



NEW! The Sycamore Multimodal

David Winer, Concessionaire

The Sycamore Islander

April 2006

Volume 85 No. 4

President's Letter

The real "March Madness" is not the NCAA basketball tournament, but the lack of precipitation. This has been one of the driest months of March on record, and there is not much of a snow pack to melt and cause flooding. While we need the rain, the river is calm and the paddling is easy. Come down, take out a canoe, and enjoy the Island in Spring.

The Building Committee has not yet been able to put the building renovation plans out to bid. However, the Building Committee Finance Committee has agreed on a financing plan, which will be presented for discussion at the April meeting and then finalized for inclusion in the comprehensive budget and financing plan to be presented to the Club for approval in the future. This month's *Islander* includes the Finance Committee's report of the proposed financing plan.

We have a busy schedule of activities in April and early May. The new member orientation is scheduled for April 9th. The Spring Workfest will be held on April 30th. Let's have a good turnout and get the Island into shape for the season. The Workfest is a great opportunity to meet other club members and enjoy a terrific picnic. Please contact George and Shelley Malusky to help with the planning, shopping and cooking. The Wildflower Walk is scheduled for April 23. Everyone comes away from this activity full of smiles and a new appreciation of diversity of flora along the canal and the river. Also take note of the river cleanup on April 8 and the canoeing class on May 6th. Past classes have received universal praise.

I look forward to seeing you at the monthly meeting on April 12th and enjoying all that the Island has to offer.

— Jeff Komarow

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 May issue is Wednesday, April 26.

Minutes: 8 March 2006

The March meeting was held on the Island and called to order at 8:10 p.m. by Vice President Wolk who presided until the arrival of President Komarow shortly after.

Present: Gerald Barton, Ann Marie Cunningham, Jim Drew, Renée Dunham, Faith Earll, Joe Hage, Larry Heilman, Jeff Komarow, John Lentz, Alison Levine, Norman Metzger, Fred Ohly, Sherry Pettie, Trip Reid, Johnna Robinson, Dick Schleicher, Cora Shaw, Peggy Thomson, Tryon Wells, Jane Winer, Stephen Wolk.

Minutes: A motion to adopt the February minutes carried with no changes.

New Members: Norm Metzger read the names and brief bios of 6 nominees for membership into the club which had been provided to him by membership secretary Tammy Belden. All have been on the waiting list since 1996, their references have been checked, and they've attended the orientation. They are: Kate Clark, Kathy Kelley & Rick Lenegan, David & Lynda Martin-McCormack, Edwina Smith & Sam Simmens, Thomas & Mary Edsall, and Gavin & Claire Bloch.

A motion carried to approve all nominees for membership.

Financial report: Jeff directed our attention to the narrative report by Treasurer Alan Gelb that appeared in the March *Islander*.

Captain's report: Tryon had two documents to distribute. One was the final drawings of the club renovations for members to inspect. He said that he has a few questions for the architect, but that these drawings are very close to final. The second was the canoe float plans, copies of which were distributed around the room. His main criteria in design and materials selection were reducing the weight of the float sections to ease the burden on our aging membership's waning strength.

A motion carried that the club authorize a sum not to exceed \$2000 to build the float.

Phone tree: Jim Drew passed around a signup sheet for any of those present to volunteer to be on the phone tree, which will be used to get members to work fests.

Crumbling towpath: This issue is important for the club's ability to bring heavy equipment vehicles up for our construction project. Tryon reported that he called Carl Linden's contact at the Park Service, who made assurances that they would look at it.

Repair of ferry & canal-side ferry landing: Tryon reported that John Mathews had produced a sketch for a new design, and then lost it. But it may have involved rubberizing the steel underwater to protect the pontoons. Gerry Barton said that he and Joe had already covered the steel with old tires last year. They agreed that, in any case, ferry repair must come after fixing the landing.

Construction Financing: Jeff Komarow led a lengthy discussion about the Finance Committee's ideas presented in the March *Islander* for financing an estimated \$200,000. In addition, John Lentz and Johnna Robinson reported they had both had discussions with banks about providing financing, and the banks encouraged them in the possibility.

