



# The Sycamore Islander

JUNE 2010 | VOLUME 89 NUMBER 6

## President's Letter

### The Party

Two ceremonial occasions celebrated with one party—and what a party it was. We couldn't have wished for a better setting of spruced-up and decorated Island in absolutely perfect weather. Preparations started early in the morning, with volunteers on hand to create a party atmosphere before the actual opening. Soon, the ferry made almost constant runs to transport the throngs over. Then games, demonstrations, food, singing, and dancing lasted late into the night. This was indeed a proper recognition of our 125-year heritage and all the effort that went into the renovated clubhouse.

The undertaking required a lot of people to carry it off. Quite a few members stepped up to suggest party ideas and to help run things. Many more just pitched in where needed. Thanks to all of you who helped make the party such a success. But we must call out by name the three who planned, coordinated, and oversaw the operation: Caroline Gelb, Jane Winer, and our caretaker, Joe Hage. As husband of Jane, I was in a special position to observe these organizers interact with each other through various stages of the effort. I can assure you that their unseen work was extensive. Special thanks to them.

### A Busy Month

The club sponsored two other successful activities this past month. Frank Daspit's canoeing instruction on a beautiful Saturday morning resulted in a very large

turnout. Canoes were all over the slough as tandem paddlers practiced newly demonstrated maneuvers. The next day, Marianne Ross led a smaller group on a bicycle ride along MacArthur Boulevard from the Sycamore Store to Old Anglers, and then down the towpath to Sycamore Island for sandwiches on the deck. It's good to see members sharing their enthusiasms like this with the Club.

To add to the unusual amount of activity in one month, we hosted the annual Canoe Cruisers race from Great Falls to our dock. Star Mitchell organized and ran the event with a great deal of help from Joe Hage and also from many other Islanders. These volunteers prepared the race course, served food and beverages, timed the racers, and manned safety canoes. On behalf of our members, thanks to all for all their effort.

### Meeting Matters

At the well-attended May meeting the club rejected four suggested changes of wording for membership terms. This next meeting will consider yet another definition of "senior member," which will require a two-thirds approval vote to change the pertinent by-law.

Next club-wide meeting is Wednesday, June 9 on the Island at 8:00 P.M. Joe plans to fire up charcoal for any who wish have their picnic supper include grilled items. So, for the full Island experience, plan to arrive early. See you there.

DAVID WINER  
President

## Children's Events at the 125th Anniversary Party

The 125th Anniversary Party saw the young and young at heart participate in a host of fun-filled games. Events kicked off with two, intertwined treasure hunts that saw dozens of children race around the island armed with compasses and their wits in order to solve puzzles and find their loot! Island co-treasurer Alan Gelb had carefully developed routes for the two teams and the kids were ably supported by Sandra Purohit, Michael Gelb and Raj Purohit as they tried to crack the code to get to the next clue. Of course, as they sped around the Island they did not know that all of them would receive a treasure at the end of the game!

After finding their loot and eating the snacks found in each treasure box, a number of the children decided to take part in a combination relay race. Sandra split the kids into teams and they successfully completed an egg and spoon/sack race combo in order to win more fun prizes. It was wonderful to see some old fashioned games embraced by the children—from the yelling you knew that they were having fun!

Not content with participating in two big games, a number of the children were happy to take part in a third game—this time including some adults! In this relay race, team members would each run to the other end of the “track” and pick up a bat—next they would stand the bat on its head, place their forehead on it and spin around. After several spins they would run/stagger back to their team and tag the next person. Two rounds of this game saw everyone from the organizing team



Children's games.

ask for a break and as Sandra, Raj and Michael watched the kids came back for more! They organized a game of capture the flag as a fitting end to a day of games!

RAJ PUROHIT

## A Cold Blooded Start to a Memorable Day

Reptiles Alive! was a great beginning to the all-day party May 8 in honor of the 125th anniversary of the founding of Sycamore Island Canoe Club. One member counted 29 enrapt kids, in addition to numerous adult kids.

The day's festivities were organized by Jane Winer and Caroline Gelb. One of Jane's jobs was to collect the crew and reptiles. I accompanied the crew assembled by Drew Walsh that carried the animals in their cages on and off the Island. Out of consideration for the few “snakephobes,” the beasts stayed within their blue plastic containers, anxious not to offend. Caroline Seitz was the main presenter and, according to a specially written ballad on her website, this was the reptile's first water voyage.

“Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale

A tale of a Reptiles Alive trip

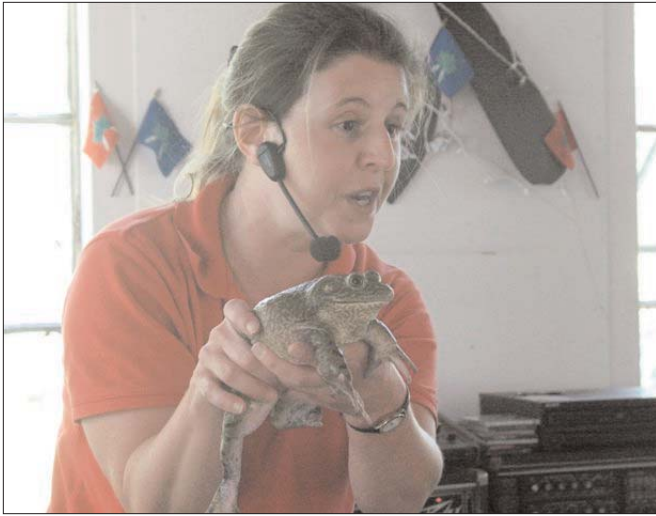
That started from our headquarters

Aboard our reptile van-ship.”

(see <http://reptilesalive.com/news/2010/05/12/an-island-tale/>)

Reptiles Alive! is a popular traveling wildlife education organization based in Northern Virginia. Caroline stressed that its animals are “working,” not pets. Such is show biz. Here are some of the critters I recall: black snake, box turtle, corn snake, bullfrog, snapping turtle, tree frog, and toad. Her copperhead was just a toy, but Caroline did have a real copperhead skin. There is no foolproof way to identify a copperhead—not by triangular head, nor by its cat-like eyes. Some harmless snakes look like copperheads. Unless you're an expert, you can't be sure they are not.

My favorite was Mr. Bullfrog, though the snapping turtle was sweet. Still, Caroline avoided putting her fingers in front of him. Caroline told us that turtles have been around since the days of the dinosaurs, so obviously they are doing something right. But you don't want to accidentally flip one over, since a turtle can't



PHOEBE HAMMILL

Caroline Seitz of Reptiles Alive!

easily right itself. Caroline lifted a very large snapping turtle to show us its underbelly. This turtle (whose growth was actually stunted) was about 25 years old, but turtles can live to be 100, especially in the wild. Tortoises grow even older. So don't lightly get such a pet; it is a lifetime project! At the end of the show we got to look closely at the reps in their bins, and got to pat a corn snake, held expertly by Caroline.

Following the reptiles was a day of lazy enjoyment and socializing among some 200 guests. The Gelb family organized games for the children. The weather was a bit cool for swimming. Even Caroline Gelb, in Gay 90s swimwear, did not venture near the bathing machines. Renee Dunham put together a clever Edwardian ensemble, complete with colorful wide-brimmed bonnet to protect the complexion. Joe Hage was a Swiss Alps type, and Caroline Gelb's family were. . . indescribable.

Before dinner we nibbled at appetizers. We drank a champagne toast in honor of the occasion and listened to brief speeches by dignitaries—President David Winer, and past Presidents Jeff Komarow and Ann Marie Cunningham. They said we can be justifiably proud about completing the clubhouse renovation project. They reflected on our place in the cycle of Sycamoreans past, present, and future, who cherish the Island's qualities. Cindy Bertaut took a wide lens group picture which I like to think will grace the clubhouse walls in 2110 (see masthead).

Dinner, about 5:30, featured the excellent results of the pork pulling operation that had gone on all afternoon in the kitchen, courtesy David Winer, Steve



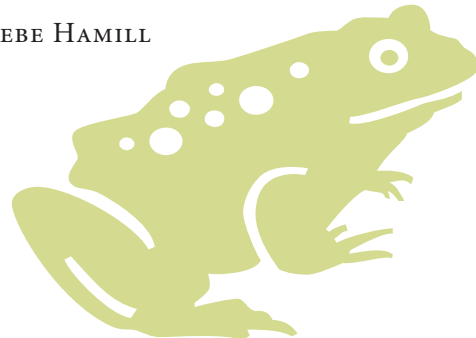
PHOEBE HAMMILL

A group of children at the Reptiles Alive! presentation.

Newman, Mary Tisdale, and other helpers. It was delicious, as were the myriad other offerings. With all modesty I will say that my scalloped potatoes were a success. I think everybody got enough to eat but there was little food left over. By 7 P.M., contra dancing was in full swing in the clubhouse. The last stragglers left about 10 P.M.

