



**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**  
**WILMINGTON DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

**B. EVERETT JORDAN DAM AND LAKE**  
POST OFFICE BOX 144  
MONCURE, NORTH CAROLINA 27559

CESAW-OP-LRJ

2 Aug 2015

MEMORANDUM THRU:

CESAW-OP-LR  
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CESAW-OP

FOR: SAD Partnership Advisory Committee Representative, Miriam Fleming

SUBJECT: SAD Corps Foundation Volunteer Coin Nomination for Mr. Francis DiGiano

1. We would like to nominate Mr. Francis DiGiano to receive a Corps Foundation volunteer coin. As a founding member of Clean Jordan Lake (CJL) Mr. DiGiano supports the Corps mission at B. Everett Jordan Lake. CJL is a local nonprofit dedicated removing shoreline trash, educating the public about proper waste disposal, and recommending litter prevention strategies to keep the shoreline clean in the future.
2. Since 2009, Mr. DiGiano, a retired environmental science and engineering professor, has worked tirelessly to bring others to the cause. He has recruited more than 3,000 volunteers to clean over 15 miles of shoreline during 122 cleanup events; removing 9,100 bags of trash (91 tons) and 3,450 tires.
3. He expanded the goals of CJL. Starting with 2 annual cleanups; they now host numerous events each year with civic/religious groups, schools, and corporate partners. He also initiated the Adopt a Shoreline program, signing up 14 Adopt a Shoreline and 2 Adopt a Feeder Stream groups to regularly clean problem areas.
4. In recognition of his efforts the Raleigh News and Observer named Mr. DiGiano the "Tar Heel of the Week" in March 2013 (attached). Local television and radio stations often feature footage of clean up events and interviews with Mr. DiGiano and other volunteers.
5. He ensures success by reaching out to the local community. He has initiated corporate service days with Pfizer, Duke Energy, and Glaxo Smith Kline; and involved organizations including the YMCA, St. Mary Magdalene Youth Group, Panther Creek High School, Elon University, and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. He also actively engages adjacent property owners securing permission to access remote areas and recruits anglers and boaters to assistance in transporting volunteers and retrieving trash bags from remote areas.
6. He promotes awareness; personally meeting with county and city officials, installing litter informational signs at popular access point, and maintaining a website and blog (<http://cleanjordanlake.org/>). CJL public service announcements and videos are published on YouTube <http://youtube/bV3IAXbEXC4> and have been broadcast on local television.
7. Mr. DiGiano's hard work is a crucial component of our natural resource management program. We would like to acknowledge his outstanding contributions by awarding him a Corps Foundation volunteer coin.

Francis Ferrell  
Conservation Biologist  
B Everett Jordan Dam and Lake

## Fran DiGiano cleans up Jordan Lake, but he has a bigger goal

Raleigh News and Observer

By Marti Maguire, March 16, 2013



"I always carry an orange bag with me," explains Fran DiGiano, president of Clean Jordan Lake, as he stands by the lake near the Jordan dam on March 13. He has forged partnerships with boaters and other lake stakeholders in the cleanup efforts.

CHRIS SEWARD — [cseward@newsobserver.com](mailto:cseward@newsobserver.com)

**JORDAN LAKE** — It is a sparkling, blue-sky day, and Fran DiGiano stands at the boat launch where nearly 100 volunteers were planning to fan out Saturday onto Jordan Lake to pick up trash.

He's explaining how his four-year-old nonprofit ferries its volunteers to pockets of garbage that are inaccessible by foot when he pauses. A few white flecks along the opposite shore have caught his attention, and he is squinting to discern if they are, as he suspects, trash.

DiGiano co-founded Clean Jordan Lake after encountering trash while kayaking, and the group has since cleared about 70 tons of it from the lake in nearly 50 volunteer cleanups. But DiGiano admits his hobby is not as relaxing as it once was.

"I'm a real pain in the neck to paddle with," he says. "I'm always looking for trash."

The retired professor's obsession may have started with the cans and chip bags visitors to the lake leave behind. But it is the massive deposits that accumulate near the mouth of the Haw River – swept in with stormwater from upstream since the lake was made in 1982 – that are his most formidable enemy.

