

Focus on Bryan Park

Summer 2013



The Newsletter of The Friends of Bryan Park - Dedicated to the Preservation and Improvement of Bryan Park

Invasive Plants Taking Over !

Bryan Park has been invaded, and so has much of our metro region. We are all used to looking into the woods beside our highways, creeks and trails and seeing mounds of vegetation covering the forest floor and climbing trees as if they were trellises. What? Our woods are not supposed to look like that? Who knew?

The park, as well as many parts of the US, is being overtaken by non-native vines and other exotic plants. In Bryan Park our primary vine invaders are Japanese Honeysuckle and English Ivy. That's right! We were brought up to think of these as "good" plants. After all, the sweet scent of honeysuckle blossoms draws us toward them in May and June. And English Ivy, that carefree ground cover which ambles up the sides of old brick houses and into the crowns of the most majestic of trees, is downright romantic looking! But the honeysuckle is from Eastern Asia and the ivy is from Europe and points beyond.

Neither is part of our own natural world. So, why are these two vines here? Much earlier in our history they were brought to the New World to plant in American gardens. But the vines escaped and began to take over entire sections of our landscape. Their seeds spread whether by wind, birds, wheels, car tires, shoes or water. The result? Many of our woodlands have been changed forever.

Friends of Bryan Park and members of the Riverine Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists had a plan. Why not try our very best to return a small area of the park back to its natural, more native state? The future Environmental Education Center, formerly Shelter 2, seemed to be the perfect site for this endeavor.

For the last year, volunteers from all over have worked diligently to remove hundreds and hundreds of vines from the Center site. Here visitors can now see woods that contain young trees, no longer strangled by invaders. Solomon's Seal, Partridge Berry, asters, Christmas ferns and Goldenrod and more have emerged from the ground after having been vine-covered for years. You can come see for yourself, if you'd like. Follow the new gravel pathway near the future Center and look around. Compare the woods beside you to the woods across the park road from your trail or down by Upper Young's Pond. The difference is profound.

Friends of Bryan Park, Riverines and other volunteers aren't stopping here. We will continue removing vines near the Center, as well as monitor cleared areas for pesky newcomers. It's our passion. And remember. You are always welcome to come on out and see what the woods are really supposed to look like!

Want to know more about non-native invasive vines and other exotic invasive plants? www.ivyoutofrichmond.org/ is an excellent site to visit!



Volunteers gather vines for disposal

City Parks Operations Manager Mary Lois Mitchum Retires

In the fall of 2008, Richmond's new Parks and Recreation Director reorganized the PRCF Department, consolidating all park operations under one manager and all recreation operations under another. Mary Lois Mitchum, who had been the South/West Parks Supervisor, was promoted to supervise the Parks position. She moved her office into the Bryan Park Gate Keepers House to oversee all City Parks Operations.

Since her appointment as the City "Parks Czar", many have noticed a remarkable turnaround in all of the City parks - improvements in turf maintenance and landscaping, better trash collection, faster responses to problem issues and new park amenities being added throughout the City's system.

She has also worked closely with the various Parks' Friends groups and recruited more volunteer work projects. All would agree that under her leadership, our Park system (parks big and small) never looked better.

She certainly helped Bryan Park in many ways. It always looked cleaner and felt safer. Mary Lois oversaw the replacement of the FoBP playground with new, updated equipment and a big solar shade, and she liked planting trees. She always delivered Parks and Rec staff and equipment when needed, and maintained high standards for her workers and their job performances.

Friends of Bryan Park have enjoyed working with her these past 5 years, and congratulate her on a job well done. We know that she has a family and a farm to attend to, but we hope that she finds retirement richly fulfilling, and even more enjoyable than working for the City!



Photo by John Zeugner

Thank you so much, Mary Lois!

Environmental Education Center On Hold, But Other Nature Preserve Projects Moving Ahead

In our last issue, we related how the Friends of Bryan Park have been advocating for 15 years for the old Shelter # 2 area to be designated a Nature Preserve Area and the Picnic Shelter be converted into an Environmental Education Center. In the last year, the old Shelter has been renovated into a fully operational Environmental Education Center (or EEC), with lab tables, stools, and basic science equipment.

