



The Sycamore Islander

November, 2002

Volume 81 No. 11

The November 13th meeting of the Club is on the Island at 8:00 p.m.

Fall Workfest is Saturday, November 16

Mark your calendars--it's only a couple of weeks away now. It's time to put away the swim float, rake the lawn and secure the Island for the winter months. See p. 6 for tasks. Call our caretaker, Joe Hage (301-229-4921), if you want to volunteer to honcho anything on the list. Work starts around 9:00 a.m. Bring tools and rakes if you have them. All club members and club applicants are encouraged to come, get some exercise, and help devour a fabulous potluck feast.

Minutes of the October 9 Meeting

The meeting took place at the Clubhouse on the Island. Ann Marie Cunningham called the meeting to order at 8:05 p.m. Present were George Loeb, Nell Hennessy, Frank Daspit, Peggy Thomson, Nancy Bower, Blair Bower, John Matthews, Jeff Komarow, Johnna Robinson, Barbara Kraft, Bill Eichbaum, Brad Coolidge, Jim Drew and guests Kevin Garrett and Felipe Pinilla.

A motion to approve the Minutes of the September meeting was made and passed.

Kevin Garrett, an American University student who grew up in our area, proposed to those members present his idea to make a film about the Island for his senior project. Discussion ensued about content and uses of the film, with suggestions about who Kevin could talk to about the Island's history. Those present voted to allow Kevin access to the Island for purposes of making the film, with the understanding that he would present the video at a meeting. Members

asked, and Kevin agreed, not to show the film outside his AU class without notifying the Club.

Discussion ensued about the loss of the rope swing tree. There was no Treasurer's report.

The Membership Secretary reported on the New Member orientation planned for October 19.

The Caretaker reported on the Fall Workfest planned for November 16, with a November 23 rain date.

There was no Finance report.

Discussion ensued about Peter Winkler's large party planned for October 19. Barbara Kraft, speaking for Peter, asked that the members approve the party with the understanding that the number of attendees might exceed 35. The members voted to approve the party.

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. **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for inclusion in the December issue is receipt at the Editors' address on Nov 30. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

October 9 Minutes (continued)

Jim Drew gave the Canoe Report. There are two canoes for sale. The Club has received a bid of \$100 for one of them. After discussion, it was agreed to offer them for sale at the new member orientation on October 19, and to re-advertise them in the next *Islander* if necessary, to see if anyone wants to bid more than \$100. Frank Daspit reported that he had taught a canoeing class in August, mostly adults, and that all involved agreed the class was a success.

Ann Marie Cunningham reported the establishment of a new Nominating Committee, to be chaired by Carl Linden. The Committee will come up with a slate of nominees for Club office to be published in the next *Islander*. Considerable discussion was had about the composition of the Committee. The sense of the meeting was that the Committee should consist of at least 4 or 5 members.

John Matthews reported on the kudzu problem. Phil Thorson's son-in-law is interested in contracting to do the kudzu removal. The Club has approached 2 neighboring community associations and asked them to help with the cost of kudzu removal. Discussion was had about the virtues of cutting vs. poison, and other ways of dealing with the problem. One suggestion was to involve the Potomac Conservancy and other environmental groups.

Various other issues were briefly discussed at the meeting, including an unclaimed prize from the Regatta, and the USGS report of water loss in the Potomac between Point of Rocks and Great Falls.

A lengthy discussion was had concerning the Club's Waiting List, mostly on whether to keep it closed or open it up on at least a limited basis. The list has been closed for the past 2 years except for the children of members. A motion to open the waiting list to allow new people to apply did not get a second. A motion to keep the list closed this coming January 2003 was made and passed. George Loeb graciously agreed to write up our options for dealing with the Waiting List.

Another lengthy discussion was had about the well on the Island. A contract to repair the well was signed in April 2002. Scheduling conflicts have prevented the work from getting done, but it appears now that the work will be done in November 2002.

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

—Barbara Kraft, Acting Recording Secretary

Caretaker Reports on Happenings

It has been another beautiful month down here on Sycamore Island. This is really my favorite time of year. The summer flowers have wilted but the Maples and other trees now dazzle with their brilliant colors. October has also treated me to migrating warblers, vireos, and sparrows as well as daily sightings of hawks and woodpeckers. The natural world is always amazing to me but to be able to watch this dramatic change in seasons makes me even more fully aware of my connectedness to it.

