



2004



Project AWARE

Every year since 2003, Project AWARE (A Watershed Awareness River Expedition) has challenged Iowa volunteers with a week-long canoe trip and river cleanup. The project has a simple goal: **Give ordinary Iowans the chance to do something extraordinary.** AWARE began on the Maquoketa River, but travels to a different Iowa watershed each June (National Rivers



Month). Participants paddle rivers and hunt trash while learning about water quality and Iowa's natural history.

Riverse

In 2004, when AWARE tackled the Des Moines River watershed, David Williamson's "Riverse" art project came on board. "Riverse" honors the work of volunteers while involving them in the art-making process.

With Williamson's assistance, Project AWARE volunteers and other Iowa citizens turned recovered scrap metal into artwork during the 2004 Iowa State Fair. **They used some of the 96 cubic yards of trash collected that summer, and "Riverse" 2004 was born.**

The Sculpture

"Riverse" 2004, our half-ton water quality icon, depicts a scale-model canoe paddle. Atop its handle sits a model of a stonefly, an insect associated with healthy watersheds.

Look closely at this canoe paddle and you'll see bridge pilings, part of a box car door U-joint, fence posts, rebar, farm machinery parts, sled runners, bicycle sprockets, a spinner from a fishing lure, a car bumper, a truck rim, a tire tread, and a clevis.

All the aluminum pieces you see were cast in sand molds by volunteers at the state fair. This metal came from smelting all the aluminum trash collected during Project AWARE (popcans, baseball bats, lawn furniture, running boards, storm doors, etc.).

All the mold impressions were inspired by items found during the cleanup. For example, part of a cast iron stove's flue grate inspired the mouthpiece and wings of the stonefly. You can also see many aluminum fishing bobbers.

Take special note of the bottom of the stonefly's legs. During the state fair, a little boy who had been watching and listening to our

demonstrations presented us with a handful of sticks. He proudly announced that he had found legs for our "bug." We took the best of those sticks and used them as patterns for our "bug's" aluminum legs.

From the bottom up, every inch of this sculpture has had volunteer input, whether in thoughts and suggestions that provided a creative spark, hands-on effort, or a simple nod of approval. As David Williamson has said from the beginning, "Some artists focus on the process of public art. I focus on making the process of art public."



Clay Smith