We salute the City for this wonderful facility, on this unique site! (This is one of the reasons why we were so upset with Mark Motley's proposal to build 40 modular homes on the 7.1 acres at the Park's western boundary, directly adjacent to our new Environmental Education Center! We were very concerned about habitat displacement, potentially more human activity and noise, and possible vandalism.

Fortunately, there has been no movement on the development proposal, mainly because of slow economic conditions, but if anybody has a half-million dollars and would like to help us buy the property, in order to expand the park, protect the Nature preserve and EEC, or name the parcel in memory of a loved one, please give us a call !

The main impediment to opening this new facility is that the nearby bathrooms must be upgraded to be ADA accessible. Nevertheless, we have been moving ahead on several fronts, summarized below:

- FoBP applied in 2012 to the Community Foundation for a \$10,000 grant funding a part-time educator to coordinate education programs for the EEC, expand outreach and set the stage for inexpensive summer camps. Our application was turned down (but will be fine-tuned and resubmitted). Nevertheless, we are very grateful for the annual \$1,000 contribution from the Belle Stewart Bryan Day Care Fund.
- Since 2011, Sally has been working with Master Naturalists, and other local groups to remove most of the invasive plants and vines from the immediate area. In 2012 she supervised the construction and planting of two beds of primarily native plants to support our insect pollinators and provide specific butterflies with their host plants (where their eggs are laid and the hatchlings feed). She laid out the nature trail with John.
- In the past 18 months, Parks and Rec, FoBP, and several large-scale work parties have created parking areas and picnic benches for the EEC, have started an interpretive trail winding through the woods for community groups with special needs - the visually impaired, those in wheelchairs, and for special education programs: Thank you, outstanding volunteers, for hundreds of hours: GE, Genworth, the James River Association, CBF, Altria, Hands On Richmond, the Backyard Farmers, Whole Foods, and Nathan Burrell and his JRPS trail-building employees!
- Recently, Vicki Campbell, the City's new Community Gardening coordinator, has been helping to add several beds of edible plants, as demonstration plots. A group from Whole Foods came to weed, water, mulch and groom these newer beds, and create new pathways.
- We will continue improving the Nature Preserve area - adding components to the trail, planting more native species, and supporting education programs and nature camps. Come take a look, or better yet, volunteer to help!



Photo by Sally Chamberlin



Late breaking news: The Parks & Rec Department has agreed with FoBP that placing one or two porta-potties up near the EEC would be an acceptable alternative to waiting another year for the bathrooms retrofit. These will be locked when the Park closes down each day, and we'll also make provisions for handwashing, so we can conduct environmental classes on Saturdays this Fall and also start our nature hikes.

Thank you, City of Richmond !

Regional Bird-Watchers Attraction !

Did you know that Bryan Park is a "birders paradise"? Its wide variety of trees, shrubs, water resources and open spaces create seven distinct habitats, each one providing food and shelter for more than 150 bird species, says Susan Ridd, FoBP Board Member and Richmond Chapter of the Audubon Society member.

These include riparian areas (near the ponds and streams); the soccer complex; the Azalea gardens; the 'old field' or meadow habitat; edge habitats (where forested areas meet open spaces); open woods and dense woods. (Complete descriptions and a comprehensive bird listing can be found in the *2003 Illustrated History of Joseph Bryan Park*, available through the FoBP website.)

Did you know that Bryan Park has Purple Martin houses with an educational exhibit nearby; and an extensive Bluebird Trail. (See our archived Summer 2012 newsletter on the FoBP website, page 4's article on News from the Bluebird Trail by Christina Woodson, Coordinator, Richmond City, Henrico County - Virginia Bluebird Society, which also includes links to live camera feeds of Bluebird boxes, nests, and babies), and it identifies several birding "hot spots" in the Park.

And did you know that the Richmond Chapter of the Audubon Society hosts free bird walks, on the first Sunday of each month, meeting at Shelter # 1 one-half hour after sunrise? All are welcome, wear appropriate outdoor clothing and sturdy shoes, and bring binoculars and or a camera For more information, please call 270-5365. Come celebrate 20 years of birding in Bryan Park !!

