



WORKING TO PROTECT THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER  
AND ITS WATERSHED IN THE TWIN CITIES AREA

# River Heroes

These individuals, each in their own way, are making the river healthier

by Jay Walljasper

Friends of the Mississippi River's work is aptly described by our name. We are a group of people who care for the river and look out for its best interests. This friendship can take many forms depending on the passions, skills and capabilities of individuals dedicated to making a difference. Laurie Bruno devotes countless hours restoring natural habitat along the river. Ruth and Butch Rehtzigel protected a large portion of their riverfront property as part of the Pine Bend Bluff Scientific and Natural Area. And Daniel Engstrom conducts scientific research that shows us how to better protect the Mississippi.

The river needs more local heroes like these. FMR is deeply grateful for their contributions.

## Laurie Bruno Restores Native Habitat

Laurie Bruno, proudly wearing a blue FMR SuperVolunteer t-shirt, leads me down a hill from Minneapolis's West River Parkway to one of the city's best kept secrets— an oak savanna tucked into the Mississippi gorge near 36th Street. She's carried a plastic bag to nab any trash we find on the trail.

"This is the first place I volunteered for FMR in 2006," she remembers. "There was a team of us clearing out invasive species—buckthorn, sweet clover, garlic mustard and things. These hills were filled with garlic mustard then. Now they are ablaze with sunflowers. And it's wonderful to see the grasses that let you know this a prairie remnant."

At that time she was working as a social worker for Dakota County and knew very little about the threat of invasive species to Minnesota's native ecosystems. "Back in the '80s, I had actually paid my kids to transplant buckthorn from one part of our backyard in Burnsville to another."

Since retiring Bruno has become a certified flora expert, spending long periods restoring natural habitat along many



Laurie Bruno helps to restore the river one place at a time.

stretches of the river. She's earned honors as one of FMR's most dedicated volunteers for many years and was selected for special training to become part of the organization's Gorge Stewards Leadership Team, who are committed to working in the area on their own as well as at organized events.

Ambling up a hill, she points out a lead plant, which is an indicator species showing the prairie's recovering ecological health. She then stoops to examine an unfamiliar species, which turns to be a kind of ground cherry. "I love to be out in nature, but I am the kind of person that really

likes to do things," she adds. "I really like working with plants. I find pulling invasive species really satisfying and cathartic."

On the advice of fellow FMR volunteers, Bruno studied to

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Friends of the Mississippi River engages citizens to protect, restore and enhance the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities region.

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

# Will Ford Motor Company Leave a Toxic Legacy?

by Whitney Clark, Executive Director



For many years the great Mississippi River in the Twin Cities was not thought of as a natural, scenic and recreational asset to our community but instead was treated literally as a sewer

and dumping ground for industrial waste. Thankfully, that attitude has mostly shifted and today we appreciate the many gifts the river brings us. Unfortunately, there remain some vestiges of that old toxic legacy that are proving to be stubbornly difficult to address. One example that FMR has been closely engaged in is Ford Motor Company's toxic waste dump on the riverbank next to their St. Paul assembly plant.

In 1925, when Henry Ford decided to build his newest assembly plant on the bluffs of the Mississippi River in St. Paul, most of the land around the facility was undeveloped fields and small farms. Over time St. Paul's Highland Park neighborhood grew up around the plant and the community learned to accept the presence of a massive industrial facility, in part because of Ford's reputation as a good neighbor. The plant employed more than 2,000 people at its peak and provided a stable source of tax revenue for the City.

After the plant closed in 2011, Ford announced its intention to demolish the plant and redevelop the 122 acre site. What most neighbors don't know is that from 1945 until 1966 Ford dumped unknown quantities of industrial waste, including solvents and paint

sludge, on the floodplain of the Mississippi River below the bluff next to the plant. The dump, known as "Area C", is one of Minnesota's first superfund sites and adjoins the popular Hidden Falls Park. Because of its location on the floodplain, Mississippi River floodwaters regularly inundate and erode the waste material. The unlined dump sits on a sandy beach on top of the Prairie du Chien aquifer.

