



# The Sycamore Islander

JANUARY 2010 | VOLUME 89 NUMBER 1

## President's Letter

Mindful of the custom when starting the new year, I offer some resolutions.

First, I resolve to serve with the performance of the Club's recent presidents as my inspiration. We are fortunate to have had such able and industrious leaders during this last decade or so. For an outfit that excels in differing opinions, their guidance in getting things done has been outstanding.

Another resolution is to address the problems of our waiting list system and methods for filling vacancies in our membership roster. We are rapidly approaching the point when the frozen waiting list will disappear. It seems to me the last thing we want to do is repeat the system that created years of waiting—which effectively excluded younger members and those with young children. I intend to work with the Membership Chairman and committee to resolve the problem. The issue needn't drag out for many months, and won't if we apply ourselves.

Finally, I resolve to nudge the Club into sponsoring more activities. We have a good start with the new and upcoming Winter Bird Walk on February 20. There is a dance, or party, (stay tuned) planned for April. We have lots of talented people to lead us in sharing favorite pursuits with the Club. Volunteers welcome, please.

January is the month when the Club prepares dues notices. You may not know when you receive your statement in the mail how much goes into this seemingly uncomplicated affair. Lisa Kliefoth, our Financial Secretary, must determine the bills individually for various categories of members as well as their special requirements (e.g., extra canoe rack). She then prints a bill for each member and places it in a stack to send out. There is more to do: sheets of addressed labels must be printed to go with the stack of bills, and then

sent to a special work-party of volunteers who sort everything, placing labels on envelopes and the matching bills in these envelopes. After this session, the box of stuffed envelopes is off to the post office. When we pay our bills, Lisa opens these hundreds of envelopes, records the data, and deposits the checks. We urge members to do your part: respond promptly when you receive your statement.

Those who attended the December meeting and pot luck Christmas party will attest to having a good time. We thank especially new members Meg and Charlie Jones, who volunteered to host, even though they had never experienced a December meeting/party.

**Star Mitchell is hosting the January 13 meeting at 8:00 P.M. at her house in Bethesda at 8705 Hempstead Avenue.** This is a few blocks west of the NIH complex. From Old Georgetown Road, turn west on Greentree Road for three blocks, then left onto Hempstead Avenue. The ninth house on the left is 8705. This address shows well on Google Map.

DAVID WINER  
President

### **ATTENZIONE! ATTENZIONE!**

Plans are in the making for a party in April to mark the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Sycamore Island Club. Caroline Gelb and Jane Winer are planning a dance to celebrate the occasion and, at the same time, to dedicate renovation of the clubhouse and caretaker's quarters. Please hold 17 and 24 April, 2010 as dates under consideration for the party to which everyone is invited, and watch for details about the dance and confirmation of the date in the next (February) newsletter.

## Minutes for the December 9 Meeting

It was with considerable difficulty that vice president David Winer called the meeting to order. The difficulty was because the year-end party, graciously hosted by Meg and Charlie Jones, was already going full tilt boogie. Delicious food and drink were spread over two tables.

Eventually, at about 8:15 P.M., David managed to coax members away from the bountiful refreshments and into meeting chairs.

No problem about securing quorum with the following present: Judy and John Lentz, Philip Ross, Pat Roth, John and Susanna Membrino, Larry Heilman, John and Ann Marie Cunningham, Drew Walsh, Karen Possner, Stan Wiggins, Alan and Caroline Gelb, Bill and Lucky Marmon, Renee Dunham, Peggy Thomson, Star Mitchell, Jody and Robert Benjamin, Tryon Wells, Charlie and Meg Jones, Jim Drew, and David and Jane Winer. (There was such a crowd that others may have been there who did not get far enough from the food and drink to sign in.)

David Winer presided in the absence of President Jeff Komarow.

David reported that because of the heavy rains, the ferry was not operating although the Island was not closed to any member who could navigate passage without the ferry. Compensation for caretaker Joe was also approved, with Alan noting to the meeting that the 2010 budget would be adjusted to take into account the decision.

