



Eagle Watch

Photo by David Winer

The Sycamore Islander

July 2004

Volume 83 No. 7

President's Message

Coming to the Island is a different experience now. An Explorer Scout troop, with help from Joe, did major trail maintenance to the path down to the Island. It's practically a stroll down the hill, rather than the treacherous hike it was. [Joe Hage has more details on page six.] And we got a second treat coming to the June meeting when on our arrival we found that David and Jane Winer had set up a telescope on the Captain's Float for eagle viewing. We were able to see very clearly the eagles' nest with the two rather large eaglets. The Winers had just finished their dinner and had hot dogs to offer to those of us who arrived for the meeting. It was such a wonderful beginning to a lovely evening that the meeting was conducted at the picnic tables by the float.

A new member at the meeting asked how we involve members in the various decisions on the reconstruction of the caretaker's quarters. We explained to her that the *Islander* is the primary means of communications and that through my column, the minutes of the meetings, and notices that the building committee occasionally places, you should be well informed of the progress. All major decisions, such as any additional allocation of funds for the project, will be made at the monthly meeting. If you have any questions, please contact Jack Sanders, chairman of the building committee, or me, or come to the monthly meeting. This project is being conducted in a very open manner, with regular and consistent communications about the progress. [Jack can be contacted at 703/799-6624 or jsand2000@aol.com and Ann Marie at 703/876-9165 or amcunning@juno.com.]

At this meeting, the discussion primarily was about the Club's finances in general and about financing the building in particular. Johnna Robinson expressed a concern that the Club's savings are at a somewhat lower level than usual and that our budget is causing us to spend down our savings. This is partly true because we used to have significant income from the savings, but that source is drying up with rates now so low. She proposed an amount of money that people would have to pay to "buy into" the club. This money would be repaid when the people leave. In the meantime, the club would have benefit of interest from those funds. Gerry Barton also had a suggestion for a fee that could be worked off in sweat equity rather than dollars. This would enable members who have more time than money to support the club with their skills. An idea that was suggested later, at the building committee meeting, was to solicit donations, with the possibility of having

July Meeting

**Wednesday, July 14, 8 pm
At the Island!**

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 Editor, Norman Metzger, 638 G Street, SE, Washington, DC 20003-2724 or by fax to 202/544-6027. Text and graphics may be sent as e-mail attachments to normanmetzger@verizon.net. Telephone: 202/544-6027 or 202/445-5436 (cell). **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for inclusion in the August issue is receipt at the Editor's address by Monday, July 26th.** Earlier submissions receive priority.

the big donors name a canoe. The building committee will form a subcommittee that will consider these possibilities, and will work to estimate costs as it begins detailed plans. For those of you who may not remember, \$50,000 was appropriated for the building, but cost estimates done by the previous committee indicate that will not be enough.

The next time I came to the Island, Jane and Dave again had their telescopes set up. This time I brought three generations of a family along as guests. The Winers were very generous in letting all of us look through the telescope where one of the eaglets was sitting. They had fledged that day, and the Winers had been there to see them. It's quite exciting to see a pair of eagles successfully raising a family right across from us. [See page four for more on the fledging.]

— Ann Marie Cunningham

From Holly Syrrakos, Archivist: 75 Years Ago At Sycamore Island

From the July 1929 Sycamore Islander

The newsy articles in the July *Islander* tell of tennis tournaments and new party and guest card rules. But, the longest article reminds us of conveniences we take for granted. The following is a selection from that article.

Our New Frigidaire

And a Short History of the Art of Refrigeration at Sycamore Island

Members who are unfamiliar with the history of the "ice problem" at Sycamore may wonder why the Club thought it necessary to expend a large sum of money for the automatic unit now in the ice-box. Mrs. Whitman...convinced us that the time had finally arrived to take on one of these apparatuses, thus placing us far in the lead among all river clubs. Let other clubs have medals, regatta cups and spoiled milk!