I'll end with our place in history. I was moved to finally read those long, but superbly written, accounts by ancient worthies on the occasion of the Sycamore Centennial. One Norment Curtis writes about a direct vertical descent (no switchback) from Conduit (now MacArthur) down to Sycamore. This deterred some prospective members. In his youth, Sycamore had a tennis court, and the top floor of the "canoe house" was a coed dormitory, separated by a curtain. We even had our own financial scandal during the first decade of the 20th century. The Secretary/Treasurer claimed to be buying ice for the Sycamore ice house, but was siphoning off club funds. This miscreant even ran off with the minutes so we have a few silent years in our records. No one else on record demonstrated criminal tendencies. . . so far as we know.

PHOEBE HAMILL



## Canoe and Kayak Storage—2nd Notice

We are sorting out rack assignments in the canoe shed. If you have been assigned a slot but no longer keep your canoe or kayak on the island, or have one in the shed that you no longer use, please contact canoe supervisor John Membrino at 301.229.1154 or johnmembrino@verizon.net. There are also a number of orphan canoes and kayaks on the ground. All canoes and kayaks kept on the island must have an assigned space in the shed. If you are uncertain whether you have an assigned rack in the shed, or if you are the owner of one of the craft listed below that are outside the shed, please contact the canoe supervisor. A reasonable effort will be made to identify the owners; after that, unauthorized canoes and kayaks left on the island will be auctioned off or disposed of.

Grumman Mooskamoo; American Fiberlite birch-style; green Coleman (Backyard Boats decal); green Liquid Logic kayak; yellow Perception kayak; red Mainstream Streak kayak; black kayak (no markings); green Discovery 158; red Phoenix 58; white aluminum canoe—DR PANGLOS; blue/white kayak MD 8669 V; aluminum Moker Craft; Cobra Navigator kayak; red Perception Swifty kayak; blue/green Mainstream Fiesta kayaks—two.

### Items available for sale to commemorate Sycamore Island's 125th Anniversary

T-shirts and mugs to commemorate Sycamore Island's 125th Anniversary are available. The T-shirts and mugs cost \$10 each. T-shirts are available in sizes L, XL and 2X. Individuals who want T-shirts or mugs can purchase them from Joe Hage, caretaker of the Island.

If you would like a baseball cap with a logo similar to the one on the mug, send an e-mail to Nell Hennessy at nell.hennessy@fiduciarycounselors.com with "Sycamore Island cap" in the subject line and indicate whether you would like the cap to be white or tan.



Mug design



T-shirt design

## Island BBQ Social Hour

Wednesday June 9, 2010  
6:00 P.M.

Come down to the Island on Wednesday before the monthly meeting and enjoy a summer evening with your fellow Club members.



Joe will have all the grills ready to go, so bring something to cook.



### Saturday Relief Caretakers **June 2010**

	10 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DARK
JUNE 5	Catherine Langer 202.342.1462 Cathylanger44@aol.com	Brenda and Jack Sanders 703.799.6624 Jack.sanders@cox.net
JUNE 12	Mary and Tom Edsall 202.494.5550 t.edsall@verizon.net	Mary and Tom Edsall 202.494.5550 t.edsall@verizon.net
JUNE 19	Francis and Francoise Latapie 301.2291429 Latapie3@aol.com	Hester Ohbi and Bob Beauchamps 202.667.8529 hesterohbi@verizon.net
JUNE 26	Eric Simpson 703.821.7556 ewsimpson@cox.net	Carole Trippe 301.469.1515 ctrippe@mathematica-mpr.com



PHOEBE HAMMILL

Greeters Narayan Teli, Raj Purohit, Mike Gelb, and Sandra Purohit



PHOEBE HAMMILL

Jane Winer and Caroline Gelb



PHOEBE HAMMILL

Joe Hage

# 125



PHOEBE HAMMILL

A young celebrant



DAVID WINER

Renee Dunham in period costume



DAVID WINER

Narayan Teli and Gerry Barton



DAVID WINER

Games

## Notes from the Island

**Monday, May 3, 2010**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7 Water Temperature: 72**

The water has warmed up and swimming season has begun! It was quite a treat to plunge into the river again for the first time this year, especially since it was so blistering hot yesterday. We need to get the rescue boat in order and one day, when I have a lot of swimmers here, we'll have to put the swim float out in the river.

It will be a busy week for me, getting ready for the big party on Saturday. I'll be working every afternoon trying to spruce things up in case anyone wants to come down and pitch in.

The nesting warblers are here. I've seen the prothonotary and the northern parula working on their nests. Other birds, like the orioles and goldfinches, are very busy nest-building as well.

**Monday, May 10, 2010**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.6 Water Temperature: 63 PAARRTAY!!!**

What an awesome party we had here on Saturday! Many thanks to all you members that showed up and helped us commemorate this special event. There were many familiar faces but also quite a few unfamiliar ones, nothing like a party to pull the members out of the wood work. One member came all the way from New Jersey to be here.

