



Aerial Sycamore

Provided by Tryon Wells

The Sycamore Islander

March 2006

Volume 85 No. 3

President's Letter

I hope that you will take the time to read this month's rather long letter because it may be the most important one that I will write about financial issues during my term. The Club is on the cusp of some significant changes related to the projected renovation of the Clubhouse and the Caretaker's Quarters. Now is the time for everyone – Regular Members, Senior Members and, especially, the Waiting List – to voice their opinions and provide helpful input

The sense of the Club's officers and the members who attended the February meeting is that the time has come for the Club to make a binding decision whether to approve the project, and, if we are going forward, to complete the construction this summer. We laid out an ambitious (even heroic) timeline, which would lead to a vote by the membership at the April meeting on whether to approve the final plans and specifications, a construction budget based on contractor bids, and a financing plan. My remarks this month go to the issue of how to finance the project.

Our timeline has the Club receiving bids from contractors towards the end of March. Until we have hard numbers, the finance committee is working on a plan that could finance as much as \$200,000 for the project. Raising this amount of money will impact members, the waiting list and, possibly, the use of the Island. The committee will be looking for the reactions and comments of members and the waiting list to the concepts that are under consideration. Here are some of the concepts the committee is looking at.

Use a portion of the Club's Reserves. The committee believes that the Club could use about half of our reserve to finance the project. This drawdown (\$30,000-35,000) would be restored over three years through an annual dues increase in the \$50 range.

Offer Prepaid Access Certificates ("PACS") To Members, the Waiting List and, if necessary, to people interested in joining the Club outside the Waiting List. The concept is that members would be asked to pay a fixed amount (\$5,000) upfront in place of dues for ten years. By prepaying dues, the member would not be subject to any increase in

The Sycamore Islander is a monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. 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 email attachments to normanmetzger@verizon.net. Telephone: 202/544-6027 or 202/445-5436 (cell).

The deadline for the April issue is Wednesday, March 29.

annual dues or assessments in lieu of dues, including dues increases or assessments related to the construction. Members who prepay would receive a Prepaid Access Certificate, which, if a member left the Club during the ten years, could be transferred as a gift or for value to a current applicant or to someone outside the Club. A transfer to a person not on the waiting list would have to be approved by the Club. If the Club approved the transfer, the new PACS holder would be placed at the bottom of the waiting list. Buying PACS is a way for members to help finance the construction voluntarily. But this is not charity. PACS should be attractive to members because the PACS holders would not be subject to dues increases and could transfer their PACS to others if they left the Club. Dues have risen modestly in the past, but the future likely will be different. As I mentioned earlier, rebuilding the Club's reserves would raise the dues by \$50 per year for three years.

If the Club does not get a sufficient response from members, then PACS would next be offered to the waiting list. The PACS holder from the waiting list would have full access to the Island on the same terms as members for ten years and, like a member, could transfer their PACS to outsiders subject to Club approval. There would be no dues increase for the remaining balance of the ten years when the PACS holder became a member. Buying a PACS would not change the PACS holder's place on the waiting list. This is a great opportunity for the waiting list to get full access to the Island in return for helping to finance the construction.

Finally, if the response from members and the waiting list is not sufficient, the Club would offer PACS to the community. New PACS holders would have full access to the Island and would be placed at the bottom of the waiting list. Their application for a PACS would have to be approved by the Club. Their PACS would be transferable on the same terms as PACS held by members and the waiting list.

I have commented previously about the aging of the membership and the importance of maintaining the vitality of the Club. Offering PACS to the community benefits the Club by reducing the cost burden of the construction on members and providing an infusion of new talent and enthusiasm from the community.

The finance committee would like to raise at least \$60,000 through the sale of PACS. If enough members committed to PACS (on the order of 30), it would be possible to avoid a special building fund assessment. Note that implementing the PACS concept will result in a dues increase for other members. Members who commit to PACS are earmarking their dues to the project instead of to cost of running the Club; i.e., the "loss" of the PACS holders' dues will necessitate a dues increase.

Special Building Fund Assessment. This would be a one-time, lump-sum assessment of \$400 to \$500 on regular members. Senior members would be assessed at 50%, but would be asked to make a full payment if possible. The building fund assessment would be fully due up front, except in special circumstances. The assessment would become the initiation fee for new members so that the entire burden of the project does not fall on today's members. A \$400 assessment would raise approximately \$72,000; a \$500 assessment \$90,000.

