

**Fall Workfest**  
**Sunday, November 18, 9 to 2**

**Be There!**

# *The Sycamore Islander*

*November 2007*

*Volume 86 No. 11*

## **President's Letter**

November promises to be a busy month for the Club. We have two big events – the November meeting on November 14 and the Fall Workfest on Sunday, November 18.

The Club will be voting this month on whether to go forward with the project to reconstruct the caretaker's quarters and improve the Clubhouse. The proposal will be debated at the regular meeting on November 14. Under the special voting procedures, members can vote at the regular meeting or at the Workfest. There will be lots to do at the Workfest along with the traditional barbecue picnic after the work is done. Let's hope that our run of good weather holds. Mark November 18 on your calendars.

Last month, I wrote about the history of the project, the pros and cons, and the financial plan. My October letter is available on the Club's website. This month I want to discuss a new addition to the financing plan developed during the discussion at the October meeting. It has the potential to reinvigorate the Club, and I am very excited about it.

## **SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY FOR APPLICANTS ON THE WAITING LIST TO BECOME MEMBERS**

As part of the financing proposal, the Club will offer *everyone* on the waiting list a one-time opportunity in 2008 to become "waiting list members" with full membership rights. The regular membership would remain at 160. Waiting list members would be carried as an overage, and would remain on the waiting list along with the people who decided not to join at this time. As regular members move to senior status or resign, the vacancies would be filled by the next person/family unit on the waiting list whether they are waiting list members or applicants on the waiting list. The overage would be eliminated in due course as waiting list members became regular members.

Waiting list members would pay the regular initiation fee (\$75), the one-time assessment (\$300), and the annual dues including the \$150 annual surcharge to fund the construction. Applicants who decide

***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](mailto:normanmetzger@verizon.net). Telephone: 202/544-6027 or 202/445-5436 (cell).

**The deadline for the December issue is Wednesday, November 28.**

not to join at this time would continue to pay the annual waiting list fee.

I see this proposal as having the following benefits:

1. The Club gets to see what impact increased membership would have on the Island and the character of the Club without having to commit to a permanent increase above 160.
2. The revenue from the waiting list members should be at least equal to the revenue anticipated from offering "PACS" but is more in keeping with the democratic spirit of the Club.
3. The Membership will get "new blood" at a time when, I believe, the Club needs a transfusion.
4. The proposal does not have a negative effect on anyone on the waiting list. Applicants who decide not to join at this time will retain their position and have the same opportunity to join in the future when their numbers come up.

This proposal will become effective only if the Club votes to approve the construction and financing plan. So members should take it into consideration in deciding whether and how to vote on the construction/financing package.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the monthly meeting or at the Workfest.

The regular meeting will begin at 8:00 P.M. on Wednesday, November 14, 2007. I am sure it will be a lively meeting.

— Jeff Komarow

## RESOLUTION

The following resolution is submitted to the members of the Sycamore Island Club for their approval:

1. Contracting for the Project. Authorize the President, with the agreement in writing of the Captain, Treasurer and Recording Secretary, to enter into a general contract or to act as the general contractor and enter into such additional contracts as may be necessary to construct the "Big Clubhouse" plan for the reconstruction and expansion of the caretaker's quarters and Clubhouse, as previously approved by the Club, consistent with the financial resources of the Club.
2. Borrowing and the Issuance of 10-Year Notes. Authorize the Club to raise up to \$150,000 from club members and applicants on the waiting list through the issuance to the members and applicants of unsecured 10-year notes, in denominations of \$5,000 or more, bearing interest at a rate not greater than 7.5% with interest and principal payable annually, which notes shall be an obligation of the Club and not of its officers, directors and members. Such notes shall not be issued unless and until Item 1 above is satisfied; provided, however, that the Club may accept refundable subscriptions for such notes with the funds collected to be put in an interest-bearing account in the interim.
3. Draw Down Reserve. Authorize the Treasurer to disburse an amount not to exceed one-half (50%) of the Club's reserve fund to pay for the construction in Paragraph 1 above.
4. One-time Building Fund Assessment. Each regular member, senior member and waiting list member shall pay a building fund assessment of \$300, payable as part of the dues and fees for 2008 or when an applicant is accepted as a regular member, whichever is earlier.

5. Annual Fee to Pay-off Notes. Beginning in 2008, each regular member and waiting list member shall pay an annual fee of \$120, and each senior member shall pay an annual assessment of \$60, which shall remain in effect until the principal and interest on the notes in Paragraph 2 have been fully paid. These fees are in addition to the annual dues for the next year determined by the Club.

