

Black Hawk

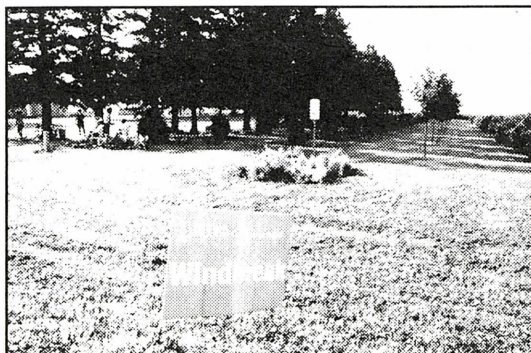
Soil & Water Conservation

District Newsletter

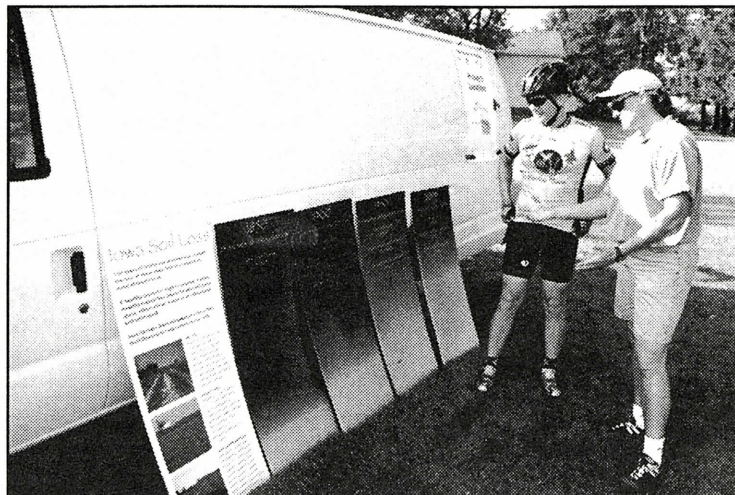
October 2007

Blackhawk SWCD Partners with Iowa Conservation TEAM for RAGBRAI Riders

On Thursday, July 26th, your Black Hawk County SWCD teamed up with the Iowa Conservation Team to offer RAGBRAI riders a place for a rest break, water,



bananas, and conservation information. The Iowa Conservation Team is a partnership between the Iowa Chapter of the Soil



and Water Conservation Society {SWCS}, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship-Division of Soil Conservation {IDALS-DSC}, the USDA'S Natural Resources Conservation Service {NRCS}, and local county Soil and Water Conservation Districts {SWCD}. The bike ride route this year took riders on Dunkerton Road and right past the farmstead. I

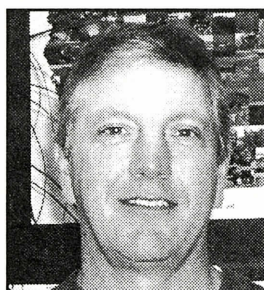
SEE RAGBRAI/Page 5

Leslie Grundy, Black Hawk County's New District Secretary

Leslie Grundy is our new Black Hawk County Soil and Water Conservation District secretary. She comes to us from a clerk position within the Waterloo Police Department, and is very excited to now be a part of our organization!



Leslie was born and raised in Waterloo, and has two beautiful children, a daughter Tellisa, 10, and a son Tylin, 6, that keep her busy outside of work. Her hobbies are reading and yard work. We appreciate Leslie becoming a part of the organization and urge all of you to stop by and welcome her to the office.



Craig Thede, Watershed Specialist

Craig Thede is the new Watershed Specialist for Dry Run Creek and Upper Miller Creek. He is currently a student at the University of Northern Iowa.

Craig lives in Reinbeck and has 2 kids; a daughter Coral, 17, and a son Seth, 15, that keep him busy. We are happy to have Craig as a part of our organization!

There aren't any rules to success that will work unless you do.

Author unknown

Patience, Persistence Pay Off for Black Hawk County Landowner

By Jason Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

John Shephard admits he didn't know weeds from forbs in 1984, the year he purchased his very own piece of land, fulfilling a lifelong dream. Now, 23 years later, with guidance, a vision and a plan, this Black Hawk County landowner has his own 60-acre wildlife haven.

