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Five Rivers, 18 Wheels

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A new mobile learning studio developed by University of Dayton students puts the region's five rivers on 18 wheels.

The RiverMobile is a traveling exhibit converted from a semi-trailer that highlights the history, benefits and preservation of the Great Miami River watershed. It is the creation of students in the University's Rivers Institute with generous support from local donors.

The RiverMobile's mission is threefold: to develop pride for the region, to provide knowledge about Dayton's river system and water resources and to develop personal responsibility for the protection of local water resources and the environment.

"We believe that if people learn to appreciate and grow to love our local watershed and its assets, they will do their part to act as good stewards," said Bethany Renner, Rivers Institute graduate assistant.

Founded in 2005, the Rivers Institute seeks to reunite Dayton with its rivers, primarily through educational outreach and programming. River Stewards — students in the University's Rivers Institute — take groups on kayak trips through RiverScape, organize an annual River Summit for representatives of cities all along the Great Miami River and create afterschool programs for young students.

The afterschool programs were the genesis of the RiverMobile, as a group of River Stewards in 2009 began thinking about how to make the rivers more accessible to the region's schoolchildren. After years of consultation with local educators about curriculum, fundraising and design work, the RiverMobile is now receiving its finishing touches.

"The RiverMobile represents a widely shared vision developed by everyone involved with the Rivers Institute," said Leslie King, Rivers Institute Coordinator. "It represents the hard work of several cohorts of River Stewards, both current and alumni, as well as the countless staff, faculty and community partners who have supported them along the way."

Exhibit Concepts in Vandalia donated services to guide the design process and was contracted for construction. Dayton Freight donated the semi-trailer, the Veolia Foundation provided a generous gift, and DP&L Foundation financed a large portion of the project.

"The Miami Valley is where Dayton Power and Light employees work, volunteer and raise our families," said Phil Herrington, DPL Inc. president and CEO. "That's why we support UD's RiverMobile project and other community organizations, charities

and educational groups in the region providing a brighter future for our next generation."

Exhibit Concepts will hand off the RiverMobile to the University of Dayton in December. It will appear at the annual River Summit in March, selected sites this spring and at local schools next fall.

Volunteers — primarily undergraduate students and River Stewards — will guide groups of students or guests through the RiverMobile for an experience lasting nearly an hour. The RiverMobile consists of five learning "classrooms," three in the trailer and two outside:

- **Exploring Our Watershed:** Before students enter the RiverMobile, they will see a bird's-eye view of the Dayton region and how the many creeks and streams near their homes feed into larger rivers. They will learn to be good "water neighbors" to those living downstream from their homes, and they will be exposed to recreational opportunities on the rivers such as fishing, kayaking and biking.
- **Exploring Our History:** Students will take a historical journey of the Miami Valley, from the glaciers to the 1913 flood. A JibJab-style cartoon featuring Miami Conservancy District pioneers Arthur Morgan and Col. Edward Deeds greets guests and teaches them about the Miami Valley's flood protection system.
- **Exploring Our Aquifer and Our Water:** Deeds and Morgan appear again in four short videos explaining the importance of the region's buried aquifer. They describe what an aquifer is, how it is refilled, its natural filter effect and how water leaves the aquifer. Students will also learn six steps involved in the city of Dayton's water treatment and delivery system.
- **Exploring Our Rivers:** Students sit in a canoe or along a rock ledge. A deer, a great blue heron and a life-size tree fill the room, as animal and river sounds fill the air.
- **Exploring Our Global Impact:** This "class" takes place under an exterior tent. Students will explore a U.S. map that shows the Miami Valley watershed's effect on neighbors downstream through the southern states to the Gulf of Mexico. The impact and suggestion of how to be a steward of our rivers and water resources will be discussed on a local and global scale.

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