



The Sycamore Islander

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President's Letter

Our next club meeting is Wednesday, July 13 at 8:00 p.m. on the Island. Joe fires up the BBQ at 7:00 so come early for a pre-meeting picnic. Bring something to grill and if you like, a dish to share. Come even earlier and have a swim.

What a wonderful summer solstice dance party we had last month !! The clubhouse was filled with members and guests. Others were outside at picnic tables and on the docks listening to the music. People brought food and refreshments. The band, BG and the Mojo Hands, was really great for dancing and listening. And, our karaoke session during the band's intermission turned out to be a lot of fun.

There must be a strong correlation between enjoying the outdoors and loving to dance. Or maybe it's just that Sycamore Island keeps us all young at heart. Thank you again to the incredibly hard working dance committee: Joe Hage, Caroline Gelb and Jane Winer.

At our April meeting the club voted to join the National Park Service's Canal Steward program by "adopting" the mile of the towpath that runs in front of Sycamore Island—from the dam up to lockhouse seven.

We are responsible for keeping our adopted mile clean and clear of brush and fallen limbs, and for alerting the Park Service if we see major problems. Caretaker Joe Hage initiated our contact with the Canal Steward program.

Joe would like to lead a group of Islanders on a working walk of our adopted mile once a month. Meet at the ferry landing every second Sunday of the month at 10:00 a.m., beginning on Sunday, August 14. Join this monthly walk as often as you can. It will be a nice hike with fine company, and a project very worth doing. Call Joe, 301.229.4921, for more information.

There are no major club events scheduled for this month. Quiet enjoyment of Sycamore seems best for the hot days of July. Come to the Island and swim, relax, picnic, read a book, get a tan, canoe, do some fishing, fix your lunch in the clubhouse kitchen, or just walk the island trails and enjoy the solitude.

JIM DREW
President



DAVID WOWER

Minutes for the June 8 Meeting

The meeting was called to order by President Jim Drew after a barbecue and picnic on the lawn.

Attendees: John Membrino, Jane Winer, Margaret Barry, Cris Weals, Maria Stenzel, Dave Winer, Jeff Komarow, John Noble, Joe Membrino, Susan Dunham, Dan Schember, Chris White, Jim Drew, Ann Marie Cunningham

The minutes, as printed in *The Islander*, were approved with one correction; the date for the dance is Saturday, June 25.

Large Parties: John Noble reported that there are seven large parties scheduled in June, one in July, one in August, and one in September. Watch *The Islander* for the dates.

He then introduced Maria Stenzel who described a large party on August 13 (with an alternate date of July 9) with Inner City Outings, an organization sponsored by the Sierra Club. There will be about 12 children and 15 to 18 adults. She needs someone who will host, as she will unexpectedly be away. The host will just need to be present, as the other adults will feed the children their lunch as soon as they arrive and organize play activities. John Membrino may be able to host.

Cris Weals wants to hold a party for a soccer team of 12 to 14 girls and several adults on Saturday June 11. There are no conflicts at that time. It was approved.

Swimming: Larry Heilman reported via Jim Drew that he would like to hold swimming lessons focusing on river safety. A date will be determined.

Bamboo poles were brought to the Island to be kept by the floats for holding out to people who may have trouble swimming back to the float. They should be painted in bright colors so their purpose will be more obvious.

Membership: A committee meeting was held this month to develop a proposal (or plans) for a process for admitting new members. The discussion included the following points:

- There should be clearly defined goals
- The process should select people according to skills that would be useful to the club
- It should be a random, democratic process

- The list should be sorted by age to ensure admission of younger people
 - It should be a simple process
 - There shouldn't be a waiting list that lasts for years
 - Everyone is welcome to participate in the committee
- Once the plan(s) is developed, it will be published for comment and discussion.

Captain/Caretaker Report: The swim float has not yet been set out because the water has been too high when work was planned. Tryon Wells will set a new date soon.

Joe Hage will repaint the lines in the parking lot.

Joe reported seeing illegal dumping, and requested that Montgomery County provide a new sign.

Does anyone have a project and laptop for use during the dance on June 25? Joe would like to project archived photos.

The first work session in the canal steward program was held and Joe completed the clearing of graffiti and rescrowing the boards on the bridge. Future sessions may be held on a different date as the first Sunday of the month comes before notice would appear in *The Islander*.

Old Business: The Summer Solstice Dance Party will be held on June 25, with a live band and karaoke. Joe will play guitar and lead us in song. Everyone should come and bring a side dish to share. See the ad in the June *Islander* for more details.

New Business: Joe will kayak from Sycamore Island to St. Catherine's Island in the lower Potomac, a distance of 90 miles, in support of the Potomac Riverkeepers' Pure Potomac program. He will leave on July 9 following a send-off party, and arrive at St. Catherine's in time for a celebration. Joe will maintain a blog during the trip. He hopes that you will donate to support pure drinking water for our region.

