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ROSEMOUNT "BIRDMAN" VOLUNTEERS TO BUILD RARE SPECIES A HOME

James Kluender carries business cards identifying himself as Birdman. But his mission is different from the comic superhero with that name.

The Rosemount resident's superpowers extend to building and placing dozens of homes for rare bird species, an effort that local cities hope to extend through their shared volunteer programs.

Kluender says he has been interested in helping wildlife and in woodworking since he was young. "Now that I am fully retired and disabled," he said, "I have the time to put some thought and effort into my projects."

Those projects include building and placing homes for several species of birds declared rare by the Minnesota DNR. He has focused so far on bluebirds, kestrels, and wood ducks. Kluender has placed 15 in parks around Rosemount, and hopes to equal that number this year in each of Apple Valley, Inver Grove Heights, and West St. Paul.

The four communities cooperate in a program to recruit volunteers who will work on projects in each city. Volunteer Coordinator Diane Erickson made the connection with Kluender through his volunteering at Rosemount's Steeple Center.

Kluender's efforts outgrew his garage, and he now has a separate workshop. He gets help from a student at Inver Hills Community College, and a local teen working to qualify as an Eagle Scout may join the team. "I would love all the help I can get," Kluender said.

He has worked with Rosemount Parks and Recreation to find suitable locations for boxes in the city's parks. Some of the birdhouses include signage on nearby trails explaining the need for habitat. "I'm hearing good comments from people saying they're seeing more wildlife," Kluender said.

“I appreciate Jim’s knowledge and enthusiasm,” Rosemount Parks Supervisor Tom Schuster said. “It is fun working with him to find just the right spot for the bird houses and nesting boxes he builds. While Jim selects locations best suited for whatever kind of bird he is hoping to attract, he is always looking for opportunities to place bird houses where people will see them and learn more about the birds using them. Jim’s efforts help encourage wildlife to live in and around our parks. And our parks are more interesting places because of this.”

The Birdman is also exploring branching out with nesting boxes for bees. Some bee species need protected spaces outside hives for hatching of larvae during winter.

Kluender builds with wood instead of materials that might be easier to use, like PVC. He says wood looks better and provides improved ventilation for the animals in summer and winter.

Volunteers are needed not just for woodworking but also to monitor and maintain the boxes. Most need to be cleaned out during the fall. And wood ducks need fresh cedar shavings for their winter nests.

For more information on these and other volunteer opportunities serving the city, please contact Diane Erickson, (651) 208-4840 or derickson@wspm.n.gov.

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