



Anniversary Story

“From Intern to Partner”

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I was hired in 2004 by The Groundwater Foundation where I served in different roles such as an Intern, GIS Specialist, and Program Assistant. I was employed for almost two years with my primary duties focused on the Foundation’s Blue River Basin Community/Source Protection Program. The project brought Nebraska and Kansas partners together to address excessive fecal coliform and atrazine impacts to source water throughout the basin. It was during this time that I had the privilege of learning from Groundwater Foundation founder, Susan Seacrest, who was relentless in her quest to educate and motivate people including me. I can remember her encouraging talks helping me to expand outside of my comfort area and to become the public health and environmental professional that I am today. The Blue River project included traveling throughout the basin Kansas where I met with community leaders and discussed how to move communities forward toward basin-wide water protection goals. It was a pivotal and growing experience. I would like to think that the Blue River Basin is healthier and safer because of our collective efforts.

I never thought my professional work would come full circle so soon and bring me back to The Groundwater Foundation but that is exactly what happened. Jump forward to 2006-07 when the Groundwater Foundation was again working to draw attention to a serious threat to ground and surface waters; that being pharmaceutical and personal care products. Highlighting a then recent study by the USGS, The Groundwater Foundation put themselves in the role of messenger and facilitator in organizing educational resources and opportunities for discussion and learning.



Nebraska
MEDS Coalition
Medication Education for Disposal Strategies

It was at that time as a newly hired Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department employee, that I attended a 2007 Groundwater Foundation workshop that brought concerned individuals, organizations, and communities together around the topic of water quality impacts from products that were finding their way

into streams, lakes and drinking water. This workshop would be a couple years before the Associated Press investigative study that identified that some 10 million US citizens were drinking a cocktail of water, unwanted medications, and other waste products. Out of the workshop the Nebraska MEDS (Medication Education on Disposal Strategies) Coalition was formed to tackle the task of changing behavior away from flushing unwanted medications to waste disposal methods that were more protective of public and the environment.

The Nebraska MEDS Coalition went forward to change state law allowing for the return of medications to pharmacies for proper disposal. Following this important step, the Coalition rallied around a pilot project in Lincoln and Lancaster County to fund a medication disposal system that was conveniently pharmacy based. Now, some six years later and after state funds were appropriated for the effort, 260+

pharmacies across the state are actively collecting leftover medications with 8,000 pounds of medications being collected for safe and legal destruction. That is 8,000 pounds of pollution that will not be in our drinking water. I don't believe this would have happened without the leadership and vision of The Groundwater Foundation. I'm proud to call myself a past employee and partner of The Groundwater Foundation.

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