New "State of the Art" Playground in Bryan Park

This spring, the City renovated the playground area in Bryan Park and installed a sun shade which provides cover for some of the playground features used by toddlers. Some of the features in the playground follow a nature theme -- ride a giant blue dragonfly, climb on rocks, mushrooms, and a big yellow butterfly; and try the two slides on the Mountain Chalet "activity island". Plus, there are swing-sets and other features.

It is important to recognize that the City's Parks and Recreation Department is providing new playground equipment which is much safer for children, and it added an additional foot-deep layer of sand, for better cushioning. But did you know that in 1996, Friends of Bryan Park raised \$25,000 from private sources to build the park's first playground?

Dr. Elizabeth Barrett headed up the design and fundraising committee, which included Dr. Viola Baskerville and Chuck Epes, Katie Romer, and other Friends, who convinced donors large and small to contribute funds. Noteworthy too was a sizable grant from Spencer Ballou.

The City Parks and Recreation Department installed the equipment, and I vividly remember the Saturday in April of 1997, when we were officially opening the Playground. Rain was pouring down, and so there was a crowd of only a dozen or so people there, Friends and several donors, who cut the soggy ribbon. All of our emotions were mixed - all that work, with expectations so high, and such a sad turn-out....

Several of us visited the playground the next day, after noon, a bright, sunny spring day. None of us will forget then City Councilman Tim Kaine parking his car nearby, with his kids SO excited - they were pulling him by the hands, saying "Come on, Dad, hurry up! Let's play !!

The first playground was a great success for 15 years, but park practices and safety codes change.

Take heart that all the swings in the original playground we built are still up to modern standards, so about half of their original gift still remains. Grab some kids, some snacks, and stuff to drink, and plan to come out and play this evening.



Azalea Garden Update:

Marilyn Erickson, who has been with FoBP for several years, is making progress with the Azalea Gardens. In the fall, a friend in Chesterfield donated 22 azalea plants, which we planted in the former "cross" area. (Now, only the boxwood frame remains of the cross.)

She has been recruiting volunteers to clean out deadwood and remove invasive vines, and recently, Capital One volunteers spread more than \$1,000 of mulch around the borders of the beds, so they would look better for the blooming season. This year, because of all the rain, they looked GREAT! She is also coordinating the Bed Adoption program - you can write to info@friendsofbryanpark.org to adopt a bed for yourself, for your family, or for a group who enjoy working together.

New Book *On Richmond's Wheels* has origins in Bryan Park

When Bryan Park held its Centennial Celebration in 2010, the Altius Cycling Team was invited to set up a display about their bicycle racing in Bryan Park. Then-president, Matt Marchal, asked Thomas Houff, a Bryan Park neighbor, to research, write and display the origins of bicycle racing at Bryan Park. The Altius Cycling Team has been racing bikes in the back part of Bryan Park for almost 40 years!

As Tom dug deeper, he said he could not believe how important cycling is to Richmond. He uncovered information on how many people, including Lewis Ginter, used bicycles for transportation and recreation, which helped the new suburbs flourish. He also found Jaw-dropping stories of how cycling helped promote women's rights and racial equality. As a bicycle racer, he was amazed at the level of expertise of early cyclists.

As Tom related, "Before the book, everyone had envisioned a few guys on big wheeled Penny Farthings, tooling around. NO WAY! Everyone rode a safety bicycle, essentially the same bike we ride today, and you could see how the bicycle sparked a revolution in transportation. The Wright Brothers were bicycle mechanics. Henry Ford's first car (the quadricycle) used bicycle technology. B.A. Blenner, an early automotive pioneer here in Richmond, began as a bicycle mechanic. Road designers here in Richmond used the Good Roads cycling magazine for ideas. Transportation laws that we take for granted today began as cycling etiquette for safety."

So, after creating the history display for Bryan Park, the project's momentum really started to build. At the same time Richmond was bidding on the World Cycling Championships, and all were elated that Richmond was chosen for the 2015 World Cycling championship. "This helped make the perfect storm of support for a cycling history book", Tom said. *Entitled On Richmond's Wheels*, the book's cover is shown below. If you wish to buy a copy, please email him at tomhauff@gmail.com.