In recent months Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) has led the effort to raise awareness of the dump and draw attention to potential risks both to the river and to public health. Perhaps in part because of the increased attention, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is now asking Ford to conduct further investigation of the dump before deciding what additional management steps to take and whether to require Ford to clean it up. FMR has several concerns about the thoroughness of the proposed investigation and the possibility that the dump could be allowed to remain at the river's edge permanently.

I believe that Ford is a good company that cares about its reputation in the community. As the investigation of the site proceeds I believe it will become increasingly clear to both Ford and the MPCA that the right thing to do is to completely remove the dump and restore the site to its original floodplain condition. It might even make sense for Ford to donate the parcel to the city to be added to Hidden Falls Park. That would be an outcome that we could all be proud of.



Ford Motor Company's toxic dump (foreground) next to the Mississippi River in St. Paul.

# FMR Advocates for Stronger State Rules to Protect the River Corridor

by Alicia Uzarek

The Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA), a 72-mile corridor along the river from Dayton to Hastings, was established in the mid-1970s to protect and enhance the corridor's scenic, natural, cultural, historical, mineral, economic and recreational resources.

In recent years, MRCCA standards and guidelines have been difficult to enforce, resulting in some development projects negatively impacting corridor resources. In response, FMR has worked with state officials to transition corridor protections from an Executive Order to state rules.

The Minnesota DNR is currently mid-way through the rulemaking process. The DNR released their draft rules for public comment in June, hosted three public meetings in July and collected comments through September.

FMR has been intently following, and working to influence, the rulemaking process through community member involvement and direct contact with the DNR and Governor's office.

Last spring, FMR started a petition that received over 1,600 signatures urging the DNR to write strong rules. Over the summer, FMR has held meetings with advocates and advocacy groups, encouraging specific comments to ensure the rules will adequately protect the river's unique resources. FMR also developed user-friendly online resources to make it easy for community members to submit substantive comments and encouraged individuals to follow their city's commenting process. View FMR's comments at [http://fmr.org/our\\_](http://fmr.org/our_)



*A large and supportive crowd listened as FMR Board Member George Dunn testified in favor of strong MRCCA rules at the DNR's MRCCA public meeting in July. More than 350 people attended the DNR's three MRCCA public meetings.*

[programs/river\\_corridor/critical\\_area.](#)

Next, the DNR will release a revised draft rules in late-2014. After a 30-day public comment period, an administrative law judge will consider the comments collected, hold a public hearing and issue a report. The Governor will then review and approve or veto the rules. If approved, the rule will be adopted into Minnesota law, which is expected in 2015.

Once the rules are officially adopted, the 30 river corridor communities (5 counties and 25 cities/townships) will update their comprehensive plans and local ordinances to comply with the new MRCCA rules. FMR will use the new state rules, as well as city ordinances and plans, to advocate for the protection and enhancement of our river corridor for generations to come.

# Comments Sought for Saint Anthony Falls Regional Park Plan

by Irene Jones

For the past year the Minneapolis Park Board has been working with a team of community and technical advisors and design consultants to develop a revised park master plan for the Central Riverfront Regional Park, the area bounded by the Plymouth Bridge to the north and the I-35W Bridge to the south. The new draft plan was officially released for public comment in November and there will be a public hearing scheduled in January. And with the new plan, a new name is also proposed: the St. Anthony Falls Regional Park.

A lot has happened in this area since the first master plan was completed 25 years ago, including the creation of Mill Ruins Park and the Mill City Museum, the Guthrie Theater's move to the riverfront, and the addition of thousands of new downtown residents to the growing Mill District. As a result of this growth, the riverfront park has surpassed the number of visitors of all other regional parks, including the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes.

The new draft plan builds on historic treasures such as the Stone Arch Bridge, Nicollet Island and Father Hennepin

Bluffs, but it also looks to modernize some elements of the park to better meet the needs of the surrounding urban neighborhoods.

New recommendations include updating roads and trails to favor non-motorized transportation, better wayfinding and signage for bicyclists and pedestrians, improved water access and canoe portage routes, and better access to local transit. It also takes a bold approach to identifying land that still needs to be acquired and establishing goals for park expansion where feasible.

To view the plan and submit comments, visit [MinneapolisParks.org](http://MinneapolisParks.org). There will be a public hearing scheduled in January.



