

PODCAST 2009-06

“COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT”

(approx 7:52 runtime)

Welcome to the Bureau of Reclamation Great Plains Region Podcast:

SOUNDER

Reclamation is the largest wholesale water supplier and the second largest supplier of hydroelectric power in the nation...but those hundreds of federal employees are also members of their community.

From public education to stepping in to lend a hand during natural or man-made disasters, Reclamation is actively engaged in local as well as regional events and activities.

The CAST...or “Catch A Special Thrill” program is dedicated to providing disabled and disadvantaged children as well as developmentally impaired adults the opportunity to enjoy a quality outdoor recreational experience fishing on the water.

At locations throughout the Great Plains region and elsewhere, volunteers, including boat owners, service clubs and Reclamation employees join forces to ensure a day of fun and excitement for these individuals, many of whom have never experienced the simple pleasure of angling or boating.

Jim Owens is the Executive Director of the CAST for Kids Foundation:

(owens 01)

“THE IDEA STARTED IN 1991, ACTUALLY, AND AT THE TIME I WAS THE WASHINGTON STATE BASS FEDERATION PRESIDENT. AND WE’ED HAVE A COUPLE OF NATIONAL MEETINGS EACH YEAR IN WHICH ALL THE PRESIDENTS FROM ALL OF THE DIFFERENT STATES WOULD COME. AND ONE YEAR WE HAD GUESTS IN

ALABAMA, AND ONE OF THE SPEAKERS WAS WAYNE DEESON FROM RECLAMATION”

At the time, Reclamation was seeking to develop partnerships for activities on reservoirs and other water facilities. It seemed to Owens to be an ideal opportunity to introduce some special needs children to the wonders of the outdoors. The rest, as he puts it...is history:

(owens02)

“WE STARTED WITH THAT ONE EVENT IN EASTERN WASHINGTON ON BANKS LAKE...FROM THERE IT’S GROWN TO OVER SIXTY EVENTS IN THIRTY-SOME STATES.”

Reclamation employee Kimberly Parish is the administrative officer in the Austin, Texas office, she calls the CAST event held in her area a gratifying experience for all involved:

(parish01)

“THESE KIDS HAVE A LOT OF CHALLENGES, AND THEY FACE A LOT OF THINGS EVERY DAY, AND FOR US TO BE ABLE GIVE BACK TO THEM JUST A LITTLE BIT OF HAPPINESS AND A LITTLE BIT OF EXCITEMENT, IT’S A REAL REWARD FOR ME, PERSONALLY.”

From the arrival of volunteers at first light, setting up tables, tents and food, to the final award presentation of the day, Parish says not even the threat of rain could dampen the spirits of everyone participating in this year’s event at Lake Bastrop:

(parish02)

“IT’S REALLY A GREAT FEELING, THE KIDS COME BACK, THEY’RE ALL SMILES, THEY’RE SO PROUD OF THEIR CATCH OF THE DAY, WHETHER IT’S YOU KNOW, A LITTLE SMALL FISH OR THEY’VE CAUGHT YOU KNOW, FIVE OR SIX, THEY’RE JUST AS PROUD...AND THE BOAT CAPTAINS, THEY ARE SO OVERWHELMED AND SO

READY TO GIVE THEMSELVES...IT IS AMAZING TO SEE THE VOLUNTEERISM AND TO HAVE THOSE PEOPLE JUST KIND OF GIVE THEIR OWN TIME."

Kimberly Parish's connection to her community is reflected throughout the Great Plains region, in both the best---and worst of times.

Water means life, but uncontrolled, it can also bring death and widespread destruction.

Early in 2009, extreme weather conditions led to high water levels along the Red River, ultimately placing the entire state of North Dakota and parts of South Dakota on flood alert. Reclamation personnel worked around the clock, monitoring the stresses placed on dams and levees, making sure that residents and civil authorities were kept informed as the situation changed rapidly.

Employees in the Bismarck office continued to work even as their own homes were at risk from flooding due to an ice dam building up on the Missouri main stem.

Civil Engineer Dennis Krogstad was among those who put in long hours, working 40-plus days of 12-hour shifts to manage the rising waters and minimize the impact on the community.

Reclamation worked closely with irrigation districts, as well as state and federal agencies including the Army Corps of Engineers, in monitoring and recovering from the worst flood season in the region's history.

