



The Sycamore Islander

JUNE 2012 | VOLUME 91 NUMBER 6

President's Letter

The club's meeting this month is Wednesday, June 13, on the Island. There will be a picnic before the meeting. Joe Hage fires up the BBQ at 7:00 p.m. Come early, bring something to grill, and if you like, a dish to share. The meeting will begin at 8:00 with a talk on old saws by Islander Wayne Limberg. Wayne restored the four antique saws on display in the clubhouse.

Sycamore Island's 127th Anniversary Summer Dance Party is Saturday night, June 23. The dance will again be a really great time for all members, wait list folks, and families. Come early and have a paddle, a swim, and a picnic. For more information see the dance notice in this issue.

The club now has 62 families on the new wait list. Most of these 62 participated in the May orientation and have wait list passes. These wait list pass holders will be on the Island on weekdays and for weekend club events and projects—so say hello.

We have now completed one full cycle of our new process for adding future members. All Islanders should recognize and appreciate the work of John Noble, membership secretary; Lisa Kliefoth, financial secretary; and Bill Marmon, chair last year of the special membership committee. The next lottery is 2014.

Sherry Pettie Fizdale, club supervisor for scheduling relief caretakers, has a notice in this issue requesting volunteers. Every able-bodied member and wait lister needs to be a substitute caretaker at least once a year.

Volunteering is a good way for wait list families to spend a Saturday on the Island during the summer.

Last month's Potomac Downriver Race was quite a day. Several members raced and did well. Many also participated in safety boats and others helped with timing as the racers crossed the traditional Sycamore Island finish line. Islander Star Mitchell did a fine job again as the overall race coordinator.

Swimming at Sycamore Island is wonderful. It keeps you young and cool. Please read swimming supervisor Larry Heilman's excellent article in this issue.

JIM DREW
President



Wild petunia, one of many blooming on the Island (endangered in Maryland)

JOE HAGE

Minutes for the May 9 Meeting

The meeting was called to order by President Jim Drew after a very interesting presentation by Robin Broder of the Potomac Riverkeeper on the state of the river. She cited a number of pollution concerns that are evident in fish and other wildlife, such as intersex fish with suppressed immune systems. What the affect of these pollutants on human health may be is a major research question. She also discussed some issues relating to hydraulic fracturing (fracking) in the Marcellus Shale, and some success stories that they have had. Joe Hage related a personal experience with red water in the Little Falls Branch in which the Potomac Riverkeeper helped to resolve the matter.

Attendees: Jim Drew, Star Mitchell, Sally Strain, Sherry Fisdale, David Winer, Bill Marmon, Tryon Wells, Jane Winer, Larry Heilman, Gerald S. Barton, Phoebe Hamill, Lucky Marmon, Stan Wiggins, Ann Lucy, Louise Meyer, Drew Walsh, and Ann Marie Cunningham.

Minutes: The minutes of the last meeting were approved as they appeared in the last *Islander*.

Communications: New waitlist members have been sending Financial Secretary Lisa Kliefoth their fees, as soon as they have learned her address.

Captain/Caretaker Report: Drew Walsh thanked David Winer for attaching life rings to the captain's and swim floats. Life rings will also be added to the canoe float and ferry.

Membership Committee: Bill Marmon reported on behalf of John Noble. Currently, there are:

- 157 regular members, with a maximum of 160, so we will admit new members soon
- 67 senior members
- 14 inactive members
- 17 honorary members
- 18 on the old waiting list
- 62 on the new waiting list (47 have attended the new member orientation)

New waiting list members have 30 days from when they were notified of their status to pay the \$150 initiation fee.

Swimming: John Heilman reported that the swim float will be brought 10 yards closer to the Island to be in the same position as last year. He is considering offering a water safety class, as swimming in a river can be very different than swimming in a pool.

Relief Caretaking: Sherry Fisdale reported that the initial response to her emails when she became the relief caretaking was quite positive, but that has fallen off. It should be an obligation of all members to volunteer annually.

Downriver Canoe Race: Star Mitchell reported on the plans for the downriver race on May 12. This is the 57th annual downriver cane race, the oldest in the nation. It was started by Sycamore Island, with the Canoe Cruisers Association taking over the next year. The ferry cable serves as the finish line.

Canoes: Frank Daspit will lead a canoe class on Saturday, May 19th.