*St. Anthony Falls in downtown Minneapolis is the centerpiece (and proposed new name) for a riverfront park master plan update currently underway.*

become a Master Naturalist through a University of Minnesota Extension program, and recently completed training to become a Master Water Steward through the Freshwater Society and Minnehaha Creek Watershed District. She also volunteers with the Mississippi National River & Recreation Area and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, plus tends gardens at her church in South Minneapolis and the deck of her apartment in Edina.

"I'm old enough to have seen the river change a lot," she adds. A favorite activity of hers as a child was hiking the trail down from Minnehaha Falls down along the Creek to its confluence with the Mississippi but when attending college at the University of Minnesota, she thought of the Mississippi mostly as a sketchy place where people snuck away for drinking parties. "Now the Stone Arch Bridge is a big destination. I always take people there to show off the city. The whole river is a treasure that's there for everyone to enjoy."

Bruno has been part of this change through her tireless volunteer work for FMR and annual contributions. She was one of the first people to donate a car to the organization in 2006. "As a social worker, I put a lot of miles on an old car, so I didn't think it would be worth much. But they sold it for \$1,500," she says with a note of amazement.

She describes volunteering for FMR as like a hobby. "You are doing something you enjoy. I am changing a small part of the city. I am creating good habitat for birds and butterflies. I go to places that I never knew existed. I see flowers that I've heard of but never seen before. And I get to go back to the places I've worked and see how they are different now."

### Ruth & Butch Rehtzigel Preserve Riverfront Land at Pine Bend Bluffs

FMR members Ruth and Butch Rehtzigel love wildlife and always wanted to live right in the midst of nature. So one day in 1986 when Butch noticed a for-sale sign in front of a woodland tract on the Mississippi in Inver Grove Heights, the couple sprang into action.

Now they look out over the river's backchannel from their deck, and regularly follow the comings and goings of deer, fox,

raccoons, opossums, trumpeter swans, egrets, songbirds, ducks,

woodpeckers and a flock of wild turkeys who strut around the place as if they owned it which, in a way, they do.

That's because Ruth and Butch saw to it that most of their shoreline property, including a wooded island,

would be protected as part of the Pine Bend Bluffs Scientific and Natural Area SNA, a neighboring nature preserve.

After nearly seven years of conversation with Friends of the Mississippi River about how best to keep their beloved land wild, they sold 66 acres to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for \$725,000 in late 2010. They still own eight acres around their house.

"I call this place a piece of heaven," Ruth says. "Some people said, 'Gee, you could have got a lot more money for it.' We always had builders knocking at our door wanting to buy ten acres. But I know we did the right thing."

FMR's Conservation Director Tom Lewanski, who met Ruth and Butch at a public meeting in 2003, says, "We're very grateful to the Rehtzigels, who have cherished the nature and beauty of this land for decades and decided to permanently protect the critical habitat that it contains."

Just a few miles downriver from downtown St. Paul, the Pine Bend Bluff Scientific and Natural Area represents one of the largest undisturbed natural areas in the metropolitan region. The land is open to the public for hiking, birding, nature study and photography.

"This addition" notes Peggy Booth, state Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA) Supervisor, "...is particularly valuable because it connects two other parcels in the SNA, providing a larger continuous block of habitat."

FMR and the Dakota County Farmland and Natural Areas program each contributed \$50,000 for the purchase, with the rest largely funded by state bonding money.

To reach the Rehtzigels' home is an adventure. You turn off the paved road just past Industrial Service LLC, which they founded after Butch, who was then working as a machinist, saw an ad for water pressure cleaning machinery in a magazine, and noted "there was nothing like that around here." The firm, which they sold ten years ago, specializes in cleaning oil refineries and power plants.

The bone-shaking ¾-mile driveway leads through tall hardwood trees, which gives you a glimmer of what the fabled Big Woods must have looked like before white settlement of southern Minnesota. Their home sits right among the trees, with only a small clearing for a garden dotted with numerous birdfeeders.

**"FMR is always a top priority for me. I like the people. I like the projects. I am really getting to know the river by working with them." - Laurie Bruno**



Ruth and Butch Rehtzigel protected 66 acres of riverfront natural area at Pine Bend Bluffs.

“It’s the quiet and serenity we love,” Ruth says about their home of 27 years. “The river and the trees and everything. In the winter when the leaves fall you can see the reflection of the sunrise on the river. It’s just perfect.”

