



# Friends Connection

SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER - [KICKAPOOFRIENDS.ORG](http://KICKAPOOFRIENDS.ORG)



Friends of KVR (FofKVR) Member Laurie Erickson

## Volunteer Spotlight Laurie Erickson

WHEN LAURIE AND Bob Erickson purchased their hobby farm on Hwy PD, locals referred to what became the Kickapoo Valley Reserve as “the government land”. Laurie says it was like the Wild West out there. That didn’t stop her from exploring. It reminded her of many happy times she had spent in the Churchill Forest Preserve near her childhood home in Glen Ellen, Illinois. Later when trails were developed, she continued to hike and snow shoe at KVR. Sometimes she would bike from her house, lock her bike to a tree, and continue to climb to Black Hawk Rock!

After she retired from the Ontario Public Library, she had more time to wander the trails with her new dog, Munchie. During

the COVID lock down, she became the designated leader of a weekly women’s hiking group. It was like herding cats. Her weekly email started with, “I’m free to hike these days; the weather looks most promising on these days; and do you have trail suggestions?” Dozens of emails later, a hike was determined. This group was motivated to complete the KVR Trail Challenge: all 50+ miles of trails in one year! Completing the challenge took Laurie to places on the Reserve she had never been. Since then, she has completed the challenge numerous times. Last year, she and her canine companion, Munchie, completed the entire challenge by April 15th, the date dogs need to be on leash to protect nesting birds.

Although her first KVR connection was with the land, Laurie is the kind of person who responds to a call for help and has served KVR through numerous volunteer activities. It started with baking cookies and bars for events and she continued working shifts at events like WinterFest and the Friends Pasta Supper. She has been on the crew at the start of the Dam Challenge several times and even led a hike for Trails Day.

Often we ignore the environmental and historical gems near us because we are just too busy with everyday life. Laurie has taken advantage of her proximity to the beauty of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. She says being able to hike at the KVR has truly shaped her life. Spring, Laurie’s favorite season at the Reserve, is upon us. She urges you to take a hike and enjoy those incredible ephemerals.



## Mark Your Calendars! Upcoming Events

**March 28th, 10am**

Spring Walk with Friends

**April 18th, 10am - 12pm**

Friends of KVR

Adopt-a-Highway Clean-Up

**April 25th**

Driftless Dialogue: Wisconsin

Poet Laureate Brenda

Cárdenas + Friends of KVR

Poetry Contest Reading

**June 19th**

Volunteer Appreciation Picnic

**June 21st**

Summer Walk with Friends

**July 12th**

Friends of KVR Garden Tour

**September 1st - Oct 16th**

Friends of KVR Annual

Photo Contest Entries Due

**September 26th**

Fall Walk with Friends

**October 2nd**

Friends of KVR Annual

Pasta Supper

**October 3rd**

Dam Challenge



Top photo: Daryl Skrupky Garden 2025 Garden Walk.  
Bottom photo: Stephanie Lied-Polnow 2025 Garden Walk.

## In the Works: FofKVR Garden Tour 2026

Spring is here, which means that planning for the Annual Friends of KVR Garden Tour is underway for 2026! Every year, we organize a fundraising driving tour of incredible gardens around the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. This event brings visitors from all over the state to learn about different styles of gardening around the Kickapoo Valley. This year's event will be on Sunday, July 12th, 2026.

We are looking for folks to help in the following ways:

- Join the planning committee. We will meet a few times between April - June to coordinate for the event.
- Showcase your garden on the tour! We will be looking for a handful of new gardens to feature this year.
- Volunteer on July 12th to help take tickets and guide visitors at each stop.

Contact Jody Rader if you are interested in helping out! [jodylinnrader@gmail.com](mailto:jodylinnrader@gmail.com) or 612-220-8990.



### Garden Club

## Calling All Outdoor Lovers: Spring is in the Air!

The FofKVR Garden Club is looking for volunteers to help beautify and maintain the gardens that welcome all to the KVR Visitor Center for the 2026 season!

The group meets at 5:30pm every other Tuesday during the late spring and summer. Typically, we work for an hour or so weeding, planting, deadheading, and other tasks to keep the gardens maintained. Afterwards, we enjoy snacks, beverages, and camaraderie on the back deck, taking in the sounds of nature - delightful!

If that sounds like something you'd enjoy, please contact Louise Muller and you will be notified when meetings begin for the 2026 gardening season.