A former food industry worker who lives in Cedar Falls, the 63-year-old Shephard purchased the 60-acre property that he once hunted. About half was corn and beans, while the rest was trees, prairie remnants and pasture.

Shephard had no interest in using the property for cropland, or even as an investment. He was interested in enhancing the land and restoring it back to its original condition—native prairie grass, wetlands and trees—purely for enjoyment.

"I have always loved the outdoors," said Shephard. "This is a natural piece of land. It has a little bit of everything."

The land is tucked away in the northwest corner of Black Hawk County, in Union Township. The location is home to a sort of "prairie complex" of hundreds of contiguous natural acres, including one of the largest sand prairies in Iowa, Cedar Hills Sand Prairie, managed by The Nature Conservancy.

Shephard worked closely with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Black Hawk County Conservation Board to identify prairie remnants, and The Nature Conservancy assisted in plant identification.

In 1987, Shephard installed the first conservation practice—a buffer strip—to protect the area from pollutants. Buffer strips are strategically placed strips of vegetation that intercept unwanted sediment runoff, nutrients, pesticides and pathogens. They also enhance wildlife

habitat and protect biodiversity. Shephard installed the buffer with assistance through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Through the years, Shephard has worked with many agencies and organizations, including the Tallgrass Prairie Center, located on the University of Northern Iowa campus. The Tallgrass Prairie Center, formerly known as the Native Roadside Vegetative Center, advocates the use of native vegetation to provide environmental, economic and aesthetic benefits for the public good. Individuals from the Center helped Shephard identify native plants and grasses on his land, and took him to the Cedar Hills Sand Prairie to identify plants he could harvest and plant on his property. Since Shephard's land sits so close to the Cedar Hills Sand Prairie, he sought permission from the Iowa DNR to collect seed to protect the integrity of the local ecotype on seven acres of his prairie. "John collected, sorted and then planted locally harvested native seeds on his property, and it's looking good," said Julie Falcon, soil conservationist in Black Hawk County. "All the work that he's done on his own makes this a unique story. Most people don't take the time to do that."

In addition to harvesting and spreading native seeds, Shephard estimates he has planted 16,000 trees and shrubs since he purchased the property.

Shephard signed contracts in 2003 and 2005, through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), which is administered by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). WHIP is a voluntary program that provides financial assistance to establish wildlife habitat. The program has allowed Shephard to enhance natural wetlands on his property, improve timber stands, plant and seed native grasses, and plant oak trees and conifers.

Shephard said he now attracts more water fowl, and has identified such birds as the American goldfinch, bluebirds, pileated woodpeckers and bobolinks. In addition, he says he now sees bald eagles, Blanding's turtles and turkeys.

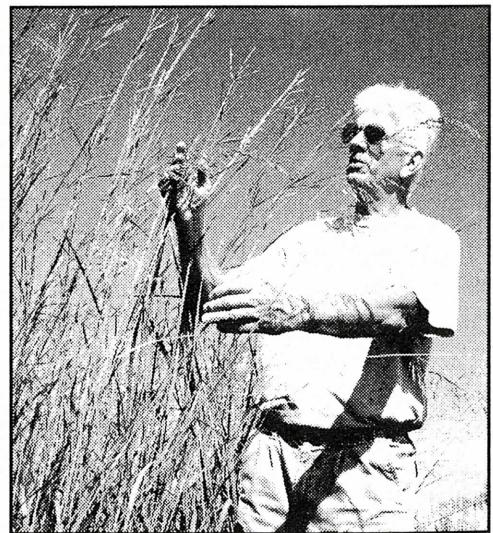
Shephard says he lets a few hunters on the property, but he doesn't hunt anymore. "I would rather walk around with a shovel than a shotgun," he says.

Patience and persistence has allowed Shephard's property to flourish. "You have to have a vision, and then stick with it," he says. "It's a lifelong learning process; go slow and seek advice."

In addition to the Tallgrass Prairie Center, Iowa DNR, The Nature Conservancy, Black Hawk County Conservation Board and the USDA-NRCS, Shephard has worked with the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Pheasants Forever, National Wild Turkey Federation and the Black Hawk Soil and Water Conservation District.

Below:

John Shephard takes a look at Indian Grass on his property, one of several species of native grass that grows on his property.