The group assessed the pros and cons and wider ramifications of each idea. There was also a discussion of the pros and cons of permanently increasing the number of regular members. The sense that your secretary took away from the discussion is that most of those present did not want any financing schemes that would upset the egalitarian and fair nature of the club.

At the conclusion of the discussion Jeff said that the Finance Committee will meet to consider all ideas and will publish in the *Islander* their financing proposal along with cost estimates for the construction and a "not to exceed" construction budget for approval by the membership, most likely at the May or June meetings. [Financing proposal on pages 4—5]

We adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

--Sherry Pettie, Recording Secretary

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

Maybe the spring of 1931 looked like the spring of this year. At least the *Islander* made me think so. It had evidently been cold at the end of March and beginning of April—but the weather was changing.

The coolness apparently kept visitors away from the Island because the first article was a plea for new members. The Club was looking to add members almost desperately, suggesting “some of you must be acquainted with young men, of eighteen or upwards, who, while they are not friends of yours, yet seem to you to be pretty nice fellows. Perhaps you see them at your office, at your church, or in the neighborhood. If you think that they’d be interested in Sycamore....” That’s how we know it’s 1931 and not 2006.

The quiet spring gave time for repairs to the clubhouse. Captain Jack Stodder and the editor tore up the kitchen floor to fix a sag. “Evidently Braddock’s brave troops (or perhaps it was Captain John Smith’s brave sailors) ate a lot of oysters just before they built the kitchen because there are lots of oyster shells down under there. Well, we put some new foundations in the corner and relaid the flooring so that it is now more level,—all at a cost of about four dollars.” I’ll bet there are still lots of oyster shells under there.

Despite the weather, some members were canoeing—and falling in the water.

“Sinker’s Club—Jumpers’ Division”

“Last Sunday far-famed sinker Dick Ackad made an almost unobserved and unconfirmed lead to a rock to prevent being immersed in cold water, thus furnishing the month’s only excuse for adventure.

“Dick was aiming to come down through the shoot around the head of Upper Sycamore and his course lay down a stretch of fast water between two rocks. Somehow or other he missed the course and the bow of the boat went against one of the rocks; the current caught the canoe and the stern swung around against the other rock and our peerless sinker leaped, clambered, jumped or maybe fell out of the boat and on to the second rock.

“There are two ways to leave a boat in a situation like this. One is to leap esthetically and nimbly at the cry ‘Allez-ooop’ and land lightly on one toe, with the arms spread gracefully, and the body perfectly poised to take a bow for the thunderous applause which is bound to follow. The other method is that which you and I would have followed and which Dick undoubtedly also followed,—like a wet walrus falling off a refrigerator.”



BUILDING RENOVATION FINANCE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDED FINANCING PROPOSAL

The Building Renovation Finance Committee has held a series of meetings over the past two months, and, in light of the written comments and the discussion at the March meeting, has developed a tentative project financing proposal that will be presented for comment at the April meeting. Thereafter, the financing plan will be finalized and presented for approval by the Club as part of the motion to undertake the construction project as set forth in the architect's plans submitted to the County for permitting and to authorize a "not to exceed" amount of funds for the construction. It is hoped that the final package can be presented at the May or June meetings.

Since project costs are not yet firm, the proposal necessarily has some aspects that are estimated and others that must offer flexibility in their use. As with all sturdy stools, this one rests on four legs, as follows:

I. Drawdown of Surplus: The Club currently has a cash reserve of some \$62,000, of which \$30,000 would be committed to the project and available for near-term disbursement. The reserve, however, must be restored. It is proposed to accomplish this with a temporary annual dues increase of \$50 for regular members and \$25 for seniors beginning in 2007. At these amounts, the surplus should be restored in about 2 ½ years, at which time this dues increase would be dropped.

II. Prepaid Access Certificates (PACs): These are designed to obtain voluntary contributions from our extensive, 140-family waiting list to lift some financing responsibility from current members. Fifteen PACs would be offered to all waiting list individuals/families around mid-2006 at an up-front payment of \$4,000 each, thus raising \$60,000 if all were taken down. Purchase of a PAC would entitle the family or individual to all membership privileges (Island use, voting, etc.) until December 31, 2014, approximately 8 ½ years if purchased on June 30, 2006, without payment of any additional dues or assessments, including item III below. In effect, this would create a new, temporary class of Club member, the PAC member.

