



No motors here: Paddlefest floats through West Alton

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WEST ALTON - For the 10th year in a row, **Paddlefest** invited the community to explore its own river.

The event was presented by the **Mississippi River Water Trail Association** in partnership with several outdoor outfitters near the **Migratory Bird Sanctuary** in West Alton. For the price of \$5, which covered insurance for the event, anyone could sport a life jacket and go into the water inside a kayak, canoe or personal paddle board.

"We believe in recreation, fun and safety on the river," **Mississippi River Water Trail Association President Joan Twillman** said. "We let people try out any and all of our canoes, kayaks and paddle boards. It's family friendly, and we encourage people to bring their kids."

One canoe, named the **Junebug**, was owned and piloted by an experienced river man named "Big Muddy" Mike Clark. Twillman described Clark as a "river legend," saying he was in several kayaking and canoeing publications constantly. Clark operates **Big Muddy Adventures** from St. Louis.

"The most dangerous boat out there is one with a motor," Clark said. "We won't be going fast enough to get into too much trouble."

The Junebug, Twillman said, is worth between \$12,000-15,000. It is built of stripped cypress wood, and is made to be water-resistant. During an outing into the river, Clark said a canoe was the best way to fully appreciate the Migratory Bird Sanctuary. he said canoes were quiet enough to not spook the observable birds.



Conservation was a large part of Clark's discussion. He said people involved in paddling would not likely litter or add trash to the river. He said the industrial and trash-based pollution in the river was on the decline, citing several community-building initiatives in the Iowa section of the river for that. He said the main pollutants in the river currently came from agricultural run-offs. Environmentally sound bioswales full of native flora to absorb the run-off would greatly decrease from that pollution.

Twillman said the St. Louis area of the Mississippi River is approximately the center of the federally-recognized **Mississippi River Water Trail**. She and Clark agreed the federal recognition will help paddlers and conservationists enjoy the river for all its worth without adding environmental damage.

The event began at 11 a.m. and lasted into the late afternoon. Besides paddling in canoes and kayaks or on paddle boards, **Riverbend Yoga** also offered paddle board based yoga exercises.