

**Department of Parks
Director's Report
Thursday, October 18, 2007**

Office of the Parks Director

- Pope Farm, our Department of Parks plant- and tree-growing nursery, held an informative open house for employees (park designers, park managers, and others) last Thursday. The focus was on trees – what was available, the best applications for various park designs, and care of the plant material. I was pleased to be able to join them, and recommend a similar tour to all who are interested in the full range of services and materials Pope Farm and the Division of Horticultural Services can provide its customers and citizens.
- I visited the Red Wiggler operation at Ovid Hazen Wells Park, and park partner Woody Woodruff shared highlights of their farm program for the disabled, a tour of the solar house located on the property and being readied for occupancy by park staff, and the plans for future site improvements and amenities.
- Several common areas of interest between Parks and the public schools were the subject of a meeting between several park staff and Joe Lavorgna from MCPS. Included were school ballfield maintenance supplemental, updates on the Poplar Run/Saddlebrook discussion, confirming the Paint Branch HS/Airy Hill Park agreement, and other topics.
- I was pleased to participate in a half-day of Cultural Competency Training, part of our Diversity initiative in Parks, and excellent program was provided through Trinity Consulting.
- I met with Donna Bartko, Chair of the Countywide Recreation Advisory Board, on how we could work together with the Recreation Advisory Boards to further our common goals for improved facilities, operations and programs in our parks.
- I attended the King Barn Dairy MOOseum Benefit and Silent Auction at the Waters house. Supporters are working with park staff to finish dairy barn project, located at South Germantown Recreational Park, so that it may be opened to the public.
- With Park Manager Jim Humerick, Rock Creek Park staff and our staff architect Eileen Emmet, I toured the Rock Creek maintenance yard, a collection of miscellaneous structures in need of an environmentally sensitive and efficient overhaul, and reviewed plans to improve it..
- I met with Sarah Phelps of Great and Small, a park partner at Rickman Farm, whose organization provides a therapeutic riding program using horses to help those in need, especially the developmentally or emotionally disabled. We agreed to do what we could to continue to assist this worthwhile activity.
- David Tobin, Parks Equestrian Manager, and I met at Woodstock Equestrian Park with Hermen Greenberg, a key park donor, to discuss plans for facilities at the site.
- At the County Council, the Park and Planning Semiannual Report was presented and discussed, and the Potomac Horse Farm lease extension was approved, allowing the construction of an environmentally sound manure composting facility.
- Discussions continue among the Department of Recreation, Department of Parks, and Joe Beach of the County OMB regarding the difficult funding and operational issues yet to be resolved for the new Wisconsin Place Community Center, scheduled to open in Friendship Heights in the fall of 2008. A meeting was held earlier this week to

review the most recent list of what will be needed and responsibilities of the various entities.

- On October 8, Park Police received a \$1,000 grant from Target to fund the development of crime prevention information for distribution to the public at fairs and community events, to make the public better aware of where Park Police has primary jurisdiction. The Target grant is part of an ongoing effort to strengthen families and communities throughout the country. Since opening its doors in 1962, Target has given 5 percent of its income to organizations that support education, the arts and safe families and communities—today, this figure translates to \$3 million every week.

Events

- OCTOBER 18—Halloween train rides at Wheaton and Cabin John regional parks. The Haunted Train rides at Wheaton Regional Park are open on October 13, 14, 18-21 and 25-30 from 6-9:00 pm for \$6 or \$5 with a can of food. The Cabin John Halloween “Eye Spy” Train ride dates are October 18, 19, 20, 25, 26 and 27, from 6-9:00 pm as well. Admission is \$5 or \$4 dollars with a can of food at Cabin John. (www.WheatonTrainandCarousel.com and www.CabinJohnTrain.com)
- OCTOBER 26 & 27—Brookside Gardens host site of annual American Horticultural Therapy Association conference.
- OCTOBER 27—Parks projects planned for Community Service Day include: a major invasive plant pull at Wheaton Regional Park, clean up along Rock Creek by Cedar Lane Unitarian Church, Bullis Local Park beautification and Long Branch clean up with the Montgomery County Democrats.
- NOVEMBER 3—Maryland Emancipation Day events at Woodlawn Manor, Sandy Spring Slave Museum and African Art Gallery and Oakley Cabin from 10:00 am – 4:00 pm. Program of celebration begins at Oakley Cabin at 2:00 pm.
- NOVEMBER 16—Opening night, 2007 Brookside Gardens Holiday Light show.

