



Friends of the Land

Director's Report

This is Merry Rankin's final Director's Report for the Keepers of the Land Volunteer Program.

Merry is now the Director of Sustainability at Iowa State University in Ames.

We wish her all the best!

Thanks for the Life Lessons

Greetings Friends!

It is a very bittersweet occasion for me as I sit down and write my last newsletter column to you. For those of you who don't already know, I have left the Department of Natural Resources to take a very exciting position at Iowa State University as their Director of Sustainability.

For those of you who know me well, know that I am pretty much on the side of "crazy tree hugging" when it comes to being green. This job allows me to "dabble in green" all over ISU's campus toward ensuring that the Cyclones are as green as possible. To that end, in my first four months, I have been involved in initiatives, projects, and discussions about green building, green cleaning, green purchasing, recycling, local foods, composting, energy conservation, stormwater management, native plantings, interpretive signage, marketing, volunteerism, service learning, green transportation, power plants, alternative energy, biofuels, websites, grants, loans, green reporting cards, carbon footprints, and the list goes on.

And so I'm feeling like I'm

in the best of both worlds, I'm in a field I love and I'm able to do every single thing in this job that I've ever been professionally passionate about.

Well... except study wild elephants – which I may not be able to swing for a while. But seriously, it has been a good move and I'm SO enjoying it.

And as often happens when we say good-bye to something we've enjoyed so much, I've been reflecting back on my time at the DNR, particularly as Director of the Keepers of the Land Volunteer Program. And I have discovered I have so much for which to thank you all. Now this thanks is not the typical... thanks for all the blood, sweat, and tears you've unselfishly given to the DNR and Iowa's natural resources over countless years (that goes without saying). It's actually thanks, on a more personal level, for all the life lessons that I take with me as a result of knowing and spending time with you.

Life Lesson #1 – Never underestimate the potential of a small group of committed citizens.

Many of you might recognize this lesson from my signature line on my DNR emails. While I have known this lesson for a number of years... through being a volunteer and working with volunteers, now as I reflect back, I realize that I



Merry Rankin in her new position, "greening-up" this year's Iowa State University Veishea Parade.

had never really stopped to understand just how intimately I had lived this lesson through my interaction with all of you. Each and every one of you is the epitome of this life lesson. There was never a time in talking to you on the phone, receiving an email from you, or attending one of your meetings or events that I wasn't amazed at what you were planning, what you had accomplished or what you were aspiring to accomplish. Even in times when finding supplies or money to complete a project was challenging, you found a way to keep things going and moving forward. Thanks for reminding me to embrace the wonderful things life brings to us in small packages.

Life Lesson #2 – Nobody does it better than the locals.

All too often as I have worked in different positions and studied in different countries, I have witnessed the tendency for the locals to be left out of the equa-

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tion. In noting this, I'm not saying that there is no room for collaboration amongst a diversity of stakeholders; in fact a team effort makes any project or initiative stronger. But without the locals as a part of that team, nothing will be the best it can be. It's the locals who know their town, their resources, and their culture. In all of the occasions that I worked with each of you I was always in awe of the grassroots activism you collected and inspired in all of your projects. Thanks for instilling in me the importance of recognizing that the greatest resources are often right in your own backyard.

Life Lesson #3 – Money is just a detail

Sure... not much can be done without money – but plenty can be done with little money. And all too often good ideas never get beyond the whimsical discussion stage because of concerns about money. Time and time again I was shown by all of you that money is just a detail. If a good idea was a good idea, it would happen; things would fall into place; and what money was really needed – would come. And you blew me away with the creativity, the vision, the resourcefulness, and the perseverance you exhibited in times when the funds you originally thought you needed fell short. And what success

you achieved as a result – triathlons, hog roasts, omelet breakfasts, trail rides, lectures, movies, cabins, lodges, and playgrounds (to name just a few). Thanks for helping me remember to always keep my eye on the goal, not the pathway to get there.

Life Lesson #4 – Faith Moves Mountains

Some of my best memories in working with all of you were the times I got to personally meet you and talk to you about how your group came together or how a particular project came to fruition. The stories I heard were all very different and unique, yet had a common theme - faith. Faith in a dream, faith in a vision, faith in a wish. Many of you told me, "We were told it couldn't happen, but we knew it could," or "We were told it would never catch on, but we knew it just needed a chance." And I'll even admit... there were a couple of things that I even had to wonder about myself. And just like I should have expected, you proved me mistaken. Ah... the strength, the power, the magnitude of faith. Thanks for ensuring I always remember the basic ingredient of success – faith.

