

VOICES FRESHWATER



Recognizing Heroes

2022
ISSUE 1

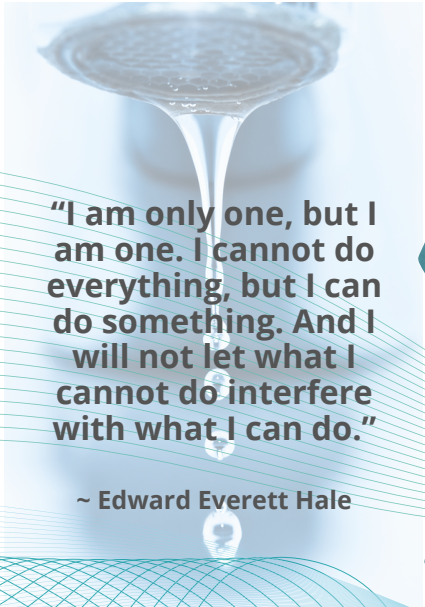


Jill Ryan, Executive Director

I always love this issue of Freshwater Voices where we announce the recipients of our annual Freshwater Hero Awards. These community leaders give so much and freely of themselves to benefit something much bigger than they are. In my work I often hear "I can't make a difference, I'm just one person." But when you think about it, that is the only thing that does make a difference: individuals acting by themselves or in cooperation with others to make the world a little better.

I want to say thank you to each one of our amazing award recipients. Thanks for helping in your community and thanks for what all your work does for our region and our world. Because individuals and groups are willing to act not just in self-interest, but for the common-interest, we live in a world full of hope and inspiration.

While the information we hear on the news can make the world seem a scary place where we each need to care for ourselves; the stories of the amazing groups and individuals working every day to make our world a better place remind us that no matter how small our actions seem, we simply need to act. Thank you to each of the amazing heroes receiving our awards this year, and thank you to all of you who we haven't yet been able to honor!



"I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do."

~ Edward Everett Hale



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Maria Maybee WATER WALKER

Maria Maybee walks for the healing of the waters; she walks for her people, the environment, and most importantly, for her family. Inspired by many women before her who walk for peace and the waters. Maria Maybee started a local Water Walk in her community on the Cattaraugus Territory of the Seneca Nation for the Cattaraugus Creek.



The walk stretches from the West Valley Nuclear Waste Facility, across the Seneca Nation territory, to the mouth of the Cattaraugus Creek. The West Valley Nuclear Waste Facility has been in cleanup and containment mode for several decades now. The cleanup is changing the landscape, blanketing the land with green pastures and new development. Maria's hope is that the Water Walk inspires people to never forget the land that once was, the land before the facility contaminated it, and never forget the radionuclides that will probably be buried there forever. When we remember this site, we also remember the people, her people, who have lived downstream and are living everyday with the consequences of the contamination. Maria and all the walkers speak and pray for healing of the waters, the two legged, the four legged, the winged ones, the ones who live in the waters, and the ones who slither above and below. All our relations. Every step is a prayer.

The Water Walk is an amazing feat of collaboration, including members of the community, students from nearby universities, spiritual leaders and Maria's family. Thank you Maria, for all the awareness you bring towards environmental justice and equity. This year, the annual walk takes place in April.

Friends of Black River Forest, WI

When construction of a golf course threatened wetlands in the Black River Forest, concerned community members jumped into action to preserve the integrity of that forest and its wetlands. What started as a small initiative between neighbors, quickly became the Friends of the Black River Forest. Very early into their advocacy, they realized they would need greater support, which led to them seeking legal representation. On multiple occasions, they have challenged an international and locally-based corporation's efforts to obtain a permit to destroy a critical wetland to build a golf course. The Friends of Black River Forest, exposed how their application skirted the regulations and would cause harm to Lake Michigan, an important drinking water source. Against all odds, they were able to have a judge deny the corporation's request to reinstate a development permit for a golf course, despite being previously approved by the Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources.



Friends of the Black River Forest continues to show up as an organization that not only stands for something, but works to educate the people that are being impacted. Thank you to our friends in Sheboygan County, Wisconsin for all the work you have done to empower your community and preserve freshwater for everyone.