Midsummer Dance: Col. Josh and the Honky Tonk Heroes will perform on the Island on June 23. There will be Hank Williams music, karaoke, lessons in the Texas two step and waltz, and more.

Environment/Grounds Committee: Drew reported that there was a good turnout for the committee prior to the meeting. The committee has been organized to deal with certain issues; invasive plants, erosion at the upstream end of the Island, damage from beavers. Watch the *Islander* for more information.

Old Business:

Old Waiting List. A motion was made to amend Standing rule 12.J to read, "Persons on the Waiting List prior to April 1, 2012, (the Old Waiting List) shall have priority for Club membership over subsequently selected Waiting List applicants, provided that those on the Old Waiting List may defer invitations to become full members until April 1, 2014. Thereafter those on the Old Waiting List will be required to accept membership when offered or be dropped from the Waiting List. Deferral of membership will not be permitted for persons on the new, post April 1, 2012, Waiting List." This issue had been discussed extensively last month. After a brief discussion, the motion carried.

Waiting List Passes. A motion was made to amend Standing Rule 7 to read as follows, “Waiting list passes may be issued by the Membership Secretary to any person on the waiting list who has attended a formal club orientation and has paid the requisite waiting list pass fee. Passes may be issued at any time and are good for the calendar year in which they are issued. The cost of the pass is the same, regardless of the month issued.” The existing rule required that a person be on the waiting list for three years before becoming eligible for a pass. It was felt that this no longer made sense with the new waiting list process. A majority of members present agreed, and the motion carried.

Alcohol. The motion presented last month to allow consumption of beer and wine on a trial basis was discussed. A majority of members were concerned that this would present enforcement and liability issues, and that it had the potential to change the culture of the Island. The motion was defeated.

The meeting was adjourned. The next meeting will be held on the Island on June 13.

Respectfully Submitted,
ANNE MARIE CUNNINGHAM
Co-recording secretary

A note to new waitlist members

Do you wish you could visit the Island on the weekends? Well, you can! Simply volunteer as Relief Caretaker some Saturday, and it’s customarily acceptable to stay on for a swim or paddle when your shift is over. Duties consist mainly of running the ferry on Joe’s day off.

Please visit the “Relief Caretaker” section of the Club website, find an open shift that you’re interested in, and contact me right away to reserve it. My contact information and “Instructions for Relief Caretakers” can be found there too.

Sherry Fizdale
Supervisor of Relief Caretakers

Environment Committee Update

We had a large turnout, especially from Islanders on the waiting list, for our second meeting held on May 9. Parker Moore set up a meeting that took place on June 1. Scott Petrey, an environmental scientist with Wetland Studies and Solutions, provided our group with advice on soil retention during flooding. Mr. Petrey will be presenting his recommendations at the next Environmental Committee meeting in the near future. Please send us an email if you would like to attend our next meeting and hear Scott’s presentation.

DREW WALSH

Downriver Race 2012

The 2012 Downriver Race was a great success with 44 racers that comprised 41 boats. The CCA was proud to introduce our new gold and green racing bibs that Susan Sherrod and Barb Brown had painstakingly designed and ordered. Again, Joan Goodbody designed our knockout yellow T-shirts which proved to be a favorite with the boating community.

Without volunteers, the race would never take place. I am exceedingly grateful for the assistance from Adam Van Grack, Potomac Whitewater Racing Center Chair, and for guidance and assistance from Davey Hearn, former canoeing Olympian.

There is no one volunteer group more important than the other. It took all of them to have a successful race—so in no particular order, I want to thank the Timers headed up by Kathy and Frank Collins, their sons Ian and Ben Collins, Michael Baummer, Alf Cooley, and Sycamore Island member, Gerry Barton.

Our land workers arrived at Great Falls at 8:30 a.m. to spend the day “toting and fetching.” We had a total of 12 land workers.

Our safety boaters gave up their day and arrived at Old Angler’s Inn at 9:00 a.m. to take their positions at the various rapids on the Potomac River. We had a total of 16 safety boaters.

Sycamore Island provided safety boaters up-river from the Island to help guide people through the confusion of islands and trees in that part of the river. Jim Drew headed up the group and was joined by Cindy Bertaut, Bill Marmon, John Lentz, Larry Heilman, and Vicki Judson.