This month has been tainted by tragedy and even though I've been enjoying the relative safety of the island I'm struck by the fragility of our lives. I'm drawn to nature at times like these, and yet I feel somewhat guilty about the pleasure I find in such small-scale matters as the call of a wren or the flight of a heron, especially when we are faced with the consequences of a war on terrorism or the prospect of an attack on Iraq. I also feel, on the other hand, that it's times like these that remind us to stay in the moment and appreciate the simpler things in our lives.

I really have been enjoying the island. My daily summer swim has been replaced by a daily autumn paddle. Normally I take out my own canoe but I will occasionally borrow other boats to take advantage of this paddlers playground outside my door. My daughters are also taking to the sport, I'm happy to say, chasing me in kayaks as I paddle my canoe

I must say I'm surprised at how few visitors I get down here. There are quite a few members and waiting-listers that I've met at least once, (I apologize for not remembering your names all the time); and there's a core of regular visitors, but it seems to me there's a large percentage of people that I've never met. On that note, I would like to give the Caretaker's Award for Most Frequent Visitor to John Mathews who faithfully comes down almost everyday.

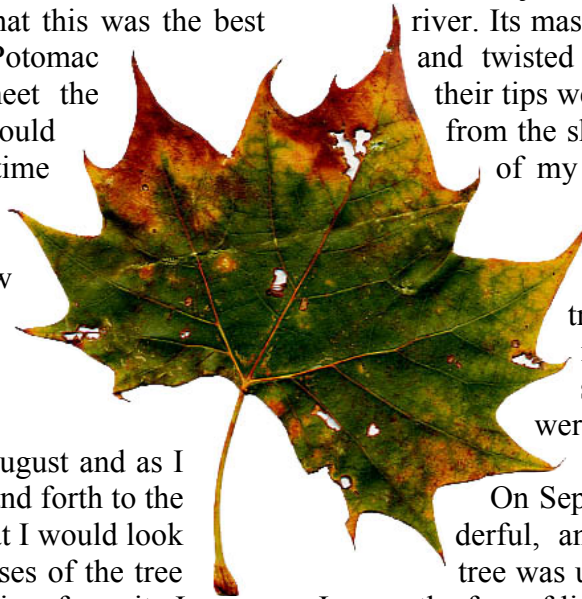
Wishing you all the best. —Joe

The Rope Swing Tree —Born 1832 - Died 2002

I had heard of this rope swing even before I took this job on the island, but I soon realized that it was more than just a nuisance for attracting risk-taking revelers. This rope swing had become a thing of local legend. True, it's reputation as a place to drink and party was spreading to an increasingly bold and rowdy crowd but I also found as I talked to the many teenagers that would stream past the ferry landing that this had been a favorite swimming hole for at least two generations. During my first days here on the island I had heard it said, with no small sense of pride, that this was the best rope swing on the entire Potomac River. As I began to meet the members of the club I would hear stories about the first time they took their children up to challenge themselves on the swing or how they as children or even as adults had first swung from this magnificent tree.

I began this job in early August and as I ferried the members back and forth to the island in the sweltering heat I would look up stream and catch glimpses of the tree and the many kids swinging from it. I looked forward to the day when I would have my chance to try out the swing. Then tragedy struck. The inevitable accident at the swing had occurred. A seventeen-year old girl, having fun with her friends on a Saturday afternoon, had somehow gotten the rope caught between her legs as she sailed off the swing. The rope burned and ripped and cut her flesh and punctured the femoral artery in her leg. The emergency technicians were called and she was quickly taken to the hospital where she was helped to survive her trauma. Later that day the Park Police had the rope swing cut down.

That night I decided it was time for me to finally visit this tree that was the object of so much attention and the unwitting cause of so much pain. I was not prepared for what I found. Not only was I unprepared for the heavily blood stained clothes strewn along the base of the tree but I was also unprepared for the awesome size and beauty of this majestic tree. It was completely horizontal with only half it's roots holding it to the shore. Its trunk was half buried for twenty-five feet until it reached the bank where it jutted out powerfully over the river. Its massive, sculpted limbs arched and twisted out over the water until their tips were nearly one hundred feet from the shore. Even in the dim light of my headlamp I could see the brilliant white and soft, colorful hues so characteristic of these riverside trees. This tree was a natural phenomenon. I was not surprised that so many were drawn to it.



