



The Sycamore Islander

NOVEMBER 2012 | VOLUME 91 NUMBER 11

President's Letter

Our November club meeting is on the 14th at 8:00 p.m. at the home of Jane and David Winer, 5927 Onondaga Road, Bethesda. At this meeting we will approve caretaker Joe Hage's year-end bonus and 2013 salary. Directions: Massachusetts towards D.C. Take the first left past the stop light at the Glen Echo Fire Station (after turning left you need to veer back more than 90 degrees). This puts you on Onondaga Road. 5927 is on the right.

Repairs have been made to the iron bridge over the canal. The bridge is now open !!

The Fall Work Session is Sunday, November 11th. Working together to get the Island ready for winter is a great day for all Islanders. Things begin at 9:00 or so with coffee, pastries, and turkey bacon grilled by entertainment supervisor George Malusky. Captain Drew Walsh (see his article in this issue) and caretaker Joe Hage will have a long list of work projects for young and old. Around noon, George grills burgers, chicken, etc., and everyone contributes their special

side dish, salad, or desert for a big potluck dinner.

Nominations committee work is proceeding well, with one big exception. The position of relief caretaker scheduler is still open for 2013. This position is very important for the club. Please contact Bill Marmon, Jim Drew, or Sherry Fizdale to discuss or volunteer.

We all thank the members and waitlisters who responded to the urgent email and came to the Island during the Sandy crisis. Our captain Drew Walsh and member Gerry Barton were key coordinators of the club's response to Sandy. See the article in this issue.

Looking ahead—the annual Holiday Party and club meeting will be December 12th at the home of Stan Wiggins and Karen Possner, 5332 Westpath Way, Bethesda. After elections and a brief meeting, we will enjoy eggnog, wine, and delicious favorite holiday dishes and deserts brought by all the members and waitlisters attending.

JIM DREW
President

Minutes for the October 9th Meeting

The meeting was called to order by President Jim Drew at the home of Larry Heilman, who graciously offered his home for the meeting since the bridge is closed. His hospitality and the refreshments he provided were appreciated by all.

Attendees: Larry Heilman, Alan Gelb, Karen Possner, John Noble, Jim Drew, David Winer, Jane Winer, Drew Walsh, Richard Lodish, Ann Lucy, Lisa Kleifoth, Joe Hage, Cora Shaw, Louise Meyer, and Ann Marie Cunningham.

Minutes: The minutes as they appeared in *The Islander* were approved.

Treasurer's Report: The club is solvent.

Captain's Report: A stalwart crew consisting of Drew Walsh; Gerry Barton; Jim Drew; Geoff Holdridge and his sons, Sebastian and Christian; built a temporary bridge across the canal last month for use until the iron bridge is repaired. However, a Park Service maintenance crew removed the temporary bridge this morning. Joe received notice the night before, so he was able to salvage the ladders. Efforts by our president to contact the Park Superintendent have thus far been unsuccessful. Various solutions to the problem were discussed, including the possibility of adapting two lock bridges for use. The ultimate goal is to get the bridge repaired as quickly as possible. Drew and Joe Hage will contact park maintenance supervisor, the volunteer coordinator, and the Canal Trust to see what can be done. (Drew subsequently had a conversation with the Deputy Park Superintendent, who said that the National Highway Administration performed an assessment of the damage. Plans for short term and long term repairs are being worked, including one for a temporary bridge, and should be completed within approximately a week.)

Drew and Joe are working on plans for the work session, which is scheduled for November 11th, including getting people and materials to the Island. They are also looking for volunteers who are willing to be crew leaders for specific tasks.

Drew Walsh and Davey Hearn examined the ferry pontoons for leaks and did not find anything conclu-

sive. Dave Winer expressed concern about water in the pontoons that makes it difficult to operate the ferry. Drew will investigate further.

The Environmental Committee planted 10 trees, including sycamores, pawpaws, and tulip poplars as part of a long-term effort to reduce erosion on the upriver end of the Island. The trees are wrapped to provide protection from voracious beavers. The next effort will be to meet with experts on the dynamics of river flow and removal of invasive plants.

Membership Report: John Noble reported that he has contacted three applicants on the waiting list to offer them membership once they provide two letters of recommendation from club members other than their initial sponsor and attend an orientation. The applicants are Jonathan Zimmerman and Maya Beth Lodish, Ashley Baquie, and Elizabeth Ewing and Louis Smith. This will bring the total number of members to the maximum of 160.