"What we've been collecting is a 30-year legacy of trash," says DiGiano, who lives in Chatham County.

Carol Banaitis, who oversees Jordan Lake for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, says that DiGiano's work has been vital in tackling a trash problem that overwhelms her small staff, particularly during lean budget times.

“He’s an invaluable volunteer, and is dedicated to the mission of improving Jordan Lake,” says Banaitis, Piedmont operations manager for the corps. “There’s just been a tremendous amount of trash removed from Jordan Lake, and a lot of educating of the public about trash, too.”

A concern for water

At 70, DiGiano is tan, fit, and fully at ease in the outdoors. He and his wife recently went on camping trips to New Zealand and Alaska, and they frequently go skiing and hiking in Colorado.

He grew up in a blue-collar Massachusetts town where his grandfather emigrated from Italy to work in a shoe factory. His father held an assortment of jobs, retiring as a truck driver. In one of his first endeavors with trash, DiGiano recalls scouring the dumpsters behind a local candy factory for treats.

He spent most summers at the family’s vacation cottage near Cape Cod, where he would go clamming and boating, solidifying his lifelong love for the outdoors.

He was the first in his family to go to college, starting not long after the Soviet Union launched the Sputnik satellite, prompting a push toward education in the sciences. He thought he’d go into electrical engineering, but a summer working as a surveyor convinced him he wanted to work outside, so he majored in civil engineering instead.

Later, he jumped on an early wave of concern about the nation’s water quality, earning government grants for his graduate studies in water resources engineering.

He was teaching at the University of Massachusetts when he was asked to do a guest lecture at UNC-Chapel Hill. He was so impressed with the school’s environmental sciences program that he told his wife he’d like to land a job there.

Only a year or so later, the opportunity arose. He taught at UNC-CH for 26 years, earning numerous research awards for his work on water quality and treatment.

But he says his second career collecting trash is equally satisfying.

Tons of trash

DiGiano’s first experience with trash cleanup started soon after he arrived in Chapel Hill in 1981. He was taking a hike near his home, and was appalled by the amount of trash he found.

He organized a cleanup event, and 100 people showed up, so he turned it into a nonprofit called Cleanscape that conducted regular cleanups for five years.

He considered doing the same thing when he first started kayaking on Jordan Lake, but waited until he retired in 2007 to get started.

Since its first cleanup in 2009, Clean Jordan Lake has cleared about 15 miles of shoreline in the southernmost part of the lake, and continues to attack the coves full of trash that dot the shoreline there.

The trash on that part of the lake, with its tires and bleach bottles and doll heads and shoes, is different from the more recreational variety found near the lake’s beaches and fishing areas. It has been washed bit by bit from points north along the hundred-mile-long river.

“It all eventually comes here,” he says. “The dam is like a plug, so anything that floats is not leaving the lake.”

A few days before Saturday’s cleanup, in one tiny inlet that the group cleared only a year ago, dozens of floating logs were interspersed with all manner of trash, including one tire.

The group has removed 2,700 tires so far, along with 7,000 bags of trash, at cleanup events that involve anywhere from 50 to 200 people.

Through its Adopt-A-Shore program, started last year, volunteer groups pick up trash near the recreation areas farther north several times a year as well. The group has also started to conduct cleanups with corporations, churches and youth groups in addition to its twice-annual public cleanup events.

Owing perhaps to his background as a researcher, DiGiano keeps detailed records of the events, with every bag of trash and volunteer duly noted in a spreadsheet.

He also does much of the legwork involved in the events: hunting out caches of trash to clear; rounding up supplies, from boats to garbage bags; coordinating the disposal of the trash; and, increasingly, educating the public about the litter problem.

In recent years, Clean Jordan Lake has won grants to put signs up for boaters and visitors to the lake about keeping it clean, for instance.

He's not sure how long it will take to remove the backlog of trash, or if his nonprofit can maintain a clean shoreline. But he believes the group's long-term goal is to teach people to stop littering.

"Whether we can tackle this is the interim question," he says. "The real question is how do we stop all of this at the source?"

