



*It's out there.
It is trash...
and tons of it can be
found in our rivers.*



Joe Wilkinson

Project AWARE (A Watershed Awareness River Expedition) set off in 2003 with specific goals and objectives in mind that focused on increasing awareness about water quality, the impact a group of individuals and organizations acting in partnership can have, and showing the state of Iowa that its citizens are serious, concerned, and willing to make a difference.



DNR Photo

With an ideologic mission – to improve the Maquoketa River by removing unsightly trash – the volunteers on the 1st Annual Project AWARE did more than just clean a river... they started a movement. Since that time, Iowa has experienced an explosion of river cleanup projects, creating what some have termed a *Cleanup Culture*.

Working together – neighbor to neighbor, community to community – as stewards of the environment, these volunteers help make Iowa great.



David Williamson

The Future
is in Your
Hands

STRONGBACK



David Williamson



David Williamson

One of the most visible AWARE innovations has been the formation of an artistic off-shoot of the program entitled *RiverSe*. During this volunteer-driven effort, artist David Williamson painstakingly guides everyday citizens as they transform trash collected from the cleanup efforts into amazingly detailed water-related sculptures and thought-provoking works of poetry.



The sculpture pictured in the center was inspired by and built from trash collected on Project AWARE in 2006 by volunteers who muscled over 48,000 pounds (66 ten-wheel dump truck loads) of trash out of the Iowa and English rivers. Aptly named *Strongback*, it not only commemorates volunteer river cleanup efforts and documents some of the discarded items found, but also pays homage to the dozens of canoes that have been used to haul hundreds of tons of trash from Iowa rivers – a strongback is the form from which canoes are built. Re-bar canoes built from strongback forms can be found on the sculpture, with a paddle blade emerging from the center.

Work gloves cast in aluminum depict the index, middle, and ring fingers in the shape of a "W." This design, when first created at the Iowa State Fair, started off as a disappointment when an AWARE volunteer failed to apply enough pressure on his pinky finger when the mold was created, resulting in a three-fingered cast. Jubilation quickly ensued, however, as three deaf onlookers held up their own fingers in a "W" gesture and said, *"this is good...this is the sign for water."*



David Williamson

From the bicycle-seat catfish to the ascending archways, *Strongback* is designed to engage all who experience it. As the archways increase in size, they symbolize the growth of AWARE and invite others to get involved in Iowa's natural resources.