Some of our older members may feel that we should have reverted to those "good old days"—when there was no ice on the Island. However, if there ever was such a day, it was sometime prior to the gay '90's, ice having been a necessary feature here before the Club went dry in 1914....Until the canal closed down in about 1923 ice was delivered by canal boats but since that date the Club has waged a gradually losing battle to keep the club ice-box filled. Members brought 50 to 100 pound pieces down the hill for a few years but the pleasure gradually wore off....

...For the past three summers we have paid an ice-man who came from town especially to serve the Island and the people on the towpath. We paid him almost triple the regular rates and altogether we spent \$81 for ice last summer and almost as much during the two previous summers. Some say that the icebox always had much more ice than was actually needed. This is quite true but the reason for this apparent extravagance was that the iceman would not deliver any ice at all unless we took four or five hundred pounds a week!

The icebox is the one we have had for three years. This new automatic unit cost \$280, payable over two years. You can see that we're saving money by buying this apparatus instead of paying \$80 a summer for ice. And if we didn't get the automatic unit there would be no ice, even at the prices we've been paying because our private ice man has decided to retire from the trade...."

Another brief item—

Sycamore Flag Flies High, Wide and Handsome"

"Our new Club flag designed by Tom Edwards now flies [sic] proudly from the flagpole in front of the canoe-house and no more need strangers passing down the river think that this is a farm with Summer boarders,—they'll know it's a Club or a sanitarium."

Minutes of the June 9, 2004 Membership Meeting

Present: Jim Drew, Gerry Barton, Norm Metzger, Johnna Robinson, David Winer, Jane Winer, Peggy Thomson, Phoebe Hamill, Ann Marie Cunningham, Larry Heilmann, Peter Winkler, Jeff Komarrow, and Joe Hage

Call to Order: President Ann Marie Cunningham called the meeting to order at 8:15 p.m., outside, by the Captain's Float.

Communications and Announcements: Peter Winkler wanted to publicly thank Caretaker Joe Hage for assisting with a school outing at the Island. Joe gave the students an excellent introduction to the Island, led them on a hike, and helped them launch canoes. Ann Marie introduced new member Phoebe Hamill. Ann Marie reported that the Building Committee will meet on June 15 at the Island. **Ann Marie also reported that we are in need of volunteers for weekend relief caretaking. Please contact Candy Means via the Club website. Waitlisters who perform this task will get a day pass to use the Island.** David Winer announced that we will again have our Club Solstice party, an overnight in July on dates to be announced. We will also have our Club fishing derby in August, on a date to be announced. David reported that he and fellow fisherman George Malusky had gone fly-fishing for carp today, using artificial cicadas.

Minutes: There was no review of the May meeting minutes as that meeting was informal, there having been no quorum.

Membership Report: Ann Marie delivered the report for Membership Secretaries Joe and Tammy Belden. We have two openings, and at the top of the list are Whitney Pinger and Roger Pollack, and Carol and Bruce Beehler. Joe checked with several Club references for both couples. The meeting then voted them into the Club. Both couples applied for membership in 1995.

Islander Report: Editor Norm Metzger solicited contributions for the next few issues.

Caretaker: Joe Hage reported that he has rigged up a new, louder set of bells for the ferry. Note that they are not on the same old rope. Joe has met the people who purchased the Sycamore Store. They are a design/build firm currently located in Kensington, Maryland, and they hope to get historic designation for the Store. They plan to leave the front of the Store as is.

Canoe Report: Canoe Supervisor Jim Drew reported that the canoe shed is full. However, there is currently no waiting list. Peter Winkler reported on the 49th running of the Canoe Cruisers Association Potomac Downriver Race, from Great Falls to Sycamore Island. The race chairman was Star Mitchell, a member of both the Club and the CCA. Star did a truly great job publicizing the race, attracting sponsors, and attracting many more entrants than in recent years. The race was well managed, and a good time was had by all. [See Larry Heilmann's appreciation to Star in this issue.]

Old Business: Gerry Barton raised the issue of getting more members to participate in Club governance and maintenance. He is the member of another club, and he explained their dues system: each member is annually assessed a flat rate plus a "work tax"; the work tax can be "paid" through work, at set hourly rates established by the club for various tasks. Gerry would like our Club to adopt a similar system. Ann Marie said she supported our considering the idea, especially as we are facing a large expenditure to improve the caretaker's quarters. Ann Marie observed that it would require a certain amount of oversight. Other members noted that it would probably raise dues for those who did not work, and that we should not undertake such a program without due deliberations.

