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Where else is the river? “When it rains and water runs off your roof, onto your driveway, and is running right down your street: That’s part of the river system. It may go into pipes. It may go into a creek or stream. So you and the river are connected. I don’t see a river system as a main channel of flowing water. I see all the land surrounding a river system as part of the river.”

Do you have a favorite spot? “I do. I went to Henry Ford Community College for a while, next door to the University of Michigan’s Dearborn campus. And that’s when I really fell in love with the Rouge. There’s a big Henry Ford Estate there, and there’s a huge dam and a lake. I fell in love with this place called Jensen’s Meadow. There was a big tree, and I used to sit underneath it and study. It was just so peaceful. U-M has an environmental interpretive center there now. It’s where we started the first kid’s water festival in 1995 and it’s still going.” For more, go to <https://umdearborn.edu/eic/>

What’s the festival like? “We do it in spring. We had 1,500 kids come this year, and we had about 90 presenters: Wetland ecologists, firefighters, well-drillers, anybody who works with water.”



Ron Fadoir and his son, Alex, hug Ron’s favorite tree, on the U-M Dearborn campus. Alex is now 18.

How do you envision the Great Lakes? “When you look at a big map and you see those five big lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior), you focus on the lakes themselves and you call that the Great Lakes. But it’s not. It’s all that area of land that flows into them. I don’t see the lakes anymore; I see the whole watershed.”

How can kids and their families learn about their local river? “They can just get out and walk (laughter). When I started, there was no such thing as a watershed map. There was no such thing as Google Earth. There was no such thing as being on the Internet. There were no good maps of tributaries – none of those things existed.”

And now? “And now you can just see the world right at your fingertips. You can get a shot of your neighborhood on Google Earth and just zoom right in and see all these little places that are treed and have wetlands and parks and streams. Just look at your neighborhood.”

What else? “Find out what watershed you live in, and go to its website. For the Rouge, go to www.therouge.org. For the Huron, go to www.hrwc.org. For the Clinton, go to www.crw.org. You’ll learn about special activities, where to canoe, and how to get involved. And you quickly will become a conservationist.”

Do you have any safety tips? “Never walk in a river or stream unless you know the nature of that river or stream. (And kids, never walk into any river without an adult.) And that can change. If I go to the Red Run, in Macomb County, when the weather is dry, it’s maybe a foot deep and four feet wide. But when it rains, it’s 22 feet wide and about 20 feet deep. I’ve been stuck in some places up to my waist in mud. Never go into any river or stream within 72 hours after a major rainstorm. It’s best to stay on the shore.”

Anything else? “A lot of creeks and streams aren’t really safe for water-body contact. E. coli (a disease-causing bacteria), could be present. Canoeing is one thing, but if you’re going to go in the water, wash your hands when you get home. If your clothes get wet, take a shower, then wash your clothes.”

By Patricia Charget



Never throw anything toxic into a drain, which channels rain water back into the river. Think of the rainwater as part of the river. The water that flows through your house, including from your toilet, is part of the river, too.



This photo, above, taken on the Red Run, the main branch of the Clinton River, in Macomb County, in dry weather. There was hardly any water. In really dry weather, it’s so shallow you can see the bottom. Below, is the same spot after a rain event.

