



# Family & Friends

SUMMER 2014

FREE

## Howling Huskies

*Dog breed gaining popularity in Watertown*

## Family & Friends

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## On The Cover



Steve Gatzow readies his four huskies for a springtime walk. On the cover: Blizzard, a 1-year-old husky, is described by his owner as quiet and a cuddler. See pages 26-39.

SAMANTHA CHRISTIAN/Family & Friends

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It's 1,208

We welcome your story ideas. If you have a suggestion, send  
it to: [familyandfriends@wdtimes.com](mailto:familyandfriends@wdtimes.com)

# Rescuing the Rock River

Kelly Lynch explains the cleanup efforts at Helden Pond, noting how fast algae has grown even in just the first month of spring.

SAMANTHA CHRISTIAN/Family & Friends

**BY JAKE MEISTER**  
**Family & Friends staff**

**T**he Rock River hasn't exactly been considered to be a hub for great fishing in recent decades, especially concerning some of the more popular game fish. However, if you listen close enough to the rumblings of some fishing enthusiasts who have set their bobbers in the area long before the turn of the century, you might pick up on a newly minted sense of optimism, due in large part to the efforts of Rock River Rescue.

Established in 2002, Rock River Rescue has worked to promote good stewardship along the Watertown portion of the Rock River and to reinvigorate the river's fishing with a discernible increase in fish variety.

Not knowing exactly how successful the group could become, Rock River Rescue President Tom Beyer said the group of six individuals decided to work on a modest stretch of riverway between the city's two dams as a sort of an experimental project.

"We chose the initial area in between (the two dams) so that it would be nice and manageable for what could quite possibly have been a very small organization with very limited funds."

One of the group's primary goals, which is still maintained, was to improve the Rock River's ecosystem, primarily by the meticulous expulsion of a particular fish species viewed by many as a nuisance.

"I talk to groups of Rotarians, Boy Scouts or whomever and one of the first questions I always ask is, 'tell me a fish that lives in the Rock River.' The first answer all the time is carp, so what we've tried to do is build an ecosystem around the carp, to give them predators. Even though we're never going to get rid of them and we know that, they will not be the only species in the river.

Rock River Rescue has moved toward its goal of a more balanced fish population by removing the carp using a myriad of different solutions.

The group has added signage to city parks, urging visitors to fish the carp and dispose of them in carp barrels, with some of the enclosures around the barrels being provided by Rock River Rescue.

One of the more exciting activities the group puts on to curb the carp issue is an annual fishing contest, now dubbed, "Cash for Carp." Held the first Saturday in June, the event takes place at Riverside Park and is open to both hook and line fishing.

"We drive around Riverside Park in a Gator vehicle provided by Dave's Turf and Marine with some buckets and a big fat stack of \$1 bills and we pick up the carp and give them a dollar for each one they've got," Beyer said. "It's kind of cool that way."

Another way Rock River Rescue has worked to cut down on the carp population is by stocking the portion of the river with a variety of young-of-the-year fish spread throughout the food chain, including pan fish, bluegills, crappies, perch, smallmouth bass, walleyes, northern pike and muskies. According to Beyer, some of the northern pike have been stocked at a size upwards of 20 inches long.

The group also dabbled in the past in stocking the river with largemouth bass and adult flathead catfish. However, current DNR regulations prohibit the stocking of live fish caught from another body of water. As a result, fish must come from hatcheries, which do not produce flathead catfish.

Even with the exclusion of the flathead catfish and largemouth bass, Rock River Rescue still has a wide enough variety of fish at hand to mitigate the growth of carp throughout their life.

"We try to stock things that are going to prey on carp anywhere from the egg stage up until the point where they're about a foot long. With the flathead catfish (that already are in the river), it's bigger than that, up to 5 pounds," Beyer said.

It isn't just the variety of fish that Rock River Rescue produces that is impressive, but the sheer size of the project as well. Beyer said the group typically drops about 20,000 fish into the river each year, with some years producing more fish than others. The group has also expanded past its original confines.

