

Focus on Bryan Park

Summer 2012
FoBP

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

Bryan Park Garden Restoration Project

For the last couple of years the Better Together Garden, established in 2006, was overgrown with weeds, many of which towered over the remaining plantings. The path which used to provide a lovely place to stroll by the garden beds was gravel-thin and spotted green with lower lying weeds.

Late last year some FoBP members took action. During the autumn an estimated 60 to 70 hours were spent weeding out Bermuda grass alone. With its deep roots and ability to regrow when a mere bit is left in the soil, the grass was a major challenge to remove. Meanwhile, strong-backed volunteers from VCU helped FoBP finish hand-weeding the paths and spread fresh new gravel. Already the garden was looking better, even though only one of the four flower beds was replanted and mulched before winter.

Supported wonderfully by the Richmond Department of Parks, early in 2012 a new set of volunteers showed up to help. Members of the Riverine Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists worked hard with FoBP to continue the chore of removing the sprawling Bermuda grass. Then the magic happened. FoBP was awarded a very generous \$500 grant for plants and mulch from Keep Virginia Beautiful's "30 in 30" grant program. With the grass problem now under control, native plants were bought from a local grower and mulch purchased from a nursery close to the park. Small metal markers were added, identifying the new native plants. A sign telling visitors about the volunteer work of FoBP and the Riverines, and the KVB grant, was placed nearby.



Better Together bed - Autumn 2011



Same bed - June 2012



Same bed - July 2012

Environmental Education Center & Nature Preserve Nearly Ready

Over the past year, the City's Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities has been converting the old Shelter #2 into an Environmental Education Building, and grooming the derelict site for use as an Outdoor Nature Learning Center. Commendably, the Mayor, Councilman Chris Hilbert, and the Parks and Recreation Department, have steered funding to enclose and renovate the former picnic shelter, to enable its use as an educational classroom and related equipment storage area. The Department is also engaged in soliciting other groups to furnish the building, provide furniture, laboratory equipment, storage facilities, and other educational materials.

Friends of Bryan Park want to express their deep appreciation and gratitude to those above for their support of our dream to eventually develop the Shelter #2 "peninsula" into a Nature Preserve. In fact, one of the charter members of Friends of Bryan Park donated \$20,000 in the mid-1990's, to start the development of a Nature Preserve and, eventually, support environmental and nature education in the back part of the Park. Just north of the Nature center is the western portion of Upper Young's Pond, with its floodplain and wetlands, with native and migrating birds, small mammals, reptiles, fish and amphibians, and extensive plant communities.

Just east, and adjacent to the main western part of Bryan Park, is the broad Jordans Branch valley and stream ecosystem, which is almost a mile in length. It is the most intact wilderness area in the park. It contains deep forest with century-old trees, vernal wetlands and an intermittent spring, and a variety of stream regimes.

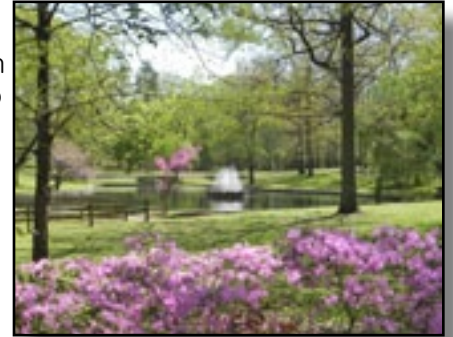
The City has proposed a curriculum which concentrates on urban and regional environmental issues. To complement this, Friends of Bryan Park has proposed an emphasis on more outdoor and hands-on learning experiences and mentor-based nature and wilderness education and exposure. Thanks to the generous gift and a recently discovered endowment with ties to 'Belle' Stewart Bryan, the wife of Publisher Joseph Bryan and a social progressive and philanthropist in her own right, The Friends believe they have the funding to hire a part-time educator/ Naturalist and program coordinator on a long-term basis. We believe this educator/coordinator will bring regional experts to teach SOL-quality programs on the natural sciences and expose the City's youth to real forests, eco-systems, geology and hydrology, plant and animal habitats, orienteering and camping skills, and a fundamental understanding of the night sky.

We'll send out an alert when the Environmental Education Center officially opens, and keep you posted on the development of the nature programs and the educator's position. We welcome your involvement and support.

