

Elisabeth Geoffrey, Livonia

Elisabeth Geoffrey of Livonia is a person who appreciates nature, and so she has considered the stream in her neighborhood an asset. Until recently, that is.

Geoffrey enjoys daily walks, and often her walks take her to Idyl Wyld Golf Course, "because of its cleaner air, pretty landscaping" and particularly its gurgling Bell Creek.

A branch of the Rouge River, the tributary flows from near Geoffrey's house on Ellen Drive past Hoover Elementary School, through the city golf course, and then east into Redford Township.

While on a winter walk, the German-born Geoffrey discovered "to my dismay that somebody had used the Bell Creek as a disposal for engine oil. The dumping seemed to have taken place farther upstream, as I would see (and smell) the oil coming from a storm drain located close to Hoover Elementary School."

The situation so concerned her that she wrote to the Observer & Eccentric.

"As this has happened before to a lesser extent, and as we still have wildlife in and around the creek, I thought that this deplorable act should be brought to your readers' attention," she wrote.

Geoffrey also reported her discovery to



JOHN STORMAZANO/staff photographer

Elisabeth Geoffrey, while walking along the Rouge through Livonia and Redford, has been dismayed to find oil dumped in the waterway. "We spend money

and taxes on our neighborhoods, and I don't want to see any environment polluted," she says.

Michigan Department of Natural Resources officials, who said inadequate staffing prevents them from investigating such "low-priority" situations. A DNR water quality specialist did say, however, that a company in Livonia's industrial park is being investigated for illegal dumping.

A POLLUTED ROUGE is high priority with Geoffrey.

"I think it's disgusting that companies bypass legal disposal methods just because they don't want to pay the cost," said Geoffrey, a member of the Animal Protection Institute and Green Peace, an international

organization of environmental activists.

"I think that's terrible. We spend money and taxes on our neighborhoods, and I don't want to see any environment polluted. Toxins go into the ground, and we don't know how long they'll stay there."

M.B. Dillon

Becky Blackmore, Plymouth

It's only when you walk to the edge of Becky Blackmore's back yard that you see the Rouge River, snaking below a grassy embankment in all its muddy-green glory.

The Middle Rouge Parkway surrounds much of the river as it winds south through Plymouth Township and east Plymouth. That's why only a handful of Plymouth residents can actually say they live on the river.

"It isn't really easy to see," Blackmore tells a visitor as she scans the river behind her Northville Road house. Just past the river, a tangle of underbrush and thin trees mark the eastern edge of Hines Park.

"It never was clean," said Blackmore, 25,

who recalls growing up near the river. "I'd go down there and fish some times. But there was never anything I wanted to keep."

Besides fishing for the occasional carp, crayfish and sucker, Blackmore said, they would make small boats and go out onto the river.

"We'd get to Phoenix Lake (a quarter mile away) and then quit," Blackmore said she always wanted to swim in the Rouge, especially on hot days. "It's a shame to have a river behind your house you can't even use."

Two geese float downstream past a house whose owner has cut a wooden stairway into a lush embankment sloping toward the

river. A tree stirs in a soft breeze. The river appears almost luminescent in the morning sunlight.

"WHEN IT GETS to raining a lot, it floods back into the park. We just watch it go — it gets going real fast."

Blackmore favors attempts to clean the Rouge, but questions the effectiveness of such a project. "I don't think they can clean it enough to be able to use it."

Although the Rouge flows near her house, Blackmore said she really doesn't think about the river much. "It doesn't seem like a health hazard. But it doesn't seem useful."

Kevin Brown



Becky Blackmore fished the Rouge, but never kept her catch.

Marge Walker, Westland

When Marge Walker and her husband bought their house on Malvern in Westland seven years ago, it was the back yard that caught their attention.

Large enough for four young children to play to their hearts' content, it abuts the Edward Hines Parkway and has the Lower Rouge River as a barrier between the quiet residential neighborhood and the park crowds.

Malvern is one of a few areas of the city that abuts the river, or the parkway. As a result, the river provides residents with a country flavor in a suburban setting.

"We like it there," Walker said. "We like it because of the privacy . . . no houses or anything behind us, just the river and the park."

The river is about 80 feet down a hill from the Walkers' property and they, like their neighbors, try to "keep it neat beyond the fence line."

They have experienced no problems with flooding and the river tends to keep park visitors from cutting through their yards during the summer months, according to Walker.

With the river as their neighbor, the Walkers must take a few precautions. They must carefully store wooden things because of rodents, and with four children, they must chain and lock the backyard gate to keep the youngsters from wandering down to the river banks.

a health hazard, in Walker's estimation, although it does, at times, produce a less than pleasing aroma.

"The only time we get a really bad odor that smells like a sewer is if the wind blows the right way," Walker said.

As aesthetically pleasing as the river is, the Walkers support cleaning up the waterway. Removal of debris along its banks, would, Walker believes, enhance their already peaceful environment.

"We bought this house more because of the back yard than the river," Walker said, "but I think it would be fine if they cleaned it up. They should get rid of the debris just as long as they leave the trees. That kind of cleanup is OK with me."

Sue McDonald



Marge Walker's most noticeable neighbor is the Rouge River. "We like it there," she says.

THE RIVER'S POLLUTION doesn't pose