Two-thirds of the fish stocked are placed between Watertown and Hustisford, with the remaining third in town.

Jan Wilbrath, the oldest female member of Rock River Rescue, is proud to help out the organization any way she can, even if it is just taking care of trash.

SARAH CHRISTIAN  
Family & Friends



Beyer believes working in the area upstream of Watertown will ultimately benefit the city.

There is going to be a greater population of game fish up there, which will drift down here. Hopefully a smaller population of carp will drift downstream. It's been working out well. There are some real nice game fish populations between Hustisford and Watertown.

The fish are bought from Gollon's Bait and Fish Farm in Dodgeville, the firm Rock River Rescue has worked with since its inception. All fish are ordered every February and typically delivered

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## Brighten Every Day with a Great Smile

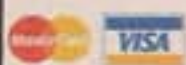


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**B**eyer said Heiden Pond was ignored in various ways when put up against its neighboring Clark Park and as a result, didn't receive treatment it deserved.

"It's really underutilized and not appreciated. It's kind of a fixer-upper. With a little bit of time, a little bit of money, it could be a nice addition to the park."

Calling the project a fixer-upper could be a generous assessment considering the condition Heiden Pond was in when the group began sifting through it.

"It was like a water dump," said Kelly Lynch, Heiden Pond project chairman and Rock River Rescue member. "It was full of tires, mattresses and all sorts of debris."

The conditions of the pond didn't deter the group from the cleaning, cutting and trimming necessary to reverse several years worth of abuse and neglect. The



Ron Altenberg volunteered his time on a recent Saturday this spring to spread out wood chips on the walking trails at Heiden Pond.

SAMANTHA CHRISTIAN/Family & Friends

efforts didn't fall on deaf ears, as many individuals and groups throughout the community have

expressed support and even offered assistance.

Local Girl Scouts have built birdhouses. The city of Watertown has helped dispose of the unnecessary vegetation cut down from around the pond. It has also donated excess wood chips for trail building, which began this April. Lynch described the construction of the trails as a "huge part of the project."

Once again, the DNR has provided the group with advice, based on surveys the department has conducted on the pond.

Lynch and other members of Rock River Rescue have been both shocked and pleased by the increasing level of support.

"Now that it's happening, it's like holy cow, we're starting to gain some momentum," Lynch said.

Lynch said the group is getting closer to stocking

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# Fiber on the Farm!

**SATURDAY, JUNE 21**  
**9AM-6PM**

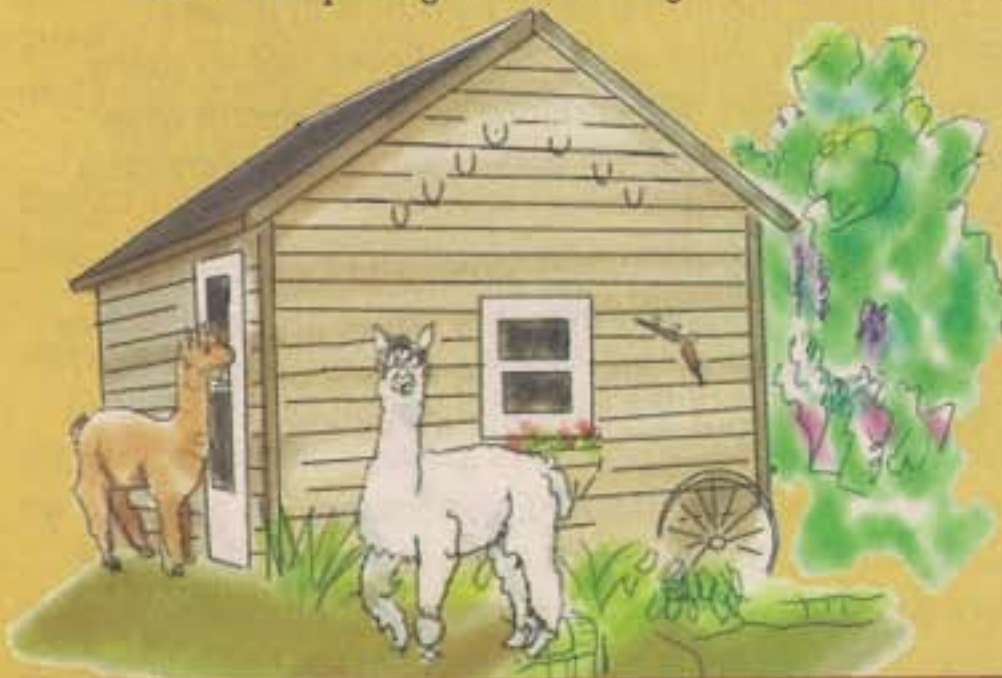
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by September and stocked as large fingerlings.