On September 10, 2002 this wonderful, and very healthy sycamore tree was unceremoniously cut down. I guess the fear of litigation forced the National Park Service to rid themselves of this possible liability. It is truly the end of an era. No longer can we appreciate its beauty and solitude in winter or it's thrill and challenge in summer. This tree lived for 170 years, witnessing the many moods of this historic river and also the many landmarks, good and bad, of our own brief history along it's banks. This tree was here long before the Sycamore Island Club was founded and will forever be a part of its history.

—Joe Hage

Applicants and New Members Receive Warm Welcome: Fall Orientation

Over thirty applicants on the waiting list and a smattering of new members turned out for the Fall 2002 orientation program. For the fourth consecutive time, the weather cooperated and



Let us gather by the river...

we were able to conduct most of the orientation outside followed by a barbeque lunch. Jim Drew (Canoe Supervisor), Joe Hage (Caretaker), Jeff Komarow (Membership Secretary) Tryon Wells (Captain and Webmaster) and David Winer (*Sycamore Islander* Co-Editor) discussed the opportunities and responsibilities of membership with an emphasis on encouraging participation in club life. Jim Drew also told fish stories and tried to drum up interest in the donated and abandoned canoes for sale on the Island. Jeff Komarow added some bad jokes to his orientation repertoire. Tryon Wells regaled the attendees with encyclopedic knowledge of Island history, and Dave Winer photographed the event for posterity.

Much of the orientation was also captured on tape by American University students who are preparing a documentary on the Island as part of their coursework. The orientation was followed by a barbeque lunch, which included a delicious array of potluck side dishes and desserts.



Eager arrivals.



Listening to a briefing while the food cooks. Not fair!

The orientation could not have been accomplished without the help of numerous volunteers, including Bill Marmon and Sherry Pettie who manned (womanned) the ferry, Alison Levine and family, the Waidman family, George & Shelley Malusky and Jerry Barton, who shopped, set up, cooked and helped to clean up. Their willingness to pitch in shows true Islander spirit.



Caretaker Joe expounds on the joys of swimming.



Some folks know how to have a good time.



Future members meet future members.

The Fall Workfest is Saturday, November 16

It's time again to clean up clubhouse and yard, fix things and generally to secure the Island for Winter.

Starting time is 9:00 a.m. If recent history is any guide, the fabulous potluck feast will probably be served in the early afternoon.

All the docks will be left in the water this year: however, we will bring in the swimming float .

Members who wish to volunteer to honcho any item on the list below are encouraged to call Joe Hage (our new Caretaker) and get the details of the job. The Club needs supervisory volunteers, so step up!

Morning Tasks

- Take out swimming float and cable
- Remove and clean swimming ladders
- Clean up ferry
- Repair picnic tables (Tryon Wells)
- Wash clubhouse deck (Joe Hage)
- Paint screen porch tables (Joe Hage)
- Screening repair (Tove Elfstrom)
- Repair any broken chairs (Tryon Wells)
- Collect/discard wood for woodstove
- Sweep/dust clubhouse
- Clean bathrooms
- Build new canoe rack (Tove Elfstrom)
- Replace step on MD shore (David Winer)
- Shore clean-up (Adrienne Allison)
- Pull kudzu and English ivy off trees
- Rake leaves (everybody)

Potluck Feast

Enjoy a hard-earned rest and refueling.

Cleanup

- Bring in the cookers
- Move picnic tables under deck
- Take up trash

Call for Nominations for Club Offices

Last time I was on the Island, I was sitting on the Captain John Matthews Float with friends, looking toward the dam, when I saw a big bird with white head and tail flying low over the river. It swooped low, reached into the water, and pulled out a fish. It then spiraled slowly upward and toward us until it was lost in the branches overhead. It was the first time I had ever seen a Bald Eagle catch a fish, and it was so exciting to see it

bring closer as if to show it off for us. It's moments like these that make the Island a truly special place, and make me grateful for the time spent there. If any of you have had special moments on the Island, and want an opportunity to ensure that it remains such a wonderful spot, please contact Carl Linden. He and the rest of the Nominating Committee are gathering the names of persons who love the Island and are willing to help keep it for all our enjoyment.

—Ann Marie Cunningham

Note: The nominees to date are listed on p.10.

