

**Department of Parks
Director's Report
Thursday, October 4, 2007**

Office of the Parks Director

- I attended the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) Congress in Indianapolis September 25-28. Over 10,000 park and recreation professionals were in attendance including several from both M-NCPPC counties. The sessions were informative, well-received, and should prove very useful. I personally attended those dealing with foundations, performance measurement, strategic alignment, dog parks, grants, and others. Our M-NCPPC recruitment materials were made available at the conference employment stations, both in hard-copy and electronically.
- Discussions on classification and recruitment were held between our staff and CAS representatives, and I attended. I am pleased with the progress we are making to streamline personnel procedures, and look forward to presenting our conclusions on this matter to the Board.
- At our Parks Department Quarterly Management Meeting, the primary topics were: supporting the park managers in their roles and clarifying the duties expected, responsibilities, and any impediments to achieving their goals; and performance measurements, progress so far, and capturing other measures that focus on the quality, not just the quantity, of what we do.
- We are moving forward to correct deficiencies at Wheaton Stables, with park staff, enterprise, property management, park development, and legal working closely together.
- Taped a segment for “The Parks Show” in my office, emphasizing the benefits to the community of an independent park and planning commission.
- We kicked off the FY 09 budget season with a session at Shady Grove for all park budget managers and budget coordinators, lead by Varghese Cherian.
- We continue to respond to public and council member inquiries regarding the use, management, and recommendations on the small park activity recreation buildings, and have held meetings with the communities to hear their views, with more expected. A dedicated site and email on our website has been posted.
- Along with a great many Department of Parks and Planning Department staff, I attended a weekend memorial service for our recently departed colleague, Rick D'Arienzo, celebrating a life well-lived.
- It was my pleasure to hand our ribbons and prizes to the winners in the North American Police Equestrian Championships, which we co-hosted with U.S. Park Police, at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds on September 22-23 (see below for more information.)
- I met with the examiners from CALEA, the organization reviewing the accreditation and certification of the Park Police, and also testified at their evening public hearing at Saddlebrook, where community member and the Department of Recreation also spoke in support of that division.
- I participated on an evening/night shift police ride along with Park Police Officer Keith Gentry around parks in the Silver Spring/Bethesda area, and there were

numerous incidents which were handled smoothly and competently by all officers on duty.

- Park Police activities include: A completed re-accreditation on-site review, including a three panel review of compliance with 446 standards, officer ride alongs, staff interviews and a public hearing where positive community comments were received. Park Police is now preparing for the re-accreditation hearing with the CALEA commissioners in March 2008; Park Police received recognition and top honors for our participation with the Maryland Chief's Challenge Seat Belt Safety Campaign; and Park Police co-hosted the North American Police Equestrian Championships with United States Park Police and Prince George's Division officers at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds, September 22 and 23. The event drew 125 competitors and approximately 500 spectators. Media coverage of the championships included *The Gazette*, *The Washington Post* (Montgomery Extra), and *The Montgomery County Sentinel*.

Events

- OCTOBER 6 & 7—20th Annual Montgomery Parks Harvest Festival at the Agricultural History Farm Park from 11:00 am – 4:00 pm both days. Event features old-time crafts, activities, music and fun for all ages.
- OCTOBER 16—Town Hall Meeting on Park Recreation Building Study from 7:00 pm – 10:00 pm at Brookside Gardens, see www.ParkPlanningandStewardship.org.
- OCTOBER 18—Halloween train rides at Wheaton and Cabin John regional parks. (Both trains will ride on various dates in October, see “Trains, Carousel” below.)
- OCTOBER 26 & 27—Brookside Gardens host site of annual American Horticultural Therapy Association conference.
- NOVEMBER 16—Opening night of the 2007 Brookside Gardens Holiday Light Show.

3rd Party Support (including pools)

- Parks staff is preparing for the Walk for Hope to cure breast cancer this year at Cabin John Regional Park, October 7.
- The “Ama tu Vida” (a Latino health fair) at Wheaton Regional Park was held Saturday, September 22. Local high schools continue to use the park for cross county events.