6. Annual Fee to Replenish Reserve. Beginning in 2008, each regular member and waiting list member shall pay an annual fee of \$30, and each senior member shall pay an annual assessment of \$15, which shall remain in effect until the Club's reserve is at least equal to the amount of the reserve on December 31, 2007. These fees are in addition to the annual dues for the next year determined by the Club.

7. Escrowed Funds. The assessment in Paragraph 4 and the fees in Paragraphs 5 and 6 shall be billed and collected in 2008 and deposited into an interest-bearing account. In the event that the Club does not enter into a general contract or otherwise begin construction authorized in Paragraph 1 on or before September 30, 2008, (unless such date is extended by the Club at the September 2008 monthly meeting), the assessment and fees shall be refunded to members (or, at the member's election, applied to future dues and fees) without interest.

8. Waiting List Membership. The by-laws of the Club are amended by adding a new Section 20.1 as follows:

**20.1. Waiting List Membership**

During 2008, and subject to the Club entering into the contract described below in this paragraph, all applicants on the waiting list shall be given a one-time opportunity to become a "Waiting List Member." A Waiting List Member will have full privileges and obligations of membership, including the right to vote and the payment of all dues, fees and assessments. Waiting List Members shall remain on the waiting list and shall become Regular Members in the order of their current places on the waiting list as vacancies occur in the Regular Membership. The decision to accept or decline the opportunity to become a Waiting List Member shall not affect the applicant's place on the waiting list. The opportunity to become a Waiting List Member shall not become effective unless the Club in 2008 enters into a general contract to construct the "Big Clubhouse" plan for the reconstruction and expansion of the caretaker's quarters and Clubhouse or otherwise begins such construction.

9. Necessary and Appropriate Actions. The President is authorized to take such actions as may be necessary and appropriate to carry out the terms of this resolution, including, but not limited to, hiring legal counsel in connection with the general contract in Paragraph 1 and to prepare the notes in Paragraph 2 and accountants to review the Club's financial statements and prepare schedules for the payment of principal and interest on said notes.

~~10. Reports to the Membership. At each regular meeting, the President shall report to the members (or Minutes for some months, to report) on the progress of the project.~~

The October meeting was held on the Island and called to order at 8:15 by President Jeff Komorow

**Present:** Gerry Barton, Gavin Bloch, Ann Marie Cunningham, Jim Drew, Bill Eichbaum, Alan Gelb, Larry Heilman, Jeff Komarow, John Noble, Sherry Pettie, Tryon Wells, and Dave & Jane Winer.

**Minutes:** The September Minutes were approved without changes.

Gerry Barton reported that Joe has done a lot of work on the tool shed, and would like to install windows.

**A Motion carried** approving up to \$1,000 be spent for shed windows.

No other business was transacted at the meeting. After quite a bit of discussion of the proposed construction project and its financing -- which is covered in other parts of this newsletter -- the meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

--Sherry Pettie, Recording Secretary

## Clubhouse Construction and Financing

Three views on the financing decision facing members this month :

John Cunningham: The current design plans were approved over two years ago in formal votes taken after extensive discussion, and that if the “plan is now somehow overturned, the effort to improve our caretaker’s quarters will be dead for the foreseeable future.”

Sherry Pettie and Jim Drew: Turning down the proposals for financing the construction would enable the Club to “start a capital building fund until a better, more visionary plan is developed.”

Tryon Wells: “I hope the membership will vote to pay for and accomplish this project. It's really not that expensive, and the benefits will be deeply and broadly enjoyed by all of us for many years to come.”

### John Cunningham

I am distressed to hear that some Islanders wish to reopen discussion on the design aspect of the building plan, more than two years after a final design vote was taken.

In her front-page message in the May 2005 *Islander*, the Club President urged all members to attend the meeting set for May 11, 2005. She stated that the meeting

*would provide the last opportunity for you to ask questions and express your opinion about the design. A vote will then be taken at this meeting to decide the design that the committee will pursue. That means hiring an architect to flesh out the details. Any further changes to the design will be made because of engineering, architectural or regulatory reasons and cost estimates will be prepared based on that detailed design, to be considered and voted on at future meetings.*

The May 11 meeting was heavily attended. A plan that would have built outside the clubhouse “footprint” by adding bedrooms above the caretaker’s living room was considered, even though the Club had voted decisively at a previous meeting to reject any proposal that would involve building outside the “footprint.” That plan was turned down. The members then considered the two alternative plans presented by the Building Committee. After an extensive -- and sometimes emotional -- discussion and debate, the members voted in favor of the “Great Clubroom” plan, which will extend the clubroom to the outer north wall, with the caretaker’s kitchen and a club kitchen placed on either side of the extended room. The caretaker’s bedrooms and bathroom will remain downstairs.

