classrooms, office space, bathrooms and storage is slated for construction (in the space between the two stand-alone classrooms) in the summer of 2023.

For more information, to volunteer or donate funds for these facilities please contact Education Director Jonel Kiesau at jonel.kiesau@wisconsin.gov.



Pasta Supper is Back!

Friends of KVR will hold a pasta supper Sept. 30, the night before Dam Challenge, for the first time since 2019.

The supper, from 5-8 pm at the Reserve Visitor Center, S3661 State Hwy. 131, La Farge, will feature Sicilian pasta sauce, crusty

bread, green salad and desserts from driftless bakers. Meat, gluten-free and vegetarian options will be available.

The public and Dam Challenge racers are invited. Cost is \$12, adults' one trip through; \$14, adults' two trips, and \$7, children under 12. Take-out will be offered.

New Gift Shop Items

The Friends Gift Shop now has much-in-demand "Driftless" stickers! New items include books by popular Viroqua author Sue Berg and Wanna-Be-Honey products: honey in several sizes, soap, lotion and lip balm. We hope to soon carry honey candles. All in time for early holiday shopping.

Volunteer to help serve, set-up or clean-up, or bake a dessert.

The KVR also will need volunteers for the Dam Challenge Oct. 1, and the Friends will need volunteers for Winter Fest Jan. 7. Past volunteers for both events are being asked to help. If you haven't volunteered in the past, and want to help with either of these events, contact the KVR at (608) 625-2960.

BOARD CANDIDATES

New members will be elected at the 5 pm Oct. 17 board meeting. The election will be held before the regular meeting, and the new members will then participate in the regular meeting. Members of the public are welcome to attend any of the board meetings.

Nominees for three-year terms on the Friends of the Reserve Board:



Beth Thayer has lived in the Kickapoo Valley area most of her life, now with her family on a small farm outside Hillsboro, where she grew up. She is starting her 17th year teaching in the Hillsboro School district. Beth has brought her three children to KVR summer camp for the past six years. "We love the visitor center, the trails, and the people that KVR has brought into our lives," she says. "Through summer camps my children have grown confident in their nature exploration, and have taught our family about the beauty and bounty that our area has to offer."



Ashley Walker lives in rural Vernon County and works full-time for the Department of Health Services (DHS) in the Office for the Promotion of Independent Living (OPIL) in Madison, and part-time as Adjunct Instructor for Western Technical College in La Crosse. "I'm excited for the opportunity to be more of an active part of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve," she says, "as I have a strong passion and dedication for the preservation and protection of our local Driftless landscapes, as well as promoting public awareness and education around the need and necessity to incorporate nature in our everyday lives."

COMING UP!

Holiday Happening
Saturday, December 3

Winterfest
Saturday, January 7

Ben Johnston Resigns: Big Void to Fill

Johnston plans to continue leading, or as he calls it, “instigating,” the bird club, the plant lookers and Frog Walk Tuesday.

Ben Johnston, who resigned Aug. 5 from the Kickapoo Valley Reserve after almost 20 years, will be sorely missed by staff and Friends.

“Ben was the first person I met at the Reserve when I moved here eight years ago,” said KVR volunteer Cathy Chybowski. “On that day I introduced my Brother to him and he has been calling me Sister Cathy ever since. He is friendly, funny and unpretentious. Ben is the kind of person who naturally draws people to him and I know this has resulted in many folks discovering the KVR.”

Ben was a wizard at mapping and geographic information system (GIS) work,” said KVR Management Board director Dick Wallin. “He spent a lot of time battling invasives and was a walking encyclopedia on them, the best times for removal, treatment, etc. He also did a lot of survey work and kept records of those surveys, bats, frogs, other species. He was always willing to help with whatever projects others were involved in and had a great sense of humor. He will be greatly missed and we wish him the best as he goes forward.”

“He is greatly missed already,” said Jason Leis, KVR property manager and police officer. “It’s going to be a big void to fill. It takes a special person to do what he did. Controlling invasive species is never ending. “You think you have it under control one year, and then it’s back next year.”