Respectfully Submitted,
ANNE MARIE CUNNINGHAM
Co-recording secretary

Swimming at Sycamore Island

Swimming in the Potomac River off Sycamore Island on a hot summer day can be a marvelous adventure. However, this is a wild and sometimes hazardous river with conditions varying greatly in terms of water level, current, temperature, floating objects, and other objects under the surface. Diving in the river is especially dangerous. One must always keep in mind that the river can be dangerous, especially if not treated with respect.

For a number of years the river has been declared clean and safe for swimming. However, there have been articles in the *Washington Post* that suggest that after heavy rains, because of the run-off upstream, the river may be unfit for swimming.

The river is within a federally controlled area, and the Park Service has jurisdiction. It was announced in the *Washington Post* in 2010 that it was illegal to swim in the river. However, when the Deputy Director of the Park Service was contacted, he stated that though it is illegal to swim off the banks of the Potomac River, it is legal to swim off Sycamore Island in view of the fact that it is private property. The article in the *Washington Post* was published after two people had drowned in the river.

The Swim Supervisor's suggested guidelines for your consideration:

- Swim at your own risk.
- Avoid swimming alone.
- Parents are responsible for their children.
- Members and guests should only swim off the swim float if they are able to comfortably swim to and from the float without stopping.
- Never dive head first into the water.
- It is inadvisable to swim in the in the channel between the Island and the mainland. Because of the swift currents that run through the channel, it can be extremely dangerous.

It can be tempting to allow non-swimmers or children to play in the water if they are using flotation devices. This is inadvisable and potentially very dangerous. You should NEVER allow a non-swimmer or a child to use a flotation device.

If you see a swimmer in distress, quickly try to place something that provides flotation support close to the swimmer in distress. There are several flotation devices

in the immediate vicinity of swimming dock.

A good procedure to follow if you see a swimmer in distress is to reach for the distressed swimmer with a pole; to throw the distressed swimmer a life saving device attached to a rope; and finally if there is no other alternative, to swim out to the distressed swimmer. Swimming to rescue a person in distress can be dangerous and should be avoided unless you are trained in lifesaving. Even if you trained in lifesaving and a strong swimmer, you should take a flotation device with you to give to the swimmer in distress.

The club keeps a canoe close to the swimming dock to assist in the rescue of boaters or swimmers in distress.

Enjoy the river and respect it!

LARRY HEILMAN
Swim Supervisor

Dance Party

The Summer Solstice Dance Party on Saturday, June 25 was well-attended. The humid weather had broken the night before, giving us a perfect evening for nibbling on appetizers, picnicking, and guzzling pretty darn good punch—even before the dancing began. Early on, Jody Benjamin gave a demo of Karaoke singing, and hopes for it as a “performer's dream come true” were fulfilled later when Joe Hage and Tryon Wells performed during a break between sets. They were really, really good! And so was the band, BG & the Mojo Hands—their sound inspired some terrific dancers and dancing (see photos).

Joe's early request for people to help with set-up brought on board Linda Martin-McCormick and Cecily Abram who transformed the Dance Hall into the House of Here Comes the Sun. Judy Lentz brought flowers, and transports of ice by Joe, Jane and David, and Sherry Fizdale kept the drinks cool. Cecily attempted—and made—gallons of our own label root beer, which we will attempt again some day, with a few technical changes to the process.

The party began early enough so that families with young children enjoyed the hoop-la, had their dinner and a taste of punch.

It was glorious—so we'll look for you next year!

JANE WINER



Dance Party



Dance Party photos by David Winer



Notes from the Island

Sunday, June 5, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.8 Water Temperature: 75

I hosted the second monthly Canal Steward Day here this morning. Nobody showed up. I was able to get some of the work done even without help. I refastened some of the planks on the bridge and I did a lot of sweeping. I was going to paint over the graffiti on the “dam ahead” sign, but I was afraid it was going to rain so we’ll save that for another day. Remember, the first Sunday of every month, from 9–12, we will gather to do maintenance and clean-up on our beloved towpath. We are the Stewards for Mile 7!

I solved the mystery about our baby eagle. I did not understand why I was not seeing the young eagle in the nest. The last I had seen it, back in mid-May, it was an adult-sized bird and it was standing on the edge of the nest. I thought it looked big, but since the young eagles never fledge before July, I thought I would have many opportunities to view it at the nest during the next month. The mystery was solved yesterday when I saw the young eagle flying! I was shocked to see it soaring above me as it headed toward the nest, and I still don't get how the bird learned to fly a whole month ahead of schedule.

Monday, June 6, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7 Water Temperature: 75

We had our busiest day of the year so far yesterday, not counting the workfests, or the Down River Race. I had some fishermen in the morning, then a high school reunion party of about 10 people. Later in the afternoon there was a birthday party of 12 and 16 cub scouts and scout leaders. Not to say that it was crazy or crowded, there was plenty of room for everyone with room to spare. The scouts took out seven canoes but there were still plenty of boats for the other guests. It was a fun day.

