

Can Coon Rapids dam stop Asian carp?

◀ FISH FROM AAI

An aggressive, unwanted species, they out-compete native fish for food and take over the habitat, Skinner said. Asian carp can jump 10 feet out of the water, even striking people in boats, discouraging recreational use and negatively affecting surrounding properties and businesses, he said.

After considering sound and bubble barriers, the DNR has decided that a tall physical barrier that is already in place would best stop the fish, Skinner said.

Under the contract with Three Rivers, Stanley Consultants will report on what would have to be done and how much it would cost to make the Coon Rapids dam a more effective

fish barrier. The investigation will include measurements of how high the fish can jump and how much distance separates the top of the dam and the water level when the water is at its high point, Skinner said.

Stanley's report, due by January, is expected to deliver recommendations on improvements, repairs and preventive maintenance to extend the life of the dam another 50 years. "We want to make sure that what we do also maintains the dam," Skinner said.

If the report finds that it is feasible to make the dam a more effective fish barrier and legislators set aside money for the work, its operation as a fish block would take priority over operating it for recreation, said Di-

rector of the DNR Division of Waters, Kent Lokkesmoe. That might require keeping inflatable gates — now used to raise the level of water above the dam only during warm-weather months — inflated year-round, he said.

The Coon Rapids dam now is used to back up the river to create a six-mile pool for recreation between Hennepin and Anoka counties. Current practice is to deflate the gates and lower the water level of the pool in the winter to prevent ice damage to private docks and boathouses along the river.

Dam is a money drain

Keeping the old dam in good operating condition has become a money

drain for Three Rivers, which is supported by suburban Hennepin County taxpayers.

Looking to shift that growing financial burden, Three Rivers last fall asked the DNR to take over the dam. The agency refused, saying it didn't want to take on more operating costs, either. There were suggestions that the dam might even be removed.

Then last March, Lokkesmoe issued a finding that the dam is valuable as a fish barrier and should be kept in place. "Preventing the spread of invasive species is a major concern," he said at the time. That ended speculation about the possibility of removing the dam to reduce operating costs.

Refashioning the dam as a fish bar-

rier would not settle the question of who should own and operate it in the future. During the 2010 legislative session, lawmakers established a 15-member commission to study that question.

The panel is scheduled to begin meeting in late September to arrive at a recommendation to present to the Legislature by March 2011.

Membership of the commission will include representatives from Three Rivers, Hennepin County, Anoka County, the DNR, the state Legislature, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others.

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Garage theater

◀ THEATER FROM AAI

After nearly eight years of performing shows from their garage, they took their act on the road in August. They will be performing through Oct. 16 in communities from Minneapolis and Brooklyn Park to Blaine and Eagan.

"For some people these are the only shows they would go to," said Ilse. "They wouldn't even go to the big main-stage shows at theaters, so we thought it would be fun to tour it to other garages."

For Herwig and Ilse, who'd typically perform in venues like the Ritz Theatre in Minneapolis, trying out their garage was a foreign concept. Most of their shows seat up to 40 people, and instead of charging a standard admission ticket, the duo ask for donations of between \$5 and \$15.

"People think, 'OK, it's in a garage, so how good is it going to be, really?' and we have everything," said Herwig. "No one would imagine what we actually do in a garage."

For their "First Annual Garage Tour," the duo resurrected their popular show from 2007, "A Gift for Planet BX63." The production is an all-ages story about a girl (Ilse) who lives on a lonely planet at the edge of the galaxy and is visited by an intergalactic space salesman (Herwig) who sells her an object she doesn't need: A flower. The tale follows this girl, who becomes infatuated with her flower and ends up buying more and more products to keep her obsession alive.

Told in rhymed verse similar to Dr. Seuss, the show's universal theme of consumerism resonates with both children and adults, Herwig said.

"It's kind of like a traveling summer stock [theater], except we're not doing British farces, we're doing spaced-out psychedelic Dr. Seuss tales, which sounds fun to me," said Herwig. "Plus, having people hang out outside under the moonlight is completely different than in some lobby with seven-dollar beers."

Herwig and Ilse decided to bring back this production for the garage tour not only because of its popularity and relevance, but because of its innovation and creativity. For a large



Photos by BRENDAN SULLIVAN • brendan.sullivan@startribune.com

Theater isn't just applause and limelight: members of the Off-Leash Area production group put together a prop at the barn of Russ Vogt and Suzanne Rooney.

portion of the production, Ilse balances on one hand in order to create the illusion that she is floating in space.