The minutes of the last meeting, as reported in the December Islander, were approved with the amendment that Jane Winer should have been listed as volunteering to serve on the special committee, chaired by Peter Winkler, to consider new rules for club membership.

Alan Gelb gave the treasurer's report. (See separate report below). Alan requested approval for an operating budget of \$75,615 for 2010, which was approved unanimously. Compensation for caretaker Joe was also approved. Joe was commended for his good service and good humor and patience during the long and sometimes chaotic construction process.

Captain Tryon Wells reported that members should notify Tryon about whether they would want a locker, probably at no charge, in the renovated club house and if so, full length or half length.

The following slate of elected officers and supervisors for 2010 was approved unanimously:

### Officers

PRESIDENT David Winer

VICE-PRESIDENT Jim Drew

RECORDING SECRETARY Bill Marmon and Anne Marie Cunningham

TREASURER Alan & Caroline Gelb

FINANCIAL SECRETARY Lisa Kliefoth

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY Peter Winkler

EDITOR Carol Beehler

ARCHIVIST Larry Heilman

CAPTAIN Tryon Wells

DEPUTY CAPTAIN John Stapko/Drew Walsh

### Supervisors

FINANCE Bill Eichbaum

LAW Maurice Tobin

CLUBHOUSE Karl Kosok

GROUNDWORK Carol Kavanaugh

CARPENTRY/PAINTING Charles Pill

WEBSITE Tryon Wells

ENTERTAINMENT George and Shelley Malusky

CAMPING/PARTIES John Noble

CANOEING John Membrino

SWIMMING Larry Heilman

RELIEF CARETAKING Alison Burns

David opened the floor to new business. There was a suggestion that members should be encouraged to remove perishable food from the clubhouse and not leave food in the clubhouse after departing. Lucky Marmon volunteered to make a sign for the refrigerator to that effect.

A motion was made to commend outgoing president Jeff Komarow as well as former president Ann Marie Cunningham for the successful completion of the clubhouse renovation and to thank Jeff for his excellent service as immediate past president. The motion was passed unanimously with applause.

Meeting, but not the party, was adjourned at 9:10 P.M. President Elect David Winer put down his papers and proceeded to concoct a large vat of delicious and dangerously alcoholic eggnog.

Respectfully submitted,

BILL MARMON

Co-Corresponding Secretary

## Treasurer's Report for the December Meeting

By end November 2009 we have spent a total of \$156,687, which includes \$87,843 for the construction project and \$68,844 in operating budget. With a total operating budget of \$75,615 for the year this means that our operating expenditures will probably come out quite close to budget for the year. As members will recall, we constrained the budget in the areas of capital improvements and repairs because of the project. However, we needed to absorb the cost of major work on our water system, including the UV filter, and tree work to eliminate dangerous overhangs. Liability and property insurance were also more costly than expected. However, we saved money on the Islander because of the shift towards electronic distribution.

Project-related spending over the years 2008 and 2009 to date totals \$160,941. Of this, some \$18,000 was for items not initially programmed. These included several costly components mandated by county inspectors, such as a firewall and other safety features.

Assuming that we come out on budget we will carry over about \$74,000 to 2110 in the Treasurer's account. Of this, about \$10,000 needs to be considered as working funds carryover, meaning that our reserve is in the

Please mark your calendars for the Club's **Winter Bird Walk** for members and friends on Saturday February 20, 2010. Winter is a great time for birding along the Potomac River and Sycamore Island often hosts a terrific mix of winter residents such as Pileated and Hairy Woodpeckers, Bald Eagles, Nuthatches, and Carolina Wrens. The river in the vicinity of the Island also draws a variety of visiting waterfowl, including Red Head Ducks, Buffleheads, Grebes, and Mergansers. The outing will begin at 9:30 a.m. at the clubhouse. We will walk the Island and part of the towpath and conclude at 11:30 with coffee, pastries and an accounting of the morning's sightings.