Management/Administration

- The department has a grants goal of \$1 million this year; to date the department has received \$500,000 toward this goal.

Partnerships

- The department’s public/private partnerships office receives 2 to 3 proposals per month for various park projects. To improve information sharing, the partnerships section of the department’s website, www.MontgomeryParks.org, is currently under construction with the new Public/Private policy adopted by the Commission in September and other information being posted online.

Property Management

- Parks property management staff contracted with a professional services firm to provide architectural, mechanical, structural and historic preservation plans including drawings, construction specifications and bid documents to accomplish the following projects:
 - Accessible ramps at the Poole area General Store and the adjacent residential home;
 - Stabilization plan for the Darby Store, including a plan to move the store from the dangerous corner—a major project;

- Structural analysis of the Meadowbrook Stables to address rotted support columns, evaluate load capacity for hay loft, planning for the addition of a sprinkler system, upgrades to electric and ventilation and evaluation of heating systems; and
- Modify the Wheaton Stables to change the existing standing stalls to larger enclosed stalls, which includes an addition to the existing building, plan for the addition of a sprinkler system, upgrade to electric and other mechanical systems.
- Parks property management staff has provided facility management and oversight for the Warner property (Circle Manor) in Kensington. The intake of new acquisitions is first in the care of the Parks property management office. Since September 2006, the Warner property has needed emergency maintenance, stabilization and security services on a routine and sometimes round-the clock basis.
- Park rental homes are at 100 percent occupancy.
- Park rental homes are 100 percent compliant with the Maryland Lead Safe Program, which is required for landlords in Maryland.
- Parks property management staff is working with Park Police to resolve illegal use of park properties. Recently, the department received restitution for damages to park property as a result of Park Police court actions.
- Parks property management staff secured a \$20,000 reimbursement from the Revenue Authority for WSSC bills, as well as \$37,000 in lost rent.
- Three agricultural leases (one horse grazing and two cropping) have recently been ratified for park properties in Dry Seneca Creek, Muncaster Manor Local Park and newly acquired property in South Germantown.

3rd Party Support

- The Montgomery County Recreation Department held the 2007 Oktoberfest at Ridge Road Recreational Park on October 6. It was well attended with lots of vendors, activities and entertainment. The evening concluded with a wonderful fireworks display. Park Police and Little Bennett Regional Park staff were on site assisting with this event.
- The Department of Parks participated in the Damascus Community Fair on September 7, 8 and 9, providing activities and information to fair visitors.

Natural Resources Management

- Managed deer hunts in county parks begin next week. The department has posted a direct link to information online at www.MontgomeryParks.org about park closures for deer management. The following media outlets have also covered the department's annual deer management operations: *The Gazette*, WRC-TV (NBC 4), the *Takoma Park Newsletter*, the *Potomac Almanac* and WMAL-AM.
- Park staff is also working with Maryland Public Television on segment about the department's deer management strategies for its Outdoors Maryland show.
- For National Public Lands Day, September 29, Friends of Black Hill participated in a lakeshore clean up at Little Seneca.

Trails (natural surface)

- For National Public Lands Day, 8 volunteers worked on trail maintenance at Blockhouse Point with park staff.

Agricultural History Farm Park

- The department's 20th annual Harvest Festival was held at the Agricultural History Farm Park on October 6 and 7, with approximately 3500 enjoying their day on the farm. The parks volunteer services office recruited approximately 90 activity volunteers, several from Montgomery College, for the 2-day event for a total of 600 volunteer hours worked. It was listed widely on media outlet calendars, including mentions and articles in *The Gazette*, *Maryland Daily Record* and *Montgomery County Sentinel*.
- Parks Archaeologist Heather Bouslog and volunteers conducted an activity for Harvest Festival visitors on the process of archaeology as children and families excavated, washed artifacts, described their objects and displayed their findings.

