

# The Art of Becoming A.W.A.R.E.



**DAVID WILLIAMSON**

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I do not remember how many years ago it was. But I do remember going down to an event at the Cedar River where a couple of large metal sculptures caught my eye. The artist was not present but there was a passionate volunteer that explained to me the unique story of these artworks.

This was the first time I heard of Project AWARE. The gentleman told me about the initiative to clean up a different Iowa river each year and how the volunteers are instructed to be on the look-out for salvage metal that the artist David Williamson could fabricate into the sculptures I was seeing. The volunteer spoke of the artworks with a pride and sense of collaborative ownership that I would later learn was no accident or overstatement.

When I became the director of the Wartburg College Art Gallery earlier this year, David Williamson was the first artist I approached to exhibit. A very short time later, my wife Kathy and I drove to southwest Iowa to participate in our first Project AWARE clean up on the Nishnabotna River. We saw first-hand the great spirit of the staff and volunteers. It was an authentic community and many of the participants knew each other from past clean-ups. I do not remember seeing more canoes lined up in one place. The morning the clean-up was to begin, we found ourselves among over one hundred other volunteers waiting in the rain, mud up to our ankles, as Project AWARE staff pushed all of us off downriver.

When I finally got to meet David Williamson, he was adamant that I understand the deep sense of collaboration in the artwork. He was clear that this was not the work of a single artist but the collective effort of scores of collaborators of all ages. He is not just referring to the participants who gather the metal. Each summer, David can be found at the Iowa State Fair in the DNR Pavilion with his forge and foundry. I have witnessed David's irrepressible passion for turning unsuspecting fair-goers into artist and poets.

David and Project AWARE recently garnered some much deserved recognition. The project has been cited in the Congressional Record by U.S. Representative Tom Latham. With this exhibition we do our part to honor David Williamson, the staff and volunteers of Project AWARE.

Scott Robert Hudson  
Director  
Waldemar A Schmidt Art Gallery



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