

Riverworks Discovery Goes National

By David Murray

A river-education program originally begun in St. Louis and supported by one barge company has proven so successful that it has been transferred to a national river museum and is expanding its reach to the national level.

RiverWorks Discovery continues to be run and promoted by its original administrator, Errin Howard, who has a long background in education, from her home in Cincinnati, Ohio. But the program is now a part of the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium in Dubuque, Iowa.

Howard calls the RiverWorks curriculum “a national education outreach effort to teach children and their families about the commerce, culture, and conservation of America's rivers and their watersheds.” For the previous few years, the program had been supported by AEP River Operations of St. Louis, Mo.

Powerhouse Museum

In 2010, AEP (which continues to be listed as a co-sponsor) gifted the program to the National Rivers Hall of Fame, part of the National Mississippi River Museum. Its Web site points out that it is one of only 9 percent of museums nationwide to be accredited by the American Association of Museums; it is also a Smithsonian Institution affiliate, a distinction enjoyed by only about 1 percent of museums.

The museum is run by the Dubuque County Historical Society, whose roots go back to the 1870s but which organized in its modern form as a private, nonprofit organization in 1950. It opened its first museum in 1964. Today, it has a board packed with high-powered corporate and business leaders, with a national vision to match.

Today, RiverWorks Discovery has 44 corporate co-sponsors, including many industry names well-known to the river community, as well as the Army Corps of Engineers. Its new home has a national platform and fundraising reach that allows it to target new horizons.

Teri Goodmann, director of national advancement for the museum, is busy raising funds for a planned touring exhibit, “Rivers of America: Journeys of Exploration,” which she expects to travel nationwide in 2012.

How hard is it to raise money for cultural projects in a difficult economic climate? “If you have a compelling vision and a history of delivering quality projects, then thankfully, generous donors make the vision a reality,” Goodmann told *The Waterways Journal*. Ingram has already made a gift for the exhibit, she said. She reports with pride that the state of Alabama plans to apply for funding to integrate RWD into its fourth-grade curriculum—statewide.

Introducing High Schoolers To the Rivers

Riverworks' early curriculum programs were targeted to primary and secondary students. In partnership with the National Energy Education Development Project (NEED), Riverworks has developed a high-school curriculum fulfilling National Science Education Standards for science, technology, engineering and math, education through the prism of the rivers. It is available to educators for download on Riverworks' Web site.

Among the many events sponsored by RWD is the Gateway Clipper Fleet in Pittsburgh, Pa., which brought high school kids aboard towboats to cruise up and down the river and listen to presentations by towing industry and Corps of Engineers leaders about careers both on the river and in the shore offices transportation companies. RiverWorks Discovery also had a presence at Cincinnati's Tall Stacks Music, Arts & Heritage Festival—which is due to return in October 2012 for its seventh annual installment, provided it can raise the \$1.6 million more it needs, according to Cincinnati.com.

Howard said RWD has educated over 300,000 children and families since its inception through involvement with various festivals, conferences, seminars, school presentations and hands-on workshops.

"RiverWorks Discovery brings together the river industry, community leaders, museums, nature centers, educators and the general public to recognize the important role our rivers have played throughout history and will continue to play in our nation's future," Howard said. RWD supports the work of sponsoring organizations by introducing children to river career opportunities through hands-on activities and educational materials.

For her part, Howard says working with RiverWorks is "just as exciting as it was four years ago."