I just saw the first jewel weed blossom of the summer. Funny, I thought they didn't bloom until July. I was putting a boat up in the canoe rack and accidentally knocked another boat off of the rack. When I went to return it to its spot I noticed that there were two tiny wren's eggs in it, next to the remnants of a nest. I put the kayak back on the rack and tried to restore the nest and eggs back to their original position. I hope the parents come back, and check your boats if you're taking

them out for the first time of the season. There might be a nest in it.

Wednesday, June 15, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.4 Water Temperature: 73

We got the swim float out on Sunday and yesterday I picked up some noodles, so we are in full swimming mode. I did not put the slide back on the dock yet and I'm not sure I will this year. It takes up so much room on the dock.

Monday, June 20, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.3 Water Temperature: 73

This Saturday is the big night, the Sycamore Island After Hours Solstice Dance!! The party starts at 7:00, be there or be square!

The other super big event that is coming up is my Island to Island Kayak Trek to support Potomac Riverkeeper and raise awareness about the source of our drinking water. My trip starts in less than three weeks, leaving the Island on July 9, and arriving at Jefferson Island Club on July 16!

Wednesday, June 29, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.3 Water Temperature: 79

Summer time and the living is easy. I've been enjoying the extraordinary weather and the nice, lazy river. These supreme conditions have made it difficult to stay focused on all the projects that need doing around here but we have managed to get a lot done. Tryon was here last week and we repaired the dock ramp. We also put up a new “safety station” on the swim dock where we now have a throw ring ready for rescue. I had to change out one of the pulleys on the ferry cable, always a tricky job. I spent some time cleaning up for the dance so the screen porch and other areas are looking better than normal. Yesterday I did some tree work and cut the old mulberry tree way back. Then there are the invasive vines, an endless job. I had Amerik Ohbi here as a volunteer. He and his helpers replaced some rotted siding and a drip cap. Helper Carl even crafted a Sycamore Island logo out of plywood and used it to cover the old stovepipe hole that was on the front of the clubhouse. It looks really cool, thanks Amerik and Carl! There is also some painting going on.

Now that summer is here most of the nesting warblers and orioles are less active and their songs are less frequent. The eagles are done raising their chick as well



and eagle sightings have gone way down. What is interesting is that there are other birds coming in to take their place. Suddenly, green-backed herons are a common sight on the canal and I just saw the first great egret of the year. The king birds are still very active and I watch them as they perform their arial acrobatics, catching any poor insect that might be flying by. I watched this adept predator try to catch a large dragonfly but somehow the dragonfly was able to out maneuver the hungry bird.

I've also been busy training for my big kayak trip down the Potomac. I try to spend at least an hour everyday paddling back and forth around the Island. The exciting thing is that Potomac Riverkeeper has me up on their website and people can go there and support my trip and Potomac Riverkeeper. I like their new slogan, "I'm 2/3 Potomac". Since we are all 2/3 water and since we get all our water from this river we are all 2/3 Potomac River! I'm happy that my trip might raise awareness about the importance of this river and I've

already raised some money for the cause! Thanks to everyone for their enthusiasm!

So I was doing my training the other day when I noticed something unusual swimming across the river. I've become familiar with what a beaver or a muskrat look like as they swim and this creature was neither of those. What ever it was, it was diligently traveling across the channel toward the Island. I paddled quickly to catch up with it before it got away and when I got up close I was shocked. It was a squirrel paddling itself across the river. I got up close, closer than I'd ever been to a healthy squirrel, and the little animal started to take on a Jimminy Cricket type of personality. The poor thing could not dive to avoid me so its only recourse was to just swim as fast as he possibly could and hope that I didn't bother it. He reached the Island and quickly ran up a tree. I've seen squirrels swimming before and I'm convinced that they have no trouble coming and going to the Island.

Don't forget, we have the Sycamore Island Canal Steward Day coming up on this Sunday, starting at 10:00 a.m. Starting in August we will do the Canal Steward Day on the second Sunday of the month instead of the first Sunday.

Thursday, June 30, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.3 Water Temperature: 79

I was wrong about the eagle. I just paddled by the nest and the young eagle was there.

We've had a lot of evening visitors the last two days. The nice weather has brought out the swimmers and I've had to run the ferry right up to 9:00 p.m. It was exciting though. In the midst of everyone frolicking and jumping into the water, a solitary beaver coolly marched onto the Island and started to eat the plants by the swim dock.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

The Sycamore Islander is the monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. Every attempt is made to publish *The Islander* before the second Wednesday of the month in advance of the monthly meeting. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to: Carol Beehler, cbehler@comcast.net.

The deadline for inclusion in the August issue is August 1.

The Sycamore Islander

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Masthead photo by David Winer

DAVID WINER