

## 2009 Grand Marshall Ed Mullady



By Mary Ann Kirsch

While Bourbonnais, officially, has no sea per se, we do have a marvelous waterway...the Kankakee River, that runs through our village, as well as Bradley and Kankakee. Not only does the river supply the water that we consume everyday, available by the turn of a faucet every minute of every hour of every day, our 'sea', the river is a major component to the beautiful aesthetics of this area and a major reason why hundreds of thousands of visitors and outdoor sports enthusiasts have come here over the past century...if only to enjoy it.

With this in mind, selecting Ed Mullady as the Grand Marshall for this year's Grand Parade was truly a simple one. For, if there were an official River Keeper for the Kankakee, he would be the choice, hands down. It is a role he's taken on for well over 50 years and one he will hang on to as long as he can.

Born in Momence in 1926, Ed fell in love with the Kankakee River at the age of three when he became fascinated with the water that flowed past his parents' produce business. As years passed, his fascination turned to passion as he became aware that such a wonderful body of water had a life and health of its own.

"I grew up with a love of fishing, hunting," and related activities like camping in or close by the river, states Mullady. During those years when he spent many wonderful hours fishing and camping with his good friend, Frank Siwicki Jr., now deceased, he felt a protectiveness grow. Also came the realization that the river was probably this community's most valuable natural gifts. With that grew commitment, something that is as strong in him today as it was well over 50 years ago. As is the hope that the river will thrive into the next century.

It was during his boyhood days attending school at St. Patrick's in Momence that he discovered a desire to write and report. While in 7th and 8th grades he wrote, produced and distributed a daily one-sheet newsletter to fellow students. He branched beyond that to sending local basketball news to the Kankakee Republican (now daily Journal). This, too, would stand him in good stead as his relationship with the Kankakee River grew.

**First things first, however. Before his commitment to the river established a lifelong foothold, Ed marries. He and his wife, Myrtle, raised eight children: Richard, Theresa, Patrick, Tim, Monica, Matt, Christine, and Nancy, deceased.**

**To pay the bills, Ed worked for many years in the sports department at Montgomery Ward and then went to work at Salkeld's Sports on South Schuyler Avenue.**

**Then, in September of 1958, a wonderful thing happened...Mullady wrote, published, edited and distributed the First Edition of Sportman's Letter. At last, all Mullady's stars had finally lined up: his devotion to his growing family, his passion for the Kankakee and its tributaries, his love of sport activities related to the river...all of it played an integral part of what was about to happen. So, too, did his ability to write about it all.**

**From that day to today, nearly 51 years later, Ed Mullady has continued to write/publish and distribute 258 editions of Sportsman's Letter, never once ever straying from his hopes, goals, and love for the river.**

**In his latest publication Mullady writes, "Publishing the Sportsman's Letter has been a way to inform outdoor people of projects that many have tried (to) make money off of by doing damage to the Kankakee. This has been one of the main concerns of the publication. Too often, people do not always understand that our treasured river is important and needs to be protected...not be the recipient of problems."**

**Those who know Mullady know this is what he's always believed and felt. Often with the help of many who felt as he did, he went to bat in an effort to protect the area's richest resource, the river. And, realized important successes.**

**"I believe that at this time the Kankakee River and its tributaries," states Mullady today, "are in the best condition they have been in since the Pilgrims arrived." He adds, as an aside, "I am not that old to verify this!"**

**He continues, "I have never in my 82 years seen the water quality as good as right now. However, sand and situation is (still) a huge problem for the aquatic life, and for flooding."**

**Mullady says he was 100% behind the proposal for developing a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Area a few years ago. "That was the one real chance we had to really do something for the good of the Kankakee River. It will take federal funds along with state money to remedy the major problem we have now of sand build-up, eroding banks and continued ditching,"**

**No one understands better than Ed Mullady that when it comes to certain projects, the wheels of progress grind ever-slowly. He seems willing to concede that for now, the river is surviving and in some ways maybe even thriving. Water still flows freely and at present there are plentiful amounts of quality fish.**

**He is cautious, however, "I have seen in the past few years a tendency for more young people becoming aware of the river's needs. I hope it continues. We need many people to decide which is right...not just for them but for the welfare of our**

resources. There have been good people fighting through several generations, but the river needs more generations (involved) and more numbers to continue."

"Late last year my lifetime fishing partner and wife, Myrtle, passed away," states Ed. "She and I often discussed how proud we are that all our grown-up youngsters and their children, have a deep respect for the outdoors and for our rivers."

And, as long as Ed Mullady has a breath left in him, his feelings about this will not wane, quite the opposite. He wants to continue to spread the word to other families, other communities. "The love of the river has always been uppermost in my mind."

Proof of those words, he and his son, Matt, travel to many Midwest outdoor sports shows and related events, teaching about river life and talking up the Kankakee.

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