

Riverbend Naturalist

Fall 2022



Riverbend Naturalist is the newsletter of the Friends of Riverbend Park (FORB). Riverbend Park is located at
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Fall Issue of the *Riverbend Naturalist*

This issue contains the following articles:

- The Passing of Nelda LaTeef (1958 - 2022);
- FORB's 2022 Election of Directors;
- Riverbend Park Scouting Projects;
- Riverbend Park Forest Preschool Update;
- School Field Trips to Riverbend Park; and
- Riverbend Park in the Fall.

Don't forget to renew your membership at www.forb.org!

The Passing of Nelda LaTeef (1958 - 2022)

It is with deep sadness that the Friends of Riverbend Park must announce the passing of one of its true friends and supporters, Nelda LaTeef. Copied below is the announcement and tribute received from Nelda's sister, Nora LaTeef:

"It is with a very heavy heart that I inform you of the passing of my beloved sister, Nelda LaTeef. After a valiant if harrowing fight, Nelda succumbed to an aggressive cancer on September 30th. She was at home surrounded by her family when she slipped away from us. A graduate of Harvard University, a member of the Harvard women's varsity tennis team, and the author and illustrator of seven children's books, Nelda left her mark. Nelda was an extraordinary person. She was artistic, athletic, compassionate, loving and a beautiful caring person who was always there for everyone. She will also be



remembered for her great sense of humor and her other many fine qualities which we will miss very much. She traveled extensively around the world gathering stories for her books from many different cultures. While Nelda's passing leaves a void, she will always be with us. Her legacy will be the countless lives she touched and inspired!

Nelda loved Riverbend Park so much that she would ride her bike to the park almost every day. When she came back home, she would be so inspired that she

was ready for anything. Riverbend Park gave her years of pleasure. As a writer and illustrator of seven books, Nelda received enormous inspiration from Riverbend Park. After our father passed away, Nelda dedicated a bench in his honor. The plaque on that bench reads 'Nothing makes me happier than when we are all together.' Nelda is now with Dad." Donations to Riverbend Park in her memory may be made at the FORB website, www.forbpark.org.

FORB's 2022 Election of Directors

The By-Laws of the Friends of Riverbend Park (FORB) provide that its affairs “will be managed by a Board of Directors composed of, not to exceed ten (10), Directors elected by the Membership.” Candidates elected as Directors serve a three-year term, and may run for re-election. The officers of the Corporation are normally a President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer who are elected by majority vote of the Board of Directors. Each officer will hold office for a term of one year or until a successor is elected.

The present Board of Directors is indeed fortunate to have a good mixture of men and women of varying ages, years of experience, and backgrounds to bring a wealth of approaches and skills to FORB's efforts and Riverbend Park's needs. The present Board of Directors, prior to this fall's elections which ran from October 27th through November 14th, consists of the following individuals:

Hugh Morrow, President
Eleanor Anderson, Vice-President
Susan Keating, Secretary
Kevin Dillon, Treasurer
Jack Bowles
Cindy Gersony
Karen Hershey
John-Hughes Caley
Frank Zeng
John Callow, Riverbend Park Manager (*ex-officio*)

During the fall 2022 election, Eleanor Anderson, Kevin Dillon and Susan Keating are running for re-election for another three-year term, while Ahalya Sharma is seeking election to fill the vacant tenth seat on the FORB Board. Photos of these four newly-elected or re-elected Directors are shown on the following page.

We are happy to now report that all four candidates for FORB Directors were elected by overwhelming majorities. This new Board of Directors assumes its

responsibilities as of January 1st, 2023 and will serve a three-year term through December 31st, 2025. The 2023 Board of Directors will also be responsible for electing FORB's 2023 Officers.



Eleanor Anderson



Kevin Dillon



Susan Keating



Ahalya Sharma

Riverbend Park Scouting Projects

The relationship between Riverbend Park and Scouting has been mutually beneficial for several decades. Scouts have successfully carried out projects to build and restore trails, build and repair bridges and steps, plant native plants, improve habitats in the park, and enhance safety measures. Park managers and staff work closely with these Eagle and Gold Star candidates, providing not only technical and managerial guidance and oversight, but also helping these teenagers learn leadership and project management skills. FORB is a partner in supporting Scouts and Riverbend Park for Eagle and Gold Star Award projects: Scouts can apply to FORB for financial assistance for their project materials.