## Daniel Engstrom Mucks Around to Keep the River Clean

For Daniel Engstrom, sediment lying at the bottom of rivers, lakes and bogs is not just muck. It’s a virtual vault filled with valuable information about the natural world—past, present and future. As an environmental geologist and director of the Science Museum of Minnesota’s St. Croix Watershed Research Station, he drills core samples from deep beneath waterways across the state and around the globe to study environmental changes through the centuries.

What he discovers is not always ancient history. In fact, his data sometimes influences the latest policy decisions about how we can protect and restore our environment. He was part of the team that uncovered the toxic properties of the common ingredient in anti-bacterial soaps triclosan—a revelation that spurred FMR’s successful campaign last year to make Minnesota the first state to ban the chemical.

“Dan’s sediment research was essential to identify triclosan-derived dioxin accumulation in Lake Pepin and other lakes in Minnesota,” notes FMR’s Executive Director Whitney Clark.

His detailed study of rapidly increasing sediment in Lake Pepin shows how current industrial agriculture methods imperil the Mississippi ecosystem. “The lake is filling in at a dramatically accelerated rate—roughly ten times what had been the natural rate before Euro-American settlement in Minnesota.”

“To address a whole range of water quality issues in the Mississippi, we have to align our agricultural policies with our water quality policies.”  
– Daniel Engstrom

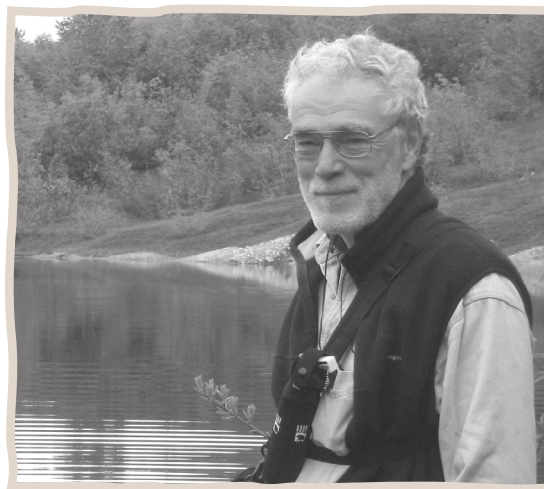
At that rate, Lake Pepin will fill in completely over the next 300 years—reducing the widest spot and one of the most scenic sights along the length of the Mississippi to a river channel within a flood plain. This

shocking scenario inspired FMR to step up efforts to reform agricultural practices in the Minnesota River watershed, which studies show is the major source of increasing sediment in the Upper Mississippi.

“Lake Pepin is threatened primarily by agricultural erosion, but not from the fields as you might expect. Two thirds to three-fourths of it is from the river channels themselves. Some people say, ‘So that’s natural, right?’ But the fact is most of the problem is due to higher river flows driven by agricultural drainage and the loss of wetlands,” Engstrom explains.

“We have to improve the way we do agriculture in order to cut down on the erosion,” he adds.

Engstrom—who is also an adjunct professor at the UM’s Water Resources Science program—stresses that his work is scientific inquiry, not political advocacy. That’s why he appreciates FMR. “We provide the research underpinnings that citizens groups like FMR can use. They are a science-based organization. They know how to partner with other organizations. They know how to get things done. They’re willing to call a spade a spade.”



Daniel Engstrom conducts science in the public interest

Engstrom worked as a science advisor on the State of the River Report, which FMR produced with the National Park Service, and has spoken about Mississippi-related issues to the Minnesota State Legislature, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and a number of public events on sediment pollution.

As director of the St. Croix Watershed Research station, he leads a team of five Ph.D. scientists conducting environmental research for scholarly publication and public use. “Our primary mission is with water-related problems and how what’s done to the land affects the water,” he says. The work takes them all over the globe, from Mongolia to Arctic Alaska.

But Engstrom’s heart is clearly in Minnesota. He grew up outside Duluth, and earned a B.S., M.S and Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota’s Duluth and Twin Cities campuses. Showing visitors around the Research Station near Marine-on-St. Croix, he shows delight in pointing out a brook trout stream that flows into the St. Croix River and a restored native prairie where they conduct experiments on ecological diversity.