Summer Azalea Care

by Marilyn Erickson

After a wonderful Spring of azalea blooms and rain, the shrubs are becoming water deprived from drought. If possible, give your plants at least an inch of water each week. Shrubs planted this year are particularly vulnerable to drought and should receive extra watering. Because azalea roots are close to the surface, they should be continuously covered with several inches of mulch to keep moisture in the soil from evaporating. Summer is also a time for rapid growth of weeds and vines that can cover the leaves and prevent adequate light from reaching the leaves. Instead of pulling the weeds and vines in times of drought, cut them down to ground level to prevent disruption of the azalea roots. Don't fertilize or prune azaleas during the summer.



Bryan Park Tree Tour and Measured Walk/Run Loops Projects Completed

Last summer, FoBP and Board member John Zeugner provided a summer internship for William Andrews, a junior from Colgate, to work on several long-needed Park projects. The first was the development of a tree tour, identifying native trees, unusual trees in the park, and invasive species (usually non-natives which tend to push native species out and disrupt the plant and animal webs originally interrelated with them).

Coincidentally, Christine Stoddard, a VCU senior living in Bellevue and founder of the *Quail Bell Press & Productions* (find it most easily on the WWW) asked the Friends if she could do a graphics project for us pro-bono, to add to her portfolio. We were thrilled with the offer and the Board green-lighted the entire project.

John Z. worked on pushing the project forward when time was available, and slowly provided information to Christine. To make a long story short, Board members Sally Chamberlin and Ed Knight helped pull the project together. The 12 page booklet including a map (associated with small name labels attached to the designated trees) was unveiled on Saturday, April 21 when the Richmond Tree Stewards lead the first Tree Tour! (They celebrated Arbor Month in various city parks and on Capitol Square every Saturday in April.)

A limited numbers of the booklets are still available for groups and individuals at no charge. The tour can also be downloaded; scan the QR code or visit the FoBP website, resources tab. In the Fall, a real-estate-type sign with a "mailbox" holding more booklets will be placed near the Shelter #1 bulletin board on Saturday mornings (when weather permits) so that families, groups and individuals can take the self-guided tour. This is an unusual educational opportunity and a chance to explore some of the natural resources in beautiful Bryan Park!

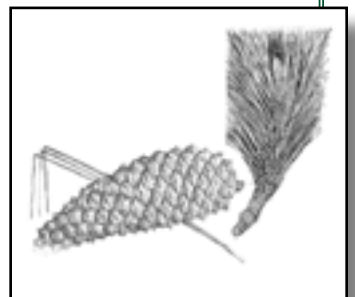
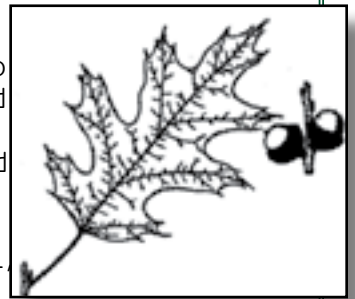
Also, William developed 2 measured walk/run loops in the back part of Bryan Park. They are essentially a 1 mile course and a 3.1 mile course. (3.1 miles is equivalent to 5,000 meters, or 5 kilometers, a common race distance.) These courses are intended to allow walkers and exercisers to know how far they have walked or run. By timing their speeds, and by keeping daily or weekly records, they can figure their time or speed improvements.

Both measured loops have start and finish signs, each with a map showing the route and interval measurements. (The mile loop shows 1/4 mi., 1/2 mi., 3/4 mi., and the 3.1 mile loop shows the route and the 1 mi., 2 mi., and 3 mi. intervals).

The start and finish lines for the 1 mile course are in the northeast part of the Azalea Garden loop, close to the southern end of the Shelter 3/soccer complex area, and are all color-coded blue. Look for the 2 blue posts with the course map on the start sign.

The start and finish lines for the 3.1 mile course are just south of Shelter #1, a little ways down Jordans Branch Lane. The course is a little more complicated, but the map and the interval signage should make the rationale clear. (This configuration is the same one that the Richmond Roadrunners use when staging races in the Park.) The start and finish posts, and the interval markers, are all color-coded green.

