



Beached.

Photo by David Winer

The Sycamore Islander

October 2004

Volume 83 No. 10

President's Message

We had a very interesting visitor at this last meeting. Dean Brenneman -- an architect who specializes in restoring and renovating historic buildings and who has very extensive experience in historic preservation in the County -- braved the stormy weather to come to our meeting. He and his partner, Peter Pagenstecher, have purchased the Sycamore Store and hope to use it as an office for their practice. They have a challenge before them, to get variances from the County's zoning code changed to allow them to renovate the store as an office. Like our clubhouse, it is a non-complying structure in an area zoned for residences. While it was operating as a store, it was zoned for business; but that has lapsed. It was also surprising to hear that what I always thought was parking for the store is actually part of MacArthur Boulevard and Wallhonding Road. Sherrie Pettie wrote an excellent article about their plans for the store for the August *Islander*. They also have a website at www.sycamorestore.com. Dean generously offered to advise us if we have questions as we go forward with our Clubhouse project.

Folks who attended the meeting had an opportunity to see an example of each of the concepts for the new caretaker quarters that Johnna Robinson described last month. The intent of the examples was to help narrow the focus of the direction that the building committee should follow. The essential question was whether to build an addition or to modify the interior of the existing structure to achieve our goals; i.e., enlarge the footprint or keep it the same, a critical issue for any construction in a floodplain. The addition would extend alongside the club kitchen, beyond the upriver end of the clubhouse and would be raised on stilts to the second level. It would have been very difficult to get a building permit to do this, because of our location in a floodplain and because the clubhouse is a non-complying structure. In response to a question, Dean Brenneman labeled building beyond the footprint in a floodplain a "non-starter."

There were two concepts to building within the clubhouse. One would convert the club kitchen to the caretaker's kitchen and bath, but the bedrooms would remain on the lower level. A new club kitchen would be built, possibly where the ladies room now is. This would keep the expensive appliances above the flood waters, but would still necessitate moving the caretaker's personal belongings.

October Meeting

Wednesday, October 13 @ 8 p.m.

[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 the November issue is receipt at the Editor's address by Tuesday, Oct. 26th. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

The second concept also would convert the club kitchen to the caretaker's kitchen and bath, and the ladies' locker room would become a bedroom. The ladies' room would become the club kitchen. The downstairs would be extensively renovated as well, with the men's room becoming a screened-in porch, which should get more sunlight than the present one. The area where the caretaker's bathroom and bedroom are now would become the new men's and ladies' rooms.

The discussion actually centered more around the bureaucratic difficulties that would be faced if we were to pursue the first option. A member who lives in Glen Echo told that it took eight months to obtain a variance in order to repair cement steps that had become a hazard. Another suggested that our club had mostly avoided county oversight up until now, and that we should choose the option that would continue to require the least interference from county officials. There was a near-unanimous vote that the building committee should pursue a design that would keep the current exterior of the building as it is; i.e., build within the existing footprint.

The building committee has been re-energized by this direction. It will be meeting soon to actively begin a design that we can all enjoy and that will provide the caretaker, his children, and his belongings a little more security than they have now. [See the note from the Building Committee Chair, Jack Sanders, page five in this issue.]

— Ann Marie Cunningham

Minutes of the September 8th, 2004 Membership Meeting

Present: Jeff Komarow, Jim Drew, Alan Gelb, John Noble, Norman Metzger, Ann Marie Cunningham, Leah Hertz, John Matthews, Dave Winer, Jane Winer, Jack Sanders and Johnna Robinson.

Ann Marie Cunningham introduced a guest, Dean Brenneman, an architect who, with his partner, Peter Pagenstecher, has recently purchased the Sycamore Store. They have researched the history of the building, and Mr. Brenneman reminded us that it originally serviced the terminus of the Walhonding Road trolley line. They are applying for zoning to restore the building and turn it into an architects' office. They will use the counter as a receptionist's desk. He believes the building may have been built before 1921 but has not gotten any definite proof. Some of the members expressed a desire to keep the historic landmark, since we think the Store may be named after the Island. [See Sherry Pettie's article on the Store in the August issue.]