Old Sycamore

— Steve Carroll

Who knows how you, old sycamore, became the perfect launching pad for the perfect rope swing that became the famous upriver playground for us kids of all ages that frequented Sycamore Island and environs. But a least 170 years ago you were born or more likely regenerated from the confused intermingled mass of roots that seem like the dense skeleton of some giant ship so tightly woven and meshed so as to actually hold the river itself in its bowels. You may never have been born from seed but rather to be another of millions of shoots from ancient roots that form the very matrix of the bank, the slope, the rocks and debris that we call riverside. To what prehistoric age do these roots go back? Ah, but that's another tale.

And who knows what storms racked you and what floods pulled you down and into the current so as to almost seem a part of that current, a fractal of the larger tidal moon-pitched earth so effortlessly did you blend into the bank, your arms beckoning all of us kids to come and play. Old and patched sycamore they have cut you down. You were too perfect, too human, you spoke our language, many trees try to speak to us but we just don't listen. We're usually off with our own kind. But you GREAT SYCAMORE ROPE SWING TREE, YOU SPOKE TO US AND WE HEARD YOU. How far will we trudge up river or down to find your brother? Will he speak to us so clearly as you? You know we want you

back. But by some mysterious genetic alchemy have you foreseen and recreated yourself? Or will we never find another with your arms, with your swaying might, with your deep lap of river pool to receive us when swing out, out, out, over river and into sky? I would like to hold that dream of your rebirth else this remorse be a kind of haunting pall that shadows me and deprives me of all joy. So, as your roots run deep and endlessly, so my dreams would rather have you again and not your mere memory. So, as you were never born have never died, I need only seek among your roots to see a new vision of you and hold this within my heart where all healing and birth and death and



birth abide. Oh noble tree, I will not mourn you but be bourn back by you to our common mother and be born again myself. Thank you Ancient One, Hamadryad, OLD SYCAMORE ROPE SWING TREE, THANK YOU BROTHER!!!!

In Memoriam to a Sycamore Tree

—by Kathy Carroll

Long before the Civil War, a bolt of lightning or a flood, perhaps, bowed the tree onto its side. Year by year, the sturdy trunk stretched farther and farther -- more than 100 yards -- out over the river just above Sycamore Island. A branch grew up from the trunk and became like a second trunk, bending toward the western sky.

It was a wonder tree. Sometime, generations ago, someone thought of putting a rope around the giant branch and a little ladder from the river to the trunk. Voila! A tree swing! Pure joy for scores of kids and hardy adults! From the first warm days of spring until the last of Indian summer I loved hearing their exuberant shouts as they splashed into the water in all manner of ways.

Several times even I, old enough to be a grandmother, inched my way across that long expanse, toes clutching mottled bark, gripped the rope with fear and trembling, and felt that rush of adrenalin when I'd swing out with all my might. Then I'd let go (letting go is an important step to remember) fly through the air, and drop into the warm, enveloping water, as the splattering drops sparkled in the sun like fireworks.... Ecstasy!

My daughter, Becca, loved the tree. It was her favorite spot for out-of-town visitors. Before she would take them to see the Capitol or the Smithsonian, she took them to the tree swing for the best entertainment around. How amazing! Just a few miles outside of the nation's Capitol, you could go back in time to the days of Huck Finn, where kids would slow down enough to groove on an old tree, a swing and a swimming hole instead of video games and MTV. It is so rare these days for kids to get beyond their scheduled indoor lives to even know what it is to enjoy free time outside.

There's a theory, the *Biophilia Hypothesis*, that to be fully human, we must learn to connect with nature. According to this theory, just as there is a critical time for a child to learn speech, there is a critical time for children to bond with the natural world. That disconnect so many people have from nature may account for many of our modern ills. I wonder how many kids found that connection through the Sycamore tree swing?

I spent my childhood in our home next to Lock Eight, enmeshed in the colors, sounds and smells of the seasons of the river and the trees around it. I plied the canal in my own little boat that could only stay afloat with a passenger under 60 pounds or so. I spent my days wild and free exploring islands and swinging on tree vines. When I was ten, though, my childhood ended as my family and I were forced from our home in the wild by governmental decree. We were condemned to civilized lives surrounded by concrete and little squares of mown grass.

