

**Department of Parks
Director's Report
Thursday, February 7, 2008**

Office of the Parks Director

- I joined parks staff from across the department—ice skating rinks, tennis facilities, nature centers, Brookside Gardens, Little Bennett Campgrounds and archaeology—at the Camps and Summer Programs Expo at White Flint Mall on Saturday and Sunday, January 26 and 27. Over 1,200 customers discussed our diverse 2008 summer camps with park staff, and we had many new signups. The Park Information and Customer Service Office coordinated designing a booth space, featuring a 6-foot tall standup marketing display for our summer camps, costumed characters (Woody the Parks Tree and Paula the Praying Mantis), a live corn snake and other attractions. We had a prime location, a great product, a professional and inviting display, and the most enthusiastic and best staff of anyone there.
- Our latest edition of *The Parks Show*, airing now through February 29, on County Cable Montgomery also features the department's 2008 summer camps, including what's new at the Cabin John Ice Rink, Little Bennett Campgrounds, Brookside Nature Center and what's being offered this summer in our archaeology program.
- I met with other park directors for one day at the Maryland Recreation and Park Association Winter Meeting to review legislative agendas as well as attend a session on performance measures for parks.
- I participated in the Woodstock Equestrian Park Community Meeting in Beallsville, along with staff and County Council President Mike Knapp. The evening meeting had a large turnout, with a stimulating question-and-answer session and a widespread sharing of neighborhood views and concerns (see below for more details.)
- Many of us in the Department of Parks joined with others in the community and throughout the Commission to mourn the loss last Friday of two of our most honored public officials and stalwart supporters, Commissioner Eugene Lynch and County Councilmember Marilyn Praisner. Park Police provided motorcycle escort and other assistance during services for Mr. Lynch, and many parks staff pitched in to host a reception for the Lynch family and colleagues at Brookside Gardens on Tuesday.

Events

- FEBRUARY 22— The fourth annual Green Matters Symposium: Sustainable Sites— a new initiative to measure and recognize sustainability in landscape design, construction, and maintenance—at Brookside Gardens, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm. *Sold out* – but visit www.BrooksideGardens.org for information. (Kicks off a year of programs dedicated to green issues in the workplace and at home, like sustainable landscaping, rain gardens, rain barrels, green cleaning products and healthy diet choices.)
- FEBRUARY 23 & 24—Brookside Nature Center's Maple Sugar Festival.
- MARCH 13—Joint Montgomery County and Prince George's County parks staff pesticide registration training at Saddlebrook. The training is mandatory for employees to apply pesticides on parkland.
- MARCH 29 & APRIL 5—Open auditions for the ParkStar Search competition to find a teen host of *The Parks Show* this summer. Brookside Gardens and the Agricultural History Farm Park, 10:00 am – 4:00 pm. See www.ParkStarSearch.com for more.

Capital Improvements

- A request for proposals for design services was advertised for synthetic turf at Montgomery Blair High School on January 14. A use agreement needs to be negotiated between the Planning Board and the Board of Education prior to construction. The proposed construction schedule is summer 2009.
- A bid opening for construction of a boardwalk connection to the Crystal Rock trail was held on January 28. The low bid was under budget and the staff cost estimate was in the middle range of the bids.

Property Management

- The first hazardous materials parks staff training was held on January 25 at the Saddlebrook Training Room. Parks property management staff coordinated the training session for 30 employees, division chiefs and park managers, to identify hazardous facility materials and the proper protocol when working in buildings that contain hazardous materials. They received a 2-hour lead awareness and 2-hour asbestos awareness certificate, as well as information on mold and radon.
- A successful demolition of a structure in Rachel Conservation Park was completed in mid-January. This is a significant enhancement for the conservation park as well as a reduced maintenance and security concern for parks staff.

Tennis

- The Cabin John Indoor Tennis facility offers 65 six-week classes for its winter lesson program. The classes are 85 percent full, serving almost 500 patrons.

Camping

- Parks staff has updated the Little Bennett Campground web site for the upcoming season. See www.littlebennettcampground.com for more. Also, the Friends of Little Bennett Regional Park have a web site, which is up and running. Visit www.friendsoflittlebennett.org
- Little Bennett Campground hosted the annual Klondike Derby January 18 – 20, with approximately 850 attending this year.

