

The Sycamore Islander

JULY 2013 | VOLUME 92 NUMBER 7



President's Note

The next club meeting is on the Island on Wednesday, July 10, at 8:00 p.m. I will be out of town and vice president Sherry Fizdale will preside.

BILL MARMON
President

Minutes for the June 12 Meeting

Attendees: Jay Zimmerman, Drew Walsh, Gerald S. Barton, Marianne Ross, Rich Lodish, Sherry Fizdale, Alan Gelb, Ned Goddard, Star Mitchell, Cindy Bertaut, Richard Bertaut, Jim Drew, John Noble, Russel Shaw, Natalia Shaw, Ma'ayan Shaw, and Ann Marie Cunningham. Vice president Sherry Fizdale called the meeting to order.

Membership: John Noble nominated Shira Stutman and Russell Shaw and their children Caleb, Ma'ayan and Natalia for membership. Shira is a rabbi at the Sixth and I Historic Synagogue and Russell is Head of School at Georgetown Day School. They were sponsored by Alissa Stern, and recommended by Greg and Maia Kats and Russell Sturm. Russell, Ma'ayan, and Natalia were present at the meeting. He said that he used to teach in an Outbound program before becoming a classroom teacher and when he first came to the Island he felt that he was coming home. The nomination was accepted and they were welcomed into membership.

Upon presentation of letters of recommendation, Catherine Bourassa and her son will be nominated next month, which will bring the total membership to the maximum of 160.



JOE HAGE



JOE HAGE

The rate of vacancies for admitting new members (nine per year) is slower than was expected. John will make a recommendation later this year to dealy at least two years the next new member recruitment and lottery.

Minutes: The minutes of the May meeting as published in *The Islander* were approved.

Communications: Several officers received an email from someone who expressed great love for the Island and wondered if he could have access. John Noble responded that there was nothing in our rules that allowed such access.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Alan Gelb reported that there was about \$126,000 in the treasury at the end of May. If spending trends are stable, there should be approximately \$80,000 at the end of the year, slightly higher than the \$78,000 at the end of last year.

Alan has reviewed the costs of insurance, a major portion of the budget. The cost of FEMA-sponsored flood insurance has been rising steadily. From \$3,567 in 2010 to \$5,425 now. This is due both to rising costs and increased coverage for the renovated building. The commercial property policy also increased somewhat from earlier years, due to the increased value after the renovation.

Under current building codes, if a flood destroyed more than 50% of the clubhouse, we would not have the right to rebuild it. If the building were determined to be a historic structure by Montgomery County, we

would be able to rebuild according to the current design and materials. Of course, being designated an historic property comes with restrictions as to repairs and renovations we would be allowed to make. For example, during the renovations vinyl windows were installed which would not be allowed if it was officially an historic structure. (Secretary's note: for historic information, the flood that destroyed the previous clubhouse and the design of the current one, read this article written by the architect. <http://www.sycamoreisland.org/centenl/sc11.htm>)

Captain's Report: Drew Walsh reported that he is re-designing the anchors that hold the swim float in place, as the float has moved downstream from its preferred location. He is working on a list of short and long term projects, and will talk to the treasurer about funding the projects and will then schedule them. He said that Tryon Wells is working on two more rollable benches to replace two fixed workbenches in the toolshed.

Large Parties: Jay Zimmerman reported that people who request large parties are good about meeting the requirements. There have been a lot of requests for camping.

Relief Caretaking Report: Jody Benjamin reported via email that the following people served as relief caretakers in April and May: Abigail Wiebenson, Abby Porter and David Kay, Dirk and Kim Suringa, Susan O'Sullivan, Cindy Bertaut, Stan Fowler, Peter Levine, Chris White and Tamara Zemlo, David Lyles, Norman and Nancy Metzger, Paul E. Hagen, Fred and Tina Ohly, Joe and Tammy Belden, and Mike Petrilli. In addition, Linda Greer, Louise Meyer, and Hester Ohbi volunteered but were thwarted by flood waters. All members of the club are grateful for the passages that these folks provide across the channel.

Swimming Safety: Sherry noted the article by Larry Heilman in *The Islander* and emphasized his point that we are all lifeguards. We all share in the safety of others and should make others aware of hazards in the water, strong undercurrents, appropriate ways to help those in trouble without endangering self or others. A discussion ensued about expanding new member orientation to include all family members who might come to the Island. Signs will be reviewed to ensure that they emphasize all the key issues.