The PAC member's name would not be removed from the waiting list so that if the PAC expired and the individual or family were still on the waiting list, they would revert to that status. Alternatively, and hopefully more likely, during the 8 ½ years, the PAC member would reach the top of the waiting list and would be accepted into the Club as a regular member. In this event, the former PAC member would not pay dues for the remainder of the 8 ½ years (through December 31, 2014) and would not pay the initiation fee. The creation of PAC memberships would result in a maximum near-term membership expansion of 15, but no long-term permanent increase. Those on the waiting list choosing not to buy a PAC would not have their positions affected.

PACs would be sold on a first-come, first-served basis. After purchase, they could be sold, but only to another party on the waiting list. Such a sale would be between buyer and seller without

approval or financial support by the Club, although the Club would have to be advised for record-keeping purposes.

III. Assessment: Existing regular and senior members would be assessed one time for the equivalent of a year's dues. If payment were received before December 31, 2006, the amounts payable would be \$300 and \$150 for regular and senior members, respectively; however, amounts received after that date would be at the rate for 2007 dues, which will probably increase, and must be paid no later than the 2007 dues payment deadline. Assuming 160 regular and 55 senior members, as well as payment in 2006, this would raise \$48,000 from regular members and \$8,250 from seniors or a total of \$56,250. The assessment would not be refundable. Beginning 2007, the initiation fee would be increased to an amount equal to the annual dues then in effect.

IV. Bank Loan: Three local commercial banks have expressed preliminary interest in assisting with financing of the project. They are (along with primary member contact): Bank of America (Steve Wolk), Chevy Chase Bank (John Lentz), and Potomac Bank (Johnna Robinson). Applications will be made to each bank for a line of credit in the area of \$170,000 in order to be able to compare offers. It is not anticipated this amount would be drawn down, and is probably on the high side since project costs are undetermined.

Each bank would be asked to provide multi-disbursement conditions for initial draw-downs that could be later converted into a fixed rate credit at an extended repayment term. If \$50,000 of bank financing were ultimately utilized and had a ten-year repayment term at 7.5% interest, amortization would raise regular members' annual dues by roughly \$40 and those of seniors by \$20. If a bank line was in place by mid-year, it could smooth out delays in receipt of funds from the PACs and assessment.

Once detailed bank offers are received, they would be reviewed in the *Islander* and presented to the Club by the Finance Committee for a vote on which one to accept. It is anticipated that such a vote could take place in a mid-2006 meeting.

Summary and Recommendation: The above financing plan would generate the following amounts:

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Drawdown of Surplus | \$ 30,000 Firm |
| Prepaid Access Certificates | 60,000 Subject to sale |
| Assessment | 56,250 Firm if paid in 2006 |
| Bank Loan | 170,000 Subject to bank response |

The Finance Committee believes that the plan will raise sufficient funds for the project, is varied in scope, and spreads the responsibility repayment widely among the various categories of our membership.

--John Lentz, Building Renovation Finance Committee

Sycamore Orientation Set for April 9th

The annual Sycamore orientation for waiting list families will be held on Sunday, April 9. The rain date is April 16th. This event is offered annually and attendance is required one time for membership or to purchase a guest pass. Those of you on the waiting list who have not yet attended an orientation should make sure that you attend one of these prior to your name coming up for membership. The orientation is a great deal of fun with old-timers mingling with those who have more recently discovered Sycamore and sharing their knowledge of its history and ways. We meet at 10:00 in the morning and, weather permitting, walk around the Island discussing topics as we go, and then share a potluck lunch together.

If you are planning to attend, please contact the Membership Secretaries, Tammy and Joe Belden (202-882-2224 or tbel@loc.gov), and let them know. Also, bring a dish to share with others for lunch.

Losses

Charles M. Trammel, Jr., a Club member for over 40 years, died February 9th. He was 93. In 2002, he wrote to the Club:

My membership status in Sycamore Island goes back over 40 years, including a period that I particularly treasure when I was elected to serve as your president. When my U. S. Government duties required me to move to Michigan in 1950, I submitted a letter of resignation to the club, but in lieu of acceptance, as such, the club favored me by making me an honorary member.

