

## Winona County SWCD celebrates 80 years



*Saint Mary's University professor Raymond Faber, Ph.D., gives a presentation on local ecological features at Garvin Heights Park in Winona on Aug. 14. The Garvin Heights stop was one of 10 site visits conducted during the Winona County SWCD's 80th anniversary conservation bus tour.*  
**Photo Credit:** Mary Juhl, BWSR

### Minnesota's first Soil and Water Conservation District marks eight decades of conservation delivery

LEWISTON—The son of the first soil conservationist in the first Soil and Water Conservation District in Minnesota spoke of his father's continuing legacy during an Aug. 14 event celebrating the Winona County Soil & Water Conservation District's 80th anniversary.

Jim Sillman drove more than 1,000 miles from his home in Lucedale, Mississippi, to attend the anniversary celebration. Sillman's father, Bill Sillman, served as the first Winona County soil conservationist from 1936 until his retirement in 1973.

"He passed away years ago, but I think he would have wanted me to be

*This restored stream near Stockton was featured on the conservation bus tour during the Winona County SWCD 80th anniversary celebration.* **Photo Credit:** Winona County SWCD



here today," Sillman said at the event at Farmers Community Park near Lewiston.

Sillman, a retired naval officer who grew up in Winona County, spoke of his father's contributions to area conservation.

"I look around and I see all these contour strips and structures. He started the process, and you folks are continuing it," Sillman said.

In 1938, the Winona County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) became the first SWCD established

“  
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– Troy Daniell, state  
conservationist, Natural Resources  
Conservation Service

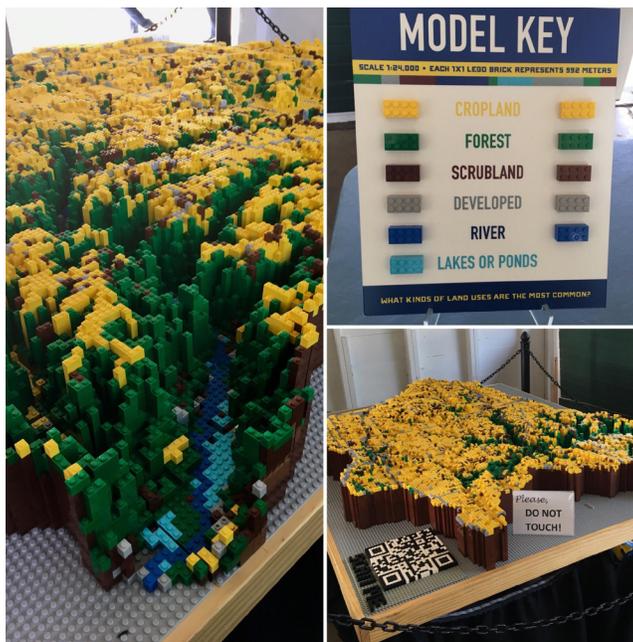
in Minnesota under the name  
Burns-Homer-Pleasant Soil  
Conservation District. LeAnn  
Buck, executive director for  
the Minnesota Association of  
Soil and Water Conservation  
Districts (MASWCD), explained  
the history. President Franklin  
D. Roosevelt introduced the  
concept of soil and water  
conservation districts in  
response to the devastation  
caused by wind erosion during  
the Dust Bowl in the 1930s.

Today, 89 SWCDs operate  
across Minnesota, with roughly  
3,000 operating nationwide.

“Everything we have  
accomplished over the years  
is thanks to those who started  
this movement, and those who  
kept it going,” said Winona  
County SWCD Chairman Leo  
Speltz.

The celebration included  
a conservation bus tour,  
demonstrations, speakers, and a  
dinner. The event was hosted by the  
SWCD in partnership with MASWCD,  
the Minnesota Board of Water and  
Soil Resources (BWSR), and the USDA's  
Natural Resources Conservation  
Service (NRCS).

Throughout the day, conservation  
professionals stressed the importance  
of local engagement in enhancing  
conservation efforts.



A LEGO® model of the Whitewater Watershed was on display  
during the Winona County SWCD 80th anniversary celebration.  
Watershed topography is depicted by 26,000 bricks to show the  
relationships between land use and water quality efforts.

**Photo Credit:** Mary Juhl, BWSR



Young Winona County residents check out a rainfall and erosion  
simulator during the Winona County SWCD 80th anniversary  
celebration. **Photo Credit:** Winona County SWCD

“I'm a firm believer that conservation  
and agricultural production go  
together, and it has to be locally led,”  
said NRCS State Conservationist Troy  
Daniell.

Attendees learned about a variety  
of conservation practices during  
the bus tour portion of the event.  
The bus tour highlighted practices  
including stream restorations, buffer  
implementation, and contour strips,  
plus a bluff-top presentation at  
Winona's Garvin Heights Park.

Winona SWCD District  
Manager Daryl Buck  
highlighted recovery efforts  
following the devastating  
2007 flood that killed seven,  
damaged more than 1,000  
homes, and destroyed millions  
of dollars in infrastructure.

“When you look at the flood  
repairs we did, most of the  
repairs were done by the SWCD  
with BWSR funding and help  
from NRCS,” Daryl Buck said.  
“This shows the partnerships  
we've been building since the  
district started.”

Back at Farmers Community  
Park, a rainfall and erosion  
simulator was on view,  
along with a trout fishing  
demonstration and a LEGO®  
model of the Whitewater  
Watershed. Constructed from  
26,000 bricks, the model  
depicts the watershed's  
topography, demonstrating the  
relationships between land use  
and water quality efforts.

The celebration concluded with  
comments from speakers and  
an evening picnic. Speakers  
included BWSR Executive  
Director John Jaschke, local  
conservation staff and  
landowners, Winona County  
Commissioner Steve Jacob,  
and representatives from MASWCD  
and NRCS. Neil Broadwater, a retired  
University of Minnesota Regional  
Extension educator, served as the  
master of ceremonies.

“Soil and water conservation isn't  
just about the present, it's about  
the future,” Broadwater said. “We  
must continue our soil and water  
conservation practices and hand those  
down to the next generation.”