For more information or to sign up, contact Paul Hagen, phagen@bdlaw.com.



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range of \$64,000. This is a creditable performance indeed, considering that we have just completed a major renovation. Moreover, with the collapse in short-term interest rates, our once considerable earnings on working capital and reserve have almost evaporated. Still, we can look on the bright side; at least we should not have to pay tax on our unrelated earnings for 2009.

The club therefore enters 2010 in good financial shape, with our reserve almost equal to the \$645,000 borrowed from members to help finance the construction. We will begin to pay these off in January 2010, at a cost of about \$10,000 per year.

Regarding the budget for 2010, inflation adjustment (as set by the consumer price index change over one year) is zero overall, and this would lead to an operating budget of \$75,615 plus the construction-related loan repayment of \$10,000. Adjusting the budget to reflect the decision of the meeting results in an operating budget of \$77,900. This will be taken as the 2010 envelope.

Respectfully submitted,  
ALAN GELB  
Treasurer

## Notes from the Island

**Monday, December 7, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.3**

**Water Temperature: 41**

The snow on the ground made it easy to spot the trails left by the beaver. A straight brown line of melted snow led from the riverbank to the young trees of the interior.

No visitors all weekend but I did get a good close look at three pied-billed grebes diving in the snowy waters.

**Wednesday, December 9, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.2**

**Water Temperature: 42**

Sorry folks, the river is going up and ferry service is shutting down. The river is predicted to crest at 7 feet on Friday. We'll see.

The beaver are getting real busy and we're losing more small trees than I realized. That river monster is getting territorial as well, aggressively slapping its tail at me when I cross in the early morning.

**Friday, December 11, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 7.35**

**Water Temperature: 35**

It looks like the river is cresting now at 5:00 P.M. It hasn't been this high since last may, it takes a little getting used to. This big river can be intimidating at times. Especially when the air temperature is 25 and the wind is blowing at 25 miles an hour.

The river will be going down soon but it might be days before it drops back below 5 feet.

**Monday, December 14, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.3**

**Water Temperature: 35**

It looks like the river will recede enough to run the ferry tomorrow.

Time to reel in the Captain's float. It might be a pain since there is a ton of debris piled up against it.

**Thursday, December 17, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.8**

**Water Temperature: 35**

The ramp to the Captain's float is back on shore again and I lowered and tightened the ferry rope. It's so

much easier to control the ferry when the rope is nice and taught.

It looks like winter is here to stay with a snowstorm predicted this weekend. It's amazing how quickly things can change. It was just two weeks ago that I was paddling up a low and tranquil river on a warm and moonlit night.

Looking back at that warm night I realize how perfect it was. It's rare when all the conditions on the river are just right all at the same time. The great thing about living here is that I can watch everything align and then take advantage. I also remember thinking that night that I needed to do more things that were unique to living on the river. You know, live up to the dream life that everyone imagines exists down here.

It was December first, yet it was in the fifties. There was no wind. The river was at 3.5 feet, not too high but high enough to make the rapids passable. And, the full moon was due to rise out of the east right when the sun disappears to the west. I decided that the thing to do was to paddle a canoe up past Cabin John Creek and hike up the hill to the beer store in Cabin John. Good Idea right? No need to sit in traffic on Macarthur



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blvd. just hop into a canoe. How many people can say that?

My timing was perfect. I paddled upriver, into the sunset, and the sky was ablaze with oranges, reds and pinks. By the time I was past Rupperts Island the sun was gone but a giant white globe was rising over my right shoulder. The trees were bare and the moonlight now cast their long skeletal shadows across the river in front of me. Soon all the ripples on the river were glistening like stars and, thankfully, I could see the rocks again. I got to shore just below Minnies Island and scrambled along the deer trails until I came out on the Parkway, right at the exit for Cabin John. It was rush hour and there must have been a problem on the Beltway because there were lines of cars everywhere. I felt a little strange, but in a good way, walking along and being the only one out there without a car.

