

“It’s getting harder and harder to keep our little group a secret!” said Friends of the Muscatatuck River Society president, Dan Shade, as he accepted a prestigious award from the Soil and Water Conservation Society for their work cleaning up the Muscatatuck River and starting a water quality monitoring program.

In addition to their three annual river clean-up efforts, last year, the Friends submitted a request to the state for a federal 319 grant to fund their work. With those funds, Jennifer Ertel was hired to provide water quality education and grant administration services and Simeon Stearns was hired to monitor the water quality of the river and to start a volunteer water quality monitoring program.

Ertel is a licensed teacher and free lance writer who has written grants for the Step Ahead Council, Economic Development Commission, Child Care Resource and Referral, Inc., First Steps and other local groups for the past 15 years. Simeon is the director of the Head Start program in Columbus and holds a degree in both business and natural resources. The two are available to speak about water quality issues in the schools and for private groups.

The Friends have a new office in the Visitor’s Center at the County Park near Vernon. The office space is being provided to the Friends by the park and tourism boards. Jennifer is available in the office on Tuesdays and Thursdays. At other times, she can be reached at home or via email at jertel@seidata.com.

The office number is 346-2953.

The Friends will be providing volunteer labor to build three bridges at the Calli Wildlife Preserve. The Community Foundation is paying for the materials and the Department of Natural Resources will provide plans for the structures.

Recycling is a hot topic in Jennings County right now and the Friends are trying to establish a working relationship with the Southeastern Indiana Solid Waste District and is working closely with the County Council and other local groups to deal with recycling issues. A brochure is being developed to explain how and where to recycle various items throughout the county.

In addition to cleaning up the Muscatatuck River, the Friends have officially “adopted” a section of State Highway 7 near Vernon. The sign is up and the Friends will be gathering road debris from that site at least three times each year.

The Friends meet every month on the first Tuesday at 7:00 p.m. at the Visitor’s Center at the County Park near Vernon. In February, they will be hosting a community-wide open house at the library on the first Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. Please attend and discover how you can become a part of the Friends of the Muscatatuck River Society or at least, listen to us brag a bit about our accomplishments.

Yes, Dan was right; the Friends of the Muscatatuck River Society won’t be Jennings County’s best kept secret any more!