Lisa Kleifoth, Financial Secretary, reported that once dues are paid, there is no receipt or other documentation that is provided to show that the member has fulfilled their obligation and is entitled to enjoy the privileges that come with membership. She proposed an easy-to-administer way of providing membership cards, which could help Joe and relief caretakers to identify those entitled to access. A roster of members should also be on the ferry. Starting next year, she'll send receipts.

Nominations Committee: Sherri Fizdale has agreed to be vice president next year. Please volunteer to serve as relief caretaker coordinator next year. Nominations for other offices are being accepted. Please contact Jim Drew or Bill Marmon if you are interested.

Large Parties: Jody Benjamin requested, and the members assembled agreed, that Paul Stanton's and Kathleen Hooke's large party privileges be suspended for two years. They held a party despite the rejection of their application and in violation of the large party guidelines. In addition, they have not yet paid the fee. Key rules for large parties are:

- The hosts must have completed three volunteer activities for the club.
- Weekend large parties must be scheduled on odd-numbered days.

■ Weekend large parties must be announced in *The Islander*.

Complete rules can be found on the web at <http://sycamoreisland.org/syparty.htm>.

New Business: Ann Lucy suggested that the meeting time be changed to 7:00 or 7:30 p.m. She will write a proposal to be placed in *The Islander* and the issue will be discussed at a future meeting.

Joe will be on vacation the week before Halloween.

Jane and Dave Winer and Karen Possner and Stan Wiggins have generously agreed to host the November and December meetings, respectively.

Larry Heilman said that the new committee reported in last month's minutes would not be effective if swimming safety were combined with canoeing safety. Jim Drew responded that he saw that committee as serving a different purpose, namely to find effective ways of orienting all members of an applicant's family to safety issues, including operating the ferry, swimming, and canoeing. Larry's concern is more focused on swimming safety for all members.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

ANNE MARIE CUNNINGHAM, Co-Recording Secretary

Tree Planting on September 29

It was September 29th and the sun was shining as a group of about half a dozen joined Captain Drew Walsh to plant saplings. Our merry band, drawn from the Island's environmental subcommittee, decided that we would plant ten saplings. The trees came from Susanna Membrino's garden and she was kind enough to donate them to us. Drew met us in the parking lot and we drove down the canal path. We ferried the trees across, loaded them up on the wheel barrow, and headed onto the Island.

Our first task was to decide where to place the saplings and it was decided that the best location was on the side of the Island near Rupert's. The thought behind this placement, facing Virginia, was that it is a depressed area that gets flooded frequently with high water.

As we began the planting process, we placed the saplings far enough away from each other so that each one would get enough light as it grew. We also tried to

avoid areas that would involve digging up other saplings that had taken root naturally. Our efforts weren't perfect but we tried to do our best. Beavers are of course an issue so we used chicken wire and posts to build a protective fence around each sapling to protect them from our long-toothed friends! Another advantage of the wiring was that it helped mark the saplings for watering and monitoring. We planted ten trees.

It was a great day and successful all around. But this is only the first ten saplings and not all of them will make it. So come spring we'll likely be out here again. If you have any saplings you would like to donate, please let the environmental committee know by contacting Drew.

Thanks to Fred Wright, Alice Bullard, Jason Waite, Drew Walsh, Marianne Ross, and Sandra Purohit. Thanks also to John Goodman for joining in on the fun and helping to drive, dig, plant, beaver-proof, and water the saplings.

SANDRA PUROHIT

A Report on the Bridge from Gerry Barton

At 9:00 on Wednesday morning, October 24, when I reported to the Island, a crew of eight Park Service bridge repair specialists were at work. Sounds like we may have a usable bridge in a "few days."

One part of the crew worked under the Parkway end of the bridge. They cleared all the tree pieces and dug two trenches about two feet deep. At the end of the day, there was a scaffold from timbers in the trenches to the bridge deck. This will support the bridge until the bent trusses are replaced in the future.

The bent hand railings on the upstream side were welded in place.

I assume that they will complete the replacement of the downstream hand railings and repair the deck and wooden hand rails, and that the bridge will then be open to use.

One of the guys said that the bridge is frequently used. Sounds like there were many complaints.

I took a pot of tea over for them for a morning break and invited two guys over to the Island for lunch on the Captain's Dock.