Nature Centers

- Meadowside Nature Center held an Apple Festival and Campfire at the end of September with 75 attendees ranging in age from 3 years old and up. Twelve volunteers were utilized for this event with volunteer hours totaling 36.
- A group from Korea interning with the Environmental Protection Agency recently helped Black Hill nature program staff to plant white turtlehead in a wet meadow at the Red Wiggler farm in Ovid Hazen Wells Park. White turtlehead is the host plant for our state insect, the Baltimore Checkerspot butterfly.
- More than 100 fourth grade students from Ronald McNair Elementary School came to Black Hill for stream and lake ecology programs.
- Brookside Nature Center is planning for 2008 summer camps, with lots of new camp offerings for all age ranges and families.
- A new roof and exterior painting is complete at Brookside Nature Center.
- Brookside Nature Center is updating its interpretive signage on the center's boardwalk entrance with the parks Exhibit Shop. The original signage was installed in 1990 and nature center staff is planning an interpretive companion booklet to be available to patrons in at least 3 different languages: Spanish, Chinese and Yiddish.
- Brookside Nature Center staff is working with the Parks Foundation and donors on park benches for the trails and a new sugar maple tree for the meadow to replace the one that died in the sugar bush area. There is a grove of sugar maples park naturalists tap in January in preparation for its popular maple sugaring programs with school groups and the public each February.

Public Gardens

- Fifty Ernst & Young employees volunteered at Brookside Gardens October 5 as part of a regional volunteer event for Ernst & Young staff up and down the East coast. In three teams, the fifty volunteers completed a stream clean up along Glenallan Avenue, pulled invasive exotic weeds in the service area and installed lights for the Garden of Lights show. Gardens staff agreed the Ernst & Young volunteers were among the most effective groups ever hosted.
- WUSA-TV (CBS 9) filmed a news segment at the Reflection Terrace in the Gude Garden at Brookside on October 3 to remember the 5th anniversary of the sniper shootings, interviewing several visitors and Brookside Gardens spokesperson Leslie McDermott.
- Work on the first phase of the Brookside Gardens Master Plan, a renewal of the main entrance to the Gardens at 1800 Glenallan Avenue, has continued with the addition of

an artist to create site-specific artwork to complement the landscape. Baltimore sculptor Linda DePalma has designed a pair of entrance signs framed by magnolia leaves, flowers and buds to welcome visitors to the garden. She is also working on a gazebo that features a delicate roof of ginkgo leaves, which will be a focal point for the renewed gardens near the entrance, and the location of interpretive signage, maps, and donor acknowledgements. DePalma's design work is being funded through the Public Arts Trust of the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County.

- Brookside Gardens staff formed a new "Green Team" to investigate and implement sustainable practices into its daily work program. The team is focusing on purchasing sustainably produced office supplies and furniture, green cleaning products, rainwater harvesting and enacting methods to reduce energy consumption. Several team members attended the DC Green Festival on October 6 to research new products and identify vendors. Staff brought back a load of compostable and/or biodegradable plates, cups and utensils recycled at the Green Festival to test whether they can be successfully composted in the existing compost operations at Brookside Gardens.
- A Brookside Gardens intern was invited to participate in a panel discussion organized by the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange of Takoma Park, "Art and Place, Defining the Human in the Human Environment," a public conversation about the intersection of art and life using examples from the fields of sculpture, dance and landscape architecture.
- The annual Chrysanthemum Display in the Brookside Gardens Conservatory opened Saturday, October 6, highlighted by eight large topiary forms covered with live, trained chrysanthemums, highlighted by a fifteen-foot tall giraffe. Show planning begins eighteen months before installation, with a theme and planting plan developed, sketches and specifications for props drafted, forms professionally welded and mum cuttings and training. The result is a unique regional display rarely found in public horticultural display gardens.

Archaeology and Historic Site Interpretation

- Friends of Little Bennett Regional Park, the Clarksburg Historical Society and the Department of Parks hosted an open house September 29 at the Kingsley School House—the historic one room schoolhouse built in 1893 and located in Little Bennett Regional Park. Visitors toured the inside of the schoolhouse, participated in some "old" school day activities, met former students and learned more about Little Bennett's history.
- September 29, Park Archaeologist Heather Bouslog and volunteers worked the park archaeology booth at the Magical Montgomery event.
- October 3, 10 eighth graders from the Bullis School volunteered with the parks archaeology program to excavate at the Needwood Mansion archaeology site and attended an interpretive program on Needwood Mansion.
- October 4, 5 volunteers came for the "Lab Night" meeting to process artifacts from Oakley Cabin.
- October 12, the archaeology program co-sponsored a Dig-a-thon with the Montgomery County Public Schools archaeology clubs. Magruder High School and Richard Montgomery students excavated and processed artifacts.
- October 13, Park archeologists Jim Sorensen and Heather Bouslog sponsored a bus trip for volunteers to the annual Archaeological Society of Maryland meeting held in Millersville, Maryland.