I bought some milk and bread and hiked back to my canoe. As I launched my boat I could see the lights of the Beltway Bridge to my right and the lights of Chain Bridge to my left. There I was, floating in a timeless world between the bridges.

**Sunday, December 20, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.5**

**Water Temperature: 33**

Yesterday, when I walked out to shovel snow, the first bird I saw through the flakes was a junco with its deep black head and back, and its ivory bill. I thought it was appropriate to see this bird since its other name is snowbird. They're called snowbirds because they migrate down from the mountains every winter. Today there are dozens of songbirds gathered on the shore by a fallen tree. I think the fallen tree affords them a way to get a drink of water from the river since most other water sources are frozen or buried under snow. The gold finches are feeding on the seeds of the plants that are poking through the snow. They are also finding some sustenance from the tiny seeds of the Sycamores. These poor birds, I have birdseed on my list but I never got around to buying any. I went out early this morning, just after the sun came over the trees, to take some snow pictures. I took a picture of my measuring tape in the snow on the picnic table, 17 inches! The snow is great for tracking animals on the Island and this morning I saw the tracks of mice, squirrels and a deer. I followed the deer tracks as they meandered around the Island until I came to a



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bathhtub-shaped hole in the snow. I guess the deer spent the day sleeping right here on the Island. Then the incredible happened, I saw two rough-legged hawks! The male caught my attention first as it took off toward Rupperts Island. Then I notice the second bird on the ground just before it took off and followed its mate across the river. I went to inspect the carnage. A half eaten gray squirrel lying in the bloodstained snow. Rough-legged hawks breed in the far northern parts of Canada and are only seen further south in the winter-time. Its pretty rare to see them travel this far south, but maybe the snow storm had something to do with them being here. A rare sighting indeed.

**Tuesday, December 22, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.3**

**Water Temperature: 34**

I shoveled the board walk to the ferry and I cleared off the ferry as well, of course. I also moved all the snow



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from the bridge and its steps. I did not shovel the spiral pedestrian bridge; I was hoping that the Park Service would take care of that. So far they haven't gotten to it. The island is beautiful in the snow and I'm a little surprised that more of you haven't been down here to check it out. I guess everyone is at the sledding hills.

Big news, there is a phone in the club kitchen now, a working phone. I know that some of you will be very happy to know, I spent the snow day sorting out the Telephone Network Box. This box was a spaghetti of colored wires dangling from my kitchen wall. I managed to get it figured out and mounted again and I was even able to connect the right wires to get the club phone working again. I then installed the new phone jack and mounted the new phone in the kitchen by the stove. It looks good, sorry it took so long.

**Sunday, December 27, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 6.7**

**Water Temperature: 36**

The ferry is closed.

The river is close to seven feet now and is expected to crest tomorrow morning at seven and a half feet. It's a little bit of a nuisance but its not as bad as I thought it might be.

It was a little nerve-wracking being out of town on Christmas, during the reports of all the rain and melting snow. I was worried that I might not be able to get the ferry back to the Island because of flooding.

As it was, we got home just after dark and found the

dock only slightly submerged. The rope for the bell was down in the water though and I had to untangle it from all the driftwood and branches that it had snared. We took a swift ride across the river on the ferry and managed to disembark without getting our feet wet. We used the ferry bench as a miniature bridge to cross the flooded dock.

I immediately began making flood preparations; I extended the tether on the ferry and then, as I was pulling up the ferry rope, there was a huge crash. I knew right afterward that it was a tree that had fallen, but it sounded like an explosion! The high water was excitement enough so when we heard that tree fall, while standing in the dark, it made us both jump out of our skins. It sounded so close by that I was sure it was an Island tree that fell. We grabbed a flashlight to investigate the carnage but found nothing. This morning I walked down the towpath and found the fallen sycamore, uprooted with trunk broken, lying in the river.