If carried out successfully, the combination of using a part of the Club's reserves, PACS, and a one-time assessment should raise the necessary funds. There likely will be a lag in bringing in the revenue from PACS and the building fund assessment that will require some kind of interim financing.

The finance committee hopefully will be in a position to provide a more detailed (and more coherent) presentation on financing at the March meeting. However, between now and the meeting, we want to hear from all interested members and applicants regarding financing. We want to know how the members and waiting list feel about the PACS concept. Would you be willing to buy a PACS? Do you know of people in the community who are interested in joining the Club and are financially able to buy a PACS? Is anyone interested in making a donation in return for naming rights to the Clubhouse or other rooms or structures on the Island?

My email address is jkomarow@covad.net. My cell phone number is 202-492-2003.

See you on the Island at the March meeting.

— Jeff Komarow

Minutes of the 8 February 2006 Meeting

Carl Linden kindly hosted the February meeting, where the snacks and beverages were plentiful and tasty. President Jeff Komarow called the group to order at 8:05 p.m.

Present: Gerald Barton, Charlotte Brewer, Richard Dianich, Jim Drew, Faith Earll, Larry Heilman, Jeff Komarow, John Lentz, Carl Linden, John Matthews, Norman Metzger, Sherry Pettie, Johnna Robinson, Tryon Wells, David Winer, Jane Winer.

Minutes: Gerry Barton offered one correction to the December minutes: He was present. With that addition, both the December and January minutes were adopted.

Financial report: Jeff has requested that Alan Gelb and Lisa Klieforth produce a financial report for publication in the March *Islander*, consisting of a balance sheet and income statement. [see next page]

Membership: There are several vacancies and selection of new members will be discussed at the March meeting.

Captain's report: Two important items on the Captain's agenda are replacing the canoe float and repair or replacement of the ferry. Since Tove Elfstrom and Dave Winer have both expressed interest in the float, the Captain will encourage them to get together and develop a plan before the March club meeting.

As for the ferry, the Captain has gotten estimates of \$3,000-\$10,000 to buy a new one. On hearing these prices, the members' attention immediately turned to a discussion of how and where to get the ferry out of the water so that an aluminum welder's truck can get close enough to make a repair. But first a canal-side landing has to be designed and built that will not allow ramming of the pontoons. All agreed that it's not an option to leave things as they are.

Tryon also reported that John Matthews and Gerry Barton continue to be concerned about the erosion of the towpath. There was discussion about whether Carl Linden could avail upon his contacts at the National Park Service, and. Carl agreed to try for a meeting with the chief of maintenance.

Swimming: Jeff asked that the swimming guidelines be published in the *Islander* in June and July, and Larry Heilman asked for a copy of the guidelines to include in the new member orientation.

Phone tree: Jim Drew and Gerry Barton are putting together a group of 25-30 people to make calls to get out more workers for Workfests. Jim suggested putting a request for phone volunteers in the next *Islander*. [see page seven]

Caretaker's quarters: There was a lively discussion about the building committee's progress, the architectural plans, a phased approach to construction, the potential cost to the club, and ideas on financing the project. The members present agreed that the building and finance committees needed to accelerate their work to be in a position to to get the job done this summer. The goal is for the building committee to complete the architectural plans and specification in early March, apply for a building permit from the county and obtain bids on the project so that a cost estimate can be presented at the April meeting. In parallel, the goal for the finance committee is to have the outline of a financing plan ready for discussion at the March meeting and to submit the financing plan to the membership for approval at the April meeting along with a request for approval of a construction budget and authorization to go forward with construction. If the Club approves the project at the April meeting, the goal is to have financing in place and a construction contract signed in mid-May. It was agreed that this is an aggressive schedule.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

--Sherry Pettie, Recording Secretary

Financial Report for 2005

In 2005, the total income of the Club was \$67,107 and total spending was \$66,332, resulting in a net surplus of \$775. We ended 2005 with a total of \$72,810 in the combined accounts of the Treasurer and Financial Secretary. Allowing for the normal working carryover into 2006, this means that our reserve stands at \$62,000. This has gradually been built up over the years, but is still a little below one year's annual budget.