Gerry Barton also discussed work that he, Tryon Wells, and Trip Reid had done on the bridge at the Spring Workfest. They cleaned around the footings. Gerry thinks the bridge is in pretty good shape, although there is some deterioration of the decking. Ann Marie has sent a letter to the Park Service regarding needed repairs. Gerry also reported that some Eagle Scouts are coming this week to work on the path down from MacArthur Boulevard. That work will be performed in conjunction with the Potomac Conservancy and the

Park Service. Joe Hage stated that the Club had been asked to contribute some money for the purchase of the railroad ties that will be used. Peter Winkler made a motion that we authorize a contribution of \$150, the amount Joe thought would be needed. Ann Marie observed that with our building plans up in the air, this would be a good time for the Club to cultivate some good will. The motion was approved.

Johnna Robinson observed that our self-insurance fund has declined from about \$60,000 to about \$40,000. Johnna proposed that we address our funding issues by introducing the concept of ownership shares, like some of the neighborhood pools, which would be payable on attaining membership and refundable upon resignation. She proposed that new members be required to put in \$1000. David Winer and others objected, asserting that we cannot so drastically impinge on the expectations of those currently on the waiting list. Ann Marie suggested that we could set a much smaller amount, and assess all current members. Jeff Komarow and others stated that any such proposal would require systematic planning and study. Finally, others, including Johnna, stated that we should be thinking about this issue now, while the building project is still

in the planning stages. Ann Marie Cunningham reported on the meetings that she, Pat Cleary, and John Matthews had with Montgomery County officials concerning our building plans. Ann Marie stated that “it won’t be easy.” We are “illegally non-compliant” right now—we are a non-residence in a residential zone—and getting ourselves declared legally non-compliant could have negative consequences if we ever have to rebuild after significant damage. We can seek a special exception, but it would require a lot of effort and we might not succeed. **Does the Club have any land-use professionals who can lend help to this effort? Please contact Ann Marie.** In the mean time, Ann Marie will recommend to the building committee that we file the paperwork to become legally compliant, and that we build within the current footprint.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m., after which some of those present went indoors, to avoid the mosquitoes and see some of the existing building proposals.

— Peter Winkler, Recording Secretary

Dear Club Members,

I sent out a notice yesterday [June 8th] to those ahead of you in the alphabet to alert them that we had NO volunteers for relief care-taking for any of June or July, In July we need both 9 -3 and 3 to dark shifts filled for the 3rd, the 24th and the 31st. The 3- dark shift for the 10th is also open.



The duty is really one of life's wonderful gifts: a peaceful day on the island when you simply have to be there in the beauty and the quiet, reading, fishing, swimming, picnicking, chatting with friends you have brought with you, ferrying the nice folks over from time to time, etc. You get my drift. It is a wonderful escape. I never understand why more people do not sign up???

Please e-mail me (candymeans@comcast.net) with a couple of possibilities or call me at 301-320-5270. Some of you have not done a duty in the last 3 years or more. Others of you may be excused for health reasons while some of you have volunteered regularly. It is time for those of you who have not done a duty to pitch in and help out. Thanks for your attention. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

— Candy Means

Jinny Jones, 1926-2004



Longtime Club member Jinny Jones passed away on June 14, 2004 and was remembered in a memorial service at the River Road Unitarian Church on June 20. In March, Jinny was diagnosed with lung cancer that had metastasized to her brain. During the last three months of her life Jinny enjoyed the company of her sister, Gail Keefer, as well as that of her husband, children and many friends.

The Jones family became members of the Club in the 1960s when Phil Jones commuted to his job at the CIA by canoe. In the late 1980s, Jinny helped to computerize the Club's membership and financial records and later became Financial Secretary. When the Joneses had small children, Jinny served as Entertainment Committee chair.

