

Some mindsets worry county's water educator

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Tippecanoe County has a new person working on the front lines of water protection.

Monica Christopher started in April as the public educator for the Tippecanoe County Partnership for Water Quality. She's spent the first few months on the job trying to raise awareness about youth and adult education programs, volunteer activities and public outreach.

"We need everyone to take ownership of this," she said.

Christopher's salary and program expenses are being paid for collectively by partners, including Tippecanoe County, the cities of Lafayette and West Lafayette, the towns of Battle Ground and Dayton, and Ivy Tech Community College and Purdue University.

She's working out of the county surveyor's office, at 20 N. Third St. in Lafayette.

Christopher answered a few questions for the Journal & Courier about her job.

Question: What's your background for this position?

Answer: I worked in Jasper County for 11 years as an education coordinator. Up there the job was broader and I taught about all natural resources, not just water, from a county-wide perspective.

Q: How did you get interested in this field?

A: I grew up in Rensselaer. Being raised with two brothers, and in a family where everybody hunted and fished and camped, I just spent a lot of time outdoors.

Then a friend of mine had been working at the conservation district and was leaving, and she knew about my background and

said I should apply. It was just the perfect fit and the timing worked out really well.

Q: How are you approaching this new role?

A: Not everyone is aware of what goes down storm drains and what impact they have (on water quality). We need to change the mindset of these folks because it impacts all of us.

One of the big things we've done is the storm drain stenciling. (Which offers a warning: Dump No Waste — Drains to Stream.) I think once people see that message they understand more. If it's in your face all the time that's when people start to catch on.

Q: What are one or two new things you've learned already on the job?

A: I've learned that a lot of people just don't know. They're unaware of where the water goes and where they get their water from and how easily the water can be polluted.

I was unaware of how unaware many people are. It's just really important to educate people.

Q: How can people get more involved in this effort?

A: There's a program called River Watch that's done periodically throughout the whole year. Anybody can go out and learn how to test water by doing chemical tests or by looking (in the water). Wabash River Enhancement Corp. has a program, too, that does a sampling blitz.

We're always looking for volunteers. Just look at our website: www.tippecanoe-county-swcd.org