Almost all income consists of member dues and charges, although, with slightly rising interest rates, our interest earnings rose a little, to just under \$2,000. On the spending side, we continued previous years' patterns of underspending on "variable" costs, including repairs and supplies, where expenses are being well contained. Even with the new roof, our major capital spending was also within budget, as was the *Islander*. Our "fixed" costs -- those over which we have relatively little flexibility during a year or which represent major decisions, such as our level of insurance cover-- came in over budget. Charges for utilities, property taxes, and insurance (liability and flood cover) were up; medical insurance costs were well contained. We also incurred costs of almost \$1500 in connection with the process of regularizing our 501(c)(7) tax-exempt status, which has now been done. The costs include the federal filing fee of \$500 and lawyers' fees. Hopefully this will be a one-off charge, but we will have to await the full conclusion of the process in 2006.

What does this mean for the future? The Club is in a sound financial condition, with a healthy reserve and income (just) covering actual spending -- leaving aside any major costs associated with the construction project. But this situation depends on continued good luck, including avoiding serious flood-related damage that would need to be repaired. Our fixed costs tend to have increased more rapidly than inflation. At some point we will need to review the balance to ensure that we budget enough for repairs, supplies, and routine capital spending.

-- Alan Gelb, Treasurer



Thanks and a Gentle Nudge

Congratulations to all those of you who have paid your membership/waiting list fees. I thank you, and am happy to report that this seems to be a record year for timeliness.

For those of you whose pens seem to have rolled under your desks, I encourage you to send in your checks as swiftly as possible. The Club would be most appreciative, as would my mail carrier and I.

— Lisa Kliefoth, Financial Secretary

From Holly Syrrakos, Archivist: 75 Years Ago At Sycamore Island Selections from the March 1931 *Sycamore Islander*

The March *Islander* closes with this note: “News has been scarce at Sycamore since the last issue and we ask your kind indulgence for just another poor *Islander*.” We should take that as a warning because there was little to report in March of 1931.

In fact, there was an editorial encouraging long-time members to welcome new members, a report on members playing chess, and a brief discussion about painting canoes.

The longest piece revolves around human nature—reminding us that some things don’t change, much.

“A Boiling Hot Club Meeting”

“The February meeting was, without doubt, the maddest group of members ever gathered together on our happy little island. It’s no exaggeration to say that every member there was, at some time during the meeting, mad at every other member who was there. Your editor has attended all but half a dozen meetings in the last ten years and we say that this one was the angriest ever. Only eight members attended, an exceptionally small gathering, but they were mad enough to make up for the whole club.

What was the fight about? Some proposed to repeal the rule about observing quiet in the vicinity of the sleeping porch after ten with quiet all over the island after midnight; others were against the repeal and there you are. But during the forty-five minutes of excitement which transpired, the range of conversation—generally quite throaty—covered a wide field and it’s not at all improbable but that even your name was mentioned, gentle reader.

Well, when the vote was taken the rule still stood and we quickly got back into the habit of speaking to each other without glaring, pointing our fingers and waving our arms. One good thing about the meeting fights at Sycamore—we all get so darned mad that we can’t think of any real mean cracks and so no feelings are ever hurt.”

Perhaps spring will bring more news and better moods.

Need a Canoe? Of Course, You Do!

Two canoes: a fabric covered Old Town, 17 feet, needs work, and a C1, about 12.5 feet. Take them from our basement! Best offer. George Loeb, 301-652-4229

2006 Sycamore Events Calendar

Event	Date/Time	Contact	Rain Date
18 th Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup	Saturday – April 8, 2006 from 9 a.m. to noon.	Renee Dunham	
Annual Orientation	Sunday, April 9	Tamara and Joe Belden	Sunday, April 16
Annual Wildflower Walk	Sunday, April 23, 10 a.m. [details next page]	Jane Winer	
Spring Workfest	Sunday, April 30, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.	Joe Hage, Tryon Wells	Sunday, May 7
Canoeing Class at Sycamore Island.	Saturday, May 6, 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. [page eight]	Frank Daspit and Jim Drew	
Potomac Downriver Race	Sunday, May 21	Star Mitchell	
Summer Solstice BBQ, River Song Party and Sleepover	tbd	Joe Hage, Whitney Pinger	
Fishing Derby	tbd		
Sycamore Regatta	tbd		
Old-Timers Potluck Picnic	tbd		
Fall Workfest	Sunday, Nov. 12, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.	Joe Hage, Tryon Wells	Sunday, Nov. 19