Wanted: A few good garages

Herwig and Ilse had everything in place — the show, the sets and the cast.

All they needed were garages in which to perform.

When Sheila McMahon of Brooklyn Park heard about their show, she moved her cars and swept out her garage.

McMahon learned about the upcoming garage tour when she attended one of Herwig and Ilse's garage performances a few months ago. She was stunned by the spectacle.

"It feels like world-class theater in

a small setting," said McMahon.

Loving the intimacy of the garage theater and wanting to engage people in her own neighborhood, McMahon volunteered her garage.

"Theater should be accessible to all kinds of people from all walks of life, and it should be easy enough to get to have those experiences and not just something reserved for people who have more time," McMahon said.

McMahon's garage door will open to the public this Friday and Saturday.

"We're kind of taking the elite out of high-end professional theater and dance," said Herwig. "You don't have to go to one of the big institutions downtown — you can just go to your neighborhood."

THE 2010 TOUR

For reservations, call 612-724-7372.

• 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat. Sheila and Jay McMahon, 7316 Cartisian Av., Brooklyn Park.

• 7:30 p.m. Sept. 10-11. Steve and Jan Campbell, 3612 33rd Av. NE., St. Anthony.

• 7:30 p.m. Sept. 24-25. Bill Mullaney, 1419 Washington Av. S., Minneapolis.

• 7:30 p.m. Oct. 1-2. Craig Harris and Candy Kuehn, 718 6th St. SE., Minneapolis.

• 7:30 p.m. Oct. 8-9. Susie Commers, 12935 Vermillion Ct. NE., Blaine.

• 7:30 p.m. Oct. 15-16. Steve Chavez, 1587 Skyline Path, Eagan.



Paul Herwig takes a water break after constructing a prop for the Friday night performance.

Cobbling runs in the George family

◀ SHOES FROM AAI

"My dad told us years ago how in the Depression, when shoes were repaired, he just got swamped with repairs," Ron George said. "For us, with the economy going down, the repairs have jumped up quite a bit."

A generation ago, there were 60,000 shoe repair shops around the country, said Donald Rinaldi, president of the Shoe Service Institute of America, a trade organization for the shoe repair industry.

When Rinaldi took over his father's supply business in 1996, 15,000 shoe repairers remained. Today, that number has dropped to about 7,000, he said.

"The industry has shrunk tremendously," Rinaldi said. "Most of it's due to inexpensive shoes coming in from overseas." Oftentimes, the cost of repairs can be more than half the cost of the original shoe.

Like the Georges, Rinaldi said

most modern shoe repairers were born into the business, although a few trade schools still offer courses in the craft.

The Georges describe shoe repair as being part handiwork and part problem solving. And the repairs they can make go far beyond new heels and soles for shoes: They'll replace a baseball glove or craft a new leather latch for the handle of a rifle case. While the focus is on shoes, they'll try to fix nearly anything folks bring in, including tents, sleeping bags, luggage and saddles.

Their workshop showcases their detailed handiwork, as well as the industrial aspect of repairing shoes. Lining the walls are shelves of new soles and shoes to be repaired, and drawers full of leathers and skins for patching. Spools of thread in multiple colors hang next to tiny boxes filled with eyelets, buttons and rivets. Machinery ranges from a sander to shoe stretchers.

Ron George said the last thing he wanted to do as a young adult was work in shoe repair. But after trying other jobs, such as driving an ambulance, he returned to work for his father.

Although Melissa George said she has been helping in the store since she was in first grade, her father said he never pressured any of his five children to take over the store. She now manages the current store and will move into co-owning the shop in the future. She's currently working to re-launch their website in the coming weeks.

Their goal is to treat the customer fairly: If they can't fix a shoe, or the cost of repair would out-value the shoe itself, they'll tell you.

"We're very honest," Melissa George said. "It's the nice thing about a family business."

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KYNDELL HARKNESS • Star Tribune

Ron George worked on a shoe at the family business. His daughter Melissa, background, has been helping in the store since she was in first grade.

GEORGE'S SHOES AND REPAIR

Where: 3673 Lexington Av. N., Arden Hills

Contact: 651-636-1312 or www.georgesshoes.com