This party was such a success and it was thanks to the huge efforts of some dedicated members. We all need to thank Jane Winer and Caroline Gelb for planning and organizing everything. We also need to thank the entire Gelb family, Alan, and son Michael, their niece Sandra and her husband Raj, and of course Niryan. They did all of the behind the scenes labor. And thanks to Dave Winer for preparing and cooking all that delicious meat.

**Thursday, May 14, 2010**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.6 Water Temperature: 63**

Caroline, the reptile woman, has posted a cute story about her trip to the Island on her web site. Check it out <http://reptilesalive.com/news/2010/05/12/an-island-tale/>

I just had a good look at our young eagle. As far as I can tell we have just the one successful chick. It was



A nice smally (small-mouth bass)

standing on the edge of its nest, completely black in color except for a couple of white patches on its breast. I think we should call her snow bird since it was hatched during that huge snowstorm we had.

**Tuesday, May 25, 2010**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.4 Water Temperature: 68**

The ferry, *Mamie*, is closed today; the river is above five feet. It looks like it will be back down below five by tomorrow and *Mamie* will be running again. (Maybe we should call her *Mamie II*, the first *Mamie* was the original name of the first boat purchased by the Club.)

**Saturday, May 29, 2010**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.0 Water Temperature: 74**

I'm glad to not have any big events happening on the Island this weekend. It's been a fun, but very busy, month down here. Last week we had the Downriver Race, the week before that we had the canoe class and before that we had the massive, over the top, anniversary party.

The Down River Race was a lot of fun and we had a respectable 45 racers. Many of the old-timers were here and we had a few first-time racers as well. Sadly, there were not many Islanders running the race. The trophies were extra special this year; Davey Hearn recycled some of his many trophies and the winners were treated to large and shiney, marble and gold trophy goblets.

Frank Daspit led an excellent canoe class and there

was a good turnout for that. I learned some things and it was fun to have an excuse to get out on the river early on a Saturday.

I think May is my favorite month on the Island. April is a close second with her bluebells, but May just has so much going on. May is hands down the best time for viewing birds and bird life. Everyday I can spot over twenty different species of birds, without even using binoculars. All types of birds flock to the Island for its superb nesting opportunities and abundant food sources, our mulberry tree being a favorite. Another interesting bird note: there is a piliated woodpecker that hammers on the same tree, at the same time, 6:00 P.M., every day! How do they know how to tell time?

Snakes are also in abundance here. I've seen water snakes almost every day for the last two weeks and I happen upon a black snake or a garter snake now and then. One day I found a shed snake skin in the rafters of the clubhouse.

I caught my first small-mouth bass this month, a nice 13-incher. I heard some bad news about fishing. It seems that the dreaded snakehead has been seen in large numbers down at Fletcher's Cove and below Chain Bridge. The aliens are knocking on the door!!

May also marks the beginning of the swimming season when the river offers us its cool, refreshing waters. Swimming in the river is so awesome, and as of yesterday, the swim float is out and ready for use.

I got all the cables attached and we got the swim float in the water. I've been tackling many other tasks



Broad-headed skink.

JOE HAGE



JOE HAGE

This black snake was in the middle of the field one day. When I came around the corner it was being heckled by two black crows.



JOE HAGE

Garter snake

too. I finally reattached the power line to the house and replaced the siding and trim that was damaged. I moved the phone line while I was at it. Before, the phone line ran right over the landing of the clubhouse steps and it was often in the way as people walked up the steps, but now it's way off to the side. I repaired some canoe thwarts and I installed two canoe rings on the dock so that people have something to tie their boats to. I took advantage of the holiday to start another major project, scrape and paint the exterior siding of the clubhouse.

JOE HAGE

# The Sycamore Islander

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Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

## FIRST CLASS MAIL



Prothonotary warbler, a breeding summer resident on the Island

BRUCE BEEHLER

### Island BBQ Social Hour

Wednesday June 9, 2010, 6:00 PM

Come to the Island on Wednesday before the monthly meeting and enjoy a summer evening with your fellow Club members.



Joe will have all the grills ready to go, so bring something to cook.

### Large Parties Scheduled

June 15, from 6 pm on, Andy Malmgren will host 20 guests for a dinner party.



June 21, Penelope Mitchell will have a Summer Celebration for 35 from 5–9 pm.

*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](mailto:cbeehler@comcast.net). The deadline for inclusion in the July issue is July 5.

Masthead photo of anniversary celebrants by Cindy Bertaut