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 9:00 pm by the President, Ann Marie. There were no minutes to approve. John Noble, the large-party chairman, brought up the request by the Maluskys (George II) for a large party on the 20th of September. It was approved unanimously. Usually, large parties are allowed only on odd days. The Treasurer, Alan Gelb, reported that the money situation is normal.

Communications: Ann Marie reported on a meeting that was held with Mr. Martin Klauber, a Montgomery County ombudsman for zoning issues. A representative from Howard Denis' office was there. [Mr Denis is a member of the Montgomery County Council.] At the meeting we were told that it will be necessary to submit a plan and then, if it is rejected, to try for variances until we work out an acceptable plan. Today she received a call from Denis' representative who told her that we would not be allowed to build outside of the current building footprint because of flood plain restrictions. Ann Marie distributed copies of draft plans for two versions 'inside the footprint' and one version 'outside the footprint'. John Noble moved that "We will eliminate from consideration any plan to build outside the current 'footprint'." The motion passed with one nay vote. Johnna Robinson, on the building financing committee, said that it would be optimal if a plan could be agreed on before the November meeting in order to have time to propose financing options for/or before the December meeting. The specific financing options will have to be approved by the membership. (It is assumed that the building committee can present the one best plan to the membership.) Jack Sanders, the building committee chairman, reported that they will meet soon to zero in on a specific plan for the remodeling.

In a comment about the recent "Mud Fest", everyone was reported to have had a fine time. Jane Winer had brought down a lovely dessert, so the meeting was adjourned before 10 p.m.

— Johnna Robinson, Acting Recording Secretary

Minutes of the August 11, 2004 Membership Meeting

The meeting was held at the Island.

Present: John Noble, Faith Earll, Gerry Barton, Tryon Wells, Jim Drew, Ann Marie Cunningham, Johnna Robinson, Peggy Thomson, Tove Elfstrom, and Peter Winkler

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 8:20 p.m. by President Ann Marie Cunningham.

Minutes: The minutes of the June meeting as published in the *Islander* were approved. There was no quorum at the July meeting, so that meeting, and the minutes taken of it, were unofficial.

Communications: President Ann Marie Cunningham had no communications to report.

Large Party Report: Large Party Supervisor John Noble reported that Abigail Wiebensohn had asked permission to host a large party for the Lowell School on September 23. The request was approved. John also reported that there were no requests for large parties in August, and no other requests so far for September.

Swimming Report: Swimming Supervisor Tove Elfstrom reported that the swim float could use a paint job but that it is otherwise okay. Tove and Tryon Wells reported that we will probably need a new canoe float soon.

Entertainment Report: Gerry Barton reported on the delayed solstice party, which became a blue moon party. Gerry said that attendance was light but that everyone had a good time.

The fishing derby will be held August 21. The annual regatta will be held September 6. The regatta is open to all members and those on the waiting list.

Captain's Report: Captain Tryon Wells reported that he was waiting for a clear day to retrieve the swimming float anchor. Tryon also reported on the debate surrounding what to do with the large tree that fell on the Island last year. Some members want to cut it up and get rid of it, while others want to leave it to grow. In discussion, it was pointed out that the tree could be a hazard to the canoe shed in the event of another flood. A motion was made to remove the tree, and it carried. Ann Marie will retain

John Stapko to cut up the tree.

Building Committee: Gerry Barton reported on the committee meeting two weeks ago. Cindy Bertaut, John Matthews, Ann Marie, and Gerry met with officials of Montgomery County who must approve, inter alia, zoning, flood, electrical, sanitation, and fire plans for new building. Ann Marie said it was a depressing meeting. Apparently, we will be unable to build outside the footprint of the current building, but perhaps we can cover over the current stairway area (but not to add living space). The Committee will meet soon with the Montgomery County People's Counsel, Martin Klauber, who has indicated a willingness to help us.

