



NEWS RELEASE

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EVENT'S SUCCESS HELPS FUEL FUTURE OF FLINT RIVER

FLINT, Mich. -- For some folks, good fortune is reflected in their "lucky" number. For Brent Nickola, that number yesterday was 504.

That was the final tally announced at the close of the Flint River 500, a three-day membership drive for the Flint River Watershed Coalition (www.flintriver.org). The FRWC is a network of local leaders and residents working throughout seven counties to insure the long-term health and well-being of the nearly 1,400 square mile watershed.

Nickola, alumni relations manager at the University of Michigan-Flint and FRWC board member, voluntarily stranded himself on Friday, September 18, aboard a makeshift flotilla anchored where the river -- one of mid-Michigan's largest tributaries -- winds through Riverview Park in Flushing. His goal: To stay on the water until FRWC had effectively doubled its membership to at least 500.

For the next 44 hours, Nickola worked, slept, ate, fished and entertained onlookers as new memberships came in. FRWC supported the effort by holding a number of activities at the

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park, including a fish fry, minnow races, fly fishing and tying demonstrations, a kayak and canoe rally, raffle drawing and an outdoor screening of the Disney film, "Finding Nemo." Volunteers also participated Saturday in a clean-up of the river just upstream from Nickola's raft, removing more than 70 discarded tires and several hundred pounds of rusting metal and other trash.

After enduring a second night of temperatures dipping near 40 degrees, Nickola woke Sunday morning to bright sunshine and a steady flow of new memberships. At roughly 3 p.m. the call was made: the FRWC's membership had reached 504.

"This has been an incredible weekend," said Nickola after being showered with cheers -- and bursting water balloons -- as he arrived back on shore. "The folks who came out learned that the Flint River is a great place to bring the family, spend the day and just have fun. And they left with a better understanding of the role we each play in keeping the river that way."

FRWC's newest members will be key in supporting that effort, said Rebecca Fedewa, executive director of the FRWC.

"Our members provide a critical voice for the river, raising awareness of the watershed as a community asset, as well as responsibility," she said. "We're glad to add these new members to the FRWC family, and we're glad to send Brent home for a shower and a good night's rest."

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