- October 13 and 14, Montgomery College's anthropology classes participated in the archaeological survey of Little Bennett Regional Park. Students learned the basics of a Phase I archaeological survey as they excavated Shovel Test Pits (STPS) along a grid, took soil and Munsell readings and collected cultural artifacts recovered.

Field Sports

- Park staff has kicked off the fall season turf program by aerating, fertilizing and over seeding Pinecrest Local Park. Martin Luther King, Jr. Recreational Park fields will be next and others to follow.

Tennis

- The new tennis courts at Pinecrest and Colesville local parks are open for play. Lighting will be installed soon at the Colesville Local Park courts.
- In September, 14 outdoor tennis classes were held and 15 classes in October. The classes were held at four locations around the county, with participants pleased to enjoy an alternative for tennis since the indoor facilities are closed.
- Renovations at Cabin John Indoor Tennis began on October 12. The renovations include the installation of a new reflective ceiling and the replacement of the halogen lights with energy efficient florescent lights. The facility is scheduled to reopen November 8. While the facility is closed, the lounge area will also get a facelift with new furniture and artwork and the front entrance will be repainted.
- Renovations at Wheaton Indoor Tennis are underway. During the demolition phase, staff determined that some additional grading work needed to be done to address water seepage. This delayed the process several weeks in order to acquire the necessary permits from the Department of Permitting Services. The contractor discovered an unmarked gas line close to the surface that required a modification to the grading plan. After the grading is complete, the contractor is ready to install the fabric skin, lights and HVAC systems and paint the courts. We now believe the facility will reopen in late December or early January.

Boating

- A group of injured Iraqi war veterans recently came to Black Hill Regional Park for a pontoon boat tour of Little Seneca Lake.

Equestrian Centers

- Brush and deteriorated fencing is being cleared by parks staff at Wheaton Stables and new fencing installed by contractor Best Fence, as the first step in rejuvenating/improving the stables' pastures.

Ice Skating

- Wheaton Ice Arena held its first Speed Skating Meet October 6, hosted in conjunction with the Wheaton Speed Skating Club. The event drew 31 skaters and over 100 spectators from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland and DC.
- Cabin John Ice Rink and Wheaton Ice Arena will celebrate National Skating Month on January 12, 2008. Both rinks will offer free group lessons for a half hour prior to a discounted afternoon public session (admission and skates for one low price). January is National Skating Month and U.S. Figure Skating member clubs and basic skills

programs reach out to new members in the community by offering the fundamentals of ice skating from professionally trained instructors.

- Cabin John Ice Rink is halfway through a Fall Group lesson season with 735 students enrolled in a total of 146 classes. Many of our high level freestyle skaters are busy perfecting their skating programs as they begin to compete in the South Atlantic Regional qualifying competition held this year in York, Pennsylvania—the first stop on the road to the national championships. The rink is now bustling in the (very) early mornings with high school hockey practice. There are increased crowds at all of our public sessions as we head towards the cooler Fall and Winter seasons and we are gearing up with lots of special events offered to the public beginning with our Trick or Treat Skate on October 26.
- Wheaton Ice Arena’s Ice Fest on September 29 included a Stick and Puck Session. With assistance from several players of the Professional Development Hockey League, new skills were taught to several skaters. Players also assisted one of our instructors with free skating lessons for 51 beginner skaters. Both the snack bar and the pro shop enjoyed increased sales.
- Wheaton Ice Arena collected three large bags of coats, gloves, hats and sweaters for the area’s less fortunate from patrons in response to their “Keep your Neighbors Warm” event held on September 28; the donations received were the largest response to date.

Managed Open Space

- Asphalt paving of total parking areas at Hillandale Local Park is complete.

Scenic Parkway Experiences

- Nearly 400 volunteers worked to Sweep the Creek along Sligo Creek Parkway for the National Public Lands Day event sponsored by the Friends of Sligo Creek on September 29.

Recreation Centers (Park Activity Buildings)

- A town hall meeting on the future of the 31 small and medium sized park recreation buildings (park activity buildings) was held Tuesday, October 16 at Brookside Gardens. An article in *The Washington Post*, October 14, mentioned the meeting and outlined the issues. About two dozen interested community members appeared and presented their views and ideas, and we are planning to share these on our website.

Mary R. Bradford

Director

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