Many of us, including this writer, would have preferred to create at least one bedroom for the caretaker on the upstairs level. But we did not prevail, and that was that. It should be remembered that after the “Great Clubroom” plan was approved, a final vote was taken on whether to proceed on that approved plan or not go forward at all. Given those alternatives, the “Great Clubroom” plan received overwhelming support.

To Islanders who were members at the time of the May 2005 vote: We -- all of us -- had a chance to have our voices heard and our votes counted. To Islanders who were not members at that time: Some issues may lend themselves to reconsideration years later, but not this one. All the work that has been done over the past two and one-half years -- with Montgomery County, with the architect, with contractors, and with banks -- has been based on the plan approved by the membership. If that plan is now somehow overturned, the effort to improve our caretaker’s quarters will be dead for the foreseeable future. We all need to be clear on that.

\*

## Jim Drew and Sherry Pettie

We now have the opportunity to vote on whether the club should actually proceed with the proposed construction project. The proposed construction project (1) does not reduce regular flooding of the caretaker's quarters, (2) makes changes to the clubhouse that are not improvements, and (3) will cost over \$250,000 and will cause a large increase in dues. We think club members should vote No.

The primary objectives when the club began considering a construction project was to move the caretakers quarters to the second floor level above the reach of most floods. After Joe and his daughters arrived, we added another objective – to create another bedroom space. Neither of these objectives is satisfied by the proposed construction project.

Under this plan, only the caretaker's kitchen will move to the second level. The rest of the quarters will be rebuilt on the lower level and still be subject to damage from the floodwaters that have historically reached that level at least once per decade. And since Joe's daughters are now living out of state during the school year, extra bedroom space is no longer an issue.

In September, the club received contractor bids for the first time. The low bid was \$252,000, an amount well above what was anticipated. Dues and assessments will go up to about \$800 per member next year if this construction project is approved. Dues will then be at least \$500 the second year and will be at least that high or higher for eight more years. Regular dues increases (cost of living, unanticipated expenses, etc.) for these ten years will be additional.

These dues projections are based on the club successfully soliciting club members for interest-bearing loans totaling \$150,000. Either a shortfall in loans received or an increase in construction related costs, if this construction project is approved and goes forward, will cause these dues projections to be even higher. Construction costs of \$250,000, plus \$50,000 interest, is too much for moving the caretaker's refrigerator, stove, etc., up one level - and that in essence is all the construction project really accomplishes in terms of our original objectives.

No other part of the plan offers a real improvement to the present clubhouse. The caretaker's kitchen will move to where the present club kitchen is now, and then almost all of the remainder of the construction project is a chain reaction. The club kitchen will then have to move to the women's bathroom area (where due to county regulations we will likely end up with no stove); the women's bathroom and dressing area then moves down to the ground floor (with a greatly reduced or no dressing area); the men's bathroom area is then reconfigured.

All the new and costly construction at ground level could of course be damaged by floods at any time. Some say we must remodel the caretaker quarters to attract good caretakers. In fact, with the present quarters the club has been able to attract and retain the three excellent caretakers who have served over the last 20 years and continuing.

What is the alternative if the club votes No on this construction project? We could do nothing more, or we could take any action agreed on by the club. We could start a capital building fund until a better, more visionary plan is developed. We could, for instance, develop a construction plan that would have as a primary objective avoiding major damage in the every-decade floods and also one that might survive the next 100-year flood. Or, we could focus primarily on enhancing the present caretaker quarters. There would undoubtedly be wide support in the club for some increased spending on the present caretaker's quarters, as needed to enhance, improve and properly maintain the present caretaker's quarters.

A final reason to vote No on this project is that a late addition to the funding plan would allow all waiting list persons to immediately become members. This was added to gain increased funds for the proposed construction project through initiation fees, assessments, and full member dues. The effect of an increase in membership of this size on island facilities has not been given enough consideration.