Ruth Ogawa GREAT LAKES ADVOCATE

Ruth Ogawa wears many hats, but chief among them is Great Lakes Advocate. She has devoted most of her career to environmental advocacy, like founding the Lake Superior Watershed Conservancy and the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council.



Through her efforts in conservation and organizing, she has created a benchmark for lake preservation that empowers communities locally and regionally. At heart, she is an entrepreneur, dedicated to starting nonprofits for the long-term betterment of society. Ruth is truly a visionary, her big-idea thinking is always combined with hard work and networking. Thanks to Ruth's vision, the northern Great Lakes have impactful organizations that have been successfully implementing protection projects for decades.



Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition, Ontario

Lake Simcoe is Ontario's fourth largest lake and faces water quality degradation as a result of human activities in its watershed. This disconnect between the public and environmental advocacy is what the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition aims to mend. Since 2003, the group has been focused on engaging residents to take actions both at the individual and community level to reduce impacts to Lake Simcoe.

Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition was instrumental in getting the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan adopted, the best watershed-based legislation in Canada. This legislation protects Lake Simcoe's shorelines and rivers, improves on past national heritage protections, and has aggressive water quality targets to address the lake's phosphorus pollution and other problems.

Another significant threat is a proposed highway that would cross many rivers as they flow to Lake Simcoe. Because salt is commonly used on highways, it would increase salinity, which can be toxic to native plants and animals. We applaud the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition for all their work in empowering concerned citizens with a chance to take action to protect their environment, despite the many challenges that come from making public policy accessible.

In Memory of Bev Dale

A strong voice for protecting Lake Superior and protecting environmentally sensitive areas was recently lost, with the passing of Bev Dale. Bev was a leader in the Shoreline Stewardship Association that protected a Provincially Significant Wetland from being destroyed from a proposed dense shoreline development, preserving critical habitat for migratory waterfowl and spawning grounds for sensitive fish. Residents and visitors to Cloud Bay and Little Trout Bay (near Thunder Bay) can experience the abundance of wildlife and 146 species of birds found in the Cloud Bay wetland as a result.



Bev shared her talents and commitment with many organizations, helping Freshwater Future, serving seven years on the Board of Directors with Lakehead Region Conservation Authority, and volunteering as President of the Sounds of Superior. Her leadership was recognized by being twice elected as a Councillor for Neebing Township. Freshwater Future will miss Bev's commitment to protecting Lake Superior, her warm smile, infectious laugh, and beautiful singing voice.



Families Reclaiming Our Environment (FROE)

Venessa Davis, her family, and community have been overwhelmed for years now, by the sickening toxic stench of crude oil, along with other gases like benzene and hydrogen sulfide. The odors released come from a hazardous crude oil facilities near their home in Saint Clair Township, MI. Through FROE's research they found out the odors were occurring during expansions, unloading, maintenance and malfunctions at the facility. Often without any notice or consideration of the impact that these releases were having on their fence line neighbors.



For over 10 years, Venessa and her community have had to contend with polluted air, drinking water issues, and health problems. Families Reclaiming Our Environment (FROE) is working on addressing pollution and pushing for stricter air and water quality standards at the crude oil facility. A complex web of intrastate laws and federal, state, and local regulations has made the work to reduce water and air pollution extremely difficult. Yet, despite the challenges, FROE continues to fight with tenacity, always pushing for enforcement of existing permits and recognition of the ongoing public health risks experienced in their community. The group hopes to make their neighborhood healthier, but also hopes that it can share their learning with other communities facing similar industrial pollution issues. Freshwater Future is inspired by Venessa's perseverance and grit and supports FROE in its ongoing efforts to make their voices heard.



Benton Harbor Community Water Council

For years, the residents of Benton Harbor, Michigan have struggled to be heard outside of their community, as lead contamination continues to threaten their access to fresh water. For the past four years, The Benton Harbor Community Water Council (BHCWC) has devoted their time to fighting for equitable treatment for residents of Benton Harbor when it comes to fresh water. With the help of Freshwater Future, they were able to make many advancements, but there is still more work to be done setting up permanent preventative measures that will provide freshwater security for many generations to come. They have been successful in putting pressure on state and government systems to increase transparency for the community.