All the very best to you, dear friends!! I sincerely hope we cross paths many, many times.

This January we bid a fond farewell to Merry Rankin as she set off from the DNR on her new adventure as Director of Sustainability at Iowa State University.

Merry was recognized by DNR Director Richard Leopold for her years of service to the DNR and passion for volunteer service.



Merry Rankin receiving her Certificate of Recognition for DNR Director Leopold.



Rankin posing with her new honor.



And, of course, there was cake!



Have an event you want to see in the newsletter?

LET ME KNOW!

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We're on Facebook!

In our continuing effort to stay on top of the latest technological trends in marketing and communications, the Keepers of the Lands Volunteer Program has a Facebook page! You need a Facebook account of your own to log in; then type "Keepers of the Land" into the search box at the top of the page. Become a fan and get updates when we update our page. It's another marketing tool we can use to promote what you do, and a great marketing tool your Friends Group may be interested in using to promote your activities.



Friends Groups Honored at 2008 Volunteer Awards Banquet

Friends groups and other volunteers from all over the state gathered to celebrate and be honored for their service to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources at the 2008 Banquet, held Nov. 8 at the Botanical center in Des Moines. The “Being the Difference,” themed banquet was a chance to celebrate the accomplishments of one of the DNR’s most important resources—volunteers.

“We depend on our volunteers very, very much,” DNR Deputy Director Liz Christiansen told the group. “Over 230,000 volunteer hours were donated to the DNR. That’s extraordinary.”

Christiansen went on to explain that those hours would have cost the DNR \$3.4 million and would have required the department to add 112 full-time employees.

Attendees enjoyed lunch, followed by a presentation about volunteer efforts and effectiveness within Iowa. The Saving Our Avian Resources (or SOAR) organization also presented a program on avian raptor rehabilitation and reintroduction with two special guests: a hawk and a bald eagle! Volunteers had a chance to see and interact with the birds closer than most people would ever have in the wild.

The banquet also offered an awards ceremony and the opportunity for vol-

unteers to share their volunteer achievements with each other.

Congratulations to all our Friends! And thank you all for “Being the Difference.”



Friends Groups and other volunteers share ideas and projects at the 2008 Banquet.



Members of Friends of Fort Defiance pose with their award alongside DNR staff.

Friends groups honored by the Keepers of the Land and the Department of Natural Resources were:

Friends of Fort Defiance collected the Outstanding Large Project Volunteer Award for their enhancement and rehabilitation of Fort Defiance State Park.

Friends of Maquoketa Caves State Park were nominated for their dedicated service to the Maquoketa Caves State Park Visitor Center. Thanks to the Friends of Maquoketa Caves State Park, thousands of annual park visitors are provided a unique educational opportunity.

Friends of the Ledges were nominated for their service to the campgrounds at Ledges State Park. Thanks to the group, the park has a valuable addition to the park that would have been impossible for staff to complete alone.

Friends of Prairie Rose State Park were nominated for their project that resulted in the completion of two camping cabins at Prairie Rose State Park. Thanks to the group, the 90,000 annual park visitors have accommodations not offered in most parks.

Editor’s Corner

Welcome to the Winter newsletter! I’m Tom Stone, the AmeriCorps member in marketing and communications with the Keepers of the Land Volunteer Program at the DNR. This is the first Friends newsletter I have written the second I have edited. I have to say that I am delighted to be involved with all the talented, creative, and motivated people I got a chance to meet at the Awards banquet and I hope to get to meet



Tom Stone

more of you in the course of my work here.

Winter is the slow season for volunteer groups, it seems, as getting people to freely agree to head outside in snow and sub-zero temperatures is a stretch even for the most dedicated. I have been hearing about warm weather plans made at winter meetings, however, and I can’t wait for all the great contributions for the Spring and Summer newsletter!

Keep up the good work and keep your submissions coming!



Don’t See Something?



The newsletter relies on **YOUR** submissions!

What projects, adventures, and ideas are you and your Friends Group having?

Email me!

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