Tove raised the question of whether we should trim the larger trees currently growing up around the clubhouse. Tryon spoke in favor of the suggestion. Both Tove and Tryon expressed the need that we preserve and protect our building. Among other reasons, if the building is more than 50 percent destroyed we cannot legally rebuild it. Tryon also stated that the electrical wiring is insufficient and needs work.

Johnna Robinson asked if Tryon could arrange for the outside shower to be fixed. Tryon said that he would do so. Johnna also said that, in response to inquiries from members, she had drafted a statement about our building goals and the ongoing efforts of the building committee. Ann Marie will review it and it will then be published in *The Islander*.

Canoe Report: Canoe Supervisor Jim Drew reported that Ann Satterthwaite has a canoe rack that has not been used for some time. He will continue to try to contact her. Jim also reported that Lee Adams has donated a canoe to the Island, a square stern Coleman. Jim said it is good for families, fishing, etc. Finally, Jim reported that we have canoe rack openings.

Someone asked whether individual canoes could be locked to their racks in the shed. Jim said "generally no," although exceptions may be granted with an understanding that the caretaker may have to cut the lock in an emergency situation.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m. Refreshments were graciously provided by David and Sea Langston Sitomer, our relief caretakers during Joe Hage's vacation.

— Peter Winkler, Recording Secretary

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

Selections from the October 1929 *Sycamore Islander*

It seems as though the Editor returned from his summer vacation because the Oct. 1929 *Islander* ran a full five pages. It opened with:

“The Hallowe’en Party Will Be Held Saturday Evening”
“...Chairman Whipple and his well-trained committee are working to make this party the best one yet from every viewpoint,--music, decorations, noisemakers and victuals.”

The Editor ends with:

“Don’t forget to wear a costume and don’t be abashed if we wear an evening suit,--we will still be the friend of the peepul[sic]. Come to Monday’s Meeting and Help Us to Decide What Kind of a New Club-Room to Construct”

The Editor re-caps the building options and ends with this note:

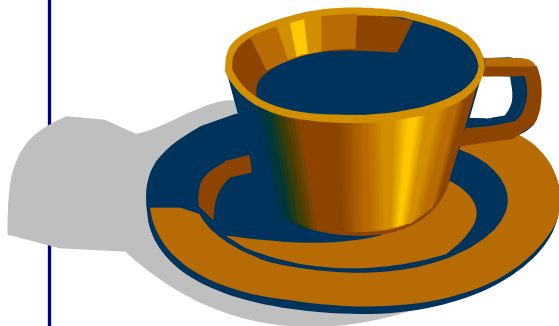
“...The matter cannot be possibly be settled to everyone’s satisfaction in every detail, much as we would like to see that result. So you and I might just as well make up our minds now that we will be willing to abide by the result of the majority’s vote and will be willing to be just as happy in the clubroom that is to be as we have been in the one we have had these past thirty or forty years.”

In a few random notes...

“Washington Canoe Club Takes Horseshoe Matches
Away from Island Experts”

“...The last Sunday in September was a sad one for Sycamore’s fame as a center for horseshoe pitching, a team from W.C.C. taking every match from our Island graybeards. However, we have an excellent alibi,--all our experts were up the river shooting rapids and if they had been at the Island and if they had known anything about pitching horseshoes we might have come in at second place in the dual meet.”

And...



“The Collins family has returned from Europe since you last ran up the street to meet the postman and get your copy of the *Islander*. The Collins’ told our ship reporters who met them at the ferry that they did not have a decent cup of coffee while in Europe and that the war is over.”

It is of interest that the Collins family and our Editor were referring here to World War I. These days it’s quite easy to get a good cup of coffee in Europe.