GERRY BARTON

Sandy's Surprise

A big thanks to all those who helped out preparing the Island for High Water! Substitute caretakers, Lisa and Chris Kliefoth, along with Hester Ohbi and Robert Beauchamp, started by bringing in the chairs and tables off the docks and tying up the kayaks. Member Gerry Barton was covering for Joe while he was on vacation and did a lot of preparation as well. I joined him on Sunday to secure the ferry on the Island in anticipation of high water. By Monday, Tryon Wells and Gerry Barton, both monitoring the river levels, advised of the need to prepare for a 17-foot river level! We had to anticipate the possibility of water entering the lower level of the clubhouse and caretaker quarters, and secure the canoes. Thanks to Tryon's email blast to the club membership, we were not in short supply of help.

Gerry Barton and Jack Bower took on the task of hooking the ferry back up to move all the volunteers over to the Island and back. John and Sam Membrino, along with Gordon Phillips, his son Gregory, and Steve Shultz removed the canoes from the lower and middle levels of the racks and secured them to the large sycamore and black walnut trees on the lawn. Steven Nowak led the effort to organize the tool shed and secure the tools.

Chris Stern and others helped clear around the lockers and screened porch areas, moving the canoe paddles, life jackets, and tools upstairs to the main room of the clubhouse. Larry Heilman, Ned Goddard, along with Bill Marmon and others, took care of moving Joe's belongings inside his quarters to higher ground. Tryon Wells made sure our picnic tables did not float



Gerry Barton and Jack Bauer

away. Roman Kulbashny assisted with taking down the ferry rope. There were several other generous Islanders who came down to help; I apologize for missing your names.

In all there were about 20 people who came to the Island on the afternoon of Monday, October 29th, as the rain was pounding down to prepare our Island for flooding. Thanks to all those who came, we quickly finished our work!

And a special thank you to Gerry Barton and Jack and Lauren Bauer who came with me on Tuesday to flip the canoes upright, ready to handle the flood!

For all those who had wanted to help but couldn't make it, there will be plenty of tasks for all at the workfest on Sunday, November 11th. See you then!

DREW WALSH

State of the Island

Because of the disruption to routine by Hurricane Sandy, club members may be forgiven for not knowing the current state of Sycamore Island or the means to get there.

First of all, as Gerry Barton reported, the steel bridge over the canal has been re-opened by the Park Service. There are still some bent truss members to be replaced, but presumably the Park Service feels it is strong enough for general use again.

On the other hand, Hurricane Sandy prompted several river level predictions by the NOAA Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service that resulted in a frantic effort by members in the cold, driving rain on Monday, October 29, to secure canoes, lumber, flotation and more.

Those NOAA flood forecasts for Little Falls wound up being wildly off the mark:

Flood forecast

Sycamore reaction

Sunday: 7.2 feet

Why worry? No flood predicted

Monday: 17.1 feet

Wow—17.1 feet! Man the barricades! In the cold rain too! Send out e-mail!

Tuesday (noon): 15.3 feet

Good, at least the caretaker's quarters are spared.

Tuesday (evening): 11.4 feet

Sheesh—11.4 feet. We didn't have to do any of Monday's tasks after all.

Wednesday: 10.4 feet

Good thing the workfest is coming soon. Lots of stuff to put back up.

The country's weather services should be commended for accurate predictions of a lot of Hurricane Sandy's behavior. Missing the water level impact on the Potomac watershed, while dear to us at Sycamore Island, was a small miss considering.

By the time you read this, the ferry pull-rope should be re-attached and access to the club should be back to normal.

TRYON WELLS

Notes from the Island

Monday, October 1, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.3 Water Temperature: 69

Our resident, self proclaimed, small engine repair man, Gerry Barton, is up in New York so it was up to me to fix the lawn mower. Luckily, he had already showed me what I had to do, so it wasn't too hard to get the needed parts and rebuild the old carburetor. It's nice to have a mower that is running properly, especially when you have to cut an acre of grass with a 22-inch mower.

Tuesday, October 2, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.3 Water Temperature: 69

Last Friday and Saturday I was out in Shepherdstown at the Chesapeake Watershed Alliance 2012 Forum. It was at the state-of-the-art National Conservation Training Center. I was honored to be a part of the forum and it was cool to realize that my position as caretaker has put me on the front lines of the watershed conservation movement. The conference was attended by numerous environmental non-profits and by government environmental agencies of all levels. I was pleased to see that our local group, Little Falls Watershed Alliance, was there, plus some others that recognized me from the Island. I learned a lot and it was a lot of fun. I hope I get to go back next year!