After several years, I was transferred back to the Washington area and reactivated my regular membership, a status which I currently occupy. At my present age (90) and distance from the club (I used to live on nearby Wiscasset Road), I am not able to get to the club premises; and I am well aware that there is a waiting list of anxious applicants. Thus, I feel that I should now yield my space on the club rolls....

A Sycamore neighbor is gone. **Gregory Stapko**, who had lived across from the Island near the dam for about 50 years, died March 12th, two days shy of 93. Mr. Stapko was an accomplished painter who worked for many years for the National Gallery and other notable institutions copying paintings. A skilled copyist must master many painting styles. He was so skilled, he was required by the National Gallery of Arts to make his paintings two inches smaller than the originals so they could not be confused. Islander John Stapko is his son. John's love of the river and the island reflects his childhood with the wild river at his doorstep. A *Washington Post* obituary on March 19th noted that his father's works now "hang in the White House, Blair House, the Arlington House, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, U.S. embassies, government agencies and the Cosmos Club...." And there's a family story related by the *Post* "that Mr. Stapko was copying a painting of Martha Washington in the White House when President Harry S. Truman happened to walk by. 'Ah, an artist! You need music,' the president exclaimed, and he sat down at the piano to play for Mr. Stapko."

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. (p. 9) | Renée Dunham | |
| Annual Orientation | Sunday, April 9, 10 a.m. (p. 6) | Tamara and Joe Belden | Sunday, April 16 |
| Annual Wildflower Walk | Sunday, April 23, 10 a.m. (p. 9) | 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. | Frank Dasplit and Jim Drew | |
| Potomac Downriver Race | Sunday, May 21 | Star Mitchell | |
| Summer Solstice BBQ, River Song Party and Sleepover | Saturday, June 24th, 3 pm till dark | 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 |

Spring Workfest

Sunday, April 30th

9—2, Pot Luck Lunch

Rain date, May 7th

The Wieb Playground

John Wiebenson, a distinguished architect and Sycamore member, died on a Sunday morning in September 2003 while inspecting a fume-filled space below an old auto garage intended for an expansion of Martha's Table. On a sunny if bit cool March afternoon, family, friends, and the faculty and the very patient children of Ross Elementary School on R Street, NW, gathered to dedicate a new playground, "the Wieb Playground". Officials spoke; the many people who made the playground possible were thanked; Sam Smith, who shared floor space with "Wieb", reminded all that Wieb lived out Russell Baker's caution to understand the difference between "somber" and "serious"; three children offered a lovely tribute (two in English, one in Spanish) to their late guidance counselor, Mr. Jimenez; the principal told us that Wieb had designed the school's library and the renovation of the cafeteria. The ribbon was cut, and the school chorus sang "Smile", softly and beautifully. We all joined in.



Abigail, Derek, and John Wiebenson, and Gloria Smith, the principal of Ross Elementary.