**Monday, December 28, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 7.94**

**Water Temperature: 36**

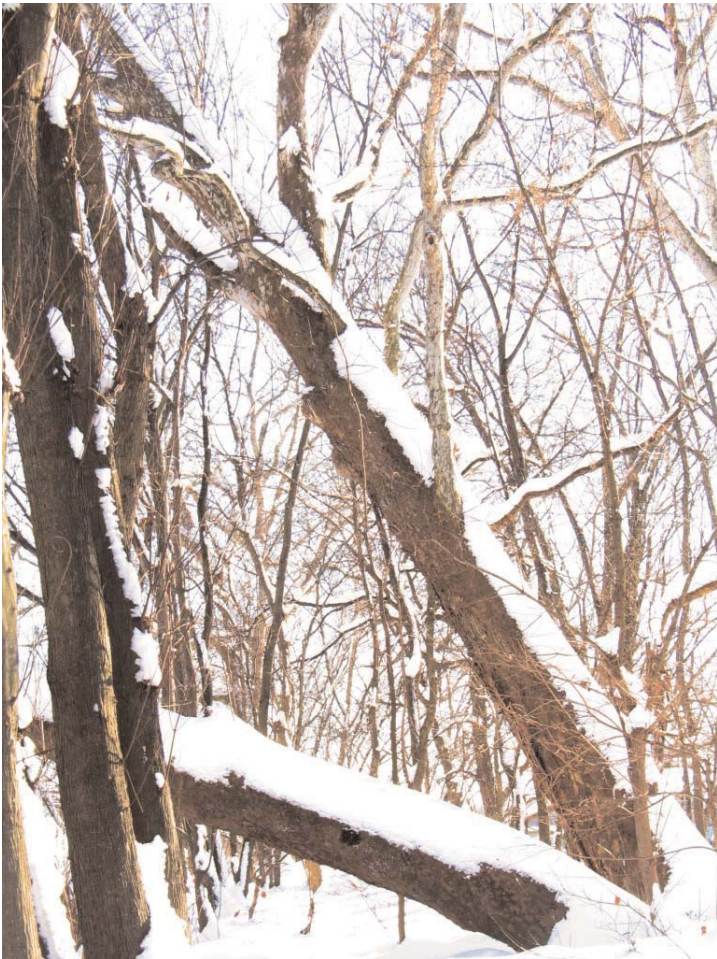
The river crested at 7.94. The gauge I installed on the Island read 8.3. I'm not sure why, but for some reason these two readings did not match, even though these two gauges did agreed with each other when the reading was 5.0 feet. I guess I installed my gauge wrong.

I've been struggling to keep the water running in the clubhouse and in the bathrooms. We had a cold snap earlier this month and I was able to keep the pipes from freezing by keeping the spigots open. Unfortunately, I forgot to turn off the water to the outdoor shower and that pipe did burst.

Soon I will be forced to turn off all the water to the club bathrooms and to the club kitchen. None of the bathrooms are winterized so we'll have to shut them down. So if you plan to come down here on a winter's day, please plan accordingly.

*Four months until the 125th anniversary party!*

JOE HAGE



## Pre-Christmas Snow

The next day, after the storm passed, Sycamore Island transformed into a Land of Enchantment.

Photos by David Winer.



# The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place  
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

## FIRST CLASS MAIL



# Happy New Year!

Saturday Relief Caretakers <b>January 2010</b>		
	MORNING 11 A.M.–DARK	
JANUARY 2	Tom and Mary Edsall 202.546.8389 t.edsall@verizon.net	
JANUARY 9	Barbara Neal 301.320.2864 nealdavis@aol.com (11:00–1:30)	Garrett Rasmussen 202.337.3396 Gigi1693@hotmail.com (1:30–dark)
JANUARY 16	Lyle Blanchard 202.320.2864 lmb@gdlaw.com	
JANUARY 23	Peter & Julia Smith 703.385.2883 Psmith8552@aol.com.	
JANUARY 30	Craig Iscoe & Rosemary Hart 202.244.5967 hartiscoe@erols.com	



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*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. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to: Carol Beehler at cbeehler@comcast.net. The deadline for inclusion in the January issue is January 23.