Ruppert

*—Created by
Johnna Robinson*

*Ruppert gnaws Sycamore personages,
Tove makes candlesticks.*

From the Building Committee...

At its regular meeting of the club on Wednesday, September 8, a vote was taken on the various building options that have been before us. A motion was made to consider only those options that involve building within the current footprint or walls. The motion passed, with one vote in opposition. A quorum was present. This represents the will of the club, as expressed in a vote at a regularly scheduled meeting -- on a topic that has been discussed for more months than any I can remember in my 20 years with the club.

Therefore our committee is charged with coming up with recommendation(s) for the further consideration of the club, except that we no longer will be considering the Wiebenson plan or any variation on that theme that involves new construction outside the current structure. Ann Marie and I will work up a proposed schedule of meetings for the committee so we can move along and report on our progress to all members of the club.

I know all of us look forward to making some real headway on this much-needed construction.

— Jack Sanders, Chair

The Canoe Consultant

A Pocket History Of The Canoe – Part I

“Canoe” simply means “boat” in Arawak, the language of a Caribbean tribe that became extinct within 50 years after being made known to the Western world by Christopher Columbus. The first Spanish historians called these craft “canao”, their reference being to large dugout boats fashioned from massive tree trunks. As North America came to be explored by Europeans, the term applied to almost all native watercraft was “canot” in French, then later our word “canoe” in English (back to the original Arawak).

Materials included tree trunks, as well as bark from such species as elm and birch. Bark of the paper birch was particularly suitable for small boat building since it is one of the only barks whose grain is not parallel to tree growth, making it suitable for easy removal, while maintaining strength after softening and molding into a hull. Early writers told of how the birchbark canoe, common among the Huron, was the envy of all other tribes.

One tribe that quickly caught on happened to be the French explorers led by Samuel de Champlain. In 1603, on his initial voyage to the New World, he sailed up the St. Lawrence River as far as present-day Montreal where he was stopped cold by the Lachine Rapids. Champlain quickly concluded that his longboats were useless to negotiate this water (try rowing down a rapid with your back to the action) and adopted the native craft.

This was a significant development since it contributed to the cooperative attitude the French had toward native peoples, as opposed to the English further south where disposition from land was a key feature of colonization. The Indians responded by showing their white friends from France canoe trails into the vast, unexploited interior. By 1750, the French had explored the Great Lakes and all of the Mississippi, while Englishmen were still bottled up by the Alleghenies - in a mere corner of the continent. Frenchmen gave their Indian guides deserved credit for paddling and portaging skills, rather than denigrating them as worthless know-nothings.

Thus, Canada and the northern U.S. were explored by canoe; religion was spread by priests traveling in canoes; and the first large-scale industry, the fur trade, was dependent on these supposedly frail craft. Fur traders were too busy (or exhausted) to write much about their early travels, but not so the Jesuit priests. Initially referring to canoe travel as “a mortification of the flesh”, the clergy soon adapted. By 1640 Father Le Jeune had set down “The Ten Commandments Of Canoe Travel”, some of which included:

Never make the Savages wait for you in embarking,
Try to eat their salmagundi (stew) in the way they prepare it, although it may be dirty,
half-cooked, and very tasteless,
Tuck up your gowns so they will not get wet,
It is well not to ask too many questions – silence is good equipment, and
Do not undertake anything, like paddling, unless you intend to continue it.

It is no exaggeration to say that the canoe made a profound contribution to the early development of Canada and much of this country.