Photos by Norman Metzger

Potomac River Watershed Cleanup - Sycamore Island Saturday, April 8, 9am to noon

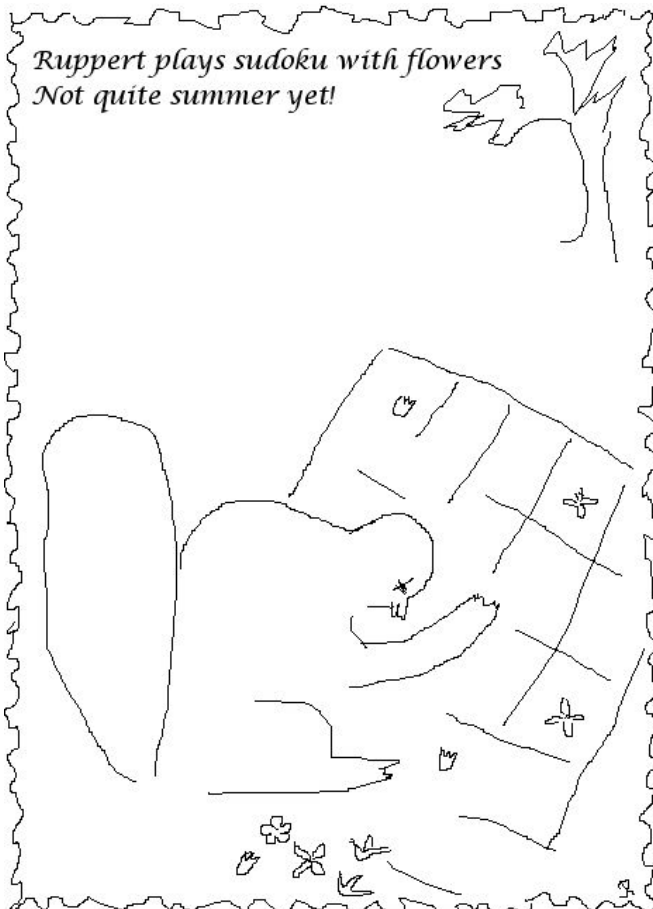
The 17th annual Alice Ferguson Foundation's Potomac River Cleanup is our chance to get down and dirty, clean up and be proud. Sycamore Island is registered with the Potomac Conservancy as a private site. We clean up our own trash on and around the Island and along the towpath shore, on foot or in canoes – whatever works. Members, waitlisters, and friends of both are invited to help. We will supply the trash bags and work gloves. You bring a bag lunch. We provide drinks and dessert. Sounds like a plan?

About 3500 volunteers have turned out in the past for the overall Potomac River Cleanup event. For more information, visit www.PotomacCleanup.org. Our Sycamore Island coordinator is Renée Dunham who can be reached at (202)686-6451 or rgdunham@erols.com. Thank you from the Potomac River birds, animals, fish, and all humans whose sanity and well being springs from the River.

— Renée Dunham

Reminder: Annual Sycamore Wildflower Walk 10 am, Sunday, April 23

To get to the start, head up river on MacArthur Blvd. (or Clara Barton Pkwy) about 5 miles from Sycamore. You will pass under the Beltway. Park alongside MacArthur Blvd. at Brickyard Road, the meet-up spot. (More in the March issue)



Ruppert

*—Created by
Johnna Robinson*

In Touch With Joe....

I have a bit of bad news; the old metal bridge across the canal is rusting out and has been condemned. I don't know what we'll do without that bridge.^x

The good news is that I managed to catch all the ground hogs that were living under my bathroom. There were no marmots living on the Island when I moved here in 2002 and my theory is that they were washed up here during that very wet spring of 2003. At first, I naively thought that I had only one ground hog and I really didn't have a problem sharing the Island with it. My feelings began to change when in the spring of 2004 I was shocked to see an adult with three tiny baby ground hogs. Despite this evidence, I still wasn't positive that I had a breeding pair of whistle pigs on the Island; I never saw two adults at the same time, and maybe she was pregnant when she got here. That mystery was cleared up the following year when the female emerged with another batch of pups. I definitely had a pair of breeding ground hogs. I didn't know if I should do anything about the ground hogs. Live and let live is the usual saying down here, but I was afraid of what a colony of ground hogs might do to the Island. Soon, I was getting complaints from my daughters about the crawling and digging sounds coming from under the floor, and when my brick walkways started to cave-in from their tunnels, I decided that the ground hogs had to go. During the winter, while all the ground hogs were hibernating I used cinder blocks to close off all the exits from under the house. All exits that is, except one. At this exit I put a Havahart animal trap. My plan worked like a dream. After catching a curious squirrel (I let it go), I soon caught four ground hogs, two adults and two younger ones, maybe yearlings. I released them all on the other side of the canal where I hope they found a happy new home.



Say it ain't so, Joe.

Photo by Joe Hage

I spent one hot March afternoon exploring High Island. It's the first Island downstream from the dam and I had never been there before. I had heard that there was once a canoe club there and the topographical map in our clubhouse shows three buildings there; so, I just had to check it out. To get there, I decided to paddle down the canal, rather than take the direct route over the dam. I made an easy portage at lock six and paddled across the feeder canal to a nice harbor I dubbed High Island Lagoon. High Island is very different from Sycamore Island. It's very rocky and has almost no Sycamores. Instead, it has many hardwoods and other trees more commonly found in the highlands like Virginia pine, cedar, and hemlock; there was a big black cherry there, too. I hiked to the top of the ridge and found a well-built chimney, the remains of a house built here a hundred years ago or so. I also saw the remains of another house down near what I think was an old quarry but the best part of the trip was looking up river at the view of Sycamore Island.

