

The Fox looks back

POLLUTION - "THE FOX"

1981

Environmentalist reviews anti-pollution fights

By KATHY HARGER

"My friends call me Ray, but most people know me as a fox."

The legendary Fox — protector of the environment or vandal, depending upon your point of view — is alive and well and living north of Aurora.

"It's the best kept secret since 1969," said the Fox, declining to reveal his true identity.

After more than a decade of activism, the anonymous environmental crusader claims to have waged 26 campaigns spanning 15 good-sized cities and five states.

Although the pollution-fighter plans to remain unknown, the Fox revealed some elusive clues to his identity.

He described himself as a man in his mid-forties, college educated, a big businessman and hard-core Republican.

"I'm an idea, a group, every environmentally conscious person," he said. "I'm the upset housewife...the person that sits out in his backyard and gets overwhelmed because the stink is so bad. I'm all these people wrapped up in one."

IT WAS 1969 when the Fox acquired nationwide acclaim. He staged one of his first attacks in the Chicago offices of U.S. Steel, the country's largest steelmaker.

"U.S. Steel came to my attention when they were cited as dumping and polluting Lake Michigan. And they were claiming they weren't," he explained.

"I went there and saw the main pipe spewing out terrible smelling stuff, so I took a jug of it and a few

other chosen things. I made a makeshift casket with dead crayfish and other fish.

"Then I walked into the company headquarters...onto their plush white carpet...where secretaries were tripping over secretaries and asked to speak to the president."

Being informed that he must leave a message as no one in a position of authority was available, he pulled a jar out from under his coat and emptied the contents on the carpet.

"She screamed," he said of the secretary. "I guess she was shocked."

He gathered the impression that she couldn't imagine her employers doing that sort of thing.

He slipped into the restroom while other office workers were running toward the screaming secretary. He changed his coat and hat and walked unnoticed out the front door.

U.S. Steel was attacked again a year later, this time in a more visible manner near the Illinois/Indiana border. The Fox erected two 70-foot long banners across the Indiana Tollroad and South Shore commuter railroad.

They read: "We're Involved in killing Lake Michigan." "We're Involved" was U.S. Steel's new publicity slogan at the time.

THE FOX noted that many of his comrades have suggested he write a book on how to lean on polluting corporations.

"I don't think I will. But I could ramble on forever about things I've done."

"I've put padlocks on all the entrances to a plant that was illegally

'There's a Love Canal in every state — people just don't know about it yet.'

FOX

dumping," he said. "I think it closed down for two days, until they could get someone to figure them out."

"Once, I climbed onto a chimney with a friend...shimmying up a smokestack. I nearly risked my life to put a lid on it. The plant sure got a taste of what it was polluting the air with."

"Oh, the nasty things I've been into, on my hands and knees I've crawled through chemicals, sewage, to block up underground sewer pipes."

As well as the corporate raids he's instigated, he has mailed some not-so-appealing items to public entities.

His most recent correspondence with Milwaukee's Metropolitan Sanitary District — in reaction to court order allowing the district to dump sewage into the lake — included a potty chair.

EXPLAINING the purpose of his actions, he said, "Publicity embarrasses them."

The Fox is not alone in his terrorist

activities against polluters. His band of merry men and women include federal, state, county, city and village officials, whose advice directs the Fox to sources of pollution, he said.

"He plays by the same rules companies do," according to one county official. "But he beats them at their own game. I wish he was working with us."

Twenty-five lieutenants know his identity, the Fox explained. But hundreds of citizens, knowing him only as the Fox, help him carry out many of his environmental escapades.

And the media is essential, he said, to publicly embarrass and induce offenders to stop polluting.

"There were occasions where I've had to stretch the laws," he said. "I've committed trespassing and other misdemeanor offenses. I guess my conscious is my guide."

"If I was to become known, there are companies that would sure like to get my hide."

Warrants for his arrest have been issued, shots from company guards have nearly hit him, collusion with area police departments has been charged, but the Fox has remained unscathed.

