



The Sycamore Islander

July, 2000

Volume 79, No. 7

Meeting to Review a New Addition to the Caretaker's Quarters

As is mentioned in this month's Minutes, the club at last month's meeting approved to build an addition to the current caretaker's quarters in an effort to put the quarters out of the reach of most floods. The room will be built on stilts outside the current kitchen and parallel to it. Final plans will be discussed at an open meeting on Tuesday, July 11, 2000 at 8:00pm at Tryon Wells' house, 6216 Winston Drive in Bethesda. Anyone who would like to have some input on this project is welcome and is encouraged to come.

July Meeting

The June meeting voted to approve an addition to the caretaker's quarters that would be built outside the current kitchen on the second floor, provided that the final estimate does not exceed \$31,000. An open special meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 11th, at 6216 Winston Drive in Bethesda to decide on the final plans for the construction. All members interested in the details of this project are invited to attend.

The regular **July** monthly meeting will be held on the Island at 7:30 p.m. *Grills will be preheated at 6:00.* The early time is to accommodate a presentation on local river history conducted by Alex McCoy, Al Brown, and Betty Burchell. All members and waiting list applicants are invited and encouraged to come.

Minutes of June 14 Meeting

Attendance: John Matthews, Bill Eichbaum, Dave and Kathleen Holdridge, Bob Henry, Johnna Robinson, Jane and David Winer, Betty Burchell, Mardy Burgess, Carl Linden, Gerry Barton, Tryon Wells, George Loeb, John Noble, David Powell (waiting list)

Treasurer's Report: Tryon reported for Alan Gelb that "everything is fine."

Party Supervisor: Bill Eichbaum reported that party activity was moderate. There was, however, one party of 25 planned for children. When parents showed up with children, the number swelled to 75. This was an infraction of the rule specifying party limits.

The Sycamore Islander is a monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. Articles, photographic essays, drawings, announcements, letters to the editors—any materials of interest to the membership and waiting list—are welcome and should be sent to the Editors, Jane and David Winer, 5927 Onondaga Road, Bethesda, MD 20816. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to davidwiner@erols.com in all common formats. The deadline for inclusion in a particular issue is receipt at the Editors' address ten days prior to the second-Wednesday monthly meeting of the club. **Earlier submissions receive priority.**

Minutes of June 14 Meeting (continued)

Caretaker's report: Doc Taliaferro reported that since the swim float was moved downriver out of sight of the rope swing, there have been no further incidents of trespass or vandalism by the rope swing population. Noisy nighttime drinking parties at the rope swing are reported to the Park Police. The general but not unanimous feeling of the club members present was not to interfere with rope swing use.

Doc and Trip Reid attended a Smithsonian presentation by Chris Lee, ranger at Assateague and expert on Potomac Gorge botany. He has researched the plants on Ruppert's Island and found five species considered rare or endangered. In the light of Ruppert's being an important natural area, our Club will continue to maintain it's natural state. Doc recommended some books on natural habitat to enrich our appreciation of this area.

A wounded dove was found and passed on to an organization competent to restore it.

Sycamore Island embroidered patches are still available for purchase at the Club. See Doc.

Old business: There has been recent concern about the caretakers' quarters — need for repair and its vulnerability to flood damage. Tryon Wells summarized the possible actions:

- (1) Do nothing.
- (2) Repair the rotting bedroom and bathroom floor - estimated at \$7,000 — \$10,000.
- (3) Remove the quarters from the flood plain by adding a second floor outside the Clubhouse kitchen — estimated at \$29,000.
- (4) Build a two story structure on pylons on the current tool shed site — estimated at \$60,000.

The ad hoc committee favored building outside the Clubhouse kitchen. Drawbacks to building on the tool shed site: It is too far from the bell; in a flood, it would be the first structure to be hit; a structure built above the current quarters could be built higher. John Matthews presented some freehand drawings of the possible configuration above the current quarters.

There is adequate funding to finance the construction. Construction could begin and be completed this summer. The Caretaker can have an alternative living arrangement during the construction.

A motion was made to approve the concept to build above the current quarters and to enable the ad hoc committee to approve final details, with the proviso that if the estimated cost appeared to exceed \$31,000, the plan would go back to the Club for approval. The motion was unanimously passed.

New business:

Peggy Thomson would like to see the caretakers log published in some edited form at the end of the year as a book for purchase. The log, she says, expresses the "essence of the Island."