Wednesday, October 10, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.1 Water Temperature: 62

I have some unfortunate news: our homemade bridge is gone. The Superintendent of the C&O Canal Historic Park, Kevin Brandt, has decided to have our bridge removed. I was lucky enough to get over there before they threw away all our ladders and lumber, but the bridge is no more.

Over the years I have had to overcome many obstacles to get to and from my lodging. I've battled flooding, thick ice, and fallen trees but I never would have guessed that I'd have to deal with this.

I'm not sure what this means in terms of planned functions on the Island but it looks like it will be many months before the metal-truss bridge is repaired.

Monday, October 15, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.9 Water Temperature: 60

The weather has been spectacular and despite the access issues, many determined Islanders have been getting out in their canoes. The river is super clear right now and it's fun to paddle around and look at the river bottom. Too bad it's too cold for swimming.

Mary and I took a canoe out late yesterday. Normally I would sit and watch the football game but it was such a perfect fall afternoon that we just had to get out. Our decision was rewarded, for once we got the canoe on the water we were transported to a world very far removed from the Redskins and FedEx field.

The wind was at our backs as we headed up river. We made it past the first lower ledges without any hassle and we were going to make an attempt to reach Minnie's Island. That was the plan, but with the river below three feet with rocks everywhere, we just could not get past that last ledge below Minnie's.

We played in the waves for a bit, then came to a rest in an eddy between the rapids. We sat there enjoying the view. There were white trunks of Sycamores on the left, bright red leaves of oaks and maples on the right and everywhere the soft golden glow of the autumn sun. There were herons and kingfishers, and lots of duck cruising by. We watched as flocks of tree swallows swirled above us, chasing their invisible prey. Then we saw the unmistakable shape of a bald eagle headed our way from down river. We were delighted as the giant bird banked and circled just yards from us. We couldn't believe our eyes as the eagle circled lower and lower until we could clearly see its massive claws reach down

and pluck a small bass from the river! I suppose it was just another day in the life of the eagle but we felt very fortunate to have been there to witness it.

We got back to the Island just before dark and we turned on the TV in time to see RGIII dash into the end zone for the winning score. Perfect Sunday.

Monday, October 22, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.1 Water Temperature: 60

At the last meeting it was suggested that the pontoons on the ferry might be leaking and that someone should investigate to see if there is any water in them.

Our Captain, Drew Walsh, is not the type to let much grass grow under his feet so last Wednesday we set about checking the pontoons for water. Drew showed up with a miniature pump that connects to a hand drill. We connected a long tube to the pump and planned to feed it into the small access plugs on the pontoons. The problem was that the plugs are on top of the pontoons under the deck of the ferry. How were we going to reach them? The water was far too cold for swimming so Drew came up with the idea of using his small inflatable raft.

Incredibly, the raft fit perfectly between the pontoons and we were in business! Drew, always ready to lead by example, volunteered to get into the raft and do the claustrophobic work under the ferry deck. It took some work to get the ferry unchained and partially up on the bank, but once that was done we put Drew into the raft and, just like closing a dresser drawer, we slid him under the ferry. The work went smoothly from there and thankfully we found very little water in the pontoons. In fact, one pontoon was completely dry while the other, down-stream pontoon had just some trace amounts of moisture.

Norman Metzger and a friend happen to show up just then and they helped us get the ferry back into place. So, despite everyone's concerns, the ferry is not in eminent danger of sinking. It was decided, however, that the pontoons should be re-patched and that more effective bumpers should be installed at the ferry landings. Good job Drew!

I haven't seen any squirrels or beaver for days now. I did see a female rose-breasted grosbeak though, and I'm learning that if I walk out to the captain's float at dusk, there is a good chance that I'll see a bald eagle fly by. The great egrets seem to have flown to warmer climes; haven't seen one for over a week.

The metal bridge over the canal is still officially closed but people are stepping over the chains and using it anyway.

NEWS FLASH! As of this afternoon, the bridge has been refenced and is no longer passable. I see a muddy walk through the canal ditch in my future. The way that it is, is the way that it is.

Sunday, October 28, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.1 Water Temperature: 60

Gerry Barton, relief caretaker wrote:

Thanks to the Saturday substitute caretakers. They moved some chairs and items and helped start the button up operation."