He believes that Minnesotans’ increasing attachment to the Mississippi and other waterways is a hopeful sign. “We will only get change when people care about water. Not when it’s just a muddy river we cross at 60 mph in our car, but when it’s a place where we walk, where we bike, where we look at it in the moonlight. That makes a difference. Then we’ll do something about it.”

# State Adopts New Phosphorous Standards for Rivers & Streams

by Trevor Russell

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) recently approved new, long-overdue standards for excess phosphorus and algae in Minnesota's rivers and streams.

Excess phosphorus in rivers and streams can harm aquatic life and recreation by reducing water clarity, depleting oxygen levels in the water, and causing excessive (and sometimes toxic) algae blooms.

The new state standards establish pollution limits that will protect our rivers and streams and help preserve healthy fish and plant communities as well as swimming and other water recreation opportunities. If rivers and streams fail to meet standards, the state can identify necessary pollution reductions and help restore our waters to health.

In developing the newly adopted river standards, the state used an "eco-region" approach, setting unique standards in different portions of the state based on how waters in each eco-region respond to pollution.

In addition, the unique standards include "stressor-response" criteria. The standard measures both phosphorus levels

(called the "stressor" variable) and "response variables" like oxygen levels and algae growth. Violations of the standard are not determined by any single factor, but by whether or not excessive phosphorus results in response variables that harm water quality.

The standards also account for the unique features of the Mississippi River and its navigation pools, and will help protect Lake Pepin, a natural lake on the Mississippi River downstream of the Twin Cities that is especially susceptible to nutrient pollution.

These new nutrient standards represent an important victory for water quality in Minnesota, and FMR applauds the MPCA and our members for supporting protective nutrient standards for our rivers and streams.



*Excess phosphorus can lead to harmful algae blooms in Minnesota's rivers and streams.*

*Photo by Amy Robak, Courtesy of Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.*

# Invasive Carp Caught in the Twin Cities but Good Progress on Deterrence

by Whitney Clark

For the first time invasive bighead and silver carp have been caught on the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities. In July 2014, commercial fisherman conducting a survey for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) netted a 40-pound bighead carp and a 20-pound silver carp. Both fish were pregnant females and were caught near Cottage Grove above Lock and Dam #2 at Hastings. A DNR spokesman called the discovery "disappointing but not entirely unexpected". The invasive fish have been steadily working their way up the Mississippi River since their accidental release in the Lower Mississippi sometime in the 1970s.

Despite this bad news, significant progress has been made in recent months on efforts to deter the upstream migration of these fish. In June, President Obama signed the Water Resources Reform and Development Act into law. FMR helped to lead advocacy effort leading to this victory. This legislation will permanently close the Upper St. Anthony Falls lock which will decisively slam the door to invasive carp passage upstream of Minneapolis, effectively protecting hundreds of miles of rivers and lakes in central and northern Minnesota.

In another notable development, researchers at the University of Minnesota's Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center



*Invasive silver carp. Let's not let this happen here.*

have begun to develop and deploy, on an experimental basis, a new acoustic deterrent technology. This technology, which was installed in Lock #8 near La Crosse, Wisconsin, works by placing underwater speakers inside the lock that emit a sound that is repellant to invasive carp but not to native fish species. The sound is played when the lock chamber is open to allow vessels to pass through to the pool above. If this technology is found to be effective it could dramatically slow the migration of invasive carp and buy time for effective population control technologies to be developed.

# Oak Savanna Restored to a Treasured Park in Hastings

by *Karen Schik*

Tucked away on the southeast side of Hastings lies a very small, but very unique city park. Just 10-acres in size, Old Mill Park was established around the ruins of the Ramsey Mill, a flour mill built in 1856 that burned down just 38 years later in 1894. The wall sections that remain from the building flank a deep gorge with whitewater rapids of the Vermillion River, all combining to create an interesting scene. The surrounding landscape of the park, however, was FMR's primary interest with this site, and is destination-worthy in itself.