Betty Burchell's riverside explorations have added to the evidence that a large population of people lived nearby along the river. Betty proposed that she and Alex McCoy give a Club presentation at our next meeting, scheduled to start early at 7:30 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:18 p.m.

-- Renee Dunham, Recording Secretary

Special Safety Notice:

Be advised that the lights on the path above the canal will be out for the July 12 monthly meeting.

"River Update" from the Potomac Conservancy's web site.

—Submitted to *The Islander* by Trip Reid

The following two excerpts 's [Riverupdate@potomac.org] might of interest to Sycamore members.

Press Coverage for the Potomac River

This summer the Washington Post is running a 12-part news series on the Potomac River to highlight the wonders of this fantastic resource and bring attention to some of the challenges facing our Nation's River.

The Potomac Conservancy is working closely with Post reporters as they prepare this exciting and informative series. The first article in the series appeared last Tuesday in the Metro section. In case you missed it, check out the story on-line at:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A64923-2000Jun26.html>

Keep a look out for future articles about our great river throughout the summer.

Volunteers Needed for Riverbank Clean Up - July 15, 2000

Join the Potomac Conservancy and Potomac Appalachian Trail Club to help clean up the river along a popular section of the Potomac Heritage Trail on the Virginia shore. The clean up will traverse the scenic one mile stretch of river from Gulf Branch to Chain Bridge.

Fish Alert!

Fisher(wo)man take note! Now that the new fish ladder at Little falls is operating, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources wants to monitor unusual fish caught (or seen) in river above the new dam. We are in an ideal position to do so. Johnna Robinson has volunteered to take calls and relay the information to DNR. If you, yourself, encounter Hickory Shad, American Shad, Rockfish, Walleye, or any other species that you believe to be unusual in our stretch of the river, call Johnna with the details at: 301-229-5421.

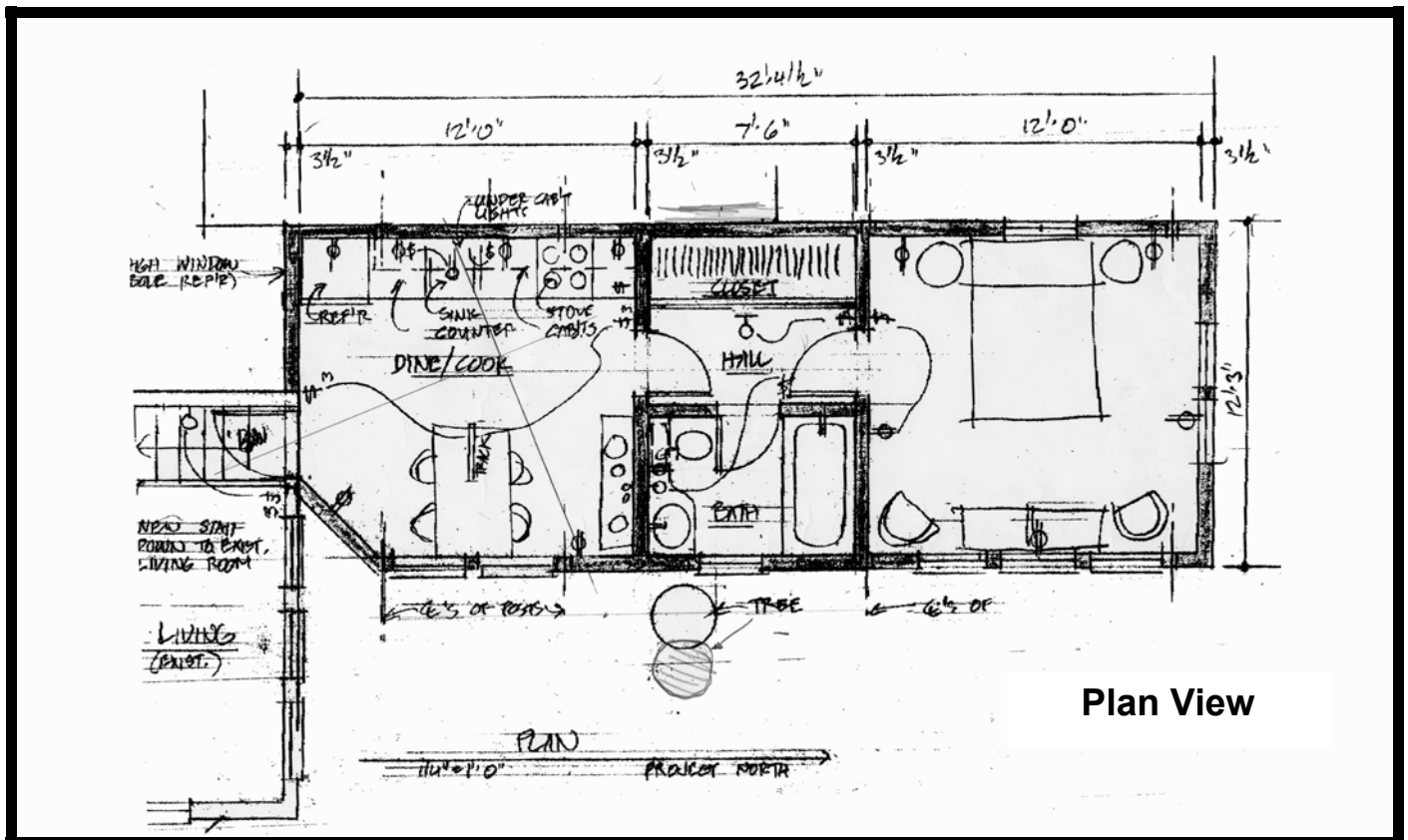
Preliminary Planning for the New Quarters

