

## GREAT 2016 Annual Report

The G.R.E.A.T. board is happy once again to have vigorously pursued its mission by means of diverse activities throughout the 2016 calendar year. We celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> year of paddling and looking after the quality of the Grand River. We had a diverse paddling schedule, with low water canceling or changing two paddles, and finally getting to make one paddle we have tried for several years to complete. We were very pleased to finally have completed a long-time goal – to have a building on our G.R.E.A.T. land. It was a very interesting year.

We started the year with Don Lynd changing his mind to continue his Presidency, and forcing G.R.E.A.T. to once again be led by an immigrant TEXIAN. So language became an issue at all the events. Last year's Annual Dinner had Aleta Daniels from the Jackson County Conservation District giving a great talk on "Restoring the Balance: The Role of Wetlands in a Changing World". Then it was on to Earth Day at Cascade Falls Park where we once again had over a hundred people (adults and children) experience a paddle in a kayak or canoe. Many were first-timers who had a new wonderful adventure. No one was lost on the water, so it was a resounding success.

Our 25<sup>th</sup> paddling season started on the headwaters of the Grand River in Liberty Township. We had 50 brave souls paddling the narrow, and sometimes shallow, river. In May, we had our 25<sup>th</sup> year commemorative paddle from Ella Sharp Park to East High Street. The board came away with two new ideas to include on future paddles. The first was to place a sign at the end of the paddles, letting people know when and where to get off the river. The second idea, which may become more important, was to rent a port-a-john when no other services are available at our trip sites. We had to cancel our June paddle on the St. Joseph River due to low water, and move the location of our July paddle from the River Raisin to Lime Lake due to low water. In August we had 58 paddlers on the Kalamazoo River, and a good sized crew braved the October weather for a trip on the Grand from U.S. 127 to Dixon Road. This year we only gave out a small handful of Swimmer Awards to people who took a swim on our paddle trips.

Our Annual Cleanup of the Grand River from Michigan Center to Stonegate Subdivision (just south of where the Portage River meets the Grand River) was once again led by Jack Ripstra. The community came out to help, with over 100 volunteers which included 20 CMS Energy volunteers and 58 J.R.O.T.C. volunteers. Over the last three years we have been encouraged with a lessening of trash on the river.

This year, with the help of an anonymous donor, Consumers Energy, the Jackson Community Foundation, and a lot of friends of G.R.E.A.T., we were able to build "THE G.R.E.A.T. BARN" on our property in "Birdland". It is a three-garage door building with lots of space for our boat trailers, kayaks, canoes, and other equipment that we use on our paddles.

2016 saw G.R.E.A.T. lose three board members, two at the beginning and one at the end of the year. Jim Seitz, G.R.E.A.T.'s "go to guy" for everything, retired from the board. During Jim's time on the board, we knew he did a lot, but after his leaving we really found out how much of everything he did. We can never repay Jim for all the hard work he did to keep us running smoothly. Don Lynd left us at the beginning of the year to spend more time with his family. We greatly thank him for his time as President. And as we close the year, we are now losing Mary Lenardson. She has been a very valuable asset to me and the board, and her loss will be missed in a lot of ways.

2016 was a great year for G.R.E.A.T. because of the great Board we have, all of our great members, and the great people who paddled with us.

Respectfully Submitted, Kenny Price, G.R.E.A.T. President