

Iowa Rivers Revival

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For immediate release -- Friday, Feb. 3, 2012.

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Charles City Named “River Town of the Year”

Iowa Rivers Revival, an advocacy group for rivers, says the N.E. Iowa town “responded to record floods in 1999 and 2008 by embracing the Cedar River with new ideas and bold projects” that improve quality of life, protect the quality of the river, and are good for the economy.

Charles City, Iowa. “Iowa Rivers Revival,” a group that advocates for rivers, has named Charles City “Iowa River Town of the Year” in recognition of the community’s outstanding work to enhance its connections to the Cedar River.

IRR is presenting the award at a reception Friday morning at the Charles City Public Library on the banks of the Cedar. Mayor Jim Erb and City Manager Tom Brownlow are accepting the Award for the City.

“Charles City responded to record floods in 1999 and 2008 by embracing the Cedar River with new ideas and bold projects, such as transforming a low-head dam into Iowa’s first whitewater kayak course and installing the state’s largest permeable paving system,” said Jerry Peckumn, Board Chair for Iowa Rivers Revival who farms near Jefferson.

“The city’s projects both protect the Cedar River and celebrate it as a rich source of enjoyment and civic pride,” Peckumn said. “We commend Charles City as Iowa’s River Town of the Year. Your efforts will be admired, discussed, and emulated by other Iowa river towns for a long time to come.”

Previous “River Towns of the Year” recognized by Iowa Rivers Revival are Webster City, Elkader, Coon Rapids, and Cedar Falls.

More background and detail:

“Iowa Rivers Revival” was founded six years ago to give a voice to rivers. IRR is committed to helping Iowans work on public policy to restore and protect Iowa’s rivers and streams.

“Rivers are one of Iowa’s most precious assets,” Peckumn said. “Charles City is a superb example of public officials and citizens who have refocused on their river to improve quality of life.”

Iowa Rivers Revival hailed numerous river-oriented projects done by Charles City, including:

- * **Transforming (“mitigating”) a low-head dam into Iowa’s first whitewater kayak course**, now a magnet for visitors from all over the Midwest and beyond. Mitigating the dam also improved fish habitat and passage, and increased the number of people fishing in the area.
- * **Developing new riverside parks**. Riverfront Park, in the downtown area, includes a boat launch, walking trail, amphitheater, labyrinth, disc golf course, the whitewater play area, and other amenities that transformed the water front. The riverfront area is filled with people on weekends and evenings.
- * **Redesigning and replacing a beloved, century-old suspension bridge** that was swept away by the flood of 2008.
- * **Completing Iowa’s largest “permeable paving system,”** with much more coming. Permeable paving dramatically reduces storm water runoff volume -- and reduces pollutants. Charles City officials rightly note that the system “marks a new way of relating to the environment, restoring a more natural system of addressing storm water.”

“These are the kinds of programs -- and vision of the future -- that Iowa Rivers Revival recognizes with the River Town of the Year award,” Peckumn said. He said Charles City’s success proves it makes sense for Iowa communities to refocus on “good relationships” with their rivers.

“It is good for business and the local economy,” Peckumn said. Charles City officials have noted that businesses have expanded inventories and services, including lodging packages, sales and rental of equipment, and shuttle services. Response to tourism and community promotional efforts has “skyrocketed,” Charles City officials say.

“It’s good for community involvement and civic pride,” Peckumn said. In Charles City, everyone is part of the picture -- Eagle Scouts doing projects for Riverfront Park; Middle School students winning national contests for environmental projects (building bat houses, this year); scores of people volunteering; city officials leading the way.

“The Cedar River is now more than ever a valued asset for the community, making Charles City an even better place to live, work and play,” City officials said in their IRR “River Town” application.

Peckumn added that Iowa Rivers Revival strongly supports State funding for valuable, public projects like Charles City’s. In Charles City, the DNR’s Low-head Dam Public Hazard Program supported the dam mitigation and channel improvements. The DNR’s Water Recreation Access Cost Share program supported the boat ramp and fishing area below the whitewater course. The Dept. of Cultural Affairs’ “Iowa Great Places” program supported the river walk area park and bank improvements.

Peckumn said: “The State contribution to the Charles City project -- about \$1.3 million -- is an excellent example of public money spent for public projects that will be used by the public.”

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