Paul Stanton running the rapids



Mary Kearney, Joe Hage, Jessie and Davey Hearn display their first place medals

I am also grateful to Sycamore Island member George Malusky who provided the cookies and lemonade at the take-out, Sherry Fizdale and John Stapko (also CCA) who scurried about taking on all sorts of tasks. And last, but not least (maybe biggest) my humble thanks go to Joe Hage (Sycamore Island Caretaker and CCA Social Chair) who ran the race in a tandem canoe with Mary Kearney. Joe did about one hundred jobs prior to the race and many more jobs after he paddled down and arrived at the Island.

After the race, we feasted on buckets of baked and fried chicken, potato salad, broccoli salad, sodas, and ice cream. After the feeding frenzy, awards to the winners were given with extra beautiful neck metals provided by Adam through Maryland Canoe & Kayak Racing Series (MCKRS). The awards were handed out by Adam and Davey with Kathy reading the winners'



Mary Kearney and Joe Hage with their first place medals

names and their respective awards.

My thanks, also, to the two caretakers for the day Sally Strain and Francis Latapie who had more work than usual. I am so grateful to all of our wonderful volunteers and to Sycamore Island for being hosts to this 57-year-old event that was started by Sycamore Island members who then went on to found the CCA.

If I failed to mention anyone who came and worked their buns off, please forgive me. If you missed CCA's great yearly race (as far as we know) the oldest, continuously existing river race in the world, we hope you will join us next year for this very special annual event.

V. STAR MITCHELL
Downriver race chair

Swimming on 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. But because Sycamore Island is private property it is permissible to swim off the Island.

The following are guidelines, not rules, for your consideration:

- You 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 and a rowboat close to the swimming dock to assist in the rescue of boaters or swimmers in distress.

Enjoy the river and respect it!

LARRY HEILMAN
Swimming supervisor

Notes from the Island

Wednesday, May 2, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.4 Water Temperature: 64
The river looks very canoeable right now. The wind has died down and this relative calm makes the river look so still and inviting. Plus, the docks are out so launching a canoe has become much easier.

Monday, May 7, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.4 Water Temperature: 70
History in the making! There were an unequalled amount of people here for the orientation on Sunday, 70, counting children! It is obvious that the Club is in for an influx of some new blood! It's very exciting and it will be fun to get to know all of the new members-to-be. Some of them are already asking for waitlist passes!

I took my first swim of the year. The water was brisk at first but I quickly got used to it and it was glorious. It was my only swim since the river got too cold back in October, six months ago!

It's May so the birding is spectacular. The recent list includes orioles, cedar waxwings, king bird, little green heron, common yellow-throated warbler, and a pair of prothonotarys nesting in a little-used canoe in the shed. I also had a report of a wild turkey being spotted nearby, right down at the feeder lock!

Wednesday, May 9, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 69
Don't forget! The Club meeting is tonight and we will have a very exciting guest speaker to kick things off. Come down early so that you can hear the state-of-the-river presentation by Potomac Riverkeeper, Robin Broder! She will present from 7-8, before the meeting, so don't be late!

I had an expert birder down here today and since she was able to identify birds by their song we were able to add these rarely-seen birds to my recent list. Today we heard scarlet tanager, warbling vireo, northern parula, redstart, and great-crested flycatcher!

Monday, May 21, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.9 Water Temperature: 72
Great weather means good times on the Island and the sign-in sheets are filling up fast. Fridays are busier now with the new wait-listers coming down. On Saturday

we had a well-attended canoe class which got things off to a good start and the ferry was moving the rest of the day. Sunday started off much slower but then went out with a bang and I was pulling the ferry until close to nine o'clock. Unfortunately, Chris White and his Volunteer Firefighters had to cancel their event on the Island. They were going to be here on Saturday but were called out for a last minute drilling excursion. Sorry guys, I hope you reschedule soon!

Speaking of the canoe class, I want to send a big thank you out to Frank Daspit for leading the class for yet another year. Frank is an expert paddler and a great teacher and we're lucky to have such a legend for a volunteer. Frank was an early member of the CCA who has witnessed the evolution of white water paddling first hand. He bought his first canoe before I was born! His annual class was well attended too and it was a joy to see so many canoes in the channel.

I had the spotting scope set up yesterday and we all got great views of the eagles sitting in their nest. With the scope we can see the youngster and the adults sitting nearby.

The Carolina wrens are nesting in the screen porch again this year. I discovered the nest inside of a corner column one day when I heard the loud chorus of chirping chicks coming from the far side of the porch. I don't mind the wrens nesting in the porch but they do have an irritating habit of popping in the same place in the men's and ladies bathrooms. I wish they would stay out of there.