If it sounds complicated, it isn't. The map on each of the start signs will make the courses clear. Try them yourself, and start recording your times. Invite your parents, your friends, your children, to start walking or running them, and enjoy the health benefits. Let us know what you think, and thanks again, William. Good luck at Colgate University this fall...!



Board Elects New Officer and other changes

For 2012, the Board elected John Zeugner to be President, which he accepted with relish (being an urban Planner, tree-hugger, and wild about Bryan Park). Other Board members on our team serve as Azalea Garden restoration guru, graphics genius, VP, secretary, treasurer and hardy, dependable jack-of-all-trade members.

Recently, Wes Robertson was elected to join the Board. Wes is a PhD candidate at VCU, currently involved in several scientific research projects pertaining to Bryan Park. He has gotten several of his fellow students involved with Bryan Park as well. The next newsletter issue will describe some of these fascinating projects.

The Friends would also like to congratulate Mr. Larry Miller, an urban planner and career manager with the City's Parks and Recreation Department, on his recent promotion to Deputy Director of the Department. Larry has been a remarkable support for FoBP for years. He is an exceptional friend of ours and of all of the Richmond City parks.

We'd also like to welcome Dr. Norman Merrifield as the new Director of Parks and Recreation, and Ms. Deborah Morton as the other Deputy Director of the Department. Dr. Merrifield came to us from Cincinnati where he served as the administrative executive officer and director of the Cincinnati Recreation Commission. Ms. Morton previously served as the Assistant Director for the City of Norfolk's Department of Recreation, Parks & Open Space for 10 years. Congratulations and welcome, all.

Celebrating our Partners!

by Sally Chamberlin

Over the last year, FoBP has partnered with several other volunteer groups to help care for and celebrate Bryan Park. We owe a lot to these fellow volunteers and to the Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities, which wonderfully supports our efforts. Here are just a few of these partnerships.

- Last September students from VCU helped us refurbish the gravel pathway that adorns the Better Together Garden near the Young's Ponds' spillway. This was a major step toward restoring this garden.
- In October, with the help of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, 188 bags of trash, 17 tires and some other large debris were removed from Bryan Park's waterways.
- After Hurricane Irene, VCU Athletes came out to clean up and care for their adopted bed in Bryan Park's historic Azalea Garden. By blooming time the bed was beautiful!
- Also after Irene the Altius Cycling Team cleared some of the back roads of fallen trees, and kept on racing!
- In November Altria volunteers and the James River Association worked with us to purchase and plant 35 trees. With our huge trees aging out, these new ones will be ready to take their places in the future.
- Sports Backers worked with FoBP for the third year in a row to provide water stations for both the Anthem Moonlight Ride and the McDonald's Half Marathon. We couldn't have staffed the tables without our volunteers!
- In January 2012 FoBP celebrated Martin Luther King Service Day by working with partners REI and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to clean up our waterways. We were joined by volunteers from Hands On Richmond and the Riverine Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists to collect 155 bags of trash and other big items. Our ultimate goal is to stem the tide of trash which flows into the park from Broad Street, I-64 and other urban stormwater routes.
- As part of the Arbor Day celebration, the Richmond Tree Stewards used Bryan Park's newly published Tree Tour to teach visitors about the Park's many varieties of trees.
- On the first Sunday of every month, our friends from Audubon meet in the park to view and to teach about birds in the area. Beginners are always welcome!
- In June, Bryan Park was a site for the 13th Annual James River Cleanup planned by the James River Advisory Council. Mounds of trash were collected. Not a piece of it will ever make its way to the Chesapeake Bay.
- In July, Eagle Scout Patrick Sullivan built and installed two beautiful bulletin boards near the dam and the spillway.
- The Azalea Garden is slowly being restored thanks to the efforts of volunteers who have adopted beds. We couldn't do it without you!



Clearly Friends of Bryan Park has lots of friends! Interested in partnering with us too? You can find out what we are up to by visiting our website. Click on our calendar, find something you'd like to do and come on out to help us celebrate your park!