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Improving Water Quality One Home at a Time: A Stormwater Success Story

John and Susie Hines moved into their home in Cedar Falls in the fall of 2006. Their neighborhood consists of many homes built within the past 30 years. The terrain is quite sloped, and their home lies about half-way down a series of closely-built lots along a hillside. Water from Hines' backyard refused to drain anywhere but into their basement. "At one point it looked like a waterfall coming out of our basement wall," said John Hines. A music professor at the University of Northern Iowa, Hines soon found himself an amateur landscaper, digging trenches throughout the backyard to divert water away from the house.

His wife, Susie, took it upon herself to begin the search for help. She was eventually referred to Black Hawk Soil & Water Conservation District for assistance. Rebecca Kauten and Wayne Petersen, urban conservationist for NRCS, visited the Hines home to investigate the problem and identify ways to solve it.

A local landscaping company was hired to re-grade the backyard and fill in additional topsoil near the foundation of the house. To protect the re-graded area, approximately 30 percent of the total rooftop runoff from the Hines' house was diverted through a series of rain barrels and decanted into a rain garden.

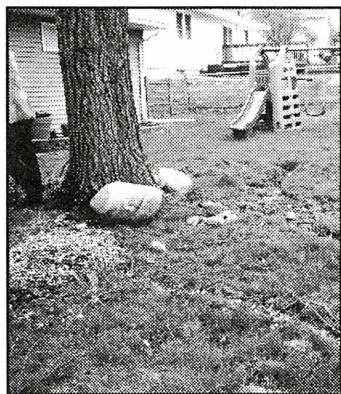
Kauten and Petersen worked with the Hines to determine the dimensions of the rain garden, placement and basic guidance on how to install the rain garden. While the grading near the house was done by a professional landscaper, John chose to install the rain garden and rain barrels on his own.

Figure 1: Runoff from a neighbor's yard created a gully on the Hines' property. The yard was constantly saturated and their two young chil-



dren were unable to play outside in the fenced in yard.

Figure 2: Washout from downspouts caused the Hines to dig channels in their yard to divert water away from the house.

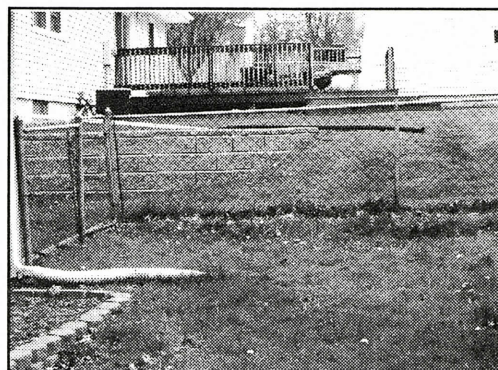


What was done

Wayne Petersen and Rebecca

Kauten met with the Hines to consider options for treating the water that was inundating their backyard. As a result, a rain garden was designed and planned based on specs found in a University of Wisconsin Extension publication on rain gardens. (Many of these specifications will be included in an Iowa-based guidebook.)

Figure 3: Area to be treated with a rain garden. Notice that the neighboring property also drains into this area.



In June and July of 2007, the Hines installed their rain garden.

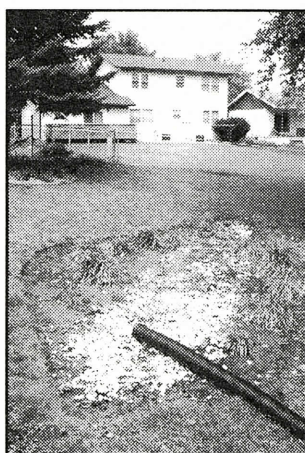
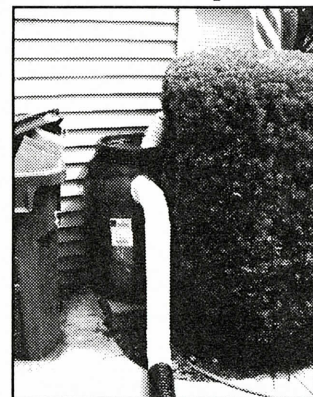


Figure 4: Rooftop runoff from the Hines' home is treated by a rain garden.

After installation, Rebecca visited the site and determined the rain garden was built correctly and according to specifications. The soils in the backyard are no longer saturated, and the children's swing set is now in an area that will stay dry enough for them to play outside.