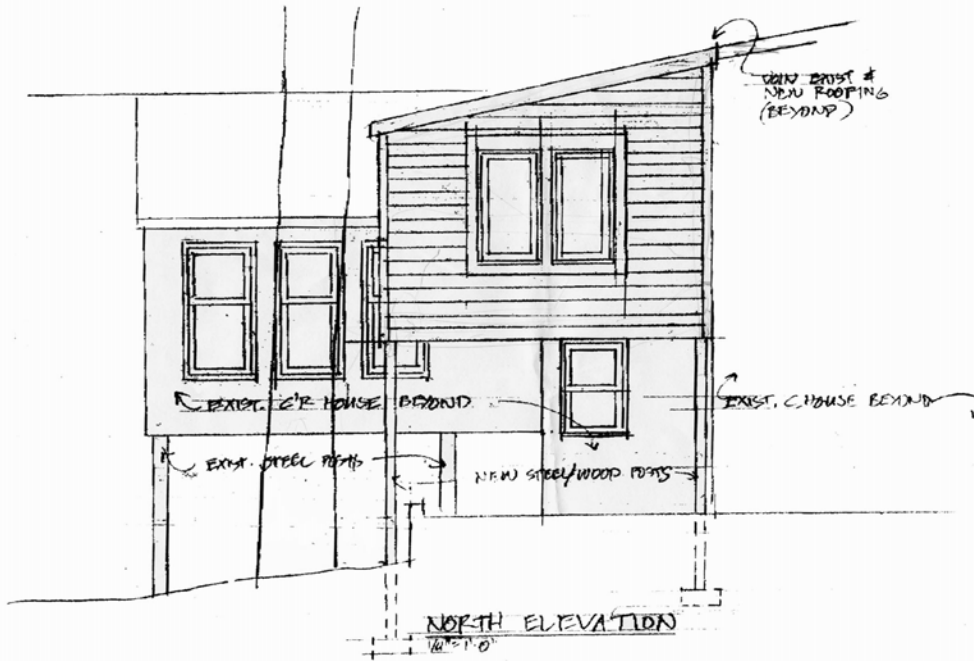
Captain John Matthews offers comments...

The status of new living quarters for the caretaker, *i.e.*, Bedroom, bath, kitchen and eating area is that it is not finally designed; --meaning we are still trying to agree as to the shape of it. Architect John Wiebenson designed a 32 1/2' x 12'4" space, sketches of which are included here. But both John and I have yet to get together to finalize.