The rolling hills of the park were once covered by dry oak savanna. When FMR began to work on the site in 2013, old expansive oak trees still graced the site, but were crowded by both non-native and native woody plants that do not belong to a savanna habitat. In cooperation with the City of Hastings, and with funding from the Natural Resources and Environmental Trust Fund (as approved by the Legislative and Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources) FMR hired Prairie Restorations, Inc. and has been coaxing a savanna community back to the site.

After the woody removal work was completed, half of the site that still harbored many native prairie species was burned in spring 2014. That area rebounded with robust growth of native grasses and wildflowers. The other half of the site had very few native species, so it was treated then burned and will be seeded in fall 2014. FMR will continue to manage the site for several years.



Just below the falls, the Vermillion River is flanked by the steep limestone bluffs of Old Mill park (left side), and Vermillion Falls Park (right).



Oak savanna restoration in progress: after woody plant and invasive grass removal, the site was burned. Here it awaits a fall seeding.

To help engage park visitors, a small demonstration prairie near the park entrance was recently planted by the Hastings High School Biology class. Most of the plants were generously grown by Bailey's Nursery, with seed that was gathered by a previous high school class. Tree House Landscaping & Emily's bakery also contributed to the project, as well as several other volunteers. We gratefully thank these many wonderful community members for all their contributions.

## Welcome Amy, John and Kate

by *sue rich*



Left to Right: Amy Kilgore, Kate Clayton and John Briel

FMR would like you to join us in giving a warm welcome to our newest staff members, Amy Kilgore, John Briel and Kate Clayton. **Amy Kilgore** is a familiar face to many as she most recently served as our events intern this past spring and summer. Since March, Amy has worked with hundreds of FMR volunteers at our restoration and education events. Amy — who holds a BA in geography, environment and society — came on as FMR's Outreach Assistant & Events Registrar this August. Amy helps to spread the word about FMR activities and makes sure everyone who signs up to help the River gets all the info they need (plus a few Facebook-worthy photos afterwards).

FMR was delighted to bring **John Briel** on board this April to build member and corporate relationships as our new Development Associate. Growing up in his home state of New Jersey, John sailed and kayaked the waters of the Navesink River, and discovered a lifelong passion for water issues and conservation in the process. While earning his MA in urban and regional planning at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, John fell in love with the Twin Cities and the river that defines it.

**Kate Clayton** brings the perfect mix of people and science skills to her position as Assistant Stewardship Coordinator; she is a former FMR and Peace Corps volunteer, professional naturalist and outdoor programmer with a BA in biology and MS in soil science. As FMR's go-to person for groups in need of an education or service outing, Kate coordinates FMR's storm drain stenciling outings in St. Paul and leads youth, corporate, college and other groups in stewardship activities.



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# Another Very Successful Evening Celebrating the Mississippi River

By Heather Haynes, Development Director

On October 1, 2014, Friends of the Mississippi River held the 13th annual *Evening Celebrating the Mississippi River* at a Twin Cities architectural landmark on the river, the Weisman Art Museum. We were joined by over 200 new and old friends of the river to celebrate and enjoy a raucous live auction with auctioneer extraordinaire Glen Fladeboe, a presentation by Executive Director Whitney Clark about our accomplishments and our upcoming advocacy work, and warm, funny, engaging storytelling by special guest Kevin Kling.

In addition to a wonderful evening of connecting to and celebrating our great river, *An Evening Celebrating the Mississippi River* raised critical funds to carry out our work. Building on last year's support that enabled us to increase our capacity to organize and take on advocacy issues on behalf of our river and community, this year's event raised more than \$90,000 to move forward with advocacy in the coming year.

The Board and staff of FMR extend a sincere and heartfelt thank you to all of the individuals and businesses that helped make this evening such a great success!

If you'd like to ensure that you're on the invite list for next year's event, please contact John Briel at 651-222-2193 x19 or [jbriel@fmr.org](mailto:jbriel@fmr.org).

Images: Matt Holland, Photographer



FMR Policy Advocate, Alicia Uzarek, with happy petition signer, Joan Kreider.



FMR board member Julia Kaemmer with Olivier Vrambout, Kate Tilney & Fred Kaemmer.



Special guest Kevin Kling spinning tales about the river.

**FMR.ORG**

Get the FMR event calendar and river news in your Inbox! Sign up for our twice-a-month e-newsletter "Mississippi Messages" at [www.fmr.org](http://www.fmr.org).



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