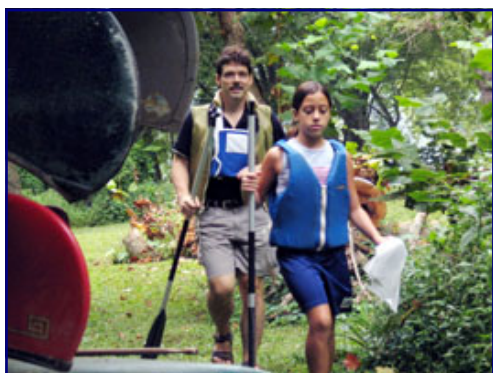
THE MUDFEST

By Kaylen Hage

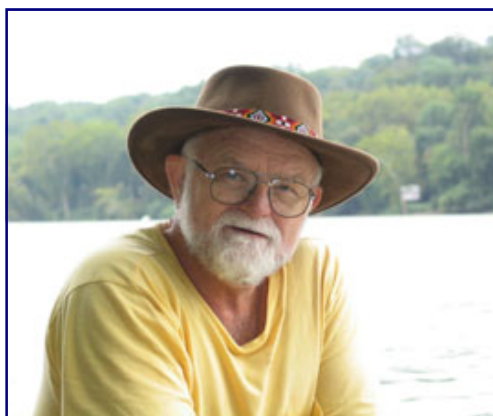


Oh, what a day it was when the Mudfest occurred. It started out slow with a few egg tosses. Not many people were there at the time, but we started the activities anyway. Unfortunately for the viewer, an egg didn't crack on anyone. Though a couple did fall on the ground, hitting several shoes. Despite the cloudy weather, we played water balloon toss. Icy water splashed innocent bystanders and balloon handlers. The winners for this activity were Kelsey Hage and Michael Kelly. They surpassed the other players with flying colors!

Now we are coming to my favorite part, and probably everyone else's: The Treasure Hunt. This involved canoeing, direction-following skills, and a trained eye. This year was especially fun because not only did you enjoy yourself, but you also had the opportunity to learn more about the island. My favorite part of this activity was when the directions told you to slime your team leader with mud. If you kept reading you would realize that this was all just a big joke and you didn't really have to do it!!!! Can you believe it?? The proud winners of this game were Michael Kelly, Joe Hage, Kelsey Hage, and Kaylen Hage. No prize, just fun!!



After this we all enjoyed a luxurious afternoon of skits, Ledo's Pizza, and Mud!!?? Mud is a scrumptious combination of thick Chocolate Pudding, infested with long, gooey gummy-worms. We all literally "dug" in. (lol)*



Photos by David Winer and Joe Hage

*"laughing out loud" in e-mail speak, for us clueless.

In Touch With Joe...

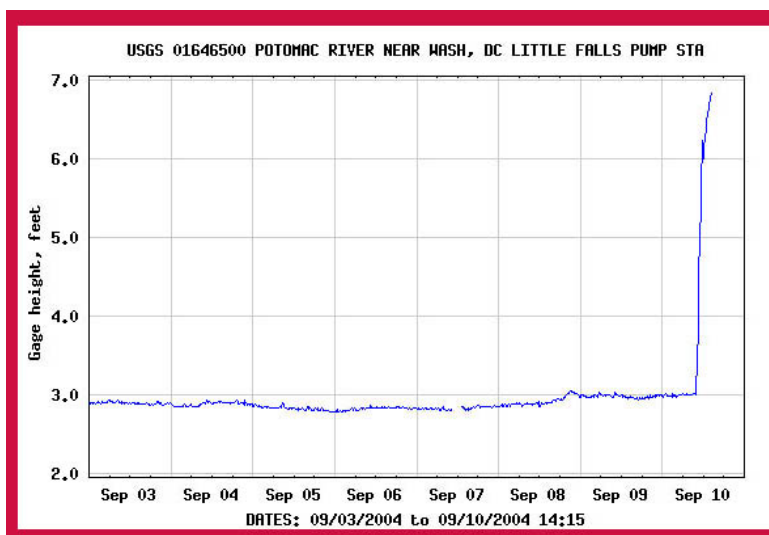
This past month has been full of variety. It started with superb swimming and fishing conditions and it was great to have the river warm and clear for such a long stretch. Two hurricanes later the river has turned big, brown and ugly. The cool weather has hit too and now it's time to break out the gloves and brace for our third winter out here on the Island. Thankfully, the hurricane season seems to be winding down. I feel so fortunate that we suffered only some minor flooding during this recent wrath of storms. It seems like those perfect days of summer and swimming came to an abrupt end and the signs of fall are creeping in with the cooler weather.