Arboriculture

- Parks staff has removed dead trees from several local parks due to drought stress.

Horticulture

- Parks staff has recycled pesticide containers at approved State of Maryland Pesticide Recycling Center.

Natural Resources Management

- The department sponsored four volunteer events for National Public Lands Day Saturday, September 29.
 - An invasive plant removal and trail project at Rachel Carson Conservation Park
 - Invasive plant removal at Blockhouse Point Conservation Park

- Invasive plant removal at Northwest Branch Stream Valley Park
- Invasive plant removal at Longbranch Stream Valley Park
- On Monday, September 10 parks staff conducted an invasive plant removal project at Fleming Local Park.
- On September 15, parks staff led a workday for certified Weed Warrior volunteers at Blockhouse Point Conservation Park. The next workday is scheduled for Rachel Carson Conservation Park on October 8.
- Parks staff continues to remove invasives from the Sligo Creek area.
- The Friends of Sligo Creek hosted its “Sweep the Creek” volunteer project for National Public Lands Day, September 29.
- Parks staff is cleaning the Kemp Mill Pond for sediment with plans for geese mitigation. A date for filling the pond is yet to be determined, signs are posted.
- On September 25, parks staff hosted a public meeting to discuss the proposed dredging of Lake Needwood. Those in attendance seemed very supportive of the project.

Trails (natural surface)

- Parks staff has updated the Black Hill Regional Park trail map to reflect the new alignment of the Cabin Branch and Hamilton trails (see www.MontgomeryTrails.org).
- Since its launch in June, the department’s new volunteer trail ranger program has trained and deployed 34 official volunteer rangers to cover an approximate total of 55 miles of trail, or roughly 65% of the assignable trail mileage countywide.
- Implementation has resumed this fall on the Muddy Branch Greenway Trail, beginning with a workday on September 23 in which volunteers cut 175 feet of new sustainable multi-use tread.
- Volunteer trail workdays are planned this fall at Northwest Branch Stream Valley Park and the Lake Frank area.
- Parks staff also plans to install the final two fiberglass bridges in Woodstock Equestrian Park this fall.
- Boy Scouts will undertake several projects on park trails in order to achieve the Eagle rank this fall. These include new construction of a section of the Muddy Branch Greenway Trail, closing and rerouting an eroded section of trail in Blockhouse Point Conservation Park and constructing a low-impact lumber staircase on the Cabin John Trail to carry users through a steep and eroded area.

Nature Centers

- Parks staff is working on a new outdoor learning center at Locust Grove Nature Center.
- Brookside Nature Center is getting a facelift with a new roof and exterior painting.
- September 17, park naturalists at all four nature centers were trained in conducting cultural history programs, including black history, sensitivity issues, storytelling, and the availability of interpretive sites such as the Sandy Spring Slave Museum, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Oakley Cabin and the Sandy Spring Museum.
- Park nature centers continue to move forward on the “Nature Everywhere” initiative by firming up pilot projects for teens, seniors and community centers.

- September 20, park nature center managers met to discuss the nature center strategic plan in preparation for an upcoming Planning Board presentation.
- Park naturalists are finalizing new activities, themes for Harvest Festival.
- Parks staff is working collaboratively on a formal plan for invasive plant removal at Brookside Nature Center.
- Locust Grove Nature Center staff helped to lead activities at the fall Women's Retreat at Rockwood Manor
- Locust Grove Nature Center staff met with Ring House, a senior citizen's center, to begin organizing special programs for its resident seniors.
- Locust Grove Nature Center staff met with Poolesville High School to begin discussing ways to work with their Global Ecology magnet program.
- Locust Grove Nature Center staff judged and displayed art entries from children who participated in the center's Summer Art Contest. The naturalists also hosted a reception for the artists (winning entries are still displayed in the Locust Grove Nature Center).
- Locust Grove Nature Center staff assisted the Maryland Department of Natural Resources with their annual Wildlife and Wetland Days.

