Earth Day at South Shore Park

By Stephanie Lowery

One decade ago, a small Earth Day celebration began in Bay View. Children would go with their teachers for a walk around South Shore Park to admire their surroundings.

Then, two Bay View area women, Teri Rudolph and Parti Sereno, decided it would be nice if they had something more: perhaps a class or a presentation to take the students to on Earth Day.

Rudolph and Sereno began working with Bea Reinders, a member of South Shore Park Watch, and together they created an Earth Day celebration that would come to be loved by thousands of elementary school children over the years.

Reinders has only become more involved over the past 10 years.

"The program is completely volunteer-based," Reinders said. "Without the community engaged we wouldn't have such a good program."

United Water, the contractor that runs the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District's two treatment plants, does provide a stipend to provide lunch for the various sponsors, said Reinders.

"It's a lot better than a lecture. They like to go 'ewww' when they pick up something that's slimy, and you can just tell they're having a great time."

—Russell Cuhel, Great Lakes WATER Institute senior scientist

Every year, Reinders, along with South Shore Park Watch member Kathy Mulvey, aids in recruiting businesses, educators, and organizations to set up presentations and workshops for public and private elementary school students. This year's event is Thursday, April 27 at the South Shore Park Pavilion from 9am to 1pm.

"This year we should have nine different presentations, of which the students can pick two to attend," said Mulvey. "There are about 450 kids expected to attend this year."

Reinders said the technicalities of the presentations this year are currently works-in-progress, but no matter what the outcome is, the kids always have fun.

Russell Cuhel, senior scientist with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Great Lakes WATER Institute who specializes in the physiological ecology of aquatic microorganisms and undergraduate research opportunities, has been involved with this program for several years. He said he agrees with Reinders that the kids have a great time at this celebration.

"They seem to respond to our question and answer session," he said. "It's a lot better than a lecture. They like to go 'ewww' when they pick up something that's slimy, and you can just tell they're having a great time."

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Historic Bay View
From German to Spanish, ‘little blue church’ stands steadfast

By Ron Winkler

The little blue church at 2644 S. Pine Ave. on the northeast corner of Russell and Pine is a rare example of an original church and its parsonage (812 E. Russell Ave.) that still stand after more than 100 years.

The church and parsonage were constructed in the late 19th century by the congregation that today is known as Christ Church and resides at 915 E. Oklahoma Ave. Christ Church commenced Feb. 17, 1895 when Rev. Henry Noehren, of Zion Evangelical Church, 1424 W. Greenfield Ave., began holding services in the old Odd Fellows Hall on the northeast corner of Kinnickinnic and Potter Avenues. When they decided to organize as a congregation, Rev. Henry G. Niefer, a recent graduate of Eden Theological Seminary, was given the assignment.

A triple anniversary was celebrated by the church Sept. 15, 1935. The events commemorated were the founding of the congregation, Pastor Niefer’s ordination, and Niefer’s years of service to the congregation. As a sign of appreciation, the congregation gave Niefer an automobile. A little over a year later, Dec. 4, 1936, Niefer died.

Rev. Albert Gonser was called as Christ Church’s second pastor, beginning his ministry April 4, 1937. As the membership continued to grow, plans were made to purchase adjacent properties for expansion, raze the old church, and build a new one. However, the Hungarian Evangelical and Reformed Church, which had formed in 1928, inquired about purchasing the old church and parsonage. As a result, the old church and parsonage were sold to the Hungarian congregation April 24, 1938 for $12,000.

Rev. Niefer met with the group July 1, 1895. They officially organized Sept. 10, 1895 as the “Deutsche Evangelische Christus Gemeinde.”

The nine charter members were German seamen and all church services were conducted.

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“We bring underwater cameras, live animals from the lake, and hands-on kinds of things where [the kids] can learn how people study the environment,” Cuhel said. “They don’t just sit there in a chair listening to us talk. We have them actually doing stuff.”

One of the goals, said Mulvey, is to expose the students to possible careers in the environmental sciences.

“We want the kids to feel like these are their parks and their responsibility,” said Mulvey. “We hope that through these parks and this program they’ll become exposed to different careers in this field.”

Cuhel agrees.

“The kids are able to see that there are many different types of careers out there [in environmental sciences],” he said. “Not necessarily wearing a lab coat all the time, but other positions” such as office work and public relations that have one common goal: promoting a beautiful and healthy environment.

And there has been nothing but positive feedback, said Reinders, Mulvey, and Cuhel.

“Sometimes we get cards from the classes saying how much they enjoyed the program,” Cuhel said.

Reinders said she is proud of this program, and hopes it will continue to be successful for years to come.

“Ours is a unique program,” she said. “People may be doing something in the schools, but [our program] is the only one I’m aware of that does what it does.”

She is also grateful for the attendees who keep this program running.

“Without the teachers coming and bringing the students, we’d be dead in the water,” Reinders said.