

Living along the river means taking care of it, too



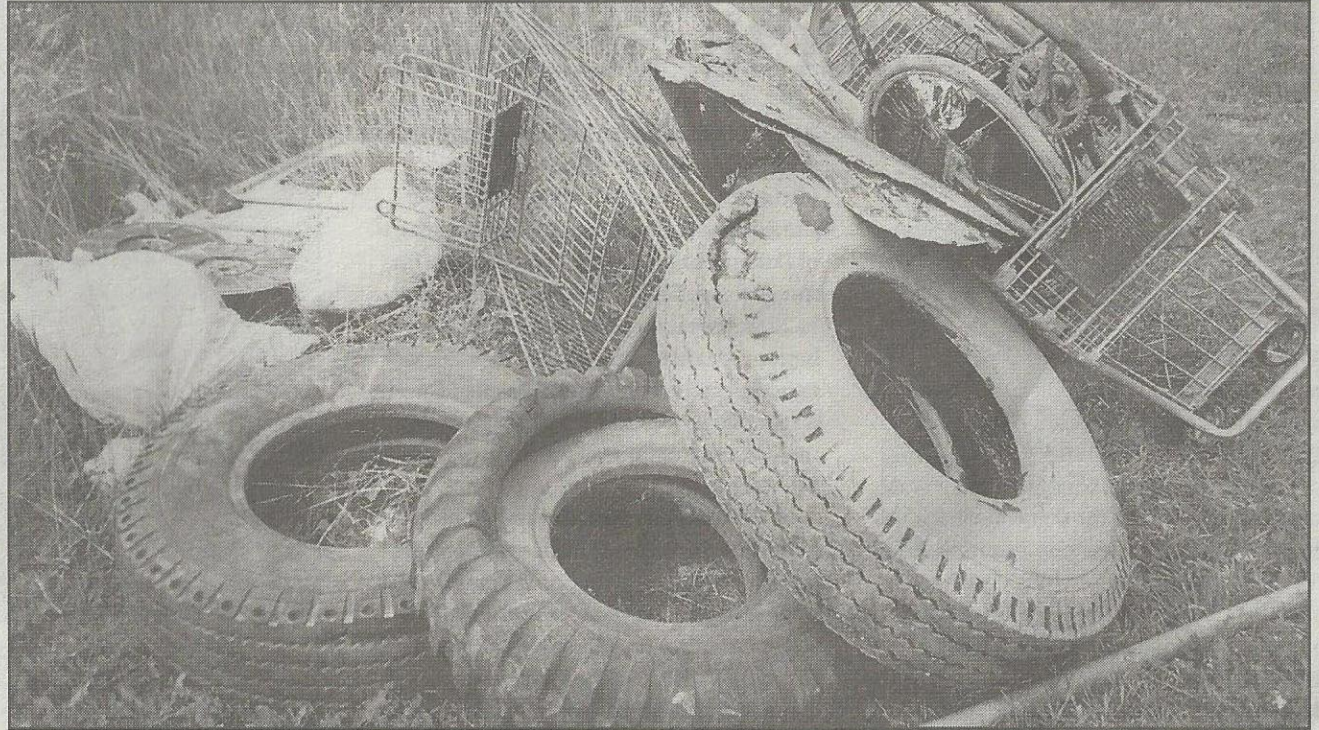
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Rivers attract people. Ask any real estate agent. Riverfront homes are extremely desirable — and expensive. Historically, living near rivers was a necessity rather than a luxury. Early people were drawn to rivers for survival. Waterways were a source of fresh water, fish, and other wildlife. Large rivers served as highways that made travel faster and easier. Traditional campsites were often located on the banks of rivers.

When Europeans created the Red River settlement that became Winnipeg, narrow river lots were established so that each property had access to the river. Fresh water was hauled from the river for cooking, cleaning, and farming. Homesteads were often built near rivers despite the high risk of flooding.

As Winnipeg's population grew, opportunities to purchase riverfront property became few and far between. Most Winnipeggers no longer lived along a river. Over time, people became less "connected" to local rivers. As the city's economy expanded, industries and businesses needing water sprang up along rivers. Clean water could be drawn from rivers for industrial and agricultural use and waste could be diluted and carried away by the river. We began to



Supplied photo

Every spring the melting snow reveals the garbage that is still being dumped in the Seine River.

treat waterways as sewers and dump sites.

By 1990, the Seine River was in crisis. It had become "a stagnant, algae-choked mosquito-breeding cesspool and lifeless ditch."

A small group of concerned local residents decided to clean up the river. Save Our Seine River Environment Inc. (SOS) was officially incorporated as a charity in 1994. Its goals were to protect, restore, and improve the Seine River environment by organizing clean-ups, monitoring river flow and quality, and educating people about the river.

Despite these efforts, people continue to treat the Seine River as a dump. As the snow melts each spring, it reveals shopping carts, bicycles, furniture, appliances, clothing, construction debris, yard waste, and other litter. Every

summer, SOS hires a team of hard-working students with the help of Casera Credit Union and the province. The Green Team spends all summer removing truckloads of garbage only to have more trash appear the following spring.

How can we break this cycle of illegal dumping and clean-ups? Perhaps the answer is to encourage people to re-connect with their local rivers by making them more accessible for walking, cycling, recreation, and education.

"For in the end, we conserve only what we love." To learn how you can help protect the Seine River, go to www.saveourseine.org. The next opportunity is June 26.

Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of Save Our Seine.