

It can be argued that, because a business organization is involved in some way with every aspect of the nations and communities in which it operates, any public service activity is appropriate for it to conduct or support. However, when such a project is related to the activities of the company or its industry, there is obviously a major additional public relations factor. That is the case with the "Save The Village Pond" (STVP) program of Ford of Britain, London, English subsidiary of Ford Motor Company, U.S.A. The effort is just completing the second of its scheduled three years.

Displacement of the horse by motor vehicles contributed to shrinkage in the number of village ponds in England from about 300,000 in the 1940's to 200,000 at the start of 1974 and a rate of disappearance at that time of about 100 a week. Some of them have been used as rubbish dumps. Others have been filled in to serve as auto parking lots or sites for real estate development. Many, due to simple neglect, have become stagnant, unused eyesores.

Since the horses, which were dependent on village ponds for their water intake, have virtually disappeared and other livestock can now be watered at home sites, is there any reason to preserve these ponds? The answers, as supplied by Ford and the British Waterfowl Association (BWA), co-sponsors of the project, are found in ecology, education, and the amenities of life. . . Several varieties of fauna -- notably one third of Great Britain's 27 types of dragonflies -- are threatened with extinction as the ponds disappear. . . The "common" bullfrog has ceased in many areas to be common. . . Several species of migratory birds make use of the ponds. . . They clearly have educational values for the young. . . And tidy, thriving ponds add to village residents' and motorists' pleasure.

It took roughly two years from initial concept in 1972 (by Anne Hope-Sleap, a journalist and then Secretary of BWA) to launching of the campaign. Much of the

credit for going ahead with the project is given by Ford of Britain's Managing Director Terry Beckett to the efforts of BWA's President James Heard. Beckett's predecessor, William Batty, was also involved. In any event, the partnership seems ideal. Ford's International Public Information Manager Robert J. Bierman, Dearborn, MI, characterizes BWA as a "small (400-member) but highly dedicated body with very professional management." He notes that BWA's participation has "helped to underline the company's serious intent in an area where initially it might have been regarded with some suspicion." Ford has, of course, supplied most of the financial muscle.

Materials and equipment for use in the effort were carefully prepared in advance of the initial publicity.

There is a logo which consists of a small silhouette of a black duck swimming on a green oval (of the proportions of that in Ford's trade mark), shown by stylized black ripples to be a pond.

A 5-3/4x8 1/2-inch book, of which 20,000 copies have been produced, is 96 pages long and durably bound in green cloth hard cover. It fully lives up to its title: "Save The Village Pond -- BWA Ford -- Conservation Handbook." The front cover features a full-color photo of an attractive rural scene with a small pond in the foreground. The back cover describes the past usefulness of village ponds and how one can be preserved as "an attractive amenity" and "even an award-winning nature reserve." Extent of the author's research is indicated by acknowledgments to 19 individuals and 30 books and articles. Publishers are shown to be BWA and Ford Motor Company Limited. It is liberally illustrated with color photos and black-and-white line drawings. Fourteen pages feature typical fish, fowl, and plant-life of ponds. Other major sections deal with the history and ecology of village ponds, how to go about restoring a neglected one, uses to be made of it after restoration, and a case history of how a pond was converted "from poisoned pit to nature sanctuary."

A two-fold mailing piece which opened up to 8½x11½ inches was printed on stiff white glossy stock (so that the rear third could be clipped or torn off and mailed to STVP headquarters in London). The front page carried the logo and featured an oval photo, printed in black on green, of a pond with geese and ducks on it and a stone house in the background. Copy outlined "The Need," "The Campaign's Aim," "How the Campaign Can Help You," and "How You Can Help the Campaign." It noted that, if local volunteers were not available to carry out the work, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers would be able to provide assistance at "subsistence cost of \$3 per day per person." One side of the return card provided blanks and check-off boxes for reporting the status and approximate size of a pond in need of attention (e.g., overgrown? full of weeds? badly littered? near a school?).

A "pond reclamation unit" -- a Ford transit bus and small trailer identified on its front doors by the STVP name and logo -- carries a great variety of equipment (including a 16-foot fiber glass punt) for cleaning up a pond.

A portable exhibit consists of: display boards, mounted on stanchions; reception desk and chairs; and tent-type signs. Carried in a Ford transit van, it is used at agricultural shows.

A press conference in March 1974 was held at London's Savoy Hotel to announce the program. At it, 120 media representatives listened to remarks by Heard, STVP's Campaign Director Christopher J. Harrisson (a farmer and businessman), and Ford of Britain's PA Director John Waddell. They also learned that the effort was to receive the endorsement of a large number of British conservation- and ecology-oriented groups. Copies of BWA's publication, "Waterfowl," which were distributed, described the campaign and Ford's reasons for sponsoring it.

Initial publicity was widespread and has continued. . . The Daily Telegraph (which at one time had bemoaned the effect of proliferation of motor vehicles upon the British countryside) has donated 20,000 posters about STVP to schools and is offering prizes for the

best pond restorations by both adults and children. . . Britain's oldest soap opera (3,000,000 radio listeners), staged in a typical village, has run a series telling how that village's pond was saved. . . A TV special was developed for independent stations. . . Bierman reports that the campaign has proved "particularly attractive" to TV and radio stations in general and that it "remains a staple of regional radio and phone-in programs."

Sponsors of each pond restoration receive a small plaque for installation at the site -- a potential source for publicity in addition to that usually earned by each clean-up effort.

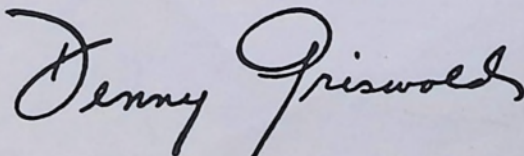
So far, nearly 1,000 ponds have been or are in process of being restored. . . There have been inquiries from an additional 15,000 community groups in England. . . Requests for materials have come from five European countries and Canada. . . The program won the 1975 New York Botanical Garden Award for Best Environmental Campaign of the Year -- an honor duly publicized in Britain.

In discussing the campaign, which will cost an estimated \$125,000 during its three years, Bierman stresses that the benefits to Ford, in addition to those already indicated, include permanence of the results and opportunities for dealer involvement at the local level.

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For your PR NEWS IDEA LIBRARY, write to: Ray L. Enderle, Editor, "Our Sun," Sun Oil Co., Phila., Pa. 19103, for "Winter 1976 Issue" of company publication carrying a Visitors Guide to Bicentennial Philadelphia. . . Frank Voss, Vice Pres.-Corp. Rels., Dana Corp., 4500 Dorr St., P.O.Box 1000, Toledo OH 43697, for "1975 Annual Report"; it tells how Dana communicates with its publics.

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Editor