Club members Phil Jones, Peter Jones and Holly Syrrakos, Steve Jones, Donna Messersmith and their children Greg and Melanie will all miss Jinny very much, as will her children, Emily Jones of Madison, Wis., and Jono Jones of San Francisco, Calif.

The Club as a NORC

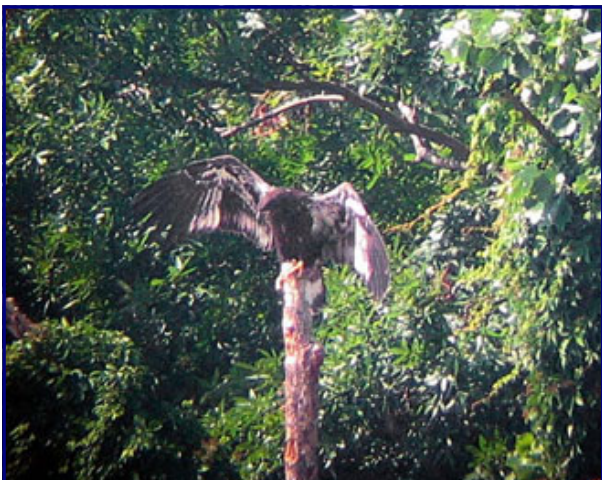
In residential real estate parlance the acronym "NORC" stands for a "naturally occurring retirement community", as is evident in Friendship Heights, MD. It is also applicable to our club, according to Tryon Well's demographic analysis of the club's membership, as published in last month's *Islander*. Furthermore, Tryon's similar study of the current applicant pool indicates basically no change in this situation during the next decade at a minimum. These stark facts have serious implications for membership support of the club's assets requiring voluntary physical labor such as the semi-annual workfests and caretaker relief duty; the former is clear from recent Workfest participation numbers while the latter is evident from the almost total lack of volunteer caretakers from mid-June through July, presaging a problematic summer when the island is at its busiest.

What follows is a not-so-modest proposal to help alleviate this situation, namely to devise a system of incentives whereby applicants most eager to become members can move up by participating in the two above-mentioned activities plus others not demanding physical labor for those applicants unable to expend such effort. Yes, this is discriminatory in the sense that those responding positively to these opportunities will move ahead of those unwilling to contribute to the club's welfare while applicants. By the same token, it stands to reason that applicants failing to respond to these incentives as applicants are probably unlikely to be active supporters of the club once they become members.

I realize that this suggestion may seem harsh and unfair to some members and applicants, but from its founding the club has depended on membership support beyond the payment of dues. For some time in recent years this has been expanded to include applicants but without any demonstrable system of positive incentives to encourage more than a relatively few applicants to help out on a sustained basis. I also believe that something along the lines proposed above will over time bring into the club the type of members we both want and need to help overcome the difficulties now facing us that will only increase in severity without some such an overhaul in procedures as outlined above.

-- Bill Kugler

Eagles in the Air



Young eagle trying its wings just before fledging.
June 19th photo by David Winer

On June 19, the two eagle youngsters in the nest across the river took to the air. Just before our group of birders arrived, another birder had seen both eaglets on the nest. We saw only one, and it was very busy flapping about the nest and a nearby perch. Seemingly this was to get up nerve to take off, because at about 10:00 a.m. there were no youngsters in sight. Both adults were sitting quietly on a branch 50 yards or so downstream. Then we spotted a fledgling circling around the nest area before it flew into the trees nearby. A little later, one of them was back at the nest, settling down to take a nap. One of the adults did some aerial work too.

Warbler nest behind the tool shed was empty. A couple of us almost stepped on a huge black snake near the clubhouse, which reinforced my theory that the babies were eaten by a snake (I had seen another, smaller, black snake a few days before in the vicinity of the nest, when the parents were bringing caterpillars.)

The day was a refreshing break from the heat wave that had gripped the region, and quite a few other Islanders came down that morning. They shared our views and enthusiasm about the eagles.

