

Spanning the Gap

On and Under the Delaware ... 15 Years of the River Clean-up

Ruth and Dave Jones initiated the River Clean-up in 1990. By styling it the "*On **and Under** the Delaware Clean-up*," they acknowledge scuba-divers, like Dave, who scout out junk beneath the surface too.

Fifteen years ago, there were really no precedents for a private environmental effort of this scope. "It took us a few years to get it right," admits Ruth. At first, employees of Kittatinny Canoes did the Clean-up, in addition to renting canoes that day also. Then came the volunteers--hundreds of them—until today there is a waiting list to participate, and families plan their vacation around the day. "It's a tradition now," says Ruth. "I'll do it till I die."

Kittatinny Canoes staff are still vital to the Clean-up, though, working any and all hours to provide and transport meals and equipment for participants, and to sort out the junk that comes floating back in. ("Payroll hell-week!" Ruth laughs.) She estimates that each Clean-up costs up to \$40,000, and this generosity has not gone unnoticed. Ruth and her son Dave have both received many local and regional accolades, as well as the prestigious *Take Pride in America* award, Ruth from the hands of President George H. Bush in Washington D.C.

In 15 years, the Clean-up has removed 245 tons of garbage from the river, much of it slow-degrading items that would still mar the river's banks if Ruth's hardy crews hadn't grabbed the junk away. Where does it all come from? Cans, bottles, toys, (and maybe the false teeth ...) are clearly the litter and lost items of day visitors. The "winning catch" of



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A diver and a canoeist team up to remove one of the the year's 200+ tires from the river.



Bikes from the bottom.

2004, an entire portable toilet, may represent an act of vandalism. Sofas, beds, computers, sinks, and lawn mowers can only be the result of household dumping or of the flooding of riverside dumpsites, particularly, Ruth suspects, in the 8 miles of unprotected "no man's land," upstream of the recreation area and Milford PA.

Ruth often speaks of the river as a friend who has given her much, and says that her Clean-up as a way of "giving back to the resource." When the irony is pointed out to her that "giving back" has meant hauling away tons of garbage, she is quick to solve the paradox: "The garbage isn't the resource;" she counters, "the Clean-up takes away what's there *that isn't the resource, that isn't the river.*"

River users leave a trace when they litter, dump, or let garbage flow into the river. Ruth offers the River Clean-up as a way to erase those careless traces--for the greater enjoyment of all river users, and for her own satisfaction of doing a favor for her lifelong friend.



An impromptu masthead.