We recognize the many magnanimous efforts that the BHCWC has made, from educating youth, distributing water filters and installing water filter stations at schools.



Melanie Napoleon Welch

Childhood experiences at Indiana Dunes National Park exploring the dunes and forests, swimming in Lake Michigan had a huge impact on Melanie Welch. After receiving a master's degree in biology, she started her career in environmental education and eventually founded the Great Lakes Conservation Program at the Shedd Aquarium.

In 2014, Freshwater Future was fortunate to have Melanie join our staff to help us expand our digital outreach and action, and her expertise was a huge asset with building our climate adaptation program. After accepting a position at the American Library Association, Melanie continued her commitment to help the Great Lakes by serving as a board member of Freshwater Future.

Melanie also gets involved locally in organizing efforts around issues such as replacing lead service lines (Illinois has the most lead pipes in the United States). "The health of the environment and specifically, the Great Lakes region where I live and raise my family, is a personal passion of mine and I still learn so much from the work of this organization," shared Melanie. For her dedication professionally and personally to clean, safe water, Melanie is a true Freshwater Hero.

Thomas Knott

Accounting for nonprofit organizations is a different animal from business accounting. Tom Knott, an accounting professor at North Central Michigan College, not only understood the differences but as a board member for Freshwater Future, helped us develop new tools for tracking grant spending and fine tuning our accounting practices.

Tom dedicated significant time helping to train our staff. Stephanie Altmann, Freshwater Future's Accounting Director shared, "Tom radiates kindness, warmth, and understanding. Because of the changes Tom helped me make, all of the grant tracking information I need is at my fingertips, expense tracking is easily reported to the Board, and information needed for final grant reports is accurate and easy to find."

Freshwater Future is grateful that Tom shared his commitment to giving back to the community with us. He continues to give back as a dedicated educator. He is well regarded by his past students at the high school and college level and where he has volunteered. We know he has a special way of explaining things so they make sense, are clearly understood, and relatable. Thank you Tom for sharing your talents with Freshwater Future.



Freshwater Voices is a joint production of Freshwater Future, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization and Freshwater Future Canada, a registered Canadian charity.

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Adam Parker

Adam Parker currently serves as Vice Chair of Freshwater Future's Board and chairs the Fundraising Committee. Thanks to Adam's many years of dedicated efforts, our fundraising capacity has expanded helping us to connect more supporters to our vital work. Growing up in the Twin Cities and now residing in the Chicago area with his family, Adam has spent most of his life on and around the Great Lakes. It was through Adam's time as staff at Shedd Aquarium that opened his eyes to the wonder and vital importance of the aquatic world to our planet and our human community.

Adam is now the Director of Development at The ARK, an anti-poverty and human services organization serving Chicago's Jewish residents where he continues his personal mission to serve his community. In the case of philanthropy, Adam truly leads by example through his personal commitment as a Freshwater financial supporter. Adam along with his wife Tamar have been longtime generous donors. Adam has graciously coordinated gatherings and events in the Chicago area, provided matching support for our Giving Tuesday and Walk, Paddle, & Roll campaigns and even challenged himself to bike hundreds of miles to raise awareness of Great Lakes protection efforts. Thank you Adam for your many years of dedication to Freshwater Future and for making a lasting impact on protecting our water resources.

Welcome New Staff



**Kristen
Haitaian**

As Community Program Associate, Kristen advocates for equitable and sustainable water affordability, water infrastructure financing, and lead service line replacement through policy enforcement and community outreach throughout the Great Lakes Basin.

She is a grad of DePaul's Sustainable Urban Development Masters program and interned at Chicago's Metropolitan Planning Council. With a B.A. in Linguistics from University of Michigan and a M.A. in Speech-Language Pathology from University of Illinois, Kristen worked for a decade in healthcare. A native of Chicagoland, she now lives in the Detroit area.



**Kwamé
Hampton**

Kwamé Hampton has recently joined Freshwater Future's staff as our Community Program Coordinator working with our community-based partners on water issues such as flooding and lead in drinking water.

A resident of Detroit, Kwamé has spent years volunteering with local community groups on environmental initiatives, community beautification projects, and outreach to community and youth. His vast work experience includes both administrative and management roles for security firms helping build business alliances.

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