Since Rock River Rescue only receives what Beyer describes as technical support from the DNR, the group pays for every fish that is put into the river through fundraising.

The group's biggest fundraiser occurs every fall at Turner Hall. Beyer said the fundraiser resembles a Ducks Unlimited Banquet and includes a raffle, silent auction and a live auction. Beyer said the event has been very successful thanks in part to the large volume of prizes awarded, with approximately one item available for every two people.

For most, it isn't about bringing home a quality prize at a fundraiser.

"People know that they are donating to a good cause," Beyer said. "We've had people who have supported us for years, ever since our inception."

Money is also earned through memberships, which have a yearly cost of \$25 per person or \$40 per family or business.

Other organizations have been instrumental in the stability and growth of Rock River Rescue. The Izaak Walton League of America makes a yearly donation for the purpose of stocking fish. Recently, the Watertown Outboarders made a generous donation.

The openhanded acts of local groups mirror the strong reception the organization has received from the community.

"It's been incredible," Beyer said. "It's been really heartwarming. When we first started, the general perception was that the river was polluted (which Beyer contends is not the case) and would not support any other life other than carp, but people supported us nonetheless. As the organization has taken hold and the things that we've done have worked, that level of sup-

port has just increased."

In addition to adding fish to the area, Rock River Rescue has created other projects focusing on different additions to the area.

The group has begun habitat projects between the two Watertown dams. Last year, the group put in half log structures intended to promote the spawning of smallmouth bass.



Siblings Kyra Lynch (left) and Ely Lynch walk along the new bridge while their father, Jessie Lynch, not pictured, helped haul wood chips for the trail.  
SAMANTHA CHRISTIAN/  
Family & Friends

Each structure is comprised of a 4- to 6-foot portion of an oak log which is put on top of a cinder block. The log and cinder block are then held down to the stream bed by a pole.

Beyer said such structures encourage spawning because smallmouth bass are partial to spawning under or in proximity to an object.

Beyer said the structures also increase the carrying capacity of the

river, which will help to keep the river in the condition Rock River Rescue desires.

To further enhance fishing experience along the river's edge, Rock River Rescue has purchased handicap accessible fishing piers, which are now located at Riverside and Fannie P. Lewis parks.

"To have a nice, enjoyable body of water is going to benefit the city and we figured this (installing piers) would be a good way to do it," Beyer said. "The piers get a lot of use. Roughly from May when they're put in to the fall when they're taken out, you can drive through town and pass them anytime during the day and there are people using them."

"Our goal is to create a self-sustaining fishery rather than always having to put fish in. If we do things like that and improve the carrying capacity, then over the years we're hopefully going to have to stock less, at least in this area."

Not all of Rock River Rescue's projects concern the river. After the death of two of the Rock River Rescue's more active and original members, Elmer Schwantes and Dave Schaefer, the group decided to fix up the city's Heiden Pond to pay homage to the late members.

"Elmer was one of our original six members, so he was there right from the time where we were trying to figure out what we were going to do. He was always kind of a rock for everyone who was here. Dave was our vice president and was very well-respected in the organization. When they passed away we got some memorial money from their funerals. We figured we could take that money and buy extra fish, dump them into the river and be done with it or we could honor them by giving them some type of a legacy to the city that was more fitting for what they did for the organization.