Figure 5: A series of rain barrels send approximately 30 percent of the Hines' rooftop runoff to the rain barrel.



Conclusion

Since installation, John and Susie's neighbors have shown interest in possibly installing rain gardens to treat their rooftop runoff and reduce the amount of saturation in their back yards as well.

Projects like the Hines rain garden may receive cost share through REAP dollars that are allocated through Black Hawk SWCD. Contact Black Hawk SWCD today to find out if your yard could use a rain garden or rain barrel system.

Musings from a Local Urban Water Quality Project

By Rebecca Kauten

Working on a water quality project can be a daunting task in itself. Urban projects, however, face a different sort of challenges that you just don't find anywhere else. Here's a run-down of some odd little idiosyncrasies I've come across in the past two years of the Dry Run Creek watershed project.

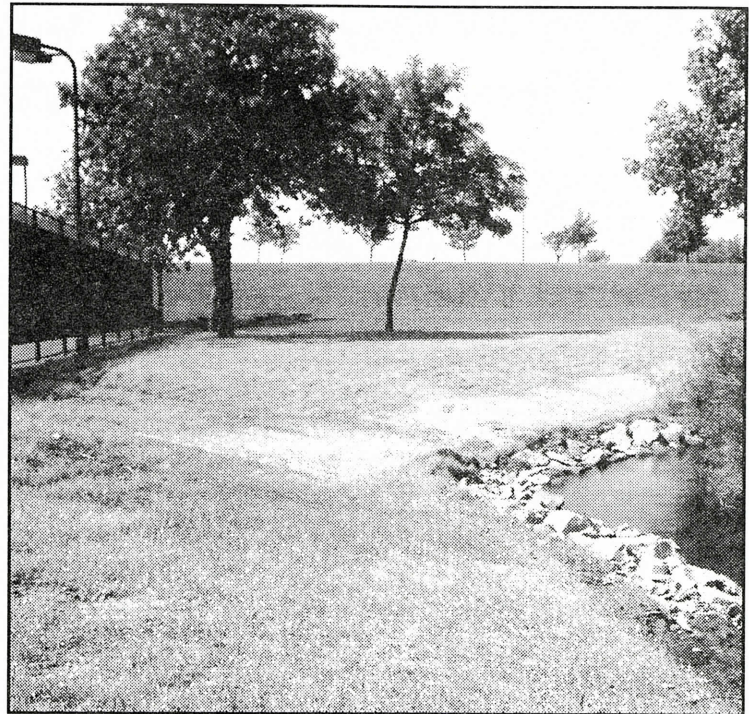
Apparently I keep UNI Public Safety Officials wondering what I'm up to – We have two parking lot runoff monitoring stations on Dry Run Creek. One collects runoff from the Malcom Price Lab School, and the other collects water as it runs off the Towers parking lot into a bioretention cell that was constructed in 2006. I replace containers in these units when they fill up after a rainfall. Sometimes it starts raining again before I'm done at these sites. On more than one occasion I've been bent over, opening up the "first flush" units and from behind me hear "Is everything ok over there?" While my first thought is to say "actually, we've got some pretty dirty runoff coming off these lots," I usually just let Public Safety know that yes, everything is fine and I'm just out enjoying the rain.

Acquiring new pets can be an occupational hazard for Watershed Coordinators – Being that this monitoring site is near two college dormitories, there tends to be a lot of physical debris (aka: trash) throughout the area around the first two weeks of May. The Monday after Finals Week, I was collecting water samples and came across an aquarium next to our biocell. What startled me more were the three goldfish still alive in the tank! The animal lover in me couldn't stand to see them roasting in the sun. So now I have three new pets enjoying their aquarium in my basement at home.

Never turn your back on UNI students with garden tools! – On another occasion this summer, while collecting samples, a UNI work study student took a weed eater to the young plants that were establishing in our biocell. Merciful heavens! Not five minutes before I was taking water samples from within that same area. After only turning my back for a moment, the weed whacking bandit made off with the tips of several liatris. Ironically, many of the plants that were pruned by his thorough work are now blooming, ready for fall. By spring, the new root systems below will have made for a great growing season to come.

