



Friends Connection

FALL 2026 NEWSLETTER - KICKAPOOFRIENDS.ORG



Metamorphosis at the KVR Gift Shop!

If you have not stopped into the gift shop in a while, it is well-worth a trip next time you are heading out to hike a trail or attend an event at KVR! After many successful years of managing the gift shop, Friends' members Louann Hoffer and Sam Reidl handed the reins over to Rose Boyajian over the summer of 2026. Since then, Rose has implemented the original vision for the shop with a new perspective.

Mission-related merchandise is emphasized, with nature-based educational materials being the top priority. Today, you will find many books on the history of KVR and the surrounding area (written by local authors), along with high-quality guidebooks on fish, wildlife, and insects that can be found within the Reserve. An inspiring selection of poetry books, influenced by the beauty of the outdoors, and ecological almanacs are also in the mix. The literature offerings are aimed at a variety of reading levels, with options children, teens, and adults.

Beyond books, other educational items for kids are featured in the shop. For example, an interactive purse that morphs from a caterpillar into a chrysalis and then into a monarch butterfly is displayed on a shelf alongside bee figurines that help to identify specific bee species.

You may find that many items that have been carried by the shop over the years are still available, however they are now displayed

in a refreshed location, perhaps alongside other new items that link education taught through programming at KVR; themes such as dark-skies and native plants are woven throughout the branded merchandise.

Rose has approached the gift shop renovation thoughtfully to make it easier to see and touch items (think: less is more!). It is also easier to move around the shop, with a new center display case and small shelves around the perimeter hand-crafted by local makers. The new arrangement opens up views of the large window of the Visitor Center, letting natural light into the shop and connecting visitors visually to the surrounding landscape.

The plan is to continue to keep merchandise fresh, seasonal, thoughtful, and reflective of the values held at KVR.



Happy customers at the gift shop in September, 2026

Mark Your Calendars! Upcoming Events

Friday October 2nd, 5 - 8pm
Community Pasta Supper

Saturday October 3rd, 9am
Dam Challenge Triathlon

October 16th
Deadline to submit images
for the Annual Photo Contest

October 20th, 5pm
Friends of KVR
Annual Meeting

Saturday December 5th
Holiday Happenings and
announcement of the
Photo Contest winners

Saturday Jan 9th, 2027
KVR Winter Festival

Staff and Volunteer Spotlight

Friend of KVR Volunteer and Staff Member Rose Boyajian has worked at KVR as the Operations Assistant for the last two years. Her professional background includes working as the manager of visitor services at the International Crane Foundation where she ran the gift shop and web store, as well as previous work with a national outdoor gear retailer. She has an empathetic eye for understanding how people experience spaces and is passionate about creating a welcoming atmosphere at the Reserve. Stop in and say hi to Rose as you are perusing the new merch at the gift shop!





Dam Challenge volunteers

Calling Volunteers!

Community Pasta Supper

Friday, October 2nd

We are still seeking volunteers to help out with the Friends of KVR Community Pasta Supper on Friday, October 2, 2026, at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center. The event runs from 5pm to 8pm and help is needed with set up, clean up, and food prep. Dessert donations are also needed.

You can sign up by calling **608-625-2960** or visit kickapoofriends.org/events/community-pasta-supper/

Dam Challenge Triathlon

Saturday, October 3rd

The Kickapoo Valley Reserve is seeking volunteers to assist with its Dam Challenge Triathlon on Saturday, October 3, 2026. Open shifts on event day include helping at the main parking lot, the boat drop, transition areas, water stations, and various other places! Help is also needed the week prior to the event with setting up the course. You can sign up by calling the KVR at **608-625-2960** or visit kickapoofriends.org/events/dam-challenge-triathlon-2/



Have questions? Want to volunteer?

Visit KickapooFriends.org for volunteer opportunities, event details, membership information, and more!



FRIENDS OF
KICKAPOO
VALLEY RESERVE



18TH ANNUAL PHOTO CONTEST

Show Us Your Best Photos of KVR

The 18th Annual Photo Contest is now accepting submissions! Every year we ask you to show us the Kickapoo Valley Reserve through your lens. Send in your favorite shots from hikes, paddles, or quiet moments outdoors. This year, 12 standout images will be selected as finalists and displayed at the KVR Visitor Center and on the Friends of KVR website. Place your vote for the Best in Show throughout November at the KVR Visitor Center.