The flooding river can be a hassle but it can also be very exciting at the same time. It may be some kind of primal instinct, but my heart begins to race at the thought of a rapidly changing environment. (To others the rising water is a windfall. Sunday, I watched a sharp-shinned hawk snatch up toads and insects along the water's edge as they were forced out of their once-dry hideouts.) To me the news of an eminent flood is similar to the anticipation of the coming winter. Although I may be filled with a passing dread and in my weaker moments might wish to flee the Island completely, there is always something beautiful and rare that reminds me of why I stay and why I love living here so much.

Living on the Island has made me so much more aware of the passing seasons as well, not only because of the greater consequences of the colder weather, but also because of a growing closeness to the rhythms of nature. I love that I now notice the changing position of the sun when it breaks over the trees and shines in my window or that I can predict the arrival of the wintering birds. I'm learning so much, but the more I learn the more mysterious everything becomes. Like how did the squirrels learn that they could leap from the high branches of a sycamore tree that's growing on the mainland, land safely in the river, and swim to the Island? And why would they go through the trouble? Why do I see raccoon prints everywhere on the Island; yet I've seen the coon itself only once? Why are most of the jewelweed flowers on the Island yellow and the ones along the canal orange? And why do the Owls make so much noise at night? It may take many winters on the Island to understand some of these things, but thankfully the Island is a very patient teacher.

Reminder, if the gauge at Little Falls reads above five feet the ferry will not be operating, thanks. [Read the gauge at http://waterdata.usgs.gov/md/nwis/uv/?site_no=01646500. For more ways to read the river see Gerry Barton's piece next page]

Whoa! I was down at the ferry at 10:00 this morning and took some pictures. I should have stayed around a little while for the show, because, according to the graph, a huge wave of flood water came down right after I left. — E-mail from David Winer. Photos by David Winer and Joe Hage.



Before and After.



River Level Forecasts from NOAA

Islanders need information about current river conditions and the forecasts for future conditions. The Island web pages provide access to the U. S. Geological Survey graphs that show past and current river stages for river stations including Little Falls. The National Weather Service of NOAA (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and my former employer) provides excellent web information for our Potomac River. You can find current information, forecasts, and flood warnings.

Start from www.nws.noaa.gov

Click on the RIVERS box above the map.

This puts you on http://www.nws.noaa.gov/rivers_tab.html

Using the new map position pointer click on the link for the Baltimore/Washington DC AHPS area to get to the Mid Atlantic RFC (River Forecast Center) page:

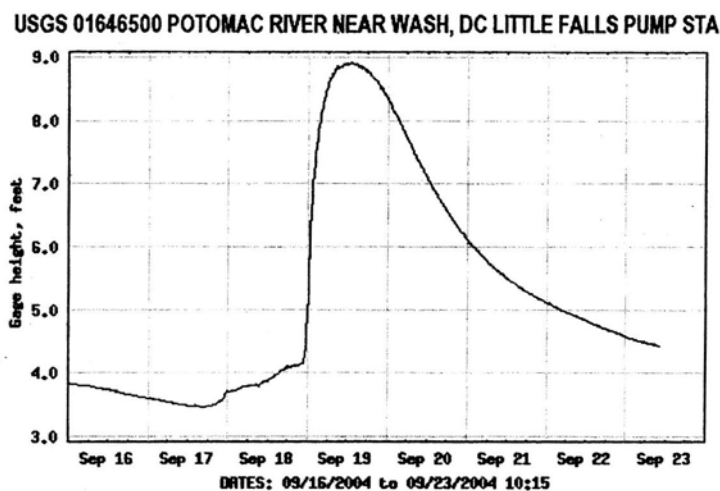
<http://ahps.erh.noaa.gov/cgi-bin/ahps.cgi?lwx>

Click on Little Falls to get <http://ahps.erh.noaa.gov/cgi-bin/ahps.cgi?lwx&brkm2>

This shows the current river height at the observing stations and color codes them for Flood, Low Flow, etc. To obtain plots for other individual stations click on the station buttons to the right of the page or the name at the bottom of the page.