Annual Sycamore Wildflower Walk 10 am, Sunday, April 23

We will meet at 10:00 alongside the Marsden Tract. Head up river on MacArthur Blvd. (or Clara Barton Pkwy) about 5 miles. You will pass under the Beltway. Park alongside MacArthur Blvd. at Brickyard Road. This will be our meeting place. From here, the group will cross the bridge and proceed on our exploration.

Continuing our progression up the Canal, the Marsden Tract is the 4th in our series of wildflower walks exploring the plant life along the C&O Canal. With this topsy-turvy weather, it's hard to say exactly what species we will see, but we can expect an array of wildflowers in bloom. We will also note some special trees including the Sweet Sugar-berry or Hackberry, Bladdernut, and we will look for the rare Chinquapin Oak.



A Hackberry Tree, decidedly **not** anywhere near the Towpath. Courtesy of the US Fish and Wildlife Service

-- RG Steinman and John Parrish

Phone Tree Volunteers Needed

The Sycamore Island phone tree is being put back together!! We need many member and wait-list-member volunteers. The phone tree will be used to make a personal call to every member and wait-list-member reminding them of each work session. These are really important calls necessary to get work session attendance back up to where it needs to be. The phone tree may have flood emergency and other uses as well.



If you can volunteer to be part of the phone tree, please call or email: Gerald Barton at (202) 363-292, gerrybarton@hotmail.com or Jim Drew at (202) 462-3836, jdrewesq@aol.com.

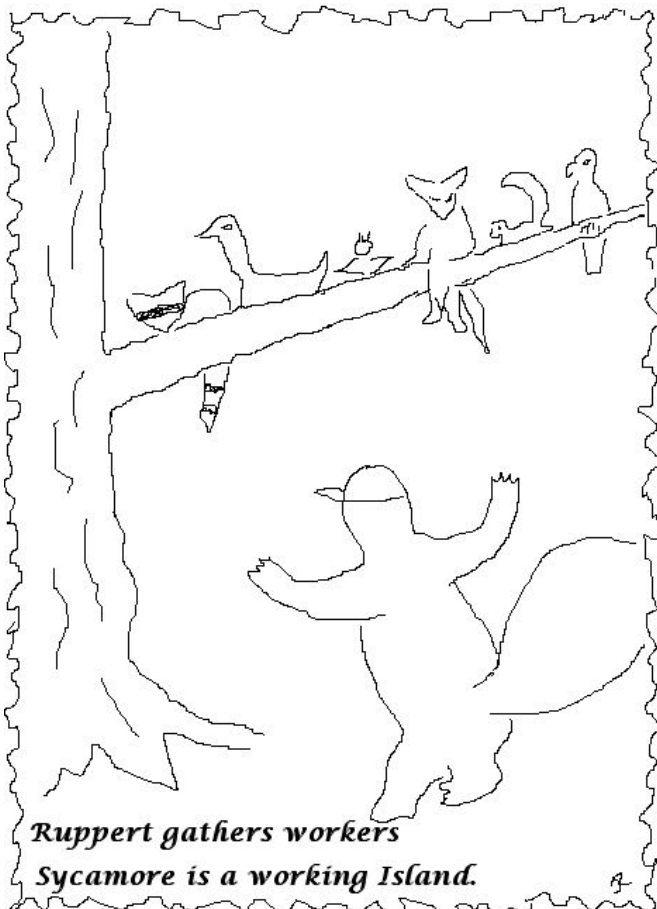
Several weeks before each work session, each volunteer will be given a short list (6 to 10) of names, phone numbers, and the information about the work session (date, time, etc.) to be conveyed. We need about 40 to 50 volunteers willing to make a few calls at least twice a year in order to make this work. Members and waitlist members are both urged to volunteer. It is an important way to benefit the island and should take only a little time.