River Gauge: Ann Marie Cunningham reported that Joe Bell and two colleagues from the US Geological Survey visited the Island on May 30 to survey the Island and take measurements on the river depth in order to determine the best location for instruments that would be used to gather measurements of pollutants in the water, as they have learned that some measurements of the chemical composition of the water that have been taken near the pumping station are not accurate during periods of heavy rain. They expect to complete the report by the end of the month and present it to an ad hoc committee of the club for review. The committee's recommendations will be presented to the club for consideration.

New Business: Jim Drew applauded the great cover photo in the June *Islander*.

The next meeting will be on the Island on July 10 at 8:00. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
ANN MARIE CUNNINGHAM
Co-recording Secretary



JOE HAGE



ANNE MARIE CUNNINGHAM

Tiger swallowtails on the bank near the Captain's float.

Notes from the Island

Tuesday, June 4, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 80

I had a very large, polyphemus moth on my screen last night. I saw it in the same spot again in the morning, then it departed. It's wings are 4-and-a-half inches across and the caterpillar stage is bright green with yellow bands and red spots.

The fishermen were catching walleye on Sunday afternoon, but after all of those thunderstorms the river is too cloudy for sight fishing. I hope I catch my first walleye this year, they're tasty!

I received a book about bird senses for my birthday back in April and Sycamore Islander Bruce Beehler is mentioned. He is a world-renowned ornithologist and the number one expert on the birds of New Guinea. He is also married to our editor of *The Islander*, Carol Beehler.

Sunday, June 9, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7 Water Temperature: 78

It's a real joy to step out of the house and hear the chorus of bird songs. Today's treat was a Baltimore/northern oriole on our mulberry tree and a wood duck swimming past with a brood of twenty ducklings.

Monday, June 10, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.6 Water Temperature: 73

This rain is not helping me catch any fish. The river is muddy brown and expected to rise above five feet later this week.

I went out at about 7 yesterday evening to start the grill when I saw a deer casually walking near the hammock and headed right towards me. It was a young buck with small antlers sprouting from the top of its head. It didn't seem too afraid of me and when it took another step I shouted at it and it ran toward the swimming dock and into the woods. I followed its prints and found it again in the brush. It bolted and I haven't seen it since.

Tuesday, June 11, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.2 Water Temperature: 73

The river has crept up above five feet so I guess I'll close the ferry. It's not very pretty down here anyway with the river being so high and muddy. We only had an inch and a half of rain yesterday but it

was coming down really hard at one point. Last week's tropical storm Andrea brought us three inches.

Wednesday, June 12, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.6 Water Temperature: 73

The river is slowly receding and it turns out that the monthly club meeting will be held on the Island tonight after all.

I guess we're in for some more weather though. They are predicting the river to go up above five feet again on Thursday. We'll just have to wait and see what happens.

Our flag pole holders for the PFD's keep breaking so I drilled the pegs directly into the 2 x 4's. It was fun. I used the old Sycamore Island manual drill to do the job. When's the last time you ever saw someone use a manual drill?

Lawnmower busted again. This time it's the drive belt on the front wheel drive. I'll replace the belt today and hope that the problem is fixed.

The zip line too is suffering from over use. One of the wheels broke so we're running on just three wheels. I'll see if I can order more parts.

I also had to do some major patching on one of the club canoes. There was a leak in the bow and another one in the middle.

Thursday, June 13, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.2 Water Temperature: 73
FERRY IS CLOSED.

No scary storm this morning but the river is slowly rising and I had to shut the ferry down.

Friday, June 14, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.99 Water Temperature: 73

The river isn't rising and the ferry is OPEN! It looks like it will be open all weekend as well.

The high water can be a pain for the members and the caretaker but the rising water can be a boon for others. Take the young wood ducks for example. Normally, when the hen brings her brood, (down to 15 now) to feed on the mulberry tree that hangs over the river, the ducklings have to wait for the fruit to fall. But now, with the river at five feet the little guys can reach the berries and can feed at will. It was fun to watch them and sometimes, when a mulberry was just out of reach, a duckling would jump clean out of the water to get it. Amazing!



Black squirrel, orange tail.

Monday, June 24, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.55 Water Temperature: 81

Summer is here! The river is getting nice and low and the water temperature is getting nice and high! (I think 80 is the perfect temperature for swimming.)

I think I have a ground hog living nearby. I'm not sure, but something is eating all of the leaves off of the mulberry sapling near my front door. I don't think it's the deer I saw. I think I scared him off.