At the top left margin of the page there are links to forecasts. Click on River Forecasts to get to <http://www.erh.noaa.gov/er/marfc/Forecasts/>

— Gerry Barton



Ivan's impact: eight days after the wall of water depicted on the previous page the river rose again from 4 to 9 feet in a few hours and took four days to return to normal.

GROWING NATIVE

During this October's fourth annual *Growing Native*, you can help to restore native forests throughout the Potomac River region...one acorn at a time. Join thousands of other volunteers who will collect native tree seeds, such as acorns and walnuts, which will be donated to state nurseries and grown into seedlings to plant along streams and rivers.

Native hardwood trees are critical to the health of our waters because they filter out polluted run-off and prevent erosion. They also cleanse the air and provide wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities that will last far into the future.

Are you the leader of a community organization? Organize a collection site for your group. A schoolteacher? Engage your students in this fun and educational hands-on project. A parent? Spend time with your children by collecting seeds in your backyard and dropping them off at one of many public drop-off sites across the region. A student? Earn community service hours for school while helping the environment.

The fun doesn't end this fall. After "getting nuts for clean water," you'll have the chance to 'get your hands dirty for clean water' by taking part in *Growing Native* tree plantings next Spring.

Growing Native is coordinated by the Potomac Conservancy, on behalf of the Potomac Watershed Partnership. To register a public collection site or for more information, visit www.growingnative.org.

— Jen Schill
301.608.1188, x208
schill@potomac.org



Scenes from last year's *Growing Native*



Photos courtesy of Jen Schill,
Potomac Conservancy

Saturday Relief Caretakers October

October 2, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	David and Jane Winer	301-229-8963
	2:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
October 9, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	2:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
October 16, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Faith Earll and Holly Welch	202-541-0313
October 23, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	2:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
October 30, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	Bill Richardson	703-892-6944
	2:00 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

Caroline Gelb will host 35 members of the Maryland Environmental Law Society on Sunday, October 17 between 11 a.m. and 7 p.m

**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**

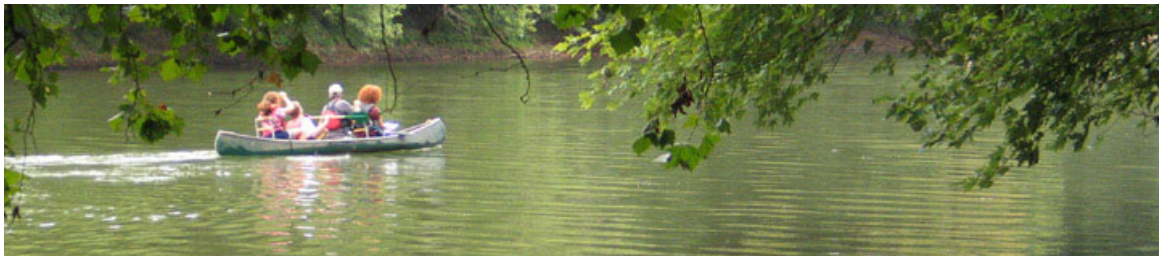


Photo by David Winer



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FIRST CLASS MAIL

October 2004

- Decent Coffee in Europe
- Progress on Building Plans
- Advising Clergy on Canoe Travel
- Growing Native 2004
- Whoa!
- The 2004 Mudfest aka Regatta



A Tree Grows on the Potomac
Photo by David Winer