If more people attend work sessions, more tasks get done, there's a bigger potluck dinner, and a better time by all. Please volunteer to be part of the phone tree.

-- Jim Drew

Learn to Paddle
Saturday, May 6th.

This year's canoeing class on the Island will be held on Saturday, the 6th of May, from 9:30 to 11:30. The class focuses on paddling techniques, different strokes, safety tips and more. Long-time Islander Frank Daspit will again be the instructor. All wait listers and members, adults and teenagers, are invited to participate. Club canoes will be available for everyone attending. For more information, contact Jim Drew at (202) 462-3836 or at jdrewesq@aol.com.



Ruppert

*—Created by
Johnna Robinson*

Sycamore Eats: Real Biscotti for a Chilly Sycamore Day

The strange impulse to degrade fine things — think blueberry bagels, white mocha macchiato, lite beer , margaritas turned into slurpees — means it's tough nowadays to find true biscotti. True, traveling to Italy is an option; but, that makes for an expensive biscuit. Below is a recipe for real biscotti now jury-tested several times, and successfully so, by the Editor. Even Mrs. Editor likes the results. That is no light assertion: The Editor's try at Peanut Soup (really) awhile ago still evokes a mixture of shudders and derisive laughter from those subjected to that disaster. The biscotti recipe comes from *Biscotti* by Lou Seibert Pappas, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 1992

Biscotti di Prato

3/4 cup whole almonds, 3 eggs, 1 teaspoon vanilla, 1/4 teaspoon almond extract, 2 cups unbleached or all-purpose flour, 7/8 [sic] cup sugar, 1 teaspoon baking soda, dash of salt

Place nuts in a shallow pan and bake in a preheated 350 degree oven for 8 to 10 minutes, or until golden brown. Let cool. In a small bowl beat eggs, vanilla and almond extract with a wire whisk. In a mixing bowl combine flour, sugar, baking soda and salt. Add egg mixture and mix until blended, about 1 minute. Cut nuts into halves or thirds and mix in. Divide dough in half. On a greased and floured baking sheet, pat out dough into two logs about 1/2 inch thick, 1 1/2 inches wide and 12 inches long, spacing them at least 2 inches apart. Bake in the middle of a preheated 300 degree oven for 50 minutes or until golden brown. Transfer from the baking sheet to a rack. Let cool 5 minutes. Place on a cutting board. With a serrated knife slice diagonally at a 45 degree angle about 1/2 inch thick. Lay the slices flat on the baking sheet and return to a 275 degree oven for 20 to 25 minutes or until toasted, turning them over once to dry the other side. Cool and store in a tightly covered container.



You can have them in the Tuscan style with Vin Santo, although for the Editor, usually not be found in Tuscany, good coffee will do. [Perhaps a future *Islander* will have advice from the Coffee Man himself, David Winer, on how to make real coffee to go with the real biscotti.]

Chocolate Glaze variation. Coarsely chop 3 ounces semisweet chocolate and place in a small pan that fits snugly over a sauce-pan of barely simmering water, Heat until chocolate melts Stir to Blend. Or place chocolate in a microwave-safe bowl and microwave on medium for 2 minutes or until chocolate melts. Stir to blend. With a spatula spread over entire top surface of cookies. Let cool at room temperature until set. [N.B. The Editor, a purist, has not tried this version. You're on your own.]

P.S. Any "biscotti" recipe that includes butter does not produce biscotti but cookies.

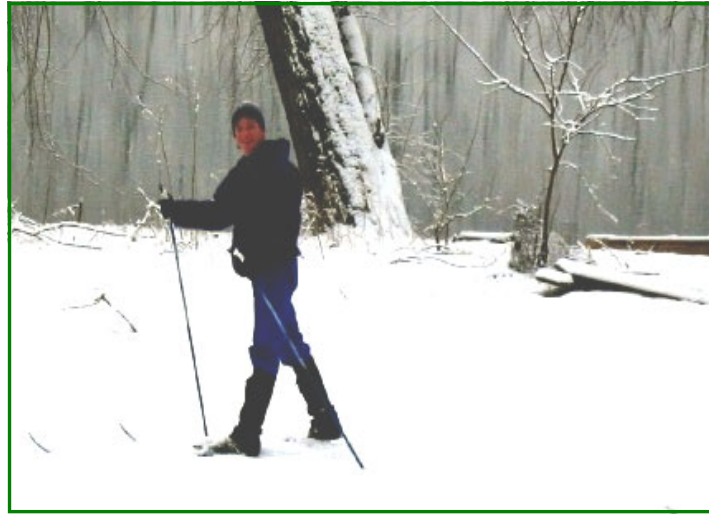


Elena and Andre at Sycamore. They are the children of Mac Thornton and Molly Carr.

