

# Volunteers help rescue river from logs, junk

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

Mattresses, snow sleds, office chairs, tires, logs and the usual assortment of junk made their way up the river embankment thanks to a human chain of some 100 volunteers in Saturday's Rouge Rescue '88 in Farmington Hills.

The more-than-three-hour cleanup was proclaimed a success by volunteers and local Rouge coordinator Dale Countegan, Farmington Hills department of planning and community development director.

"This has been an enthusiastic group," Countegan said. "A lot has to do with it being the third year running and the good weather."

Under the dirty, pale blue Rouge Rescue '88 T-shirts, heat and exhaustion, volunteers made a good time of the annual cleanup behind Boys Republic, on the north side of Nine Mile, and west along the river to Inkster Road.

"What a workout, I don't need to go to the gym now," an unidentified volunteer said as he clambered up the embankment toward the refreshment tent, where a barbecue lunch was provided following cleanup.

SOME, WHO expected the morning to be pure drudgery, surprised themselves.

"I have never had so much fun in my life," parks and recreation worker Bill Dyer said.

His colleague, Tom Galvinton, agreed.

"It's our first time out here. We were going to go clean up some ballfields but decided to come out here instead. It's been a lot of fun."

Though most of the 100 volunteers were city employees, Countegan said the turnout was just right, considering the difficulty in reaching the cramped site.

"If we had more people we'd have been walking all over each other," he said.

MOST VOLUNTEERS said they came out to the river at 8:30 a.m. simply to help out their community.

And most said more than one coordinated cleanup should take place during the year.

"One time out of the year, I get to do something for the public," said Glenn Lemmon of the Farmington Hills assessor's office.

"I think if you live in a community, you ought to contribute to it," resident Joan Pompel said.

The cleanup effort is both a symbolic gesture for a pollution-free river and actual progress in removing debris that stops the river's natural free-flowing course, Pompel said.

"I'd really like to see this done more than once a year though. It can't hurt," she said.

Farmington resident Bill Liba, who calls himself "a fixture" of the annual Rouge cleanup, described to other volunteers within earshot the cleanup campaign's kickoff Friday at Fairlane in Dearborn.

"We keep working piecemeal with this so we'll get the flow downriver," Liba said. "They keep talking about Ford (Motor Co.) polluting downriver. But it's cleaned up. We're the ones who are dumping and it's going downriver."

ADMITTEDLY, THE one-day cleanup does nothing to improve directly the river's real pollution — raw sewage and toxic pollutants. But the annual cleanup goes a long way in improving the river's flow.

When the river changes its course because of blockage, it erodes the river banks and prevents the river's natural abilities to cleanse itself of the growing fecal contaminants, Countegan said.

Fecal waste enters the river through various ways, particularly from sanitary sewer and septic system overflows.

The long-planned, \$45.8 million Evergreen-Farmington sanitary sewer improvements are designed to prevent sanitary sewer overflows by adding capacity to sewer lines.

Even more troubling is the possibility of septic and sewer systems emptying directly into the river from houses, which is illegal.



RANDY BONST/staff photographer

Volunteers help clear a stretch of the Rouge behind Boys Republic on Nine Mile. In the background, Bill Liba (left) of Farmington and Al Whittemore of Farmington Hills move tree limbs

on the river bank. In the foreground, Farmington Hills public service employees Paul Pinkowski (left) and Walter Lay use chain saws to cut through logs removed from the river.



BOB SKLAR/staff photographer

AT LEFT: Dennis Skowronski (right) of Farmington Hills and his children, Amy (left), 9, and Todd, 6, survey the banks during Rouge Rescue '88. This is the second year they've lent a hand.

*'I think if you live in a community, you ought to contribute to it.'*

—Joan Pompel  
Farmington Hills

# Chief gets involved

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Meanwhile, she has thrown herself into volunteer work, continuations of affiliations from New Jersey. Soon after arriving she looked for the local chapter of the League of Women Voters.

"This is the most exciting organization to be part of," Macon said of the LWV. "It's life and learning and growing."