\*

## Tryon Wells

The discussion of what, if anything, to do about improving the caretaker's quarters, is nearing completion of its 8<sup>th</sup> year. As Jeff Komarow summarized in last month's newsletter, much has been decided after much wrangling and debate, but so far, not a nail has been hammered. It is certainly easy to become discouraged about any issue that has convulsed and divided the club for so long and just wish the problem would go away.

But it really won't go away. At meeting after meeting, several compelling arguments are voiced that require that we look hard and make some decisions:

- The caretaker's quarters are in need of various repairs and renovations.
- The size of the caretaker's quarters is small.
- The caretaker's quarters are vulnerable to the inevitable flood.
- For the above reasons, it is hard to attract a quality caretaker (though we've been lucky).
- The uneven and partially collapsed concrete floor in the men's locker room is a potential liability hazard.
- The club has benefited for 70 years from the money spent in 1936 to rebuild the clubhouse, but now it needs to spend some more to protect that investment. Because of the quality of the investment in the clubhouse 70 years ago, our dues has stayed very low since our facility has seen very little repair or renovation.

While the renovation bids (to date) seem high, a one-time investment of around \$1000 per member would cover the entire projected expense of the approved plan (along with a 50% draw down of the club's reserve). Though this is not the financial proposal on the table, it illustrates the club's ability to pay for the proposed work. The finance committee's budget proposal that is on the table, is actually much easier on the membership, requiring only a \$300 special assessment for regular members (\$150 for senior members), with the bulk of the costs being paid for by a loan from club members. Though future dues increases will eventually pay back the loan, the financial strain of this budget plan is modest and will spread out over a longer period.

In my view, there are several additional reasons to go forward on this proposal:

- A comprehensive renovation, like the one planned, will probably only get more expensive in the future.
- Tackling the renovation in one fell swoop means it gets done now, not piecemeal over several years with varying degrees of quality.
- This renovation plan deals with the ground-level floors in a way that will make any future floor repairs simple and inexpensive.
- This plan will upgrade the building's plumbing and electrical systems; the latter presumably will also reduce the possibility of fire.
- The caretaker's quarters will expand as will the upstairs main clubroom (there's something in this plan for both the caretaker and the membership).
- The finance committee has crafted a clever financing scheme that should be relatively easy for the membership to afford.

In short, I hope the membership will vote to pay for and accomplish this project. It's really not that expensive, and the benefits will be deeply and broadly enjoyed by all of us for many years to come. Also, hopefully, we won't have to discuss it again for another 70 years!

\*



## From Holly Syrrakos, Island Archivist

### 76 Years Ago—*The November 1931 Sycamore Islander*

The *Islander* of November 1931 covered all the requisite events—the recent Halloween party, the upcoming “woodfest” and the recent meeting and election report.

There was a sort of editorial argument as well, about the condition of the Clubhouse. Evidently there had been an ongoing discussion about “improving the appearance of the club-room, to give it a more comfortable, club-like appearance.” There was some interest in “chairs of a comfortable type, roller shades and hanging curtains at the windows, a few old rugs and perhaps some pictures—but just the right ones—on the walls.” No member had a quarrel with the chairs but “the shades, curtains and rugs do not fare so well.” The argument being that “they’d soon be wrecked and also that ‘they wouldn’t look like Sycamore.’” The editor clearly did not agree with this line of thought. He wrote, “We might point out that we always had hanging curtains at the windows of the club-room before it was remodeled and although a great many thought they would ruin the half tobacco barn, half wood-shed appearance that was thought to be truly Sycamorian, even these die-hards changed their views when the curtains were actually hung.”

Even in November (or maybe late October) Sycamoreans were out on the Potomac. Titled “Club Members Shoot Rapids and Tin Cans,” the story unfolds...

“Harold Gray, Kalil Ackad and Bus Whipple took canoes up to Point of Rocks last Tuesday and started down the Potomac to Sycamore. It’s been a good many years since anyone tried to do this because of the low water in the canal but these three venturers were troubled with low water in the river as well as in the canal and when they had a foot of clear water under them they felt like they were on the boundless ocean. Except for the lack of water, things apparently went as well as a canoe trip can go without water. They had to haul the canoes by truck from Great Falls to Angler’s Club and spent Saturday night down there. Sunday morning half a dozen members went up to Bear Island to come down with the voyagers. While they were all on Bear Island they were shooting at a tin can with a .22 gun but no one was hitting close enough to let the can know there was a war on. Then up stepped young Jack Stodder and boldly declared that he’d show them how to hit that tar can on the first shot—And the funny part of it is that he did! Imagine it! Just lay down this paper and imagine it! Oh! The gloat of it all!”