I have to mention the excellent birding we've had here this past migration season. Besides the hundreds of cormorants that are flocking here, I've also had snow geese and we even had a flock of fifty tundra swans pass through. I've seen ring-necked and golden-eye ducks, two kinds of grebes, two types of mergansers and lots of other bird activity.

The Virginia bluebells are out. Now's the time to visit the Island!

^xHappy (Belated) April Fools Day!

Saturday Relief Caretaker April — May

| | | | |
|----------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| April 1, 2006 | 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 | Pat Barry | 301-229-5351 |
| | 3:00 p.m. - dark | Silvija Strikis & Miguel Browne | 703-748-4671 |
| April 8, 2006 | 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 | Richard Dianich | 301-229-4138 |
| | 3:00 p.m. - dark | Edward & Margaret Tilghman | 301-320-5846 |
| April 15, 2006 | 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 | Lee Gravatte & Carol Cavanaugh | 202-333-6830 |
| | 3:00 p.m. - dark | Liz & Dallas Jones | 301-571-4942 |
| April 22, 2006 | 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 | Sam Francis & Gail Henry | 202-965-0314 |
| | 3:00 p.m. - dark | | |
| April 29, 2006 | 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 | | |
| | 3:00 p.m. - dark | | |
| May 6, 2006 | 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 | | |
| | 3:00 p.m. - dark | | |
| May 13, 2006 | 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 | Norman Eule | 301-320-3669 |
| | 3:00 p.m. - dark | Beth Barlow Grant | 202-234-7547 |
| May 20, 2006 | 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 | Margaret Barry | 301-229-5351 |
| | 3:00 p.m. - dark | Patricia Hartge & Son | 301-907-6657 |
| May 27, 2006 | 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 | | |
| | 3:00 p.m. - dark | | |

**** Caretaker Volunteers ****

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

Large Parties

April 15, 3:30 to 6:30 p.m., Amanda Cannell, 15th birthday party for daughter, 15-20 guests

April 23, 12 to 4 p.m., Joe Hage, Boy Scouts, 15 guests

April, late in the month, weekday, Joe Hage, Waldorf School children, 30 guests

May 3, about 10 to 4 p.m., Kathy Sessions, environmental policy makers, about 30 guests

June 3, noon to 5 p.m., Alan and Caroline Gelb, Faculty party for son's class, 35 guests

**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**



The Sycamore Islander

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

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

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Upcoming Sycamore Events

Potomac River Clean-up, Saturday, April 8

Island Orientation, Sunday, April 9

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

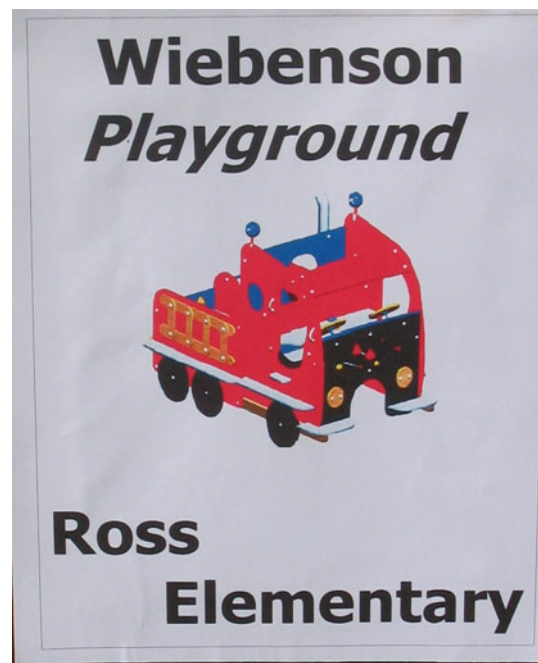
Annual Wildflower Walk, Sunday, April 23

Spring Workfest, Sunday, April 30

Canoeing Class, Saturday, May 6

May Meeting, May 10, 8 p.m. At the Island.

Full listing of 2006 Sycamore events on p. 7



See Page 8