

"One Yard at a Time" campaign drawing donations for lake revitalization

By Colin Hogan

While \$12.89 doesn't buy as much as it used to, people in the Fulton area are finding it can go a long way toward a good cause.

With the dredging of Fulton's portion of Lake Neatahwana underway, the Fulton Community Revitalization Corporation (FCRC) this month launched its "One Yard at a Time for \$12.89" campaign, in which supporters are asked to make a contribution of \$12.89 or more toward the effort.

"It's got a good ring to it," Mayor Ron Woodward Sr. said, "and its affordable enough that people who can't manage to put much in can still make a contribution."

For years, the lake has been closed to swimming and other activities due to a high presence of blue-green algae. The state health department says the organisms pose a threat to humans, pets and wildlife when they bloom, releasing toxins – known as cyanotoxins – into the environment.

As of Sept. 10, the state Department of Environmental Conservation confirmed that blue-green algae remains present in the lake, though the toxin level is still below the threshold of serious concern.

Local officials say that, over the years, between eight and 12 feet of silt has built up along the lake's basin. This has inhibited the flow from the freshwater springs that feed it, and left the water warmer and more stagnate than it used to be. By removing that silt, local officials believe they can restore the water's flow rate and temperature enough to resolve the algae prob-

Continued on page 3

lem.

Fulton and the Town of Granby have each received \$200,000 in state funds to move forward with their dredging projects. In Fulton, where a contractor has been hired to do the work, the first 10,000 cubic yards will cost about \$118,000.

For any dredging beyond the first 10,000 yards, the contractor has quoted a rate of \$12.89 per yard.

"12.89 is really taking off," said FCRC member Dennis Merlino. "Since we started with (the slogan), the checks are rolling in."

Woodward credits Merlino as the leader of the campaign, though Merlino is quick to point out that the idea was born from several minds, including Fulton Police Chief Orlo A. Green III, who coined the slogan.



"Everyone is asked to give whatever they can, but \$12.89 is a catchy, workable number," Merlino said. "If you can't give more, it's still enough to feel like you've made a significant contribution to the project."

Word is getting around outside of the Fulton area, too. Woodward said he has heard from businessmen in Oswego who now intend to donate to the effort.

Woodward noted that it's important for contributors to know that their donation is not a purchase of one cubic yard of silt, but a symbolic sponsorship indicating how their money is being used.

And while there's no tangible reward for giving, many involved say the contribution still allows a donor to take ownership of the project.

"I honestly believe that by giving that, it allows them to take a piece of the project," said Fulton Councilor and FCRC member Norman "Jay" Foster. "When people see this actually happening, I think it's a great way of motivating everyone to get involved."

Foster said the campaign has even taken off among local kids.

"Kids are asking about it, asking how they can get involved," Foster said. "They grew up without being able to swim in the lake, and now it looks like they might get their chance. For them to have a piece of it is just awesome."

One-hundred percent of all money donated to the campaign goes directly to the lake clean-up, Merlino said.

"The beauty of this is there is no administrative costs," Merlino said. "All the money collected is used solely for the lake."

Merlino says getting the lake cleaned up is about more than just having a place for residents to swim again. He feels the lake's re-opening will serve as a rallying point for community involvement across the city.

"I think when people see the lake cleaned up and open again, it will help revive spirits across the board," Merlino said. "People who have lived here an extended period of time will relive their memories and stories from the way it used to be. I think the younger generations and people new to Fulton will get to have a sense that they're helping build the community up again, too."



Pictured is a barge operated by Groh Dredging and Marine Construction working off the shore of Lake Neatahwanta in Fulton.

Colin Hogan photo