Water can also be cause for celebration, as in the case of the Nebraska Children's Groundwater Festival, founded in 1988 and providing an outreach education through entertainment, interactive displays and hands-on experiments:

(powell01)

“THE FESTIVAL IS REALLY ABOUT EDUCATING 4TH AND 5TH GRADERS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF ALL WATER RESOURCES IN THE STATE OF NEBRASKA, SURFACE WATER AND GROUND WATER. AND THAT’S IMPORTANT DISTINCTION BETWEEN SURFACE WATER AND GROUND WATER, ESPECIALLY HERE IN NEBRASKA. SO WHETHER THAT WATER COMES FROM THE GROUND OR FROM THE HYDROLOGIC CYCLE RIGHT OUT OF THE SKY, AND THEN FROM THERE YOU KNOW, YOU HAVE WATER TREATMENTS, THE POTENTIAL FOR WATER POLLUTION ALONG THE WAY. SO REALLY, A LOT OF THINGS HAPPEN BEFORE IT ENDS UP AT THE END USER.”

That’s Clinton Powell, a Civil Engineer in Reclamation’s Nebraska-Kansas Area Office.

(powell02)

“THE BUREAU’S REALLY FOCUSED ON BEING A PART OF THE CHILDREN’S GROUNDWATER FESTIVAL SO THAT WE CAN PROVIDE AN EDUCATION YOU KNOW WE’RE REALLY OUT THERE TRYING TO TEACH YOUNG STUDENTS AS WELL AS THEIR TEACHERS APPROPRIATE TECHNIQUES FOR CONSERVING WATER AND DIFFERENT WAYS THAT WE USE OUR WATER RESOURCES.”

No matter how technical operations become, or how the Bureau’s responsibilities expand in the future, employees like Clinton Powell and Kimberly Parish have a vested interest in the health of the community in which they live, have families, shop and work every day:

(powell03)

“AS A RECLAMATION EMPLOYEE...THERE’S JUST A FEW OVER FORTY EMPLOYEES IN THE NEBRASKA-KANSAS AREA OFFICE, AND YOU KNOW ANYTHING WE CAN DO TO BE A PART OF THE COMMUNITY, TO SHOW THAT WE CARE ABOUT THE COMMUNITY THAT WE LIVE IN IS AN IMPORTANT THING. SO WE SEE THIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO GET OUT, MEET WITH SOME PEOPLE, LET THEM

KNOW WHAT WE DO AS GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AND SHOW THEM HOW WE'RE SERVING THE PUBLIC EVERY DAY."

(parish03)

I THINK IT GIVES AT LEAST SOME SENSE OF TRUST AND SOME SENSE OF CARING, THAT WE'RE NOT JUST THERE TO DO A JOB. FOR INSTANCE WE HAVE COURTESY DOCKS THAT WE'RE PUTTING IN PLACE, TRYING TO MAKE THINGS MORE UNIVERSALLY ACCESSABLE. IT REALLY SHOWS I THINK, THAT WE'RE INTERESTED IN THE COMMUNITY AND TRYING TO GET EVERYBODY OUT AND ENJOY THE AMENITIES THAT WE HAVE TO OFFER. AND I THINK THAT CAST ALSO SHEDS THAT SAME LIGHT, THAT WE ARE INTERESTED IN THE COMMUNITY, WE DO WANT EVERYBODY TO BE ABLE TO JOIN IN AND SHARE IN THE THINGS THAT WE HAVE TO OFFER."

Reclamation, like any organization or agency, is composed of people who are part of the community at large...just ask Jim Owens:

(owens03)

"A LOT OF TIMES, ESPECIALLY NOWDAYS, THE THINGS THAT YOU HEAR ABOUT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES ARE ALMOST ENTIRELY NEGATIVE. AND IT REALLY DOESN'T GIVE YOU A GOOD PICTURE OF WHAT THESE AGENCIES ARE AND ABOUT THE PEOPLE THAT WORK THERE. WITH ALL THE EVENTS THAT WE'VE DONE WITH THEM OVER THE PAST EIGHTEEN YEARS, I'VE JUST SEEN AN INCREDIBLE OUTPOURING OF SUPPORT FROM RECLAMATION EMPLOYEES. YOU KNOW, THEY DON'T GET PAID TO DO THIS, THEY HAVE TO GIVE UP THEIR TIME ON THE WEEKENDS TO COME OUT AND DO THIS AND THEY DO THAT GLADLY. IT'S JUST BEEN A TREMENDOUS RESPONSE. I'VE WORKED WITH SEVERAL DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONS, AND THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

IS REALLY A SPECIAL ONE. THE CULTURE THAT THEY HAVE THERE IS JUST A LOT DIFFERENT... THEY'RE AN INCREDIBLY HELPFUL ORGANIZATION AND THE PEOPLE ARE JUST VERY SPECIAL IN WHAT THEY DO."

For more information about Reclamation's community involvement throughout the Great Plains Region, visit their web page at

www-dot-u-s-b-r-dot-gov-forward slash-g-p

This podcast is produced by Belongie Entertainment Enterprises for the Bureau of Reclamation, Great Plains Region, Office of Public Affairs.

(SOUNDER)

RECLAMATION...MANAGING WATER IN THE WEST.