Equestrian Centers

- Parks staff hosted a public forum Owens Park in Beallsville on the status of Woodstock Equestrian Park, Monday, January 28, at Council President Mike Knapp's request. Over 50 Woodstock neighbors, Poolesville residents and others attended the presentation and lively discussion to receive an updated on the status of the master plan and the facility planning process for the park. Several expressed support for a passive park serving county residents as opposed to a large facility that some feared would strain water supplies and increase traffic along Route 28. Parks Equine Resources Coordinator David Tobin has been appointed coordinator of Woodstock programs to increase communication on the project both internally and externally.

Ice Skating

- Cabin John Ice Rink skater Kristine Musademba qualified for the US Figure Skating National Championships in St. Paul, Minnesota this year based upon her competitive standings in events around the world leading up to Nationals. She competed in the

Junior Level ladies event in January and finished in fourth place. This was her first year competing at the Junior Level—moving up from the Novice Level last year where she was the silver medalist. We are very proud of her!

- Cabin John Ice Rink is enjoying full public sessions on weekends with several sold out sessions of 450 patrons on Saturday and Sunday. On weekends, over 4000 patrons visit the [Cabin John Ice Rink](#).
- Wheaton Ice Arena's "[Heat Wave in January](#)" special session produced 4 boxes and 2 large bags of warm blankets, towels and toiletries for the area homeless.
- High School Hockey is coming to a close. The playoffs will be held the week of February 18. [Wheaton Ice Arena](#) will host a game February 19, 5:00 pm – 6:45 pm. See www.mshl.org for the competing teams.
- At both ice rinks, summer skating camp registration is open and registration for February group lessons begins February 15.

Group Picnic Areas

- Parks staff has renovated three bathrooms at [Black Hill Regional Park](#) and upgraded the toilet fixtures with waterless urinals and electronic flush valves as part of the department's [water conservation program](#).

Scenic Parkway Experiences

- New guard rails were installed by contractors on [Beach Drive](#).

Trails – Paved Surfaces

- Park Trail Planning Supervisor Lyn Coleman conducted a session on our Heart Smart Trails at Washington Council of Governments' [Washington Regional Trails seminar](#) January 30. The seminar focused on promoting trails for health, recreation and economic development.

Arboriculture

- Parks arboriculture staff has been able to focus on [reducing the backlog](#) of service requests thanks to the relatively mild storm season this past summer and fall.
- Starting February 1, contract tree crews will perform [tree maintenance](#) along Sligo Creek Parkway and associated hiker/biker trails between New Hampshire Avenue and Colesville Road. Excel Tree Company will perform hazard tree and limb removals over the next two months. We welcome their expertise to help make our parks safe.
- To date, parks staff at [Pope Farm](#) have dug 471 trees, planted 41 trees along Matthew Henson Trail, and planted 4 and transplanted 3 trees at Hillwood Manor Park.

Natural Resources Management

- On Sunday, January 27, parks staff presented information to a Sunday school audience of about 100 4th to 6th graders at the Temple Emanuel in Kensington about the threat of [invasive plants](#) to trees and how to play a role in saving park trees and habitats, including participating in the department's Garlic Mustard Challenge in late April.
- Parks staff sprayed and removed non-native invasives in the [Meadowbrook](#) area.
- [Remote monitoring](#) is up and running at the [Lake Needwood dam](#) and the [Lake Frank dam](#).