Tom says "Ask anyone in America - do you know how to ride a bicycle? The answer is - of course I do! Cycling is a rite of passage, for every American child. It all began with that spark in the evolution of individual transportation, and these days is experiencing an amazing revolution in popularity - for fun and recreation, as a valid transportation alternative to work and for socializing, racing competitions, and far more than anyone imagined: mountain biking, bike rodeos, and in the near future bike path initiatives connecting cities, states, and all our continent's coasts."

Tom says "we MUST understand that Richmond will be THE cycling capital of the world in 2015. Richmond has had big bike races before, but this one dwarfs all of those! Join Altius and other bike racing teams as they prepare for the World Championship. Altius Training Criteriums are held every Tuesday, 5:30 -8pm in the Azalea Garden loop, from May 22st to September 4rd. For more information, visit the Cycling Team Blog: <http://altiuscycling.blogspot.com/>



Tom Houff and Wayland Hundley racing in Bryan Park.

Proposed Phase 1 of Bryan Park Azalea Garden Irrigation Plan

On another front this spring, Rick Sinsabaugh, FoBP's vice-president, is working with the City's Parks Department (Mike Barbor) and a sprinkler consultant, Tim Kienast, with Smith Turf and Irrigation, to develop a plan for installing a modern irrigation system in Bryan Park.

It was the opinion of both the City's Parks maintenance director and the Mr. Kienast that it would be more cost-effective to install a new system (which would be more flexible and more efficient) than to try to salvage a system beyond repair. Due to the Gardens' unusual conditions, a hybrid system is proposed- completely automatic, but with pop-up, custom-directional heads (risers) to ensure that the entire planted area would be watered, and no more.

We have decided to focus on the area around the Fountain Pond and beds east of there, for several reasons. The area around the Pond is the first stop when people visit the gardens, it's the most visually attractive area, and this is the general area where the City would like to construct a gazebo for weddings and other special events in the near future. When power is brought to the gazebo, the city may then be able to power a recirculating pump for the pond fountain (imagine colored lights in there too).

The second phase of an irrigation system for the Gardens may be extended to the west a little further, but we believe that trying to revive and maintain 17 acres of azaleas is unsustainable. As another alternative, we have discussed moving viable shrubs from some of the western beds to areas where they can be watered regularly. Furthermore, irrigated areas would allow us to plant new varieties and experiment with starter-growing beds.

We'll keep you posted on our progress!



(Reprinted with kind permission from Smith Turf and Irrigation)

Volunteers Needed for Bryan Park's Two Big Sporting Events

For the past 4 and 5 years, Friends have worked closely with Sports Backers to provide water stations in the Park for the half-Marathon and the newer, Anthem Moonlight Ride. They are always thrilling and inspiring events, and we need your help!

The first event, the Anthem Moonlight Bicycle Ride, will occur on **Saturday evening, August 17th**. Riders start at the Diamond, and are routed into the park after dark, so they ride along Jordans' Branch Lane from Shelter #1 to the southern lane of the Azalea Loop road (beside I-64). Since the back road is pitch-black dark, volunteers place dozens of glowing light-sticks on each side of the road so riders can stay on track. Riders said that was the coolest part of the entire fun ride! The water station will be near the Bellevue Bridge, and we need at least 10 volunteers. Please sign up ASAP on our website, and you will also receive a beautiful volunteer T-Shirt.

Three months later, the American Family Fitness Half Marathon will come through Bryan Park on **Saturday, November 16th**. We'll need closer to 25 volunteers for this event, but we'll put plenty of publicity in the park as November comes closer.

A Note from the FoBP President -- John Zeugner, AICP

Immediately, I want to apologize for the year-long gap between the last newsletter (Summer 2012) and this one. I would hate to have people think that we have become less active in the last year. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, we have been busier than ever, and it hasn't allowed us enough time to keep you abreast of our activities as we should. This newsletter covers some of the most timely news, but it doesn't include our list of annual accomplishments - information on several scientific studies underway in Bryan Park and news pertaining to the Park's new management.

Did you know that Friends of Bryan Park will be 20 years old in 2014? That's remarkable for a small business and amazing for a small, unpaid non-profit. We are grateful for the donors who have helped support and maintain us through the years, large and small! However, next year will be a milestone, and we need your help and support.