I also spotted some squirrels on the Island, again. This time I saw two gray ones and one that was black with an orange tail. I kid you not, black squirrel, orange tail! These squirrels just get more mysterious everyday.

Speaking of orange and black, the orioles are often seen feeding in the mulberry tree. I say, THE mulberry tree, because you can sit and watch that tree at the top of the boardwalk and see every avian inhabitant of the Island, including the geese, of course.

I have not seen the cuckoo yet but I did hear one. I think it was the yellow-billed. I saw a hummingbird but still lazy about setting up the hummingbird feeders.

I think I mentioned the big, old silver maple that fell down at the foot of the Island, but we now have another tree headed for the floor. This one is one of our beloved sycamores. It's the second sycamore upriver from the ferry. It took a hit during the Dereche storm but recently it was hit again and it is leaning hard on another tree at a very steep 45-degree angle.

These sycamores are sturdy and it could well survive even if it was laying flat, but it sure would change the look of things if that one fell.

I got the lawnmower working again and I've been burning petrol ever since. I think it takes over four tanks full to cut the whole Island.

I also built a new rack for the club kayaks that had been sitting on the ground. I'm still waiting for some more parts to come in to complete the job but I really like the design and it makes me so happy to get those boats off the ground and out of the mud.

One final sad note. The zip line is now completely busted and out of service. We'll have to design our own, heavy duty trolley. I tried to ease the disappointment of not having a zip line by installing a tire swing. I didn't have a tire so we made a seat out of wood. The swing is cool and a lot of fun but it's a little too close to the tree. I'll work on improving that later.

Wednesday, June 26, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.4 Water Temperature: 82

Maybe it's been the chance of thunderstorms that's keeping people away but whatever the reason, it hasn't been as busy as I expected lately. I thought things would pick up once the local schools got out for summer, but it's been quite the opposite of that, at least on the weekdays.

The new safety post on the swim float came off and I forgot to mention that deputy captain, Gerry Barton and I refastened it with lag bolts last week. It looks like all the safety posts will need to be redone with the larger bolts at some point, in order to keep them fastened properly.

Sunday, June 30, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 82

I've been doing a lot of ferry-pulling in the rain lately. Most of the time we've been able to dodge the thunderstorms but sometimes you just have to resign to the fact that you're going to get wet. Thankfully the rain never seems to last long and having all of those big clouds passing by makes for some beautiful sunsets.

Anyone living here along the river for the last ten years and before are well aware of the 6 foot sewer line that runs next to the canal. Usually, your first initiation to the smell is when you exit off of the beltway at Clara Barton Pkwy exit. There is a vent in the sewer line right there by lock 12 and stench is unmistakable. We have

also had to endure the smell near here at Sycamore Island. There happens to be a sewer pipe vent right across from us here and the odor can be overwhelming, especially in summer. Visitors to the Island would always assume that it was the river that was so smelly and I had to explain about the source of the stench. But now, the smell is gone and I don't have to do any explaining! I can't believe that it really happened and that the new vapor scrubbers actually work, but I am thrilled! No more stinky walk up the hill!

Today, Mary and I, with some help from Paul Stanton, got the swim float back out in the river where it belongs. It was sent adrift during the last flood but now it's back in action, good work guys!

I fixed the tire swing and I think it's a nice addition to the facilities.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

Canal Steward Volunteer Day

Come help Joe cut back the brush on the trail down the hill to Sycamore Island

Meet on the Island
Sunday, July 14
10:00 a.m.–12 noon



JOE HAGE

Canoe rack made from 13-foot beams that Joe salvaged when the metal bridge was rebuilt two years ago.



Large Parties Scheduled



July 12, 4 p.m. to close, Marianne Ross,
20 guests

July 13, 11:30, Adrienne Allison, 18 guests

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL

To volunteer as a substitute caretaker, please email your choice of day and shift to Jody Benjamin, benjafamily@gmail.com.

Saturday Relief Caretakers July/August 2013					
JULY	9 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK	AUGUST	10 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK
JULY 6	Adrienne Allison	Topaz Terry and Melanie Clark	AUGUST 3	Penelope Mitchell	Anne Marie and John Cunningham
JULY 13	Rachel Rudy and Nat Reid	Louise Meyer	AUGUST 10	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer
JULY 20	Please Volunteer	Julia Strasser and Andrew Cassidy	AUGUST 17	Please Volunteer	Sandra Young and Raj Purohit
JULY 27	Please Volunteer	Sandra Young and Raj Purohit	AUGUST 24	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer
			AUGUST 31	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer

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 August issue is July 26.