Tennis loving mink? – The new streambank stabilization project near the UNI tennis courts has become a regular destination for many local walkers – including myself. On more than one occasion I've found a small mink who lives in the newly stabilized streambank. If one sits still long enough by the water, he may swim up and surprise you!

Next time it rains, you know where I'll be. If I'm not out tak-



A newly-stabilized streambank behind the UNI tennis courts. If you were a mink, wouldn't you want to hang out here too?



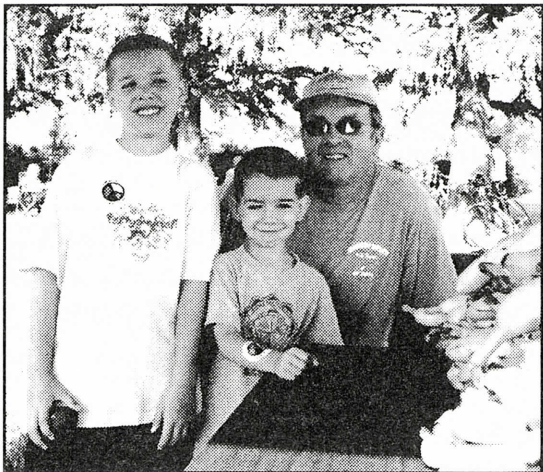
Runoff from the Malcom Price Lab parking lot runs directly into Dry Run Creek in Cedar Falls.

ing samples, shooting a few pictures, or checking transparency levels in Dry Run Creek, I might be upstream seeing if I can't spot a few new residents in our urban habitat.

RAGBRAI

Continued from page 1

was approached about hosting the Conservation Team tent in my front yard beside a shady pine tree grove and windbreak area. I agreed to host and supply fresh (recently tested) cold well water for the riders along with a large supply of bananas supplied by the Conservation Team. We handed out 14 cases of bananas, stamped postcards, many gallons of water, and conservation related materials to many riders from states all over the Union and also a rider from Japan and England! We also had a panel display showing soil loss



settlement and many conservation questions were answered for the inquisitive rider. Many of the riders said they always look forward to the

Conservation Team tent as they have become acquainted with the great service in providing conservation postcards to family and friends provided at the tent on each day's ride. It is a good way to interact with the public,



provide a needed service, and spread the conservation message. This was all made possible with the help of Jason Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist for NRCS, and local office employees Julie Falcon Soil Conservationist, Elaine Hammer Soil Conservation Technician, and Rebecca Kauten Watershed Project Coordinator and John Shephard volunteer. I thoroughly enjoyed hosting this event at my farmstead, meeting many wonderful people, receiving thanks for sharing the water, bananas, shade, rest, and conservation messages. It was a great experience. Thank you to all the staff for their help in making this a great success.

Robert Hansen, Black Hawk SWCD Commissioner

"People of character do the right thing, not because they think it will change the world but because they refuse to be changed by the world." -- Michael Josephson

Black Hawk County's Soil & Water Conservation District Award Winner

Henry & MeriKay Shepard have been selected for the 2007 Black Hawk County Soil & Water Conservation Award. The Shepards live in South Central Black Hawk County and have been farming for the past 35 years. They were nominated for the award by the Black Hawk County Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioners.

On their cropland acres, they follow a corn and soybean rotation where they utilize conservation tillage practices including strip tillage, no-till and waterways. To improve water quality and provide wildlife habitat, the Shepards have made extensive use of the Conservation Reserve Program. Their land stewardship also includes quail

buffer strips, and roadside buffer strips. The Shepards work with the EQIP program in combination with nutrient and pest management practices.

Henry recognizes the importance of no-till practices including the economic advantages of not only saving time and fuel costs, but also protecting the soil resources. In their spare time, the Shepards enjoy hunting, fishing, and motorcycling.

Henry & MeriKay's farming operation sets an example of land management with a diverse selection of conservation practices that maintain high levels of crop production while protecting valuable natural resources.

City-wide Water Monitoring Snapshot October 20 in Cedar Falls

Be a part of a city-wide water quality monitoring snapshot of the Dry Run Creek watershed. Black Hawk Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) is partnering with IOWATER, Iowa's statewide volunteer water quality monitoring program, on a fall "snapshot" water quality monitoring events in Cedar Falls.