There were other interesting bird sightings, but the real show was the eagles. Sadly, a Prothonotary

— David Winer

A Star Turn

For Star Mitchell, Downriver Race Chairman---THANKS from all of us who went flying down the river in the 49th Annual Potomac Downriver Race this past May. Star, you did an extraordinary job organizing the event and making sure that there was a marvelous reception for the wet and weary canoeists and kayakers at Sycamore Island. Your selection of the brilliant orange T-shirt was perfect!



It was a great day for running the river with rapids just challenging enough to make for a memorable run. I had chosen John Thomson's one man, specially designed Kevlar canoe for the race. My partner was Mike Stoller, an extremely able canoeist, who stroked me through the fun-filled, blast of a race. Because of the extremely cramped space in the bow, which was my vantage point, the run from the falls to the Club provided a physical experience that next year I hope to avoid when Mike and I will return to using John's big and ancient Grumman canoe.

Again, thanks Star—the price was right and the run was great.

-- Larry Heilman

In Touch With Joe...

You should all be pleased to hear that the Sycamore trail has been much improved. Matt Berres from the Potomac Conservancy, along with Eagle Scout troop 1800 and me, braved the early rain and worked hard all day fixing the trail. With materials donated by the National Park Service and Sycamore Island, we put in new timbers and moved many wheelbarrows of new dirt. I'm very happy with the new trail; it should make my life a little easier. One problem: We'll have to relearn our steps now so we can walk it in the dark.



Photo by David Winer

I had a really great group of sixth-graders here. I led them on a nature hike around the island and we were very lucky to see a wide variety of wildlife. I was amazed at how much the kids already knew about natural history and it was fun for me to lead such an enthusiastic and interested group. Later that day we found a bee's nest under the club canoes.

Luckily I was the only one stung as I urged the children to "RUN"! I've since exterminated the nasty buggers from their nest. Poor bees. I found the nest of the prothonotary warblers that I've been seeing and hearing. This beautiful songbird has built a nest inside a metal tube on an old basketball rim, and it's only three feet off the ground! [Alas, Dave Winer (page four) believes the warblers may have succumbed to "nature red in tooth and claw".]

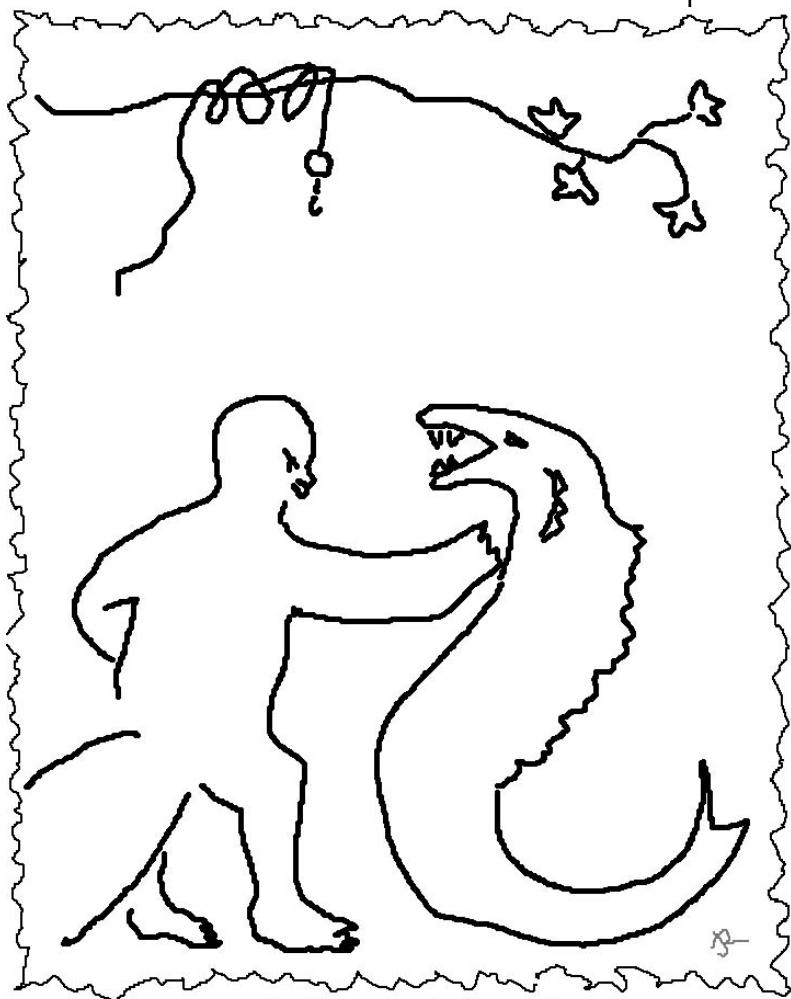
We also had a large troop of girl scouts down here one day. I think they, and their parents, had a great time and they earned their canoeing badges too!