How to Enter

Entries will be accepted from September 1st - October 16th, 2026. Winners will be announced at the Holiday Happening Event on Saturday, December 5th, 2026.

Visit kickapoofriends.org/events/18th-annual-photo-contest/ to learn more and to submit up to 3 entries.



Spring and Summer Events Re-Cap

Thank you to all of the volunteers and staff who helped out with events over the last few months. From picking up trash for Earth Week, to delighting in gardens of the area for the Garden Tour, to serving food and hosting appreciation events, we had a great time together.



Earth Week Adopt-a-Highway Cleanup April 2026

David Theis, Karen Theis, Phil Farley, Margaret Tingley-Farley, Nate Cress, Jody Rader



Volunteer Appreciation Event June 2026

Jamie Gudgeon, Jody Rader, Ashley Baker, Katee Heisel



Lisa Larson and Tom Miron



Jamie Gudgeon, Sharon Meissner, Louise Muller, Barb Monroe, Peggy Pasker



Farmers Market + Driftless Garden Tour July 2026

Jody Rader, Peggy Pasker, Karen Theis



Barb Monroe and Joan Kent



Zach Hanson, David Theis, Marcia Bader, Jim Sanford, Diane Gloede



Staff Appreciation Event August 2026

Jesse Haney, Diane Gloede, Jackie Leis, Danae Gardner, Tyler Dvorak, Amy Dvorak



Master Naturalist Service Project Bird-Friendly Windows Coming to KVR Visitor Center

Windows on our buildings are a source of light, ventilation, and allow for humans to connect with the outdoors while inside. However, windows are also one of the leading direct human causes of bird mortality. Known as bird strikes, millions of birds die every year after colliding with windows, in the United States alone. During the day, birds collide with reflective surfaces while avoiding predators, flying from trees, or looking for places to stop and rest. Unable to distinguish shiny surfaces from open flyways or reflections in the landscape, bird strikes tend to occur more often during times of the year when birds are on the move, such as spring and fall migration periods, as well as during breeding seasons.

When Nancy Melin learned about bird strikes and the fact that the KVR Visitor Center is not immune to the phenomenon, she was inspired to take action. As a student enrolled in the Master Naturalist training at KVR over the spring, summer and fall of 2026, Nancy was able to dedicate time as part of her service project (required to become certified as a Wisconsin Master Naturalist) to researching ways that bird strikes could be mitigated at KVR.

Nancy dove head first into learning about all of the companies, products, and methodologies for retrofitting windows to make them more visible and distinguishable to birds. Products such as window decals can be applied to the exterior of windows and are designed as arrays of small dots or other shapes. These are the most common types of products out there. Other methods involve acrylic paint or installation of vertical structures on windows. As she was researching, Nancy also collected detailed information about the costs, time and skills needed to install bird-safe window treatments. She had samples shipped to KVR so that staff could review and compare options for applying treatments to the windows at the Visitor Center.

Beginning with friends and fellow bird-lovers, Nancy has been leading the charge to raise funds for the project, which is anticipated to cost around \$1700. Friends of KVR has committed to donating up to \$500 to support the project, and as of the writing of this article, an additional \$630 in donations have been collected.

Want to Support This Project?

If you'd like to donate to this project, indicate "Bird-Friendly Windows" on checks made to Friends of KVR which can be dropped off or mailed to S3661 State Road 131, La Farge, WI 54639. You can also donate online at kickapoofriends.org. Thanks!



WI Master Naturalist Nancy Melin (standing, left) and KVR Staff Amy Dvorak (standing, right) presenting on various types of bird-friendly window treatments.

Friends of KVR Board of Directors Strategic Planning

FoKVR Board members met on Sunday, August 30th for a day of strategic planning. Main topics focused on expanding Friends memberships, volunteer recruitment, planning for future events, and improving current communication streams with Friends. It was a wonderful day of collaboration and we look forward to what the future brings at the KVR. The Friends of KVR Mission Statement was reviewed and a few minor changes were made. Below is the revised Mission Statement, which now places more emphasis on volunteering in service to Kickapoo Valley Reserve and promoting education.

The Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve is a non-profit organization of volunteers dedicated to assisting the Kickapoo Valley Reserve in its mission to preserve and protect the lands entrusted to the Reserve by raising funds and promoting public awareness and education.

Friends of KVR Community Garden

KVR Native Plant and Garden Club

The Friends of KVR Community Garden has been a welcoming beacon for over 20 years – serving as a place where volunteers come together to share in the delights of gardening, as well as to provide a place of quiet reflection for those passing through. This summer, many native plant plugs were donated from a local volunteer and KVR staff installed them along the walkway across from the garden, expanding the variety of habitat that support the birds, bees, and other insects found throughout the Reserve.