Archaeological and Historic Site Management

- Parks staff is developing a draft RFP for the Woodlawn Visitor Center design.
- Parks staff is evaluating proposals to preserve/stabilize the Seneca Stone Barn.
- Parks staff has issued an RFP to hire an architect for stabilization projects, including the Darby Store.
- Parks staff has repaired the heads and replaced the air compressor on the fire suppression at the Woodlawn Barn.
- Parks staff has completed flat roof repairs at the Warner Property.
- January 23, 8th grade students from the Bullis School contributed service hours to the parks archaeology program. Parks Archaeology Volunteer Associate Don Housley introduced the students to basic archaeological concepts and the students processed artifacts in the archaeology lab. Montgomery College Television shot a segment at Needwood Mansion showing volunteers processing artifacts and the visiting Bullis students working in the lab for “Campus Conversations,” airing in February.
- January 30, 7th grade Bullis students also contributed service learning hours, and were given an interpretive tour of the Needwood Mansion.
- January 26, the 2nd annual Montgomery County History Volunteers Conference was held at Montgomery College, Germantown campus. This annual volunteer conference is jointly sponsored by the Montgomery County Historical Society with Montgomery College Lifelong Learning Institute, the Montgomery County Department of Parks, Peerless Rockville and Strathmore Hall. This year, parks archaeology Volunteer Associate Don Housley gave the presentation: “The Civil War Camps at Muddy Branch and the Outpost Camp and Blockhouse at Blockhouse Point.” The conference was well attended with approximately 150.
- January 31, Magruder High School’s archaeology club started up again for the spring semester and contributed service time to the parks archaeology program by washing artifacts from the Needwood Mansion archaeological site.

Nature Centers

- Meadowside Nature Center held its first Winter Wonderland Festival, January 22, a day off from school for Montgomery County Public School students. Approximately 150 participated and enjoyed a number of winter themed activities, including making snow, bird feeders, snowman snow meters and snow globe crafts and learning about animal adaptations in winter. Eight teens volunteered for the day, contributing approximately 48 hours of service.
- Brookside Nature Center received a new sugar maple tree as a donation and a new park bench, thanks to donor Mr. Grayson.
- Brookside Nature Center is seeing more Title 1 schools on site and off site than ever before, most from the Silver Spring area. Title 1 schools are able to participate in our many school programs at no charge to the students.
- Brookside Nature Center is offering 16 camps this summer, for 2 years to 17.
- Park naturalists are working on programs to support the department’s new Wild Montgomery initiative, including Wild Montgomery nature hikes for the public starting this summer to explore the many treasures within the county’s parks system.
- Brookside Nature Center is working with the parks Exhibit Shop to replace the interpretive plaques on the center’s boardwalk entrance.

Public Gardens

- Two EZ-GO electric carts are now in operation and use for grounds maintenance at Brookside Gardens. They are the same size and hold the same capacity as the older gasoline-powered utility carts, but have much lower noise and emissions levels. They were obtained through the scheduled equipment replacement program.
- Brookside Gardens is in the process of purchasing a new computerized engraver/labeling machine to produce hundreds of plant display labels each year. This will replace the 22-year-old machine that finally became irreparable. The new machine is the same as the ones used at the Smithsonian and the U.S. Botanic Garden.
- Work is in progress at the Sycamore House to convert former storage space into offices for four gardeners.
- Brookside Gardens received a pledge of \$2,000 from the Silver Spring Garden Club to be used to purchase plants for the new rain garden that was recently installed near the Conservatories. The donation is being given in honor of Alice Frandsen, past president of the Club, for her many years of service.
- Sponsors of the sold-out Green Matters Symposium “Sustainable Landscapes” include: The Association of Professional Landscape Designers, Sierra Club Montgomery County Group, Natural Resources Design, Inc., Friends of Brookside Gardens, the Silver Spring Garden Club, Brookside Gardens Chapter of the Azalea Society of America, Annie May DeFrank, Neighbors of the Northwest Branch, Inc., the Winding Orchard Citizens Association, and David and Lynn Vismara.
- Washington Gardener Magazine held their third annual Seed Exchange in conjunction with the National Seed Swap Day at Brookside Gardens on January 26. More than 125 attended to listen to expert speakers and to exchange seeds.

Park Police

- Five officers successfully completed the Field Training and Evaluation program and have been assigned to independent patrol.
- Officer Evans and K-9 partner, “Niner” completed basic patrol dog training in Baltimore County. Officer Evans, Officer Andrews and their K-9 partners are currently enrolled in narcotics detection training in Baltimore County. They are expected to complete training in February.
- The Gaywood Garden Club hosted their annual holiday thank you dinner for public safety officers, primarily the Park Police. Officers from all three shifts were able to attend this year’s dinner. The Club provides a tremendous holiday dinner as a sign of their appreciation for the efforts and cooperation of the Park Police for their service to the community.

Mary R. Bradford

Director

Montgomery County Department of Parks