Well, now chalk up another point for "civilization" and disconnection -- for the power of litigation against wildness and beauty. From what I understand, a girl was hurt, her mother sued or threatened to sue the Park Service. On September 10th, the Park Service in turn, chopped down the Sycamore tree. I don't know who made the decision, but was like putting the tree to sleep because it bit the girl. (I'm sure it was the last thing the girl would have wanted -- to punish the tree and everyone who enjoyed it. She was there because she loved the tree.) The ground looks like it's covered with sycamore soldiers lying dead on a battlefield or a huge butchered corpse whose arms, legs and head were strewn haphazardly -- this, where a few weeks ago our wonder of the world proudly stood.

When I found out about the tree, it was almost like losing my home all over again, like lancing an old, slightly infected, wound. Only now my children and many others are suffering with that desolate, wrenching wound in their hearts, too. I think that is what hurts the worst.

Up until recently, whenever I needed to regain a sense of inner peace, I would imagine my husband, Steve, and me gliding in our canoe along the river right up by the tree swing on our way to the main channel, the sun shining and the water shimmering. I want to keep that feeling of peace and I want my family, our children and their friends, and all the kids to still love and enjoy the river even though the thrill of the tree swing is gone.

Our tree has already begun to sprout some babies, suckers who will use the powerhouse of

nutrients available from the mother stump to grow like wildfire next spring. It was a bit of a comfort to me to see new life sprouting from all that death and destruction. Who knows? Maybe a lightning bolt or a flood will bow one of them on its side. Perhaps one day, our children's children's children will know a tree like the one we lost.

Kathy and Steve Carroll have been members since 1997. They would like to receive writings – photos, art, etc. to make up a book – just for all of us – in memory of the tree. When their son Jon Michael gets back from Europe he wants to make a sculpture of one of the pieces of wood that are lying around from the tree and leave it there, where the tree used to be.

Kathy Carroll writes: *My son Jon Michael has been living abroad for the last few years. Whenever he would visit home, he'd spend more time making pilgrimages to the Sycamore tree than he did with us. Here is a poem he e-mailed when he heard about the death of his favorite tree:*

Love for Our Fallen Brother

—by Jon Michael Carroll

love for our fallen brother
u know few things make me cry holmes
a couple years back they would've seen a torment of destruction throughout
the streets and up in all those fuzzies beats
but now we that much stronger
touching hearts on the daily
soul rebels kid
we're always there
in flight at the peak of the swing out
and we could hope to grow up strong
root deep in the earth arms bear hugging the
skies
dancing in the soft breeze and hard wind
in the ten million shades of pink and purple
of a summer sunset...
*he estado en un brazo del arbol sycamore
cantando le al rio
cantando por amor*



“...in flight at the peak of the swing out...” - photo by David Winer

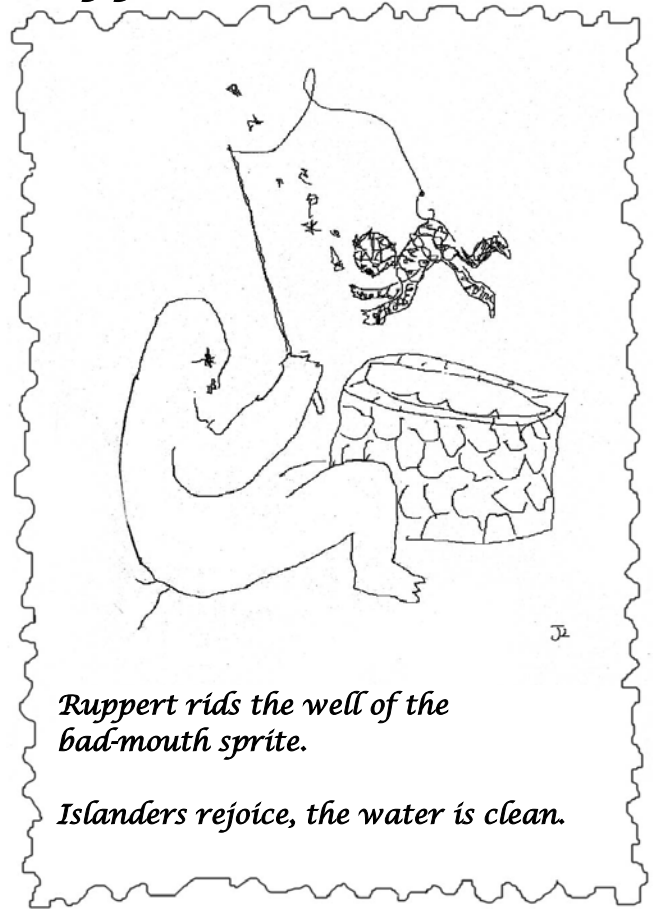
Ruppert

Two Canoes Still for Sale

The minimum bids on the two canoes for sale have been cut in half. Final reduction. The canoes and new minimum bids are:

1. **15 ft. Grumman—named "Bunny II."** On the H-2 rack. Minimum bid \$100.
2. **17 ft. Grumman—named "Dr Panglos/Candide."** On the ground with other club canoes. Minimum bid is \$50.

