



VILLA GROVE CLASS OF 1983 during the reunion on May 27. Back row: Rob Sherwood, Jon Hubbard, Rene' (Woodward) Doody, Ginger (Greger) Patton, Tammy (Greger) Wallen, Troy Greger, Nathan Fleming.

Middle row: Dana (Pittman) Clark, Joanne (Bosch) Adomaitis, Kim (Hundley) Morgan, Lisa (Wilcoxen) Redmon, Kayla (Rund) Apgar, Cammy Foster, Tracy (Hatchel) Helm.

First row: Randy Robbs, Michelle (Henderson) Hesse, Katie (Bloom) Gutshall, Andy Hardin, Cindi (Billman) Haake, Amy (Ellington) McCollom, Diana (Dyke) Wyant. Photo by Dominik Stallings.



GIDEON WILLIAMS gets in the zone for the 6 and under Freestyle. Photo by Margie Carter.



DARLA STANFIELD (left) speaks with Karen Bickers (front) and Jane Pickett (back) about products from Auteberry Farm during the June 2 First Friday Farmers Market, which produces goats milk soap amongst other goods. Photo by Dominik Stallings.

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Embarras

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stream.

Nutrient pollution is one of the most serious water pollution problems facing the nation, and addressing it is especially important for cities like Charleston that use the river for drinking water. Fortunately, observed Spaniol, "there's a lot of interest from stakeholders," a good sign for conservationists.

A landscape-scale approach to river restoration

Grand Prairie Friends, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to preserving tall-grass prairie and woodlands in east-central Illinois, is one stakeholder working to rescue the Embarras.

"River corridors are natural connectors," said Sarah Livesay, Grand Prairie Friends's executive director. For her organization, conservation strategies that restore wetlands, woodlands, and prairie along the Embarras in turn support native biodiversity, provide flood protection and recreation opportunities, and help filter out nutrient pollution.

When it began in 1984 the focus was on acquiring scattered remnant prairie tracts in northern Champaign County, but over time it expanded to landscape-scale conservation. "We now know that nothing likes to live on an island," Livesay explained; "no animal or plant species can live that way."

The map from the Grand Prairie Friend's 2020 Annual Report shows parcels of protected conservation property along the Embarras River in Coles County.

During the last decade Grand Prairie Friends has transitioned to acquiring and restoring land along the Embarras River in hopes of stitching together a river corridor for native plants and animals, and in the process improve the river's water quality. Currently they have restored 14 miles of land along the river between the town of Villa Grove and Fox Ridge State Park.

Ruth Riegel, a Coles County horse breeder who lives along Hurricane Creek, a tributary to the Embarras, wasn't initially thrilled to see nature trails built by Grand Prairie Friends in Warbler Woods, a place she used to go birding. "I didn't like to see the whole world acting like it was their personal discovery. But I've grudgingly come around to the fact that they are doing a lot of good," she said.

Revising farming practices for healthier rivers

While Grand Prairie Friends is working to transform land along the river, an-

other not-for-profit organization, Grassland 2.0, is working directly with farmers to transform practices. Grassland 2.0 has a five-year United States Department of Agriculture Coordinated Agricultural Projects (CAP) grant to explore what farms along the Embarras River could look like in the future.

According to Grassland 2.0 team member Randy Jackson, the Campbell-Bascom Professor of Grassland Ecology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a good place to start is by asking farmers, "when your children inherit your farm, what do you want them to have?"

Once these goals are articulated, he said, his organization can help communities explore what is possible in the landscape, design a new supply chain, and incentivize and manage change. All these have the goal of replacing some current farming practices (such as farming right up to a riverbank) with more sustainable practices (like planting riverside buffers of perennial grasses), even if this means taking some land out of production. In fact, Jackson explained, taking land out of production in favor of grasses will eventually benefit farmers. Grasses have deep, fibrous roots that hold and build up soil, they soak up water and reduce flooding, and they capture and filter harmful components of fertilizer before they reach the water supply.

Asked if the Grand Prairie Friends' strategy of purchasing and restoring land along the river is effective, Jackson nodded but said that the problem is much larger than people think. "It's a drop in the bucket. We can't fix the current system. It is fundamentally flawed. The immense nature of the problem is going to require immense change—transformative change. Yes, it is expensive to change, but not as expensive as cleaning up the mess."

The chart from the 2011 Embarras River Watershed Management Plan showed that a majority of non-point source (unspecified entry site) pollution comes from corn and soybean farming (tan and orange colors)

The work ahead

There has been deep interest over time in cleaning up the river. In 1993, the not-for-profit Embarras River Management Association partnered with other agencies to develop the initial Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. This plan was renewed in 2011, and again just last fall.

These plans identified water quality targets and made recommendations on how to achieve them, but when the

newest update of Illinois's Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy Report came out last year the river's water quality, like that of most other rivers in the state, had actually gotten worse. "The [improvement] needle just hasn't moved as much as we had hoped," Spaniol said.