Details:

10:00 AM:	Meet at the Cedar Falls Tourism & Visitor Center
10:00 AM – 12:30PM:	Collect sample data from Dry Run Creek
12:30 PM – 1:00 PM:	Return to the Tourism & Visitor Center with water and data

The Cedar Falls Tourism & Visitor Center is located at 6510 Hudson Road in Cedar Falls. Volunteers will get information there on sites to be monitored and instructions on how to collect the data needed for the snapshot.

After the program, volunteers will depart and collect water samples for analysis from assigned sites. Sites will be marked where volunteers are to sample. Teams will then collect the samples and follow detailed instructions on how to analyze the samples. Once data sheets are filled out and samples are taken, groups then return to the Tourism & Visitor Center for refreshments and to turn in the data sheets.

Area residents who are IOWATER certified are encouraged to participate in the snapshot. However, IOWATER certification is not required. Volunteers are asked to RSVP, however people may also simply show up the day of the snapshot to participate. If groups want to monitor specific locations or want to work as a group, a call to participate is requested.

Water quality monitoring includes physical, chemical, biological, and habitat assessments. Physical assessments document the physical attributes of a water body, such as temperature and water clarity. Chemical testing includes pH, nitrogen, phosphate, chloride and dissolved oxygen monitoring. Biological monitoring includes identification of "benthic macroinvertebrates," or organisms that live in streams, rivers, and lakes. Habitat assessments can be used to document the suitability of water bodies to sustain aquatic life.

Dry Run Creek is currently listed as one of Iowa's impaired water bodies. A project funded by the Iowa Watershed Improvement Review Board is working to build awareness for issues and concerns related to the creek and its watershed. Anyone interested in water quality and the health of Dry Run Creek is encouraged to participate in the events.

For more information or to RSVP for a snapshot event contact Rebecca at 319-610-7507 or rebecca.kauten@ia.usda.gov. For information on IOWATER, snapshots and IOWATER certification visit www.iowater.net.

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COMPUTERIZED NEWSLETTER:

They're know miss steaks in this newsletter cause we used special soft wear witch cheques you're spelling. It is mower or lass a weigh to verify. How ever is can knot correct arrows in punctuation ore usage: an it will not fined words witch are miss used butt spelled rite. Four example; a paragraph could have mini flaws but wood bee past by the spell checker. And it wont catch the sentence frag-ment which you. Their fore, the massage is that proofreading is knot eliminated, it is still berry much reek wired.

Thanks to those who have shown support of your Soil & Water Conservation District's efforts to further knowledge of conservation practices by donating to the 2007 Contributor's Club. These funds are used for educational materials, local awards, this newsletter, and conservation field days and demonstrations for which other funding is not available. It was stated in the April 2007 newsletter that certificates would now be issued to those contributing at the Sponsorship, Stewardship and Conservationist levels. At that time we were not aware we would be going through a secretary change which would leave the office without a state secretary for several months. Although our new secretary is now on board, in an effort to provide her time to get up to speed on other office matters we have decided to delay the start of the certificate program until 2008. This delay in no way lessens the appreciation we have for those joining the 2007 Contributor's Club and hope more of you will consider a tax deductible donation prior to the end of the year.

2007 Contributor's Club

Black Hawk Soil & Water Conservation District

Contributor (under \$25)

Phyllis Morgan Trust

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Conservationist level (\$75 & up)

Sherman & Bev Lundy

John Runchey/No. Nat Gas

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Alice Lichty

----- Please Cut or Tear -----

I want to support the Black Hawk Soil & Water Conservation District. I am enclosing a check to join the 2007 Contributor's Club at the membership level indicated:

_____ Sponsorship (\$25 - \$49)

_____ Stewardship (\$50 - \$74)

_____ Conservationist (\$75 & up)

_____ Other amount \$_____

Name(s) _____ Phone _____

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Leslie Grundy, District Secretary

Newsletter Sponsorship

Since the Black Hawk Soil and Water Conservation District is a non profit organization, we are seeking businesses to help offset publication costs. Your contribution will be greatly appreciated and your business will be recognized for your generosity. Please call the office at 296-3262 for further details.

Seeking Applicants!

The Soil and Water Conservation District is seeking applicants for the Teacher Award recognizing the efforts of a K-12 Teacher in Black Hawk county who has been a leader in soil and water education activities in their classroom