Joe had scheduled a friend to watch the ferry today but she did not come. (My friend, Melissa, works at Dumbarton Oaks and unfortunately had to report there unexpectedly, for their own hurricane preparations.) I was there at 11 and Drew came from about 1-3. We decided to close down the Island today. All chairs, charcoal grills, are in or near the club house. The deck is clear except for the big green table. I took down the hammock and the volley ball net. There was a ladder near the canoe shed and I put it on a rack. We moved the john boat up near the club canoes as well as a huge beam that was near the canoe dock. We pulled the canoe dock closer to the shore. I moved all of the heavy planks from the walkway to the wood storage area under Joe's house. I moved a bunch of fire wood the past 3 days and loaded up the wood crib next to the stove. I cleaned the chimney last Wednesday and it is in good shape. Last time I swept it was about 2 years ago. We put up the "Ferry Closed" sign.

Drew and I discussed the ferry and decided to park it parallel to the flow on the Island side. Drew had to go to work so I parked the ferry, raised the bell rope, and raised the ferry pull rope as much as possible. The ferry rope needs more help but there is a lock on the Canal side of the line—Joe will have to do this when he returns. I put a canoe on the steps—it is locked and has a paddle and two life vests.

NOAA forecast has 7.3 on Wednesday. Goes up to 5 feet on Tuesday and continues. The curve seems to flatten on Wednesday, but probably will go higher. I am guessing 8 to 9 feet. Joe told Drew we start the Canoe shed clearing at about 9.5 feet, so we may have more work to do on Wednesday or Thursday.

One person came to get a favorite kayak off the



Drew, Jerry, and Jack heading to the Island the day after the storm to flip all of the canoes so they wouldn't wash away in the impending flood.

Island about 4:45 just as I had move the chains but I was able to get her. She did not know about the bridge being open so paddled back upstream to the lock house.

Wednesday, October 31, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.1 Water Temperature: 60

I got back to the Island today, a day earlier than I had planned. I was down in sunny Florida listening to all of the horrific predictions for hurricane Sandy and I decided it would be prudent to cut my vacation short and head back to Sycamore Island right away. It's funny how these storms always show up when I'm out of town.

I was so worried that this was going to be THE flood and I wanted to be here to take care of things, including all of my belongings. When I left Florida, the river was expected to go up to 17 feet on the Little Falls gage which meant that it would be the first flood to get into my quarters since I moved here ten years ago. I had already talked to Drew, our captain, and I knew that he had arranged to have a group of Islanders to come down and move my stuff out of flood range but I still wanted to be here when the river crested.

We drove all afternoon on Monday and we still had ten hours of driving to do to get home, but by Tuesday morning some of my fears were abating. We were monitoring the storm and thankfully the river level predictions kept going down. I soon realized that this was not going to be the killer flood that I had feared after all. I got back to the Ferry landing last night after dark but decided to wait for daylight before crossing over.

I shouldered my luggage this morning and made my way down the trail. My first delight was that the canal bridge had been fixed! My second delight was having a flock of cedar waxwings filling the trees around me as I

came down the switchback. I found the canoes locked on the towpath and paddled over. I was a little nervous, it had been a long time since I had paddled when the river was this high, plus the water temperature had dropped considerably—only 50 degrees! I got over to the Island while the river was at about ten feet and found that things were not too bad. There are a few broken and fallen tress on the picnic tables but the docks are okay and no trees on the clubhouse. I chased all of the Canada geese off of the docks and went to inspect my quarters.

This was the third time that we've had to move my furniture due to flooding but all three times it was unnecessary. Thankfully, all three times the river did not reach it's expected level. I found my bedrooms and foyer empty of furniture and my living room and kitchen piled high with stuff. Thanks to everyone that came down to pitch in, especially Drew and Gerry, I really appreciate you guys looking out for me while I was gone.

The river crested at a mere 10.2 feet, that was at about 5:00 pm. Tomorrow I'll be pushing the docks back out, clearing the debris from around the ferry and shoveling the mud from the walks and landings, as the flood waters recede. It looks like the ferry wil reopen on Monday, once we get the pull rope back in place.

I'm really sorry for all of those people up north that were not as lucky as we were, but I sure am relieved that I still have not had to witness the river flowing through my bedroom.

Right now I guess I'll start moving all of my furniture back to where it belongs.

JOE HAGE

The Sycamore Islander

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SANDRA PUROHIT

Sycamore Island tree planting crew

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. 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
cbeehler@comcast.net
The deadline for inclusion in the December issue is December 1.

Don't forget to come to the **Workfest**



Sunday, November 11, 9:00 a.m.

**There are no large parties
scheduled for November.**