Spaniol hopes the new management plan spearheaded by Coles County will go further towards inspiring meaningful action. It recommends building additional wetlands, planting woodlands, establishing grassed waterways and terraces in farm fields and providing grant opportunities to make these mitigations possible. Stakeholders like the Farm Bureau and other soil and water conservation districts along the river have already shown interest, and she hopes other districts in the watershed will be inspired to write their own plans and get funding to implement conservation practices.

In the meantime, Grand Prairie Friends continues its restoration work. Their most recent property acquisition, the 80-acre Edna Edwards Burnett preserve near Villa Grove in Douglas County, was added just this past year. "This is really the biggest bang for our buck (if we can create corridors), and doubly exciting if it is along river waterways." Livesay stressed, "We are not done here, we have work to do."

Back at the Coles County Water and Soil Conservation District, Spaniol agrees land restoration helps on the local level, but for her, improving soil quality will still produce the biggest improvement for people downstream. "The healthier the soil, the less likely it is to erode and the more water it can hold. The more water it holds, the less likely it is to run off into the river." Spaniol admits that the task is daunting, especially given that the Embarras is one of the largest watersheds in Illinois, yet she feels confident that the current coalition of partners—including the Farm Bureau, the University of Illinois Extension, other soil and water conservation districts, and elected officials—will finally make progress towards cleaning up the river. "I was born and raised in Coles County...I want to see water quality stabilize or improve so the next generation can use the river for drinking water, for recreation, and so all the river's benefits will be available to everyone."

This story can also be read in the May/June edition of the Public I.

East Prairie middle school fourth quarter honor rolls

5th grade high honor roll

Bozarth, Isabel Marie; Brown, Ava Ryen; Cook, Vivienne Grace; Devlin, Hadley C.; Hornaday, Leah Jean; Huffman, Avery Caroline; McCall, Kaja Danette; Wilke, Avery Grace.

5th grade honor roll

Beniach, Lainey Kay; Bennett, Chloe Marie; Bosch, Sophia Cler; Brown, Jackson David; Brucker, Jacob Alan; Buchanan, Waylon Daniel; Carter, Mackenzie; Chalfont, Garrison; Coad, Charlotte "Charlie"; Cook, Maiya Rae; DeLeva, Brayden; Drake, Noah Elliott; Greenstone, Noah Alan; Hershberger, Peyton Louise; Kwiatkowski, Ava Elaine; Long, Andrew William; Melton, Kayla Grace; Miller, Issabella Love; Quinn, Madeline Sue; Ray, Lyla Mae; Reifsteck, Evan Eugene; Ring, Jensynn Brooke; Rosas, Olivia; Steffens, Julianne Joy; Stevens, Johnathan Michael; Tarr, Ashton D.Thomas, Dexter Howard; Williams, Asah Jane; Willoughby, Zella Marie.

6th grade high honor roll

Bubb, Samuel Timothy; Burlew, Frances Indira; Gibson, William Robert; Gilpin, Kora Elizabeth; Goodmann, Linus Emery; Guthridge, Teil Charles; Hawkins, Charlotte Marie; Hinds, Alexandria Sue; Hornaday, Noah Henry; Jones, Cohen Jameson; Kerner, Caden Andrew; Kleiss, Ava Danielle; Koch, Lydia Rose; Long, Alydia Joleigh; McLeese, Cole Ryan; Moody, Elijah David; Moore, Jordana Lynn; Pettry, William Bruce; Vitale, Maria Pia "Mia"; Whitson, Beau Joshua.

6th grade honor roll

Alholwani, Ayriana Jane; Arroyo, Isabella Medina; Bretz, Chase Justin; Chaplin, Isaac Reese; Cravens, Meadow Rain; Dobson, Allyannah Darlene; Elder, Alexander Joseph; Ellis, Grace Angela; Gardner, Kylan Dale; Hackett, Rorey Leigh; Hawkins, Amelia Elizabeth; Kern, Gwynevere Ember; Mann, Alyssa; Manus, Amelia Jane; Moenck, Carter Anthony; Ochoa, Destiny Maite; Quinn, Jaycelyn Kay; Southworth, Tristan Jared; Steinert, Severin Robert; Taylor, James Curtis.

7th grade high honor

Chaplin, Ethan Ryan; Clodfelder, Corey Matthew; Ford, Margaret Joy; Higar, Jillian Renee; Ludwig, John Edward; McKinnie, Myles Douglas; Mentock, Jaes Allen; Smith, Brix Loudon; Smith, Hunter James; Walker, Grace Kathleen; Walker, Samantha Faye; Wallace, Cale Matthew; Wishard, Isabella Rose.

7th grade honor Roll

Atwater, Mitchell Ray; Block, Tanner Joe; Broady, Hudson Kristian; Cook, Lilla Clare; Cooley, Ethan Joseph; Cruzan, Braxton Albin; Dyer, Carson Lee; Fiscus, Kellen Ryan; Fowler, Logan James; Haynes, Abigail; Hinds, Maybree Ella; Lacine, McKenna Ann; Ladage, Carmen Susan Aubrey; Neuner, Tessa Mae; Rhoades, Lilian Louise Getche; Smith, Hayden Christine; Stockton, Makenzie Grace; Williamson, Matthew Tanner; Zimmerman, Natalie Lillian.