THE FOX RIVER, the environmentalist's namesake, is improving somewhat after a decade of concern expressed by citizens and the Fox's crusades, he said.

On the other hand, the Fox River still contains eleven carcinogens from which seven different diseases can be contracted, he said.

In some places, the river's fish are healthy. But in other areas, fish are

being extracted with open sores on their skin and fishing for consumption is not advisable.

The Fox's hopes are high for the river's survival, despite the unrealistic law which demands the nation's waterways clean enough to drink by 1984.

"Some day, it'll be able to support healthy aquatic life and recreation spots," he said. "But a river, you know, can never completely clean itself."

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Other animals join in

The Fox isn't the only animal interested in the environment.

There's the Bear in Wisconsin, the Barracudas in Florida, the Echo Commandos on the East Coast, the Bobcats in South Aurora and the Hawk in Montgomery.

"Enough people know who I am. I don't know why I haven't been found out," says the Fox.

And because he's not alone, he can contact the other anonymous animals to help him wage national wars with corporate and public entities which generate pollution.

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The Fox

TWO CARPENTERSVILLE firms have been subjected to the Fox's attacks.

McWhorter I.M.C., a manufacture of paint and varnish products in the Cottage Avenue industrial park, was "hit" Oct. 26, 1975.

Reports indicate the environmentalist threw muck — allegedly emitted into the Fox River from the plant's discharge pipes — onto the firm's white building.

He was almost snared after this attack, he told reporters, as Carpentersville police swiftly responded to the scene following an anonymous call reporting a burglary at the plant.

Characteristic of Fox campaigns, he left a poetic note stating: "Ye company called McWhorter. Do ye play dirty? Well, sorter. What ye have dumped in the stream is most rotten, low and mean. So we're dumping it back like we otter."

The next day, the firm's manager reportedly drank a sample of the discharge from the plant to

demonstrate its harmless effects.

A MORE RECENT local attack occurred Jan. 22, 1980, at Cargill Inc., another chemical producing and manufacturing plant on Cottage Avenue.

The Fox initiated the firm to his standard water polluter punishment. He threw a container of foul-smelling chemicals through a window in the plant's offices.

Carpentersville police investigated the incident in which a money order was left to pay for damages to the window. But trailing the Fox was to no avail.

Again, he left a scribbled note warning the firm about a stepped-up campaign if it continued what he claimed was illegal pollution of the river and air.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) had filed a three-count lawsuit against Cargill in December of 1979. But after the Cargill incident, the suit was turned over to the Attorney General's office.

According to recent reports, both the village and IEPA have been satisfied with the content of the plant's discharges, protection of storage tanks and partially-implemented \$250,000 air pollution system.

A SOUTH ELGIN company had a taste of the Fox's actions. Or did it?

That was the question after a cold December morning in 1977 when employees were locked out of the old Tri-County Landfill.

A sign was left charging the firm, Waste Management Corp., with polluting the land. It was signed with the typical fox logo on the bottom left-hand corner.

Some questioned whether it was truly the Fox's doing because he had usually put his prints on the bottom right-hand corner when corresponding.

However, county officials say the Fox has left his imprint in various places and styles and the landfill attack was indeed the Fox's responsibility.

The Fox sprung into action after Kane County Circuit and Appellate Courts orders to "roof" the landfill in 1974 and 1975 were ignored by Waste Management.

Roofing is standard practice required of landfills. It entails laying clay and planting grass over its refuse. When a landfill lies untreated, fertilizer and chemicals mix with rainwater and create leachate.

The material created at the Waste Management landfill could have seeped into the soil and poisoned wells, the source of drinking water in South Elgin.

After the Fox's attack, the com-

pany complied with court orders and constructed a roof.

THE FOX'S actions have spawned lawsuits. Before full-fledged court battles usually ensue, companies either agree to install pollution stopping devices or correct environmental violations. Then again, when taken to court, alleged polluters are at times proven not guilty.

But in some federal and state EPA initiated suits, heavy fines have been imposed.