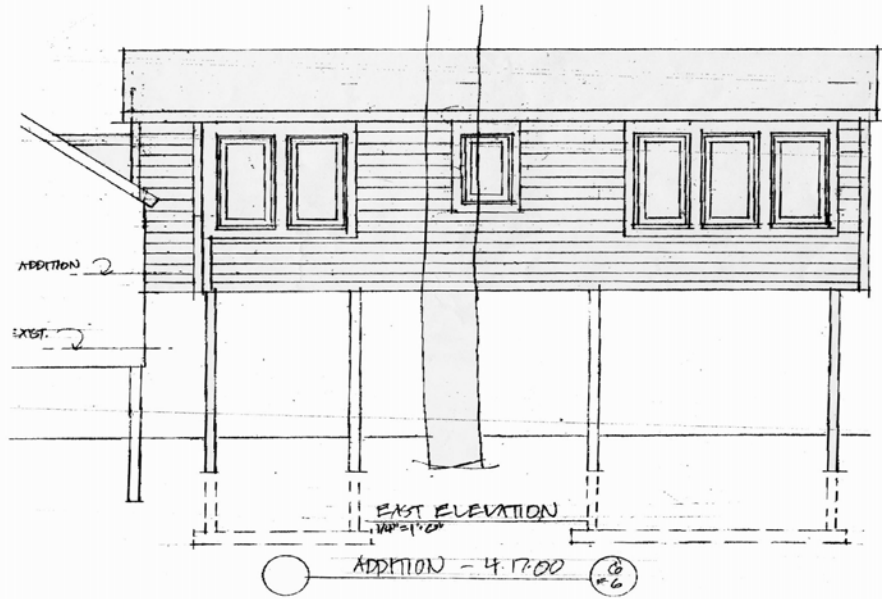
However, I have determined a few things that bear on the details of construction:

- Solid rock is too far down for us to go down to it for bearing & anchoring, therefore,
- We will have to do 3 foot deep footings that will
- Require 4 tons of sackrete--(80 lb bags of a cement, sand & gravel mix that must be mixed with water to be placed).
- I have ascertained that I can get a concrete mixer that will mix about 2 cu. ft. at a batch (4 80 lb. bags).
- The mixer can be taken across on the ferry and will cost \$120 per week.
- We should probe the existing structure to ascertain the extent of its footings in the area of our structure.





Side Elevations



Sketches of the Preliminary Design of New Caretaker's Quarters
 —Club Architect John Wiebenson

Notes from the Island

Sat 17 Jun

The squall line had moved through... the rain and lightning had long since stopped... the computer had been plugged in... when we were visited by the proverbial "bolt out of the blue." I actually saw the strike across the towpath on the hill... so close one felt the shock wave and smelled the ozone. The Caretaker's Wife was sitting at the computer as blue "something" shot out of the electrical wall plug beside her. Both the Club President and Captain later reported hearing the boom and crash in their homes some distance away. The computer and fax machine were fried, despite two surge protectors connected in series. All downstairs breakers were tripped and the place stank of burned insulation. Subsequent investigation revealed that the phone line down the hill was literally blown to pieces. As the James Super party left it was seen that a length of line was lying across both the stairs on the iron bridge and the towpath itself at about chest height. Greg Super bravely pulled the wire down from the trees so no bicyclist would decapitate themselves, and it was discovered that one end was connected to parts of the telephone junction box from the pole there... and that the remains were charred.

Sun 18 Jun

Canoe Supervisor David Lyles came down and repaired one of the Club Old Town canoes that had a busted thwart.

Mon 19 Jun

Bummer news: It was discovered today that some of the many small, blown up wire fragments littering the towpath from Saturday's lightning strike event are in fact from the power line from the Island that goes up the hill to power the lights on the hill. As this was an old but heavy duty telephone line salvaged and used by Ken Fassler (because of its self supporting capability over distance), it was initially thought it was pieces of the Island telephone line. This means no lights on the path for the foreseeable future, as it is uncertain how this might be repaired and replaced without

involving a major contractor... or even where appropriate materials might be found. It is also curious that the lightning struck two wires that were at least thirty yards apart.

Tue 20 Jun

During a "very" early trip to the bathroom this morning the sound of dripping water could be heard coming from the closet wherein reside the hot water heater, water pump apparatus, and other mysterious water equipment. Sure enough, it appeared that water was leaking from the bottom of a raised hot water heater and running down the walls. A few hours later the flow had increased such that the water in the entire facility had to be shut off because there seemed no way to isolate this hot water heater from the water system.

This also meant the Club had to be closed, as state law requires functioning toilets.

Wed 21 Jun

So... this morning at 0900 hrs we awaited PEPCO, Bell Atlantic, and our plumber.

Donny and Kevin with a total Bell Atlantic crew of 4 arrived to string new wire down the hill for our telephones. There was continued amazement as they pulled the old wire down and pointed out where certain parts of the wire itself were literally blown out of the insulating cable.

PEPCO did not arrive but Kevin declared that their equipment showed a good ground at the Clubhouse.