THE LOCAL chapter is composed of 71 members, a mixture of "women with babies, retirees, professional and non-working people."

"The common denominator is concern for issues that affect everyone. . . This is a pretty strong chapter with leaders at the regional and state level."

The league, Macon said, is best known for its voter guides, a project which rotates among area leagues.

"Our phones ring off the hook this time of year," she said. "It speaks to the non-partisan nature of our group."

The LWV also sponsors candidate nights for local campaigns in the West Bloomfield and Farmington areas.

"They Represent You" brochures are written and distributed by the group to give residents the names of everyone from "the president on down to the zoning board." Members also distribute pamphlets prepared by state and national LWV chapters in schools, libraries and nursing homes.

THE LEAGUE tackles issues of concern on the na-

tional, state and local level as diverse as water quality and child care.

The concerns overlap with another service organization, Alpha Kappa Alpha, of which she has been a member since she was 18. A number of the members of the predominantly black organization are also members of LWV. The group sponsors the Child Abuse Neglect Council, of which Macon is treasurer.

"I wanted to be part of the Pontiac group," she said. "I feel a commitment."

Macon was raised in the inner city schools of St. Louis, but as an adult has lived in predominantly white neighborhoods.

"I'm living in two cultures," she said. "It's not difficult. It's not a dichotomy."

Her son Kenny, a student at West Hills in West Bloomfield, is very comfortable. "It was difficult in the neighborhood at first, because he was new, not for any other reasons. It's been a perfect neighborhood for him. There's a boy in every house."

OF HER easy transition, she said, "It's important to be outgoing, to look for ways to be part of the community, not ways to be isolated."

During the interview with Macon, she received two telephone calls with invitations to serve before she put on the answering machine. Does she ever say no, we asked.

"Well, if I can't do it I usually find someone else to help out. I know I won't be adding another significant volunteer role right now. I want this to work well. "Too much would only dilute it."

# School unions stay neutral

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Looking at general issues, first-term incumbent Abernethy said he was disturbed with the poor decision-making skills of current students, but pleased with the way the current board has "invested the district's money." He remains concerned with raising public awareness of the fall bond issue for a new elementary new school. He also called for enrichment classrooms for science and music in the Farmington district.

Newcomer Jacob hyped the fall pilot project at Highmeadow, calling for enrichment classes for all Farmington schools. He also called for better parent involvement throughout the schools, and said, "We have a good school district. We need to make it better. Broad, full-based education — that's what it's all about."

Three-term incumbent Prutow also called Highmeadow a "prototype" for future education in the district and called for using "technology as a tool" in the schools. "It's an exciting time to be involved in edu-

cation, especially in Farmington," she added.

Meanwhile, members of the Farmington Coordinating Council's PAC, affiliated with the Michigan Education Association and the National Education Association, sent a letter to the MEA membership last week, advising them of the group's decision not to endorse.

"The board has not acknowledged or proposed a plan to remedy the gender-based (pay) discrimination which exists in the Farmington School District," the letter said. "The two incumbents have failed to display the leadership needed to bring about a settlement in the ESP (Educational Support Personnel) contract."

The PAC failed to endorse Jacob, the letter said, because "we did not find the challenger . . . knowledgeable enough to warrant our endorsement."

PAC chairman Bill Brinker stressed his group did not advocate a "no vote" stance, but is simply leaving the choice of candidates to indi-

vidual members. The PAC could not endorse any of the three under the circumstances, he said.

Although both incumbent candidates were cautious in their reply to pay-equity questions because of negotiations, both responded to the audience inquiry Wednesday.

"Comparable worth is worthy of taking a look at," said Abernethy. "I'm troubled if (the contract) has taken this long. People in these positions need to look at comparables. To look to industry, to look to government."

Prutow added, "I feel we've offered a very equitable package."

Members of the ESP unit, mainly secretaries and para-professionals in the district, have worked without a contract since last July.

The PAC committee represents members of the Farmington Education Association; the Farmington Bus Drivers unit; the Farmington Custodial, Maintenance, Cafeteria unit; and the Farmington ESP.

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