



Farmington Hills Department of Public Service director Tom Blasell (left) and Dan Rooney (in water), superintendent of the Division of Public Works, help clear debris from the Rouge.

Rouge Rescue '86

Volunteers, city employees help give the Rouge a cleaning

By Joanne Maliszowski
staff writer

IT WAS humid and muddy. But 125 volunteers and 40 city employees participated Saturday in "Rouge Rescue '86 Cleanup" in Farmington Hills.

While city employees trudged through the muddy Rouge, pulling up dead trees and logs, volunteers stood ready on the banks to take the debris

to waiting trucks.

"We had 20 truckloads. They were five-yard dumps. And we filled two dumpsters," said Dale Countegan, coordinator of the city's Rouge cleanup effort and assistant to the director of the Department of Public Services.

Farmington Hills volunteers and city employees joined 1,000 Detroit-area workers Saturday in "Rouge Rescue '86" — coordinated by WJBK-TV and partially underwritten by Ford Motor Co. — a major volunteer river cleanup effort involving 10 communities, private businesses and governmental resources.

Most of the volunteers who turned out Saturday morning shared a concern for the Rouge, most of which runs through private property in Farmington Hills. The waterway winds 126 miles through suburban Detroit. Most of the Rouge River Basin is in Wayne and Oakland counties.

"I LIVE on Pebble Creek, a branch of the Rouge. And I guess I turned out today for the same reason I've worked on cleaning Pebble Creek for 47 years; I just like it. I enjoy it. You get to know the river — its characteristics," said Farmington Hills naturalist Fred Harrison.

"The river just adds to the beauty of the whole area. Its value should be brought out to kids in school at an early age."

Harrison, like many of the cleanup volunteers, lent a hand out of love and concern for nature.

"There is so little left to the area's natural beauty. You drive out Hagerly and where you once saw farms, now you see nothing but blacktop. I would just like to do my part to helping preserve the natural beauty that remains," he said.

Volunteer Leah Blizman, a Farmington Hills zoning employee, echoed similar sentiments.

"I'm concerned about the condition of waterways, ecology, and you can add acid rain to the list," said Blizman, joined in the cleanup by husband Paul and daughter Alexis.

"It's the chance to have some direct affect on things rather than just complaining or supporting things," Blizman said.

"It's a general sense of community. It's nice to put back. And the hope is that everyone will participate to make the community better."

FARMINGTON HILLS officials called the cleanup effort — centered behind the Farmington Nursing Home, 30405 Folsom — a great success.

"Everybody worked together and worked well," Countegan said. "And we pretty much completed the work."

The Farmington Nursing Home site was chosen because it is considered one of the city's biggest problem areas along the river. Major logjams have blocked the river and, in some cases, caused it to back up and overflow, Countegan said.

The Rouge in Farmington Hills has not suffered from pollution as it has in some of the downriver communities.

"Our main objective was the five logjams — and that was completed," said Dan Rooney of the city's Department of Public Services. "It was a good target area. It was congested with logjams and debris, and we found some tires."

Volunteers in Farmington Hills included representatives from the Boy Scouts of America, Farmington Area Jaycees, Farmington Nursing Home, Botsford General Hospital, Civil Air Patrol, as well as families and individuals.

FARMINGTON HILLS' cleanup was sponsored by the city, Farmington Nursing Home, Botsford General Hospital and Community Emergency Medical Service.

"It was great to see as many citizens volunteer show up. There were a couple of families, scouts, women and men. It was a real effort," said City Manager William Costick, who also joined the early morning cleanup. "It was dirty, it was muddy and it was humid. But everyone had a great time."

Farmington Nursing Home residents provided coffee and doughnuts during registration and ran water stations throughout the cleanup. Lunch was provided by the nursing home. Ford Motor Co. offered volunteers hot-air balloon rides.

By the end of the morning's cleanup, volunteers were as covered in mud as city employees who jumped into the river.

Following lunch, Harrison said he went back upstream from the nursing home and worked "for another hour, helping clear the fine debris." Other than picking up little bits of debris and putting up the guardrail near the river that had to be taken down Saturday for the cleanup, volunteers and city workers completed the work that needed to be done, Rooney said.

Although city officials have not been involved in lengthy discussions about future cleanups along the Rouge, most believe efforts should continue.

"I think it would be a great idea," Costick said.



Lisa Simon (foreground), community relations specialist with the Farmington Hills Department of Special Services, leads members

of Boy Scout Troop 491 (Detroit) to their work station along the Rouge.



Robert Rankin of Farmington Hills' parks and recreation staff tightens the chain on his saw during the Rouge cleanup.



Dave Sellers (left) and Larry Thomas, both 11, of Boy Scout Troop 491 (Detroit), haul debris from the Rouge to an area where it can be picked up by trucks.

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