

# Iowa Rivers Revival

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## Decorah Named “River Town of the Year”

**Iowa Rivers Revival says the people of the historic river town and scenic river valley “have a passion for protecting the legacy and passing it on for generations to come.”**

**Decorah, Iowa.** Iowa Rivers Revival, a group that advocates for rivers, has named Decorah as “River Town of the Year” in recognition of efforts by the city and its many partners to make the Upper Iowa River the heart and soul of the community and a focus for recreation, economic development, and environmental stewardship.

Iowa Rivers Revival (IRR) is presenting the “River Town of the Year” award at a reception Friday morning at Luther College, Peace Dining Room. Mayor Don Arendt and City Administrator Chad Byrd are accepting the award on behalf of the city.

“The people of Decorah and the Oneota valley are deeply aware of the legacy they have inherited with this beautiful valley,” said IRR Director Roz Lehman. “They have a passion for protecting the legacy and passing it on for generations to come.”

“Decorah is connecting people to the river that inspired the town’s settlement so long ago,” Lehman said. “The river still makes Decorah a very special place to live and visit.”

Iowa Rivers Revival pointed to several key river-related projects:

- **Trout Run Trail.** The 11-mile, four-season trail is the newest gem of many attractions centering on the river. It connects the city to the Decorah Fish Hatchery, with several miles running parallel to the river or Trout Run. The Trail is a superb recreational resource, and it also helps protect the river and Trout Run coldwater stream from erosion or heavy development.
- **An impressive park system, and hiking and mountain bike trails.** People of the city and Oneota valley have always valued outstanding community parks and public lands.
- **Decorah celebrates the river and makes it the center of life.** Nordic Fest features the “Elvelopet” river run and “Kanalopet” river race. Outfitters and others organize regular river clean-up events. School students have many learning activities focused on the river.

- **The “Keep it Clean, Keep it Fun” campaign** in the corridor is the strongest one in Iowa. It’s an effort to educate river users to eliminate litter and respect landowner rights.
- **The Upper Iowa River Watershed Project** is an alliance that has achieved documented decreases in nitrogen and phosphorous in the river, and increased clarity. (That accomplishment is rare and may be unique for a major Iowa river.) The City and partners monitor water quality at 29 sites in the 640,000-acre watershed.
- **Projects always have a focus on protecting the environment as well as enhancing recreation.** For example, Trout Run Trail and parks with native grasses provide buffer strips that reduce silt and chemical pollution.
- **Strong efforts are under way to engage all stakeholders in mapping plans for the future of the river corridor.** Meetings bring together land-owners, land-managers, public agencies, livery operators, and other organizations and citizens to create a good future and a “culture of respect” for the river and property in the valley.
- **The River is a part of students’ learning at every level.** Decorah school children from K-12 are connected to the river – they visit the Hatchery, learn how to gauge water quality, learn about aquatic life, write about and do art about the river, and study macro-invertebrates, insects and aquatic ecosystems. Luther students engage the river in an extensive environmental studies program.

“These projects are impressive,” Lehman said, “but we also want to recognize the process.

“Collaboration is crucial. All these efforts in Decorah and the valley are characterized by a rich mix of public and private cooperation and partnerships between city, county, state and federal governments, other public agencies, businesses, organizations, land-owners, schools, and volunteers.”

“All Iowa looks to Decorah and the Upper Iowa valley,” Lehman said, noting that the Upper Iowa often is considered Iowa’s most scenic, most popular and most visited interior river.

“Decorah is ahead of the game. High usage of the river and valley inevitably generates challenges as well as opportunities, and Decorah is giving all Iowa a good example of how to work through the issues with everyone’s voice being heard,” Lehman said.

Previous “River Towns of the Year” recognized by Iowa Rivers Revival are Webster City, Elkader, Coon Rapids, Cedar Falls, Charles City, Central City, and Dubuque. (For details, go to [www.iowarivers.org](http://www.iowarivers.org).)

Iowa Rivers Revival was founded seven years ago to be a voice for rivers. IRR is committed to helping Iowans work on education and public policy to restore and protect Iowa’s rivers and streams.

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