River Quest marks 20th anniversary milestone May 14-17

Duluth, Minn. USA – This year marks a milestone in waterfront history. Twenty years ago a group of forward-thinking business leaders and waterfront companies created a unique educational outreach program called St. Louis River Quest. By the time this year’s session winds up on May 17, River Quest will have served more than 16,000 students in the greater Duluth-Superior since its inception in 1993.

Small groups of students stop for ten minutes at each of 12 hands-on learning stations where presenters have prepared experiments and displays covering everything from pollution prevention, soil conservation, river cleanup and maritime commerce to boating/water safety, fish habitats and preventing aquatic invasive species. Teachers are given resource materials to use in advance and in follow-up work in the classroom. After the event, students are encouraged to submit essays about their experiences for the Capt. Ray Skelton River Quest Essay Contest, named after one of the program’s founders.

The 20th annual St. Louis River Quest is set for May 14-17 but with a new twist this year: while six learning stations will remain aboard the Vista Star, the other six will be located in Pioneer Hall at the DECC. The River Quest planning committee opted to expand the program for 2012 to include this landside venue – not only to celebrate its 20-year milestone but, more importantly, to accommodate 250 additional students – a 25% increase in participation thanks to financial support provided by a host of local sponsors (listed below).

Today, supported by nearly 40 public and private organizations concerned with the proper use and preservation of the St. Louis River estuary, River Quest will involve some 1,191 sixth-graders from 13 schools, 40 educators, and as many as 100 volunteers this year alone.

“Helping to Clean America’s Rivers”

To kickoff River Quest’s anniversary week on Monday, May 14, one of the program’s sponsors, Sappi Fine Paper, is hosting a presentation at 7:15 p.m. in the DECC Gooseberry Falls Room by nationally acclaimed champion of environmental stewardship Chad Pregracke, founder and president of Living Lands & Waters, a nonprofit he launched at age 19 to clean up America’s rivers. The event is free and open to the public, but seating is limited to 300 guests; people are encouraged to arrive early and tour the River Quest learning stations in Pioneer Hall at 6:45.

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As founder of America’s only “industrial-strength” river cleanup organization, Pregracke will share a compelling, funny story about growing up on the river and how his experiences led to his unique vision to clean up the Mississippi. His entertaining remarks leave audiences with a clear understanding that each person’s actions truly make a difference in cleaning up America’s rivers. Pregracke’s vision, charisma, non-stop work ethic and natural leadership have garnered him an abundance of awards and honors over the years. Notably, he was the recipient of the Jefferson Award for Public Service, America’s version of the Nobel Prize, in June 2002. He accepted this award in the United States Supreme Court with other award recipients: Rudolph Giuliani, Bill and Melinda Gates, and Lilly Tartikoff. Most recently, he had the honor of speaking to the four living former presidents of the U.S. at the Points of Light Tribute in Washington D.C. in March 2011.

River Quest 2012 Learning Station Topics & Sponsors

**Onboard the Vista Star**

*Cold Hand Luke*” Hypothermia & Water Safety
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

*Fish Families*
Great Lakes Aquarium & MN DNR MinnAqua Program

*It floats, you don’t. Wear your life jacket!*
Duluth Sail & Power Squadron

*What is the Es-chew-air-ee?*
Lake Superior NERR

*Get Habitattitude!*
Minnesota Sea Grant Program

*Break the Grip of the Rip*
Twin Ports Rip Currents

**DECC Pioneer Hall**

*What is the difference between Storm & Sanitary Sewers?*
City of Duluth Utility Operations (M,T)

*Pollution & the River Watershed*
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (W, Th)
**Bacteria: The Real Workers at WLSSD**
Western Lake Superior Sanitation District

**Sustainable Forestry**
NewPage  (M,T)

**Great Lakes Cargo Capital**
Duluth Seaway Port Authority  (W,Th)

**Living Lands & Waters**
Sappi Fine Paper

**Oil Spill Cleanup**
U.S. Coast Guard & USCG Auxiliary

**Stream Table**
Superior National Forest

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**2012 River Quest Donors**
Financial support for this year’s program has been provided by:

**(Platinum $1,000+)**
Duluth Public Schools, Duluth Seaway Port Authority, Holcim (US) Inc.,
Sappi Fine Paper, Vista Fleet

**(Gold $500+)**
Marine Tech, Minnesota Power, Minnesota Sea Grant Program, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,
Western Lake Superior Sanitary District

**(Silver $250+)**
Fraser Shipyards, Gavilon Grain, Hallett Dock Co., Midwest Energy Resources Co.,
NewPage, Subway

**(Bronze $100+)**
Allouez Marine, Grandma’s Restaurant Co.

**(Steel)**
National Bank of Commerce

“It isn’t often, you find an educational outreach program so unique to still be in existence after 20 years, let alone be continuing to evolve and expand,” noted Adele Yorde, Port Authority public relations manager and current River Quest coordinator. “We honor those visionaries who created this program in the first place and express our deep gratitude to the organizations who continue to so generously sponsor the program and remain an integral part of River Quest’s leadership team.”

For more information about River Quest, [www.seagrant.umn.edu/riverquest](http://www.seagrant.umn.edu/riverquest)

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