The Community Garden also serves as a place to learn: a hands-on laboratory where we can see how different plants respond to their surroundings and how they grow and change over time. Today, some areas of the Community Garden are thriving, while other areas have become overtaken with a handful of invasive or aggressive non-native species that crowd out the rest. Keeping up with the invasive species in the garden has become a huge undertaking, which requires more than regular weeding. The need for more action came to light as the Garden Club was preparing to host the Community Garden as a stop on the 2026 Driftless Garden Tour.

As a first step towards working on a long-term strategy to address the issue, a Friends and Master Naturalist volunteer spent time documenting and creating an inventory of all of the plants that exist in the garden today. This inventory will be ongoing over the next year, as seasonal species show up and are counted. As of now, there are over 50 species counted of trees, shrubs, grasses, and forbs within the garden! A list of potential native plant species



Friends of KVR Community Garden (Photo - Karen Hermesen)

to be planted in the garden in the future is also being developed. This list includes native plants that are found in KVR that may be lesser known. Their future inclusion will support a variety of native insects, while also serving as tool for education. Small interpretive signs have been installed in the Community Garden lately, to showcase the benefits of specific native plants.



Recently installed interpretive plant markers

Meanwhile, there has been a notable growing interest among many in the area to learn more about native plants from the Kickapoo Valley, as well as interest in learning more about gardening with native plants. Discussions lead to an idea to start the KVR Native Plant and Garden Club – a way to bring people together to learn and share knowledge. Events such as seed collection days, volunteering with the Community Garden, and plant identification hikes are some initial ideas for the group.

If you are interested in joining the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Native Garden & Plant Club, please call 608-625-2960 or email kickapoo.reserve@krm.state.wi.us to get on the mailing list. More to come as this club takes shape!





New FofKVR Board Member Welcome Alyssa Craig

Greetings! I'm Alyssa and I'm excited to be joining Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve Board. I live in rural southwest Wisconsin with my husband and our dog, Finn, and I love spending my free time outdoors—hiking, kayaking, camping, and simply enjoying everything this beautiful area has to offer. The Kickapoo Valley Reserve is especially meaningful to me because it brings together so many things I value: nature, wildlife, recreation, conservation, and community. I'm looking forward to getting more involved, learning from others, and helping to support and preserve such a special place for years to come.

Interested in Joining the FofKVR Board?

The FofKVR is seeking committed people to fill positions on the FofKVR Board in October. If you are interested, please email info@kickapoofriends.org or call 608-625-2960.

Welcome to New and Returning Friends of KVR Members!

Robert & Megan Barrow
Robert Bauer
Sarah Crowley
Catherine Fox
Mary Ann Fuetz
Chris Georgeson
Nakaala Jean Grade
Thomas Kehrer
Clay Kelly
Jarrod Kennedy
Barb & Joe Kruse
Brayden Leis
Charles Marn
Larry Mahan
Jennifer McCoy
Kim Nordmann
Heidi & Dam Obert
Ross Padlin
Kyle Potvin
Dan Reget
Allissa Reynolds
Kevin Schweder
Amy & Charles Stamschror
Sarah Stefanczyk
Greg & Katherine Vereschagin
Dan Vilanj
Daniel Wiersema
Dennis & Jeanne Woodall
Ken & Michelle Workowski



What Does a Friends of KVR Membership Support?

Fundraising through events, gift shop sales, along with Friends of KVR membership fees, are integral to support the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. In one way or another, every dollar collected or donated to the Friends is used to support the mission of the Reserve, whether that is for education, land management, outreach and awareness, special projects, or day-to-day operations.

Here are some of the KVR programs, purchases, and events that are supported by the Friends:

- Scholarships for summer camps
- Equipment for land management activities
- Driftless Dialogue Lecture Series
- Trail and campsite maintenance
- Dark Sky Lighting at KVR
- Native plantings
- Habitat improvements
- Visitor Center and Star Valley Gardens
- Winter Festival
- Dam Challenge
- Ephemeral Art Classes



In Memoriam

Friends of KVR honors the lives of two active members who passed away recently. Sheila Johnson passed away on July 25th, and Laurie Erickson passed away on September 4th. Both of these incredible women were dedicated and committed to the mission of the KVR and will be dearly missed.