In addition to identifying, detecting and controlling invasive species, Leis said Johnston did mapping and was the “on-site naturalist. As a member of the field crew, he also did whatever needed done, from moving canoes to clearing trees off the trails,” said Erica Cronk, KVR executive assistant. “All duties as assigned,” he called it.

He also was at the forefront of suggesting content for the Discovery Center upgrade, Cronk said. “He was an amazing co-worker and always a pleasure to be around. He was willing to do whatever was asked of him. I can’t say enough nice things about him, and he was so modest.”

“At the moment I have no future plans,” Johnston said. “I will presumably need to find a job. Not sure what that will be. No intentions on moving. For years I have been looking for that help wanted ad.. ‘Wanted: Geologist to sit on Ass,’ with top pay.

Meanwhile he still hopes to collect seeds and propagate native plants, make efforts to control invasive plants, and take part in citizen science activities.

KVR Bird Club meets 7 am (8:30 am during cold months) the last Saturday of the month, with locations changing each month.

Plant Lookers meet second Saturdays at 9 a.m., at Bailout Trail. September is the last “scheduled” walk, but he says there is talk about meeting in October.

Frog Walk Tuesday has ended for 2022. Anticipated start date is the second to last Tuesday in March, and walks continue until a Tuesday in mid-July.



Photo: Sister Cathy

Ben documenting the location of a recently discovered rare plant, Hairy Petunia, along with Peter Schmidt and Erica Cronk. See page 6 for more information.



Scott Walter *continued*

“All of our children are interested that the farm continue in the family,” he says. “But they’re too young yet for us to determine what that might look like.”

Scott will teach biology, research methods and statistical analysis at UW-Platteville and Platteville’s Richland Center campus. But he will stay at the KVR in a part-time position until a new director is hired, and plans to return as a volunteer. He switched from full-time to part-time at KVR on Aug. 22 and started teaching Sept. 5.

Scott’s tenure at the KVR has covered several major changes including creation of the Discovery Center, collaboration between the KVR and La Farge School District on the Forest School, and the Management Board’s decisions on changes on the KVR’s agricultural land.

“Scott did an exceptional job,” says KVR Management Board chairman Dick Wallin. “The board was really disappointed to learn he would be leaving, but he has brought some new ideas and direction to the board. These included some changes in our forestry management practices and a significant change in our ag lands by banning neonicotinoids. Scott, who came over from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, which has banned neonicotinoids on state lands it leases, was instrumental in getting the board to consider banning them.”

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

Filling KVR Positions

Hiring a new KVR director begins through the Wisconsin Department of Administration's Division of Personnel Management, which will select candidates to refer to the KVR Management Board.

Board chairman Dick Wallin said the DOA posted the job in mid-July, and the closing date was to be mid-September. When that two-month window for applications is closed, the DOA will send the KVR Management Board the resumes of selected candidates. A Management Board committee will review the applications and select those it wants to interview, with interviews tentatively set for the first or second week of October, he said.

"If the process goes smoothly, the KVR will hire a new director in November," Wallin said. But he said the board could reopen the process if it doesn't accept any of the candidates, or, if the board chooses someone who currently works for a state agency, the person would need to use their accrued vacation time so the KVR won't have to pay that.

The KVR will also need to replace Ben Johnston. Johnston held two Limited Term Employee positions. This enabled him to receive benefits such as sick leave, retirement and vacations, which employees working one LTE position do not receive, Wallin said.

The KVR director usually hires LTEs and Johnston's position has not yet been posted, Wallin said. The Reserve could hire one person to hold two LTE positions who would do all the jobs Johnston did and receive benefits, or divide the duties and hire two LTEs without the benefits, he said.

Photo Contest Still Open!

The Friends 14th Annual Photo Contest and Show is accepting entries through October 10. Submit up to three favorite photos (taken in the KVR) at the Friends' website, www.kickapooofriends.org.

Vote for your favorite photo at the Visitor Center in November, then come to Holiday Happening on December 3 to find out the winners.

Wondering about the New Exhibit?

Everyone is! The major construction and the painting are completed. The rest of the project has been held up by supply chain issues with some electrical components.