Photos by Jane Winer

In Touch With Joe....

I own six headlamps, two super-power flashlights, and there is also a collection of a dozen other flashlights on the Island at my disposal. I always try to keep at least one light in the van just in case, but somehow on this particular night, I was without a flashlight. This was important; not for walking the trail so much, but for seeing the numbers on the combination lock that holds the ferry; swimming was not an option. Another item that I didn't have, one that really helps a lot when it comes to seeing tiny numbers in the dark, was a pair



The Caretaker in Winter

Photo by Kaylen Hage

of reading glasses. I turned forty over three years ago and my eyes aren't what they were when I first moved to the land of ferries and combination locks. I made one more search through the van and although I didn't find a light as I emptied the glove box onto the floor, I did find a small magnifying glass (Naturalist keep these kinds of things in their cars). Armed now with my magnifying glass and the light of my cell phone I jumped out of the van and slammed the door. Oh [deleted]! I must have put my keys down when I emptied the glove compartment and now my keys were locked inside the van.

Now what? If I can't unlock the ferry I'm stuck without a car and if I do get on the Island can I get into the house? I have extra keys to the van in the house but I know the emergency house key is also locked inside the house. But wait, maybe my house is open. I left it open earlier because there was a large party on the Island and they needed a bathroom to use. The so-called "warm bathroom" in the men's room wasn't working and I told Star Mitchell that she and her guests could use mine. (Fifteen degrees above zero was too cold for the pipe that feeds the toilet out there). With all this going through my head I brace myself against the wind and start down the trail. I'm really hoping that Star didn't lock my front door.

There was no moon, it was well below freezing, and the wind got stronger as I got closer to the river. Things could get very grim. I arrive at the ferry landing, pocket magnifier in one hand and cell phone in the other. I don't want to take off my gloves but off they came as I tried to hold the phone and the glass with one hand and turn the numbers with the other. My stiffening fingers slowly work on the numbers as I adjust the distance of the magnifier. It feels like life or death as I concentrate on not dropping anything into the river below. I turn the last number and the lock pops open.. I quickly put my gloves back on and pull myself across, still full of uncertainty. Blowing into my gloves I rush up the boardwalk to my door. It's open. I'm happy. I locate my car keys and immediately put the extra house key in its hiding place. All's well that ends well.

Saturday Relief Caretakers March — April

March 4, 2006	10:00 a.m. - 2:00		
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Linda and Dick Riegelman	301-229-2871
March 11, 2006	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	John & Jyl Pomeroy	703-243-8256
	2:00 p.m. - dark		
March 18, 2006	10:00 a.m. - 2:00		
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Bruce Gaber	301-654-7479
March 25, 2006	10:00 a.m. - 2:00		
	2:00 p.m. - dark		
April 1, 2006	10:00 a.m. - 3:00	Pat Barry	301-229-5351
	3:00 p.m. - dark		
April 8, 2006	10:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark		
April 15, 2006	10:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark		
April 22, 2006	10:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark		
April 29, 2006	10:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m.—dark		

**** Caretaker Volunteers ****

To volunteer, contact Maxine Hattery at 202-362-1361 or hattery@aol.com

Savor the Solitude with Sycamore Biscotti
Contact Maxine! Help the Island!

Large Parties

No Large Parties scheduled for March and April

A large party application form may be printed from the Club's web page at
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/systems.htm>
To request a form through the mail, call the Supervisor of Parties, John Noble
e-mail: jnoble@shs.net, phone: 240- 747-4810, fax: 301-468-6433



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Upcoming Sycamore Events

March Meeting, March 8, 8 p.m.. At the Island.

April Meeting, April 12, 8 p.m.. At the Island.

N.B. Monthly meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month.

See p. six for 2006 Sycamore events



Photo by Joe Hage