A division of Foster Wheeler Corporation incurred a \$10,000 fine after a Fox campaign pointed to air pollution emitted from their plant on Rt. 25, north of Aurora.

Armour Dial Corp. was slapped with a \$100,000 fine for polluting the Fox River. An 11-year campaign against their Montgomery plant finally produced results.

The Armour Dial campaign was the Fox's first.

HE WAS WALKING along the Fox River in North Aurora near what he said was one of the company's soap dumping spots. First he noticed two dead mallard ducks floating along the edge of the river.

Down the river some, he said, he saw three dead ducklings.

"That's when I sort of committed myself," the Fox said.

Time is running short for the middle-aged Fox; he knows he's getting a little too old to be running around staging such incidents all the time.

However, according to the Fox, there's plenty of young foxes coming up in the ranks.

AS FOR CAMPAIGNS under way, he notes the Milwaukee Sanitary District controversy. He plans to be in that area shortly.

In Peoria, a Fox case has just been wrapped up, he explained.

A proposed landfill operation which saw seven years of opposition from local residents ended with the admissions by the company of an engineering error, forfeiture of IEPA permits and violations of two federal laws charged.

Akron Land Corp. had received an IEPA permit, allowing them to bury toxic material on land with a high limestone content. If the corporation was to use the area as landfill, the townspeople claimed, it would have ruined the city's entire water supply.

"So I ran a 'Go Fox, Stop Pollution' campaign in Peoria newspapers. I have friends in high places — I let them know about it."

Another Fox campaign is continuing in Naperville. 84 Lumber Corporation has been posting its signs to trees on public and private property, the Fox said. And the signs have been mysteriously disappearing via his efforts.

"It's not a U.S. Steel. But this is a big corporation, they don't need to do this."

According to county officials, the Fox is in the process of bringing the actions of an Aurora firm from the back to the front burner.

Alba Manufacturing, a glycerin-refiner, is one of the worst air polluters in the county, they have claimed.

The Fox, however, gave no details as to his plans concerning this company.

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THE MOOD OF the country apparently favors the Reagan administration's policies, including the move toward government deregulation.

Will this put a damper on environmental protection efforts, such as the Fox's?

The Fox says yes, but.

"The environmental movement has been set back with the Reagan administration," he said. "But lobbies are growing in response. They'll be exerting pressure to get him to change."

"Reagan has put a bunch of foxes in charge of the hen house," he commented. "The heads of environmental agencies do not have a clean environment in mind."

According to the Fox, the environment contributes less than one-percent to inflation. He sees no reason to reduce environmental regulations.

Admitting to backing Republican politicians, he qualifies that his support goes to those in favor of inflation-reducing measures, but not at the expense of the environment.

"I'm all for business booming...without compromising the environment regulations," he said. "The problems we have today will be more expensive to correct tomorrow."

THE COURTS and environmental agencies aren't as effective as they should be, he contended, without reducing their enforcement guidelines.

"The court system is horrible here...it's much too easy for polluting corporations to get away with it. They should be classified as felons."

"Public officials are looking through rose colored glasses when they believe everything corporate PR people tell them."

About the IEPA, he says, "For a group that needs public support, it could be a lot more conscious of people's problems."

"People have to fight for their rights... and they're not concerned until the problem is at their back door."

THE FUTURE DEPENDS on the education of the nation's children, according to the Fox.

And he's spoken to elementary, high school and college students. He's written literature for a Sunday school publication and provided tape recordings for students — all in the name of protecting the nations endangered waterways, land and air.

"Until the public becomes educated and activists, things won't change...not just organized when a problem comes up, but organized to begin with."

"There's a Love Canal in every state — people just don't know about it yet."

The Fox has terrorized big business, yet he claims to be one of their kind. His philosophy calls for unified efforts between business and the environment.

"It's good there's a contradiction. I'm leaning on people like myself, that don't care," he said.

"A really big businessman is one who cares about the environment — not reckless irresponsibility at the expense of the people."

"Or it'll catch up to them," he said.

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