Even though we now have a “warm room” in the Clubhouse, there is still plenty to do to make the Island ready for the winter so keep the Workfest in mind. And, remember Sycamore is open year



Photo by Norman Metzger

## In Touch With Joe....

Now that the water temperature of the river has dropped below sixty degrees and the sun goes down before six in the evening, I think it's safe to say that the summer season on the Island has finally come to an end. It makes me so glad -- I mean sad, of course -- to think that I won't have to pull the ferry as much for a while.

October was fun. We had great weather *and* I set a personal swimming record. I (and others) went swimming in the river on October 21. That's a full month after the Equinox! Another event to celebrate this past month was that we finally got some rain! That made all of us paddlers very happy.

I took advantage of the wet conditions and paddled Cabin John Creek for the second time. This time the water was higher, actually too high, and after I saw the first drop with its three-foot standing wave I decided to wait for the water to go down. I was glad I did because even with a foot less water to cope with, that creek was still very pushy and the short run was over before I knew it. October is a month of dramatic change here on the Island and we have been treated to beautiful river vistas nicely colored with yellow and red. My favorite time is in the morning. When I see that mist on the water and the sun breaking over the trees, I just want to jump in my boat and paddle out into the fog.

I heard a story this past month about hundreds of fish confined in a deep pool up above Ruppert's. It's impossibly rare for the conditions of low water and clarity to combine and offer us these great river experiences. But then again maybe this will be the norm of the future. I saw something unusual in the river one night. We were sitting on the Captain's float around 11:00 pm when something started to cause the mirror-still water to stir. My immediate response was that it's a beaver. I knew, of course that no fish would be making these kinds of large ripples and splashes, at this time of night especially. Then it seemed that something wasn't right. I know beaver, and they have a very distinctive wake that stays predictably straight as they swim past the docks. The creature we saw that night appeared very agile and a bit curious. This late-night episode made me think of my earlier discovery of clamshells under the dock. I like the idea of an otter spending the winter near the island. I haven't seen the ground hogs for a long time but you'll probably hear me complain about them next month when they decide to dig their winter homes under my bathroom again. I saw a bunch of swamp sparrows feeding on seeds at the foot of the Island.



"A giant fresh-water clam that was found by Alexander McCoy." Photo by Joe Hage.

I'll see you all at the Workfest. I'm renting a truck so we can haul out a lot of junk. I also want to build a new rack for the canoe paddles and maybe a landing between the two sets of steps on the Maryland shore. We have to bring in the floats, but I want to petition that we leave the Captain's Float in the river, at least for the time being. We also need to rake leaves and paint, if conditions are right.

My Raptor class on Wednesday nights runs through November so I won't be able to attend the monthly meeting; but I plan to attend the big holiday meeting in December.



## Saturday Relief Caretakers November — December

### NOVEMBER

3	10-2	Pat Barry	301-229-5351
	2-dark	Mary Ann Stein	301-229-8657
10	10-2	Silvija Strikis & Miguel Browne	703-748-4671
	2-dark	Bobby and Jody Benjamin	
17	10-2	Sam Francis	202-965-0314
	2-dark	Hester Ohbi	
24	10-2	Trip Reid	202-363-8554
	2-dark	Linda & Richard Riegelman	301-229-2871

### DECEMBER

1	11-dark	Susan Shattuck Benson	202-546-1016
8	11-dark		
15	11-dark		
22	11-dark		
29	11-dark		

\*\*\*\* Caretaker Volunteers \*\*\*\*

To volunteer, contact Maxine Hattery at 202-362-1361 or [hattery@aol.com](mailto:hattery@aol.com)

## Large Parties

John and Susan Membrino — Birthday Party for 35 from 12—3 on Saturday, November 3

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: [johnnoble@comcast.net](mailto:johnnoble@comcast.net), phone: 301-448-8562



*The Sycamore Islander*  
6613 80th Place  
Cabin John, MD 20818  
ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

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

FIRST CLASS MAIL

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

FIRST CLASS MAIL

### Sycamore Events

November Meeting — Wednesday,  
November 14, 8 p.m. Island.

Fall Workfest — Sunday, November  
18, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

December Meeting — Wednesday,  
December 12, 8 p.m. Site tbd.

N.B. General meetings are held at 8 p.m. on  
the second Wednesday of the month.



Halloween, Eight a.m.

Photo by Joe Hage