



Mississippi Earthtones Festival Hosts Announce Recipients of Confluence Conservation Leadership Awards

by Hannah Flath
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ALTON - At the 17th annual Mississippi Earthtones Festival on Saturday, September 16, Sierra Club Illinois' [Three Rivers Project](#), [Alton Main Street](#), and the [Jacoby Arts Center](#) will award three local activists with the 2023 Confluence Conservation Leadership Award. The festival organizers have recognized community members who have made significant contributions to environmental conservation in the Riverbend region since 2007. This year's Confluence Conservation Leadership awardees include: Carla Cope, Clifford Clark, and Tim Podhorn.

“All three award recipients have made significant contributions to environmental conservation in the Riverbend and are unsung heroes in our region,” said Virginia Woulfe-Beile, Co-Coordinator of the Three Rivers Project of Sierra Club Illinois. “Join us at 4:30pm on September 16 at the Mississippi Earthtones Festival’s main stage as we honor the work of these three leaders, who work tirelessly to advocate, educate, and inspire action in the areas of environmental activism and justice, sustainable agriculture, and clean air and water initiatives.”



Carla Cope is the owner of [Cope's Country Creations](#), an eco-conscious bath product business serving the Riverbend area. She is also a registered radiology technician, certified ultrasound technician, wife, and mother of three. After the death of her son in 2021, she became a passionate advocate for warehouse safety reform in Illinois. She is currently working with Illinois' Warehouse Safety Standards Task Force to advocate for improved worker safety during natural disasters. Carla, her husband Lynn, and daughter Alexandra worked tirelessly to get bipartisan support in the Illinois General Assembly

on Senate Bill 2368—legislation that establishes climate-resilient building codes. The legislation passed into law in 2023.



Clifford Clark is a retired educator and lifelong volunteer now working to promote small-scale production of organically grown foods via the Milton Community Garden at the Milton School House in Alton. Over the past ten years, Clifford has transformed the once-neglected area into family grow boxes, Hugelkultur mounds, and an oasis of flowers and veggies while progressively eliminating invasive plants. Clifford is the go-to person at the local farmer's markets to answer questions from gardeners and growers. He grows unusual vegetables and plants and has a breadth of knowledge about heirloom tomatoes, goosefoot greens, Malabar spinach, hibiscus tea, figs, heirloom garlic, and more. An Alton, Clifford is especially proud of his 11.5 years in two tours in the Peace Corps serving in Africa, the South Pacific countries, and the Caribbean working as a Computer Advisor to the National Library of Antigua, organizing and implementing the first Mango Festival in the Caribbean, and helping chicken farmers expand egg production.

Tim Podhorn of Godfrey has degrees in computer science and mechanical engineering. He retired early due to back problems, but got a new lease on life after an operation likely saved him from life in a nursing home. Tim started walking in his neighborhood while recovering from surgery and gradually worked up to walking 15-20 miles a day along the Great River Road and Route 3 in Godfrey while training to hike the Appalachian Trail. Over the last three years, Tim has picked up trash along the way on his walking routes. Tim says that he goes through about ten grocery bags a day and a grabber and pair of walking shoes a month. "The Great River Road is a showcase, and we need to work to protect her. My contribution is picking up litter. I hate to see litter in the streets and storm drains, not to mention the nano-plastics that are not only a pollutant but mimic synthetic estrogen as well. I have community pride and I hate to see our world deteriorate. I get personal satisfaction in making my world a better place!"

About Alton Main Street

Alton Main Street is a community based, not-for-profit, volunteer-led organization dedicated to securing the economic vitality and aesthetic quality of the historic downtown district. Since 1994, Alton Main Street has led volunteer efforts to transform Alton's Downtown district into a thriving commercial and residential center through education, historic preservation, and coordination of social, economic, and beautification activities. To learn more, visit www.DowntownAlton.com.

About Jacoby Arts Center

The mission of Jacoby Arts Center is to nurture and promote the practice and appreciation of the arts through education, exhibits, cultural programs, and community outreach initiatives. For details on upcoming classes, events and programming, please visit www.JacobyArtsCenter.org.

About Sierra Club Illinois

The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with more than 3.8 million members and supporters. In addition to protecting every person's right to get outdoors and access the healing power of nature, the Sierra Club works to promote clean energy, safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and legal action. For more information about Sierra Club's work in Illinois, visit www.sierraclub.org/illinois.