Installation of the exhibits is slated for Oct. 12-13, with a final walk through Oct. 17. That will put the donor reception event and the public opening around the end of October. Plans for these events will be finalized when the work is completed.

In the meantime, you may have noticed that some of the panels from the old exhibit are now displayed on the garage wall by the public bathrooms. Other parts are available for viewing in the lobby. Your patience has been appreciated!

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 2022)

Tricia Leis
John Young

Jump Right In!

There are many fun ways to volunteer with the Friends of KVR:

- Baking, preparing or serving at social events
- Weeding and planting Friends' gardens at KVR headquarters and Star Valley Memorial
- Showing your garden or hosting at the annual Garden Walk
- Picking up trash on Road Clean-up Day

Check the [Friends website](#) for ways you can get involved.

Julie Hoel Wears Many Hats *continued*

weekends. Julie volunteers at almost every event at KVR and values the fabulous opportunity KVR provides to build community. These events have connected multitudes of people with KVR over the years, and she recognizes the important role KVR plays in meeting our basic human need for social interaction. Julie credits KVR with forging many of her friendships, connecting her to others who share her appreciation for KVR's natural beauty and recreation opportunities.

"KVR provides such a powerful experience for people to experience the natural world. It always thrills me when kids return to KVR on a second or third field trip and remember sites they visited on their first trip here. The magic of KVR really sticks with both kids and adults," commented Julie.

Julie currently serves as the Education Representative on the KVR Management Board (KVRMB). Before joining KVRMB, Julie spent six years on the Friends of KVR

Board. Julie is also president of the Governing Council for the Forest School and spent many hours hammering nails to construct the first Prairie Springs Classroom.

Not surprisingly, continuing the education initiatives at KVR is a top priority for Julie. "I view and experience KVR through the lens of an educator – the expanse of so much open land and water to explore, the geological features, the unique history of the peoples who have lived here. I am proud that KVR has hosted special courses like Deep Water Rescue, and Large Animal Rescue training. I also want to create ways for people with limited outdoor experience to enjoy nature safely and with awe. Let's envision more ways for KVR to help people learn safe outdoor skills, like classes in camping, canoeing, skiing."

Joan Peterson is a Friends board member who lives in La Farge with her husband Kurt and their dog and two cats.

Stalking the Wild Hairy Petunia

The story starts with an unknown person telling the KVR policeman that there is Hairy Petunia along the West Ridge Trail...

Chris policeman writes to Erica at KVR office: "a gentleman approached me and advised me he had located a small stand of endangered Hairy Petunias"...

Then Erica asks me, and I say "I ain't know nuthin' 'bout no Petunia, being it Hairy or otherwise..."

So Erica and I call up some of the troops for a search...

Lo and Behold we find the plant.

Interesting is whether or not the Petunia population is original from a remnant prairie site, or was from a seed mix of a planting effort once upon a time. Folks in Madison kind of think the latter. There is the slim chance that it was brought in by a mower, or a person, which might explain

the location being in the trail corridor. IF it was remnant, one would think it would also be found off trail, yet, maybe the disturbance/mowing, or snowmobiles (pre-KVR) might have stirred up seed.

Worth noting is that there are no herbarium records for the Petunia for Vernon, La Crosse, Monroe, Richland counties. There are some in Crawford. Point is that it would be quite odd that the first such record for Vernon County would be right there in the trail and had never been noticed before.

If folks find a rare plant be it on the KVR or otherwise, the first step is to not panic. Remain calm. Take a few deep breaths.

Then document the site: Take pictures of the plant for confirmation identification – not just the flower but the leaves, the leaf position on the stalk, look for special features such as hairs on the underside of the leaf, vein patterns. Such clues are what determine



Hairy Petunia (Ruellia humilis)

a rare from a common look-alike plant. One never knows what detail is needed, so get 'em all. Also document other plants in association of the rare plant, either by pictures of habitat conditions or notes. Get a GPS reading.

Then send the information to the proper property authority and/or to the WI Rare Plant Monitoring Network (<https://wiatri.net/inventory/rareplants/index.cfm>).

Volunteers are needed to locate and relocate rare plants. Sign up today.

Ben Johnston, Citizen Scientist