News From The Bluebird Trail

by Christina Woodson

Coordinator, Richmond City, Henrico County - Virginia Bluebird Society

June 2012: Surrounded by azalea garden strollers, Frisbee golfers and soccer games, the Bryan Park bluebirds have been busy nesting and raising their young. In early March 2012 nine new boxes were added to the existing trail and the notably mild winter meant that nesting season began shortly thereafter; the first egg of the season was noted on March 28. Since then, 22 Eastern Bluebirds, 6 Carolina Chickadees, and 5 Carolina Wrens have fledged and the season is by no means over! The fact that two of the newly installed boxes have already hosted a second brood is encouraging since it can take a year or so for the birds to locate and begin using new nest boxes.

The male's contribution to nest building consists of perching on the nest box of his choice, waving his wings in a display while holding nesting material in his beak, leaving the female to do all the nest building by herself. Papa assumes his familial duties when his mate begins to incubate the eggs, providing food for her and their youngsters when they hatch. Summer food preferences include caterpillars, grasshoppers, beetles, crickets and spiders, which makes Bryan Park's open grassy areas perfect habitat for these keen-eyed hunters. Often, bluebirds can be observed perched on a traffic sign or post, scanning for ground-dwelling insects. A typical brood in Central Virginia consists of five eggs, and two successful nestings per year are quite common. In a year where weather conditions permit, three broods have been documented, so it will be interesting to see if that situation occurs on the Bryan Park trail. Stay tuned for an end of season report!

Although popular wisdom maintains that bluebirds "mate for life," researchers have discovered that a female Eastern Bluebird frequently mates with multiple males, so that one or more chicks in any nest may be only a half-sibling to its nestmates. In fact, studies in South Carolina and Ontario have revealed as many as 25-30% of any given brood were sired by a different male. Around 20 days old, the young birds are ready to take their "big step" and leave the nest. After they fledge, they frequently remain close by to help their parents take care of the next brood. At this stage the youngsters are often visibly bigger than their hard-working parents, who are worn from the constant regimen of feeding their offspring and nest cleaning.

According to the North American Bluebird Society, bluebird populations declined by an estimated 90% in the period 1920-1970. The primary reasons for this alarming decline were loss of habitat (open grassy spaces and nesting cavities), increased pesticide use and competition from House Sparrows and European Starlings. Thanks to a concerted effort by dedicated volunteers who mobilized and set up nestboxes in public parks, on rural tracts and in their own backyards, the population stabilized and rebounded. The Bryan Park Bluebird trail is part of that nationwide system. For more information contact rvbluebirdtrails@gmail.com.

Curious to see inside a bluebird nestbox? Check out this live streaming video from Pennsylvania:

<http://www.westmorelandconservancy.org/BlueBirdWebcam-1.htm>



Photos of our two new bulletin boards. They are located at the Bryan Park Avenue entrances to the park. For his Eagle Scout project Patrick Sullivan (second from the right in the photo) built and installed them. You'll see some of his helpers in one of the photos, too. The boards are gorgeous, and a welcome addition to the park. As for the next Gaston, the posts are buried in concrete two feet deep!

Thanks, Patrick!



Shirley Subdivision Update

by John Zeugner

I hope that most of you know about the Shirley Subdivision controversy. If not, I'll update you quickly. Shirley Subdivision is a 7-acre property in Henrico County immediately adjacent to the NW part of Bryan Park, which is known to many as the shelter #2 area, which is the area we've been planning to transform into a Environmental Education Center and Nature Preserve for almost 20 years (please see front page article).

Fast forward to today. Mr. Mark Motley, of Motley's Auction and Realty Group in Richmond, acquired the property about 4 years ago. To develop the property for residential uses, he needed to widen the 35-ft wide lots to meet the minimum width of Henrico's codes. This resulted in 40 lots, essentially 4 rows of 10 homes each, directly adjacent to Bryan Park. Because he is working from a grandfathered plat, Mr. Motley does not need to rezone nor is he required to notify the 3 or 4 residents who live there now (in a wonderful, wooded seclusion) or any of the neighboring property-owners (including the friends of Bryan Park). The current proposal has numerous problems: too many houses, too close together, on too-small lots, and it ruins the neighborhood for the several current residents. The density of 6 dwelling units per acre is high, and the project has only one way in and out, a significant fire and safety issue.

