

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

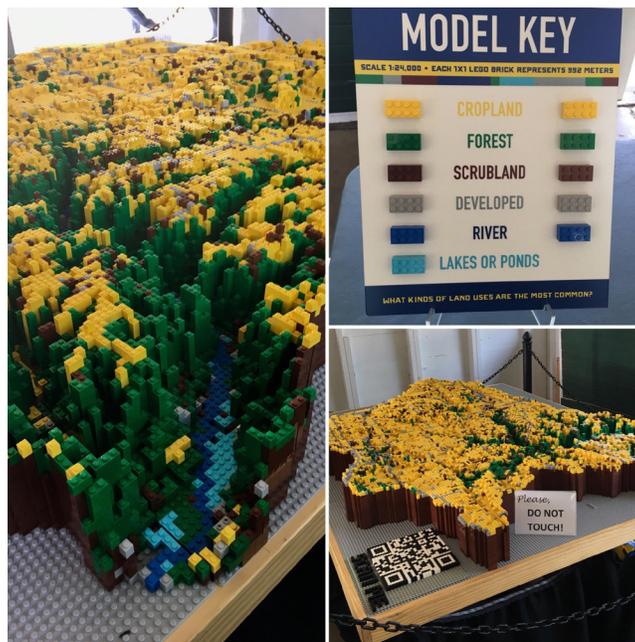
in Minnesota under the name
Burns-Homer-Pleasant Soil
Conservation District. LeAnn
Buck, executive director for
the Minnesota Association of
Soil and Water Conservation
Districts (MASWCD), explained
the history. President Franklin
D. Roosevelt introduced the
concept of soil and water
conservation districts 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.”