Herb Dennison and son Herb arrived after lunch and made quick work of restoring the water system. The old water heater was cut out of the system and detached so that it could be easily removed when the facing of the cabinet is taken off. The outdoor shower was fixed and Herb declared that best guess for the hole in the water line was critter chew.

Notes from the Island

Thu 22 Jun

Finally today the telephones became operational. A mystified Bell Atlantic crew came back to check the Island after running 1500 feet of new wire across two roads, down the hill, and across the river... but with no success at restoring service. What they discovered was a charred wall plug where the lightning had melted the connections, and finally, in the afternoon, on the fifth day, the phones rang again.

Sat 24 Jun

Canoe Supervisor David Lyles came down with his Mother to fix the broken thwart on one of the Old Town Club canoes. While David worked, his Mother held court and kept all entertained on the screen porch.

Thu 29 Jun

It was a dark and cloudy day... just the sort of day to try an experiment with the new work computer of the Caretaker's Wife to see if we can resume updating the Log. Have we collected and installed all the necessary and correct software??? If so, our own Club President gets all the credit. The Caretaker's computer could not be scheduled for repair before 13 July.

The Caretaker has been getting stomach sick this week, but when this happened to the Wife also, some intuition suggested that the ultra violet system that supposedly kills all organisms in our water be checked. Sure enough, it seems the UV system has not been operational since the 20 Jun incident when the entire Island water system was down. This does not mean to imply that the illness comes from the well... but the coincidence is statistically significant enough to be mentioned. The UV system is now operational again.

Fri 30 Jun

Yesterday there was some confusion regarding the responsibilities of Members when the Caretaker is sick or temporarily absent and the ferry is left on the Maryland shore. In this case the sick bed had to be left and Members asked to stop

swimming or otherwise respond to the ringing bell. This happened several times and seems to be a problem every year, requiring an annual lecture to the Membership. This year's lecture is now in the form of a notice left on the ferry:

Attention: When the ferry is locked up at the Maryland side, the Caretaker is away on an errand or ill. Any Member who unlocks the ferry and takes it to the island becomes the de facto caretaker and is responsible for answering the bell should any other Member or the returning Caretaker wish access to the Island. This means you can not go swimming or stay at the ends of the Island where the bell can not be heard. If you take a canoe or kayak out, you must first return the ferry to the Maryland shore and lock it up.

If another person rings the bell, you may transfer the responsibility to that person as a condition of their access to the Island. At all times there must be a designated responsible person to answer the ferry bell and act as substitute caretaker.

This need not be enshrined as a rule, as it should be considered simple logic or common courtesy.

Sat 1 Jul

During these last few days when the Caretaker and his Wife have been ill, a special mention in the dispatches to Substitute Caretaker Supervisors Jeff Komarow and John Krasny for laboring so hard to find Members to man the ferry... and many thanks to all of you who have pulled together to make it work in the absence of staff. Those of you who worry that the Club evolves more toward a country club and away from a co-op have reason to worry less.

—Doc Taliaferro

Excerpted and edited from the Caretaker's Log at sycamoreisland.org

Webmaster's Corner

News of the Wired

Though not the usual kind of article to be found in the Sycamore Islander, some of the latest developments in cyberspace may be of interest to some members and may influence Club dues and fee collection in the near future.

The worlds of finance and investment have seen a lot of changes lately with the advent of the Internet and e-commerce. Now a couple of small Internet companies are poised to take the banking industry by storm. PayPals.com and X.com (merging as this is being written) have hit upon a simple but elegant way of marrying the ubiquitous e-mail systems we all use routinely with the process of making payments (for now) to other individuals.

The idea is deceptively simple. A customer fills out a short personal form online at either web site and opens an account. No minimum fee is necessary. With X.com, after a couple of weeks the customer will receive starter checks and a debit card, still without ever depositing a cent. To use the account, of course, you will have to deposit

some money into it in order to make a payment. This can be accomplished the traditional way by writing a check to the bank or using a credit card at the site and depositing a specified amount.

To pay someone, the customer goes back to the web site and instructs X.com to pay John Doe (whose e-mail address the customer enters), say \$20.00, for services rendered. X.com then sends John an e-mail notifying him of the payment (complete with a convenient link back to X.com's web site), stating that if John opens an account with X.com, the payment will automatically be placed in his account. Not surprisingly, most of X.com's accounts are opened this second way.