Public Gardens

- Children's Day at Brookside Gardens on September 15 attracted a record number of visitors, with more than 4000. Free activities related to the theme of "Treeriffic Trees" included tree product identification, paper-making, games, tree climbing demonstrations, the magnificent tree walk, performances by Billy B. and appearances by The Walking Tree Man.
- The "Wings of Fancy" Live Butterfly Exhibit closed its 11th season on Sunday, September 16 with a new attendance record, totaling 49,370 paying visitors. A field trip to the butterfly exhibit has become a tradition for many schools to complement classroom instruction.
- Rain Garden Update: The contractor who is donating his services completed grading the area, created two rain garden swales and finished the installation of permeable paving along most of the perimeter of the rain garden. Gardens staff is working with staff from the Low Impact Development Center to create a planting plan. The rain garden will be fully planted by mid-October.
- Three students from the Poolesville High School Global Ecology Magnet program will work with Brookside Gardens staff to complete their senior research project. The program involves an interdisciplinary approach to study of environmental issues with major emphasis on science and social studies areas. The project with Brookside Gardens will be to investigate the production and use of biodiesel to fuel Gardens equipment.
- The Fall Lecture Series at Brookside Gardens began on Friday September 28. Continuing the "Year of the Tree" theme, some of our nation's foremost experts on trees from well-respected arboreta around the country will cover topics including small native trees, new elms for American cities, maples for home gardens, ginkgos, and magnificent magnolias.
- Brookside Gardens has once again partnered with Horticulture Magazine to bring their annual symposium to the Washington metropolitan area on October 18. The symposium travels to public gardens venues across the country, bringing inspirational

speakers to share their innovative ideas with both amateur gardeners and professional landscape designers.

Archaeology and Historic Site Interpretation

- Parks Volunteer Associate Don Housley accepted a grant from Heritage Montgomery to create an archaeological brochure, interpreting the Civil War sites within our Blockhouse Point Conservation Park. He represented the Mid-Potomac Chapter of the Archaeological Society of Maryland who will oversee the grant.
- Parks Archaeologist Heather Bouslog participated in the Damascus Fair's Children's Day Program September 7 leading an interpretive activity that allowed the students to "excavate" an "archaeological site in a can."
- The Thursday, September 6, Lab Night meeting concentrated on processing artifacts from Oakley Cabin.
- Parks Archaeologist Jim Sorensen, with volunteer Vivian Eicke, led an introduction to archaeology class at Blockhouse Point Conservation Park for the fall Women's Outdoor Retreat participants. Participants were instructed in excavation methods and techniques.
- Parks Volunteer Associate Don Housley gave a presentation on Blockhouse Point to visitors at the annual Happy Birthday Montgomery County event September 9 at the Beall-Dawson House in Rockville.
- September 11, the semi-annual board meeting of the Archaeological Society of Maryland was held at Needwood Mansion.
- *The Gazette* featured an article, September 12, about the Civil War and the department's Darnestown Square Urban Park project.
- Parks Archaeologist Heather Bouslog attended the quarterly meeting of the Council for Maryland Archaeologists on September 15. The group's current focus is on the deposition of Maryland's unidentified Native American remains. Archaeologists statewide will form a committee with the Maryland Council of Indian Affairs and its representatives to resolve the issue.
- September 16, parks archaeologists and volunteers went to Carlisle, Pennsylvania to continue research on the blockhouse at Blockhouse Point Conservation Park and to hear a lecture on the new biography of Col. Charles Russell Lowell of the 2nd Mass. Cav., once in command of the Blockhouse Point troops
- *The Gazette* featured an article, September 19, about the department's ongoing archaeological investigations at the Civil War camp at Blockhouse Point Conservation Park.
- September 20, the Department of Parks co-hosted a presentation by Montgomery County Historian Tony Cohen and nationally known expert on the Underground Railroad, with the with the Mid-Potomac Chapter of the Archaeological Society about Cohen's latest documentary, *Patrick and Me*, where he follows the escape route of one of his ancestors and his return to join the U.S Colored troops.
- September 26, Parks Archaeologist Jim Sorensen and others led volunteers from Richard Montgomery and Magruder high schools in excavating a prehistoric campsite during low tide at Lake Needwood. A dart point, dating from about 3000 B.C. showed the site to be a band-related nomadic campsite where prehistoric peoples foraged for food along Rock Creek.
- On most Mondays and Wednesdays in September through October, park archaeologists and volunteers will be in Little Bennett Regional Park searching for