Friends of Bryan Park met with Mr. Motley in early April, to learn more about his plans and discuss other options. He said that he wants to build good, affordable housing and to preserve as many of the trees on the site as possible. In fact, 40 units of modular housing are to be squeezed into these small lots and new water and sewer lines will need to be trenched-in. Add driveways and other utility services and the site WILL need to be clear-cut, removing large mature trees and destroying the existing wildlife habitat.

Other environmental impacts will be the erosion and sedimentation from the site development. (The soils are classified as highly erodible.) The County appears to be barely concerned about the land being a designated Chesapeake Bay Resource Management Area (RMA) where low-impact design and vegetation protection are required criteria, among others. Furthermore, considerable stormwater runoff from all of the new impervious surfaces (rooftops, driveways, paved streets, curb and gutters) will impact the state-protected wetlands on the other side of Brydhill Rd, the western part of Upper Young's Pond, and Jordans Branch creek to the southwest.

Late last year, Mr. Motley asked adjacent property owners for construction easements. The City of Richmond was asked to donate a 20-ft wide construction easement, to then become a permanent drainage ditch. The Mayor, Councilman Hilbert, and Dr. Merrifield, the Parks and Recreation Director, all said that they weren't about to give up an inch of Park property. We are grateful to them all for protecting Bryan Park. Please thank them when you see them!

However, it is a real tragedy that the plans the City and Friends have for developing the Shelter #2 area as a Nature Preserve and Environmental Education Center will certainly be disrupted by the construction of this subdivision. The loss of deep forest continuity (green infrastructure) and quiet, the elimination of the mature trees and understory, and the inevitable intrusion of families and traffic, will likely undo all our efforts to cultivate the wildness and educational opportunities there.

We are pursuing several options. Mr. Motley has offered to sell us the property, but we doubt that the Friends, or the City could afford the \$1 million-plus cost. Our discussions with the Henrico Parks Department about their acquiring the property were fruitless. It would be possible for the City or the County to offer a comparably-sized property as a land-swap, which would offer many additional benefits - future residential development closer to main roads, schools, shopping, etc. Better site layout, clustering, green and low-impact development would be preferable too, as would be the development of authentic affordable housing with shared open space and amenities.

Our Shirley Subdivision Task Force is meeting regularly to explore these and other options. If you'd like to get involved, contact FoBP through our website. Are there some wealthier "friends" of Bryan Park out there, who would like to purchase 7 acres of land and donate it to the City or Friends of Bryan Park for a tax write-off? Or help us and the City (and possibly the County too) make it attractive for Mr. Motley to place the property in a Conservation Easement? Whether there is one investor or a small group, we have the legal expertise to make it work for you. If Bryan Park and the Nature Preserve/Environmental Education center are important to you, and you could make a donation to help us pursue some of these other options, please contact us too. We are keeping the Shirley Subdivision Task Force information page current on our website, and we would be grateful for any assistance and support you could provide.



www.friendsofbryanpark.org
Become a Member of FOBP

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

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: _____

Help support FoBP by becoming a Member:

\$5 Student \$10 Individual \$15 Family

\$25 Friend \$50-\$299 Benefactor

\$300-\$999 Park Guardian

\$1,000 and above Founder's Circle

Method of Payment: Check Money Order

Checks are payable to Friends of Bryan Park.
Please send to FOBP,
P.O. Box 15481,
Richmond, VA 23227-5481

Would you like to Volunteer for events? _____

FoBP is an IRS-certified 501(c)3 non-profit. All donations are fully tax-deductable!

Friends of Bryan Park Board Members:

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| John & Bucci Zeugner | Sally Chamberlin |
| Ed Knight | Donna Lacy |
| Cary Wright | Sue Ridd |
| Rick & Sarah Sinsabaugh | Mary Beth Mains |
| Marilyn Erickson | Wes Robertson |

Other Important Contacts:

- Third District Councilman - Chris Hilbert, City Hall: 646-5400
- Police 4th Precinct Switchboard: 646-4105
- Director of Parks, Rec. and Comm. Facilities - Norman Merrifield 646-5717
- Deputy Director II - Larry Miller: 646-0037
- Parks Operations Manager - Mary Lois Mitchum: 646-1099

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

Friends of Bryan Park

P.o. Box 15481
Richmond, VA 23227-5481
www.friendsofbryanpark.org