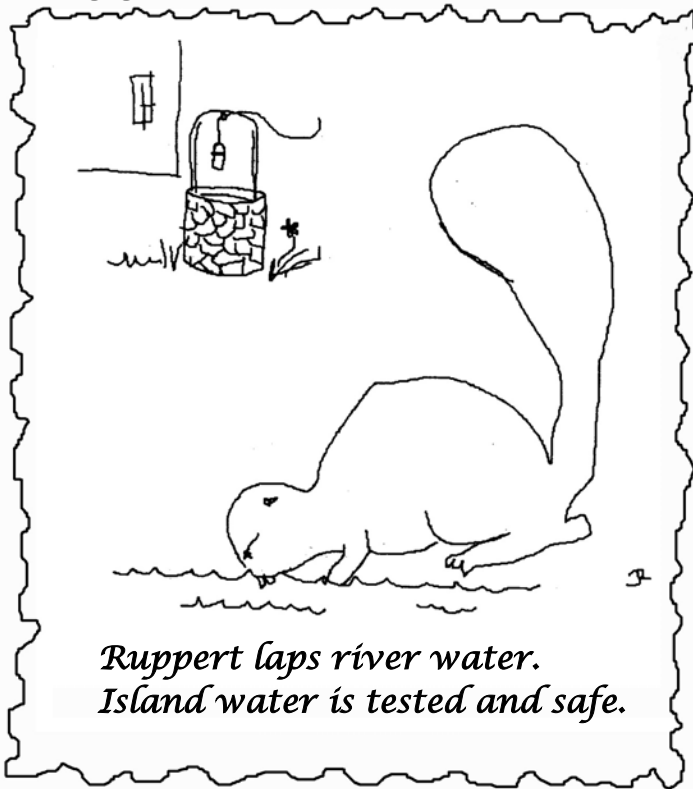
Basically, X.com and PayPals.com have figured out a way for people to wire money to each other instantly without the horrendous costs banks have traditionally charged for that service. Both companies currently are eating credit card costs and starter check costs in order to increase the amount of accounts they have. It seems to be working since the latest estimates report that X.com and PayPals.com combined have signed up over 3 million accounts in the past 4 months using this scheme. Hotter than white-hot, and still privately held, an IPO is planned later this year and is one of the most watched in a recent history of many well-watched IPOs.

X.com's web site informs that business accounts are only months away meaning that Sycamore Island will have to wait for now to open an account. So members and waiting list applicants will have to wait too before being able to e-mail their annual dues or other fees to the club. Or maybe not. In any event, these companies will be watched closely in the coming months.

In the meantime, you can get in on the trend by opening an account with X.com or PayPals.com. It can't hurt and costs nothing. And you may be surprised to find a use for the account before you expect it.

-- Tryon Wells

Ruppert



Sunday Relief Caretakers

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
July 2	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Fern and Jasper Ingersoll Rene and Eric Simpson	301 270-5219 703 821-7556
July 9	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Phyllis Olfky Katalin and Robert Hardi	301 345-2353 301 983-5415
July 16	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Deborah Sheppard -Thomas Levy Elisabeth and Dallas Jones	301 229-1569 301 571-4942
July 23	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Susan and Bill Richardson Sharon Pettie	703 892-6944 202 965-5366
July 30	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Esther Delaplaine Birgit and Brian Waidmann	301 913-0090 703 536-3168

***** Caretaker Volunteers *****

Call John Krasny (301-564-0342) or Jeff Komarow (301-897-5996) to volunteer for caretaking in July or August. You can also contact them by e-mail at jfkrasny@erols.com or jeffkomarow@aol.com Volunteers from the waiting list are encouraged. It's a great way to spend time on the Island!

Large Parties

Date	Time	Who	What
Jul-09	1530 to 1900	Peter Fuchs	Work colleagues and families
Jul-23	1200 to 1600	Margaret and Patrick Barry	20 people — family and friends

A large party application form may be printed from the club's Web page at <http://www.sycamoreisland.org/systems.htm>

— or —

**To request a form through the mail, call the Supervisor of Parties,
Bill Eichbaum , 301-229-1713**



The Sycamore Islander

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July 2000

This Issue:

- The best laid plans need meetings.
- Dot coms, and sealing the deal.
- Bolts from the blue, and fried wires.



Paving the way.

At the spring workfest, Gerry Barton enlists some help from Tommy Esch with a project to replace decking.

— photo by Renee Dunham