One morning I saw David and George on the towpath. They were fly fishing for carp using (not real cicadas but) cicada flies. When I mentioned that I saw the carp eating the mulberries George told me that they have imitation mulberry flies as well. I saw a goose eat a cicada. I thought they were strict vegetarians but I guess they don't mind a little protein snack once in a while. There's one goose who has perfected it's own grazing technique. It will swim in place and eat the cicadas and mulberries that float by.

I met the new owners of the Sycamore store; they seem like they are going to be good neighbors. You might see the girls and me working in the yard over there, they've agreed to let us cut their grass. [Sherry Pettie will have more details on the new owners and their plans for the Sycamore Store in the August issue.]

CAMP OUT ON THE ISLAND!!!

Come one come all, members and waitlisters alike join us for a super night of camping and island fun on July 31st starting at about 4:00. The Malusky's are bringing the burgers and the breakfast so just bring a side dish and your sleeping bag and be ready for great time! Don't miss out on the festivities, RSVP by calling either Joe Hage at 229-4921 or Shelley Malusky at 301-871-1707. Please don't forget to call; we need to know how much food to bring!



Ruppert

*—Created by
Johnna Robinson*

*Ruppert and the Snakehead:
Shall we fight?*

"15 Minutes of Fame?"

Morris Cobern, a member and the *Islander's* printer, sent a note to report that "I was running ferry Saturday when Joe had friends over to make a four minute short for a class. (It took hours.)". One of the crew was setting up on the float before the rain, and one was inside during the actual take with Joe playing and singing a self-written song.

The Editor, enterprising fellow that he is, asked Joe for more details: "Not much to report on the filming. A friend of mine is taking a video photography course from the public access channel and chose me as his subject for a four-minute film assignment. The station liked the idea and may do a longer piece later. Who knows, I may be on TV!"



Photo by Morris Cobern

Saturday Relief Caretakers June—July

July 3, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Toby and Janet Smith	703-553-7732
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Ljubisa and Catherine Vitkovic	301-652-3315
July 10, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Robert and Katalin Hardi	301-320-5381
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Toby and Janet Smith	703-553-7732
July 17, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Faith Earll and Holly Welch	202-541-0313
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Whitney Pinger and Roger Pollak	202-686-5443
July 24, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Silvija Strikis and Miguel Browne	703-748-4671
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Carole Trippe and Kit Bigler	301-469-1515
July 31, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Abigail Wiebenson	202-332-6857
	3:00 p.m. - dark	George and Marcia Loeb	301-652-4229
August 7, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
August 14, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
August 21, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
August 28, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	

*** Caretaker Volunteers ***

To volunteer for Saturday relief caretaking, call Candy Means: 301-320-5270.
Volunteers from the waiting list are encouraged. It's a great way to spend time on the Island!

Large Parties

John Noble reports that “Scott Newman has rescheduled his party to Wednesday, July 7. He will host 15 attendees from 9:30 to 3:00. I have also received calls reflecting intentions to use the island on Monday and Tuesday, July 5 and 6.”

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, John Noble
e-mail: jnoble@shs.net, phone: 240- 747-4810, fax: 301-320-4216



FIRST-CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
BETHESDA, MD 20817
PERMIT NO. 1172

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818
ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL

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

FIRST CLASS MAIL

July 2004

- Jinny Jones
- The Island Ices the Ice
- Is the Island a NORC?
- Eagles Rising
- Solstice in July



The Bell Tolls

Photo by David Winer