Look these over. They are excellent buys if you need a serviceable canoe. Interested persons may leave a written bid with Care-taker Joe Hage by November 30.



Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

Current Nominees for 2003 Club Officers

Elections for Club officers and supervisors will be held at the December meeting. Nominations will be accepted from the floor then. The Nominating Committee (Carl Linden, Ann Marie Cunningham, Tryon Wells, Johnna Robinson, Jane Winer) is accepting names until then, and is now proposing the following:

Officers

President Anne Marie Cunningham
Vice-president Jeff Komarow
Recording Secretary Carl Linden/Peter Winkler
Treasurer Alan & Caroline Gelb
Financial Secretary Lisa Kliefoth
Membership Secretary Bill Marmon
Editor David & Jane Winer
Archivist Holly Syrrakos
Captain Tryon Wells
Deputy Captain John Stapko

Supervisors

Finance Bill Eichbaum
Law Maurice Tobin
Clubhouse Karl Kosok
Grounds Penny Doolittle
Painting/Carpentry Charles Pill
Website Tryon Wells
Entertainment George & Marcia Loeb
Camping/Parties John Noble
Canoeing Jim Drew
Swimming Tove Elfstrom
Relief Caretaking Scheduling Candy Means

Sunday Relief Caretakers November-December 2002

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
November 3	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.	Bill & Joan Kugler	301-652-0132
	2:00 p.m. - Dark	Dick Jung	301-983-5710
November 10	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.	Adrienne Allison	301-951-8007
	2:00 p.m. - Dark	Werner & Karen Gundersheimer	202-333-6697
November 17	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.	John & Susan Membrino	301-229-1154
	2:00 p.m. - Dark	Frank Daspit & Nell Hennessy	202-526-0157
November 24	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.	Penelope Mitchell	301-229-4605
	2:00 p.m. - Dark	Renee & George Dunham	202-686-6451
December 1	11:00 a.m. - dark	Bill Bays	301-320-2286
December 8	11:00 a.m. - dark	Patricia Hartge and Alan Strasser	301-907-6657
December 15	11:00 a.m. - dark	Sherry Smith and Donal O'Hare	703-821-2803
December 22	11:00 a.m. - dark	Bob Oakley	301-279-9103
December 29	11:00 a.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	

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

To volunteer for Sunday relief caretaking, call
Bill & Lucky Marmon: 301-654-7893 or Howard and Candy Means: 301-320-5270

Volunteers from the Waiting List are encouraged. It's a great way to spend time on the Island!

Seeking Short-Term Caretaker

Our Caretaker, Joe Hage, would like to be off for three days, December 9-10-11 (Monday-Wednesday). He is seeking to hire someone to replace him. Respond to Joe at 301-229-4921.

Large Parties November 2002

There are no large parties scheduled for November.

A Large Party application form may be printed from the Club's Web Page at
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/systeps.htm>

— or —

To request a form through the mail, call the Supervisor of Parties, John Noble

Supervisor of Parties drops a Note.

Emily Glazer and I are by lucky coincidence both Club members and managers at the federal government's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information. In October we hosted at the Island a planning group from our office. Using a facilitator, the 14 person group made plans for the ensuing year and enjoyed the ambiance of the island. The weather was a little raw, but not enough to warrant a fire. All participants enjoyed the uniqueness of getting to and from the island and the out of the ordinary nature of our clubhouse as a meeting room.

—John Noble



The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

<http://www.sycamoreisland.org>

To view this month's Sycamore Islander on the Internet, go to:
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/squirrel/islander.htm>

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November 2002

- Fall Workfest wants you.
- Rope swing tree: more memorials.
- Becoming oriented at last.
- Nominations for 2003 Officers.



River trophy.

Sherry Pettie helped with the ferry at the Orientation, then took a spin in her kayak. This snake skin was hanging from a tree at the north end of the Island.