There was rain up in the mountains early last week so by last Wednesday the river was muddy and climbing, reaching 4.95 on Wednesday afternoon. The muddy water put a damper on the swimming but by Friday I was swimming again.

The fishing hasn't been too good yet and with this new batch of rain I don't see it improving. Bass fishermen like drought.

Monday, May 24, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2 Water Temperature: 72
I had to call Easterday Well and Pump on Sunday. They are the guys that keep our well working, so you know that if I have to call them, it's not good news. I woke up on Sunday to the loud hum of the well pump motor. Usually, the pump is silent in the morning since no one has been using the water all night.

My next guess was that it was the filters. If they get



Baby wrens nesting in the screen porch

JOE HAGE

clogged the system can't pressurize, and the pump will not stop. I took out the old filters and put in new ones but the pump would not stop running.

On Monday morning, Darren of Easterday Wells came down to check things out. Darren and his helper opened the well and were shocked at what they found. Instead of a ten-year-old pump, they found a pump that must have been installed sometime during the nineties, or before! This pump was completely corroded and covered with rust. It also had a large hole in the side of it. I think we found the problem. They installed a new pump and now the water is working again, hurray!

Now the water is better than ever. The other good news is that it looks like our well has plenty of water, which is vitally important. No water, no club.

Wednesday, May 30, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.1 Water Temperature: 72
The river went down to 3.8 but it went back up last night. All of this rain, while not causing any flooding, is making the swimming and fishing less than optimal. I hope everyone had a fun and relaxing Memorial Day! We had a slow start to the weekend but then on Monday I had to heave that heavy ferry across the river over thirty times. We also had quite a few waitlisters come down, not realizing that they weren't allowed on holidays. I wish everyone would read the standing rules and by-laws. It would save me from being in the awkward position of either turning a blind eye to the rules, or worse, telling people that they can't have their Memorial Day picnic on the Island.

I also want to bring up another problem that

happened on Monday. On normal days this might not have been a problem, but when I have to pull the ferry 30 times from 10:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m., the inefficiency can be a real annoyance. Simply put, a party of six should not require four trips just to get them onto the Island, and if the party decides to leave at different times that's even more trips. I'm not afraid of working hard and I don't like to complain, but if ten parties of six all came down and did the same thing that would be 40 trips across the river just to get them here! I understand that not everyone can show up at the same time, but maybe on busy days members could volunteer to bring their latecomers over themselves.

We put up the hummingbird feeders and right away a female rubythroat came and drank the sugar water that we prepared. Now, I see hummingbirds everyday.

Thursday, May 31, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2 Water Temperature: 72
I've been busy trying to get all of the grass cut. There was a problem with the carbtorater on the mower so we had to fix that and now we're behind on the mowing.

I have a couple of annougements: first, make sure you're here for the meeting as we'll have Wayne here talking about the old saws that they used to use on the Island and that are still here today! Second, all you canoe enthusiasts should know that the Anacoastia Watershed Society has weekly canoe trips on that river. Every Tuesday they offer free canoe trips from Bladensburg.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker



Stand up paddling the Sycamore way

DON'T MISS



*Sycamore Island
127th Anniversary
Dance*



SATURDAY, JUNE 23, 7-10 P.M.

THIS WILL BE A COWBOY DANCE
FEATURING THE HONKY-TONK SOUNDS OF

**COLONEL JOSH AND THE
HONKY TONK HEROES**

SO PUT ON YOUR COWBOY HAT
AND COME DANCE THE TWO-STEP ON
BEAUTIFUL SYCAMORE ISLAND

food and drinks ★ please bring a side dish to share

KARAOKE

**QUESTIONS? LIKE TO
HELP? CONTACT:**

CAROLINE GELB
CGELB@WORLDBANK.ORG 301.229.5969

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The Sycamore Islander

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Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL



Large Parties Scheduled



Friday, June 8, 2 pm,
Lucky and Bill Marmon, 15 guests,
birthday party

Saturday, June 9, 3 p.m.–dusk,
Richard Bertaut, 15 guests,
end-of-school party

Saturday, June 23, 2–5 p.m.,
Gavin Bloch, 25 guests,
party to celebrate Bar Mitzvah



Joe Hage as a RIVERKEEPER

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, cbeehler@comcast.net. The deadline for inclusion in the July issue is July 2.

Masthead photo by David Winer