likely locations of both prehistoric and historical sites to help interpret those cultural resources into an overall archaeological management plan for the park.

- Parks Archaeologist Heather Bouslog with volunteers and Richard Montgomery High School students worked a booth about park archaeology at the Magical Montgomery Arts and Humanities event Saturday, September 29.

Baseball and Softball

- All Blair High School sports in full swing and the fields look good with no major issues other than trash. Boosters playing soccer on Sundays.
- Local fields at Glenfield and Pleasant View are closed for annual field renovation.
- Parks staff is slit seeding /aerating/fertilizing/broadleaf spray in Cabin John athletic area fields.

Field Sports

- Parks staff is working with soccer and other user groups to ensure proper lining and goals are installed.

Tennis

- The contracts for the lighting and ceiling replacement work at the Cabin John Indoor Tennis facility are being routed. Work is scheduled to begin on October 8 with a scheduled reopening of November 8. Letters have been sent to all seasonal patrons telling them about the work being done. Another letter will be sent as the completion date draws nearer to inform them of the reopening.
- Progress is being made on the Wheaton Indoor Tennis renovations. However, work was temporarily halted for 3 days (September 26-28) due to an underground bee infestation that was disturbed during the grading of the area. Staff is pressing forward to complete this project in November.

Equestrian Centers

- The October episode of “The Parks Show,” which airs daily on County Cable Montgomery Channel 6, features the department’s equestrian facilities and Parks Equine Resources Coordinator David Tobin.
- Parks staff is clearing and removing overgrowth Wheaton Stables at continues along with plan to lime and spilt seed areas.

Ice Skating

- The annual Fall Skating Exhibition was held on September 15 at the Cabin John Ice Rink. It was a smashing success with 26 skaters performing for the public on our NHL rink. Monday, September 24 was Scout Day at Cabin John where customers wearing their boy or girl scout uniforms received recognition and a reduced entrance fee.
- Our Fall Customer Appreciation Day was held September 15 at the Wheaton Ice Arena. Customers were treated to free ice skating and rentals plus a discount at the Pro Shop. There was a record breaking turnout for this event of 456 patrons. Wheaton’s Ice Fest Saturday, September 29 featured free lessons and hockey demonstrations in addition to discounted admissions.

Trains, Carousels

- The Wheaton Haunted Train and Creepy Carousel will run October 13, 14, 18-21, 26-30.
- The Cabin John Halloween “Eye Spy” Train ride dates are October 18-27.

Trails-Hiker Biker (paved surfaces)

- The department’s Heart Smart Trails were named a winning website in the 2007 American Trails Website Contest for promotion of trails for health and physical activity.
- Park trails were used for the Holy Cross Hospital Walk for Obesity September 29.
- Park trails used for the Kensington 14th Annual 8K Run September 29.
- Park trails used for Rock Creek Park’s Half Marathon September 16.

Recreation Centers

- Parks staff is actively seeking public input on the Park Recreation Building study, meeting with interested communities and sharing information online at www.ParkPlanningandStewardship.org.
- A town hall meeting on this study and recreation buildings is scheduled for October 16 at 7:00 pm at Brookside Gardens.

Event Centers

- The 2nd annual Fall Women’s Outdoor Retreat at Rockwood Manor was well received by nearly 60 participants—twice the number of registered participants for the first year’s weekend event.

Mary R. Bradford

Director

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