Louise Muller, [mullerlouise15@gmail.com](mailto:mullerlouise15@gmail.com)  
608-528-4436



2025 Friends of KVR Garden Club.

## Friends Community Garden History

Snowdrops, although not native, are a welcome visitor each spring in the Friends of KVR Garden at the Visitor Center. These and the white birch tree were planted by founder and visionary of the Friends Community Garden, friend and gardener, Bernice Schroeder. These flowers remind us each spring of Bernice and her dedication and lifelong love of nature, flowers, trees, and the Kickapoo Valley. Many of the original plants were transplanted from former homesteads within the KVR, including the oak tree which now stands tall in the center of the garden.

Bernice was a former landowner and local resident her whole life (born and raised on Jug Creek) and passed away in 2024 at the age of 104. She deeply loved the Kickapoo Valley and was passionate about preserving the history of the valley, especially during the La Farge Dam Project. She was also instrumental in the development of the Star Valley Memorial on the KVR, and the Former Homestead Garden the Friends maintain there.



Bernice Schroeder, Spring 2005.



## Earth Week at KVR

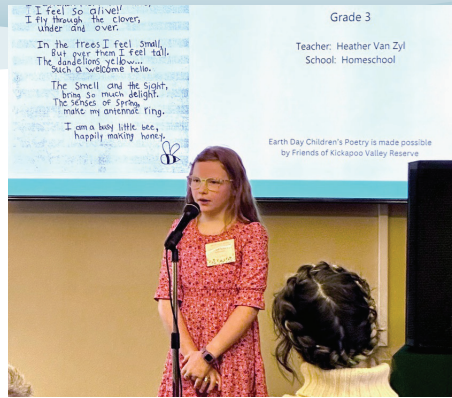
Earth Day, which is celebrated every year on April 22nd, is an international day dedicated to celebrating environmental advocacy and conservation. Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson was an initiator of the first Earth Day in 1970, in response to a number of environmental disasters in the late 1960s, such as the Santa Barbara oil spill and the fire on the Cuyahoga River in Ohio in 1969. Senator Nelson chose the date because it fell between spring break and final exams for many students, and he wanted the day to be an inspiring day of service with youth participation.

At the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, Earth Day is so highly revered, it is celebrated over an entire week!

## Roadside Clean-up

**Saturday, April 18th 10am - 12pm**

Kicking off this year's week of festivities is the Friends of KVR Roadside Clean Up Day on Saturday, April 18th. Friends of KVR will be cleaning up litter and debris alongside State Road 131 north of the KVR Visitor Center, which is the Friends' Adopt-a-Highway section. Volunteers should meet at the Visitor Center at 10am for instructions. Dress for the weather and walking along the roadside!



## Poetry Contest

**Saturday, April 25th 2pm**

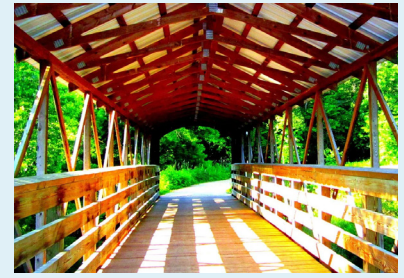
Earth Week will be wrapped up at KVR with the annual Earth Day Poetry Contest. This contest is open to youth in grades 3 - 8. Poets of Merit will be selected from each age group and invited to read their poems at the KVR Earth Day Celebration on Saturday, April 25th beginning at 2pm. This year, special guest Wisconsin Poet Laureate Brenda Cárdenas will be reading poetry and introducing youth poets at the event, in collaboration with the Driftless Dialogue series. The event is free and open to the public, and all poetry entries will be exhibited at the KVR Visitor Center during April, National Poetry Month.

### Interested in submitting a poem for the contest?

Nature-themed poems can be submitted by students in grades 3 - 8. Judges will look for originality, imagery, application of the theme, legibility and writing conventions (spelling and grammar). Entries should be on a single sheet of paper sized 5"x7" or 8"x10" and backed with colored construction paper. On the back, please include the poet's name, grade, teacher, school and school city, and adult phone contact number. Home-schoolers can use a home address.

Entries are **due Friday, April 10th by 4:30pm.**

Deliver to:  
**Kickapoo Valley Reserve**  
**33661 State Road 131**  
**La Farge, WI 54639**



## New Event: Walk with Friends

Friends of KVR is announcing a new seasonal event called Walk with Friends. Every quarter, we will meet and walk the Old 131 Trail. That's it - simply a walk to get to know other Friends and enjoy the changing of the seasons at KVR together!

Bring your own water, sunscreen, and comfortable shoes. We will meet at Landing 12 (near Rockton) at 10am on Sunday, March 28th for the Spring Walk with Friends.

See you there!