For now, could we ask you to officially join the Friends group? Small sums add up and your donations will cover our usual costs: mulch & gravel, tools and trees, refreshments for volunteers, trash and dog waste bags, etc. (Believe me we are a very frugal group.) If you'd like, you can fill out the form on the back page of this newsletter, or use the PayPal button on our website to make a donation. You'll find us at www.friendsofbryanpark.org. Become an official Friend of Bryan Park today!

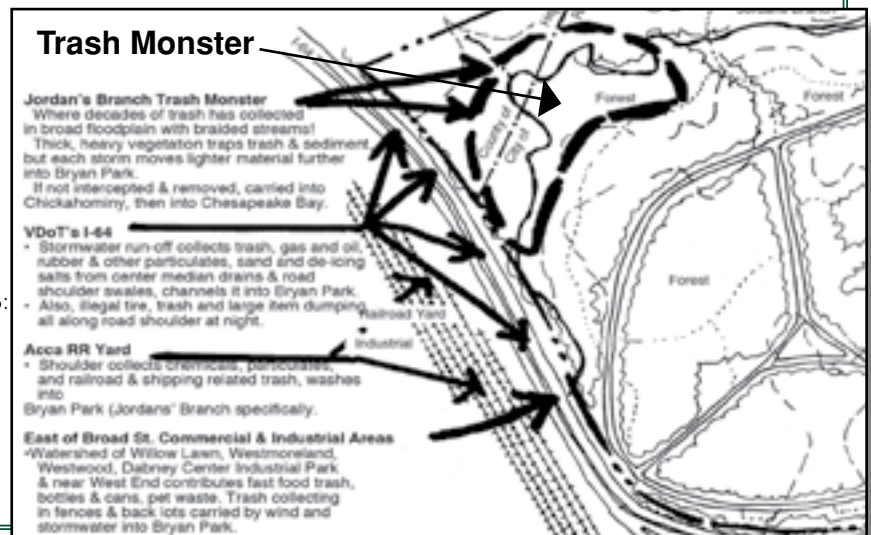
Trash Monster Shrinking

In the past year or two, stream clean-up volunteers have been working further up into the Jordans Branch watershed, towards the Park's southern boundary, at I-64. Each work party has managed to work closer to the Interstate, collecting nearly a hundred large bags of trash, dozens of tires and assorted large debris. It's apparent that much of the trash is decades old - glass bottles and tin cans, as well as plenty of newer trash: plastic, aluminum and styrofoam. Winter is the best time to do these deep clean-ups: most of the vegetation is gone, and the snakes go to Florida for the winter season (at least that's what we tell the volunteers).

Tim Thompson, aka the Trash Fox, christened the area the Trash Monster, and he has focused considerable attention on it, working with CSX and VDOT officials to reduce the quantity of trash that seems to be coming from their properties -- and they seem to be paying more attention to more frequent clean-ups.

Also, we are talking with Henrico County officials about the trash that you see in the watershed.

FoBP would like to sincerely thank the following crews: the JRAC volunteers last June; the SustainRVA crew; the SEALS PT group; Sam E and her John Tyler Community College students, and a work crew from Froehling & Robertson (Engineers & Tech consultants at Byrd Hill and Dumbarton). Larger Map is posted on our website



www.friendsofbryanpark.org
Become a Member of FOBP

Name: _____

Address: _____

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email address: _____

(email addresses will ONLY be used to alert you to upcoming events/Bryan Park issues which may interest you. We'll also alert you when the latest issue of this newsletter is published and downloadable on our site.)

Please list your areas of interest in Bryan Park: _____

Would you like to Volunteer for events? _____

Help support FoBP by becoming a Member:

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\$1,000 and above Founder's Circle

Method of Payment: Check Pay Pal

Checks are payable to Friends of Bryan Park.

Please send to FOBP,

P.O. Box 15481,

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Other Important Contacts:

Third District Councilman - Chris Hilbert, City Hall: 646-5400

Police 4th Precinct Switchboard: 646-4105

Director of Parks, Rec. and Community Facilities - Norman Merrifield 646-5717

Deputy Director II - Larry Miller: 646-0037

Bryan Park Gatekeeper's House: 646-0194

Let Us Hear From You!

Your suggestions and comments about the Park are important to FoBP. Send comments to info@friendsofbryanpark.org. Use this email too if you'd like to be added to our server list. Also visit our website at:

www.friendsofbryanpark.org

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