## Spring Walk with Friends

**Saturday, March 28th**  
**10am - 11:30am**  
**Meet at Landing 12**  
**(KVR Pass is required)**

Questions? Email [info@kickapoofriends.org](mailto:info@kickapoofriends.org)



## Have questions? Want to volunteer?

Visit [KickapooFriends.org](http://KickapooFriends.org) for volunteer opportunities, event details, membership information, and more!



Paradise Found, by Evan Nielsen



Next Gen Web, by Reggie Nelson



Tree at Potts Corner, by Karen Hermsen

## Winners announced Friends of KVR 2025 Photo Contest

The 17th Annual FofKVR Photo Contest concluded on October 17th, 2025. The top 12 finalists had their photos on display for Best in Show voting at the KVR Visitor Center during the month of November. The top 3 photos were announced during the Holiday Happening event that took place on December 6, 2025.

We hope you will join us in submitting photos for the 18th Annual FofKVR Photo Contest that will kick off in October!

## Winter Events Re-Cap

Thank you to all of the volunteers who helped out for the 2025 Holiday Happening and 2026 Winter Festival! Hundreds of people attended both events, with the Friends of KVR serving up food, treats, and beverages to raise funds for the Kickapoo Valley Reserve.



Ashley Baker, Joan Kent, Jason Leis.



Joan Kent, Patty Kinsey, Sandy Jaynes, Geri Hall.



Jody Rader, Karen Theis, Margaret Tingley-Farley.



Kristi Shore, Sucheta Connelly, Jan Kasperbauer, Niels, & Beth Jensen.



Niels & Beth Jensen.



Sharon Miessner, Sandra Larsen, Jackie Leis.



Jana Muehlenkamp, Sally Colacino.



Kristi Shore, Marcia Bader.



Sally Colacino, Sheila Johnson.



Karen Theis, Jody Rader, Nate Cress.



## Friends of KVR Member Survey

As part of ongoing efforts to ensure that events and volunteer opportunities are enjoyable and worthwhile for members, the Board of Directors has created an online survey to collect input. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey and share your insights at [surveymonkey.com/r/FofKVR-member-survey](https://surveymonkey.com/r/FofKVR-member-survey)

## Friends of KVR Website Refresh

You may have noticed that the FofKVR website has a new look these days. Thanks to the creative efforts of Mike Lind, along with guidance from the FofKVR Board of Directors and KVR staff, we have launched a new and improved site.

The new site has been re-organized and has a few extra features: a shared calendar with KVR, updated methods for payments, and an adapted Friends of KVR logo that builds off of the logo that has been used from the very beginning.

Thank you to the ongoing efforts of many Friends of KVR members who have supported creating and posting to the sites over the years!



## Friends by the Numbers

In 2026, so far we have counted on 274 Friends of KVR membership accounts (individual + family + business). Of these, 226 are returning memberships from last year. Thank you for your continued support of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve!

Did you know that Friends of KVR members come from 75 unique zip codes? We cover a lot of ground!

In 2026, we have gained 63 new members and one new business membership! Welcome!

Melissa Albert

Marissa & Sam Anderson

Jim & Luke Ballentine

Gary Birch

Joe Block

Christopher Canelake

Lyle & Theresa Crossland

Gabrial Daniels

John Davis

Shawn Doherty

Derek Duce

Jacalyn & Lann Ellis

Marta Engel

Cindy & Doug Evak

Angela Gatzke-Plamann

Nakaala Jean Grade

Jamie & Pete Gudgeon

Jayne Hartley

Romelle Heisel

Cory & Kristin Isaacs

Chris Jungbluth

Desiree Klein

Douglas & Kappy MacFarland

David May

David Memenga

Terrence Moen

Kendra Muehlenkamp

Susan Nesbit

David Oldenburg

Linda and Terry Parrish

Debbie Pavick

Hannah & Logan Peterson

Kai Peterson

Gordon Prejean

Todd Reavis

Hillary Runice

Justin Running

Jessica Sandry

Lucie & Neal Sawyer

Chip Schreader

Travis Shulka

Daniel Soukup

Joe Traynor

UW-La Crosse - Business

Juli Van Cleve

Lisa & Scott Vatland

Vernel Vesbach

Joe Vetter

Mike and Sharon Vonderheide

Jessica Voss

Lyndsey Winchel



### Need to join or renew your annual membership?

It's easy! Go to [kickapoofriends.org/product/membership/](https://kickapoofriends.org/product/membership/) or purchase at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitors Center.

In addition to supporting KVR, members receive the following benefits:

- 2026 KVR Annual Pass
- A lifetime subscription to the Friends Connection Newsletter
- Gift shop member-only sales