Many park visitors are unaware of these collaborative and environmentally sensitive projects, which have enhanced their enjoyment. One of the earliest Eagle Scout projects entailed installing stairs on an eroded, often slippery dirt slope, leading down from the Nature Center asphalt trail to the dirt trails back to the river and the upper parking lot. This was undertaken by Tom Wood, Jr. twenty years ago, in October 2002. Tom and his team of Scouts regraded the area, put re-bar pilings into the ground, and then installed the high-quality wooden stairs. These photos show the stairs today, still fully sturdy.



The area before the project started, October 2002. Tom Wood is on the far right.



The stairs 20 years later, October 2022.

Tom graduated from Virginia Tech in 2007, majoring in business, and then obtained an MBA from the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. He is now back in northern Virginia and works in the commercial real estate investment business. Tom and his wife have introduced their two young daughters to the park, and the girls are among those of the next generation getting great use of these steps.

The park's available projects are sometimes too large for a single Scout, but can be divided into two sequential activities. Such complementary projects can be particularly appropriate for two brothers close in age. One such project was a steps and walkway project connecting the lower parking lot to the grassy area near the river, carried out by twin brothers, Mitch and Cameron Williams. The first phase of the steps and small bridge was done in December 2017 by Mitch, and the second phase, building the walkway, was carried out by Cam in July 2018.



The path before Mitch's project.



Mitch and his Scout team working on the project.

Park management proposed this project because visitors had forged a dirt trail as a shortcut to the park benches and river, and this trail was eroding the area and causing damage to native plants.

These stairs not only allow visitors to walk safely to the picnic area from the lower parking lot without damaging the hill, but also allow many of the plants that had been damaged by visitors trampling them to regrow. To the right is a photo of the team and the just completed project.



Cam's project took place the following summer and involved building a boardwalk over the gully at the end of the stairs Mitch and his team had built; puddles of water and mud frequently pooled in this area.



Cam's project area in Spring 2018 before work began.



Scout team working on the boardwalk.



The two projects upon completion, 2018

To the left is a photo of Mitch and Cam's two completed projects, greatly enhancing safety and the environment. Mitch is now a senior at Florida Institute of Technology, majoring in mechanical engineering, while Cam is a senior at the University of Virginia with a major in political science.



The stairs and walkway today

These infrastructure projects are among the most visible in the park, but equally important are the many environmental projects, which include building or repairing trails, protecting the park's ecological habitat, and re-planting damaged areas. In the first category is a trail project led by James Waugh in December 2009, which created a new 650-foot long trail connecting the parking area at the entrance of Riverbend Park through the woods all the way to Conn's Meadow. This trail, which connected sections of the Bootlegger Trail, made access to the meadow easier for horse riders, hikers, and bird watchers.

James led a team of Scouts in clearing trees, shrubs and brambles, relocating ferns, and planting saplings to replace trees that were cleared from the path.



James Waugh leading work team in forging the trail



This section of the Bootlegger Trail today.

James graduated from James Madison University in 2015 with a degree in Engineering. He now lives in Seattle and works for a medical equipment manufacturer.

Sawyer Jones carried out a project in May 2012 designed to protect the environment of the park. He led a group of Scouts and friends in redirecting a portion of the Potomac Heritage trail along the Potomac River between Riverbend Park and Great Falls National Park and fencing off the “spider trails”, which are created by hikers wandering off the main trail, making their own path, and damaging plants in the process. Especially important to the park was protecting the native Valerian plant, and the project accomplished that objective.



Sawyer reviewing first aid precautions

Sawyer went on to Ohio University, and he now lives in Colorado where he works as a CPA and Accounting Director. He returns home to northern Virginia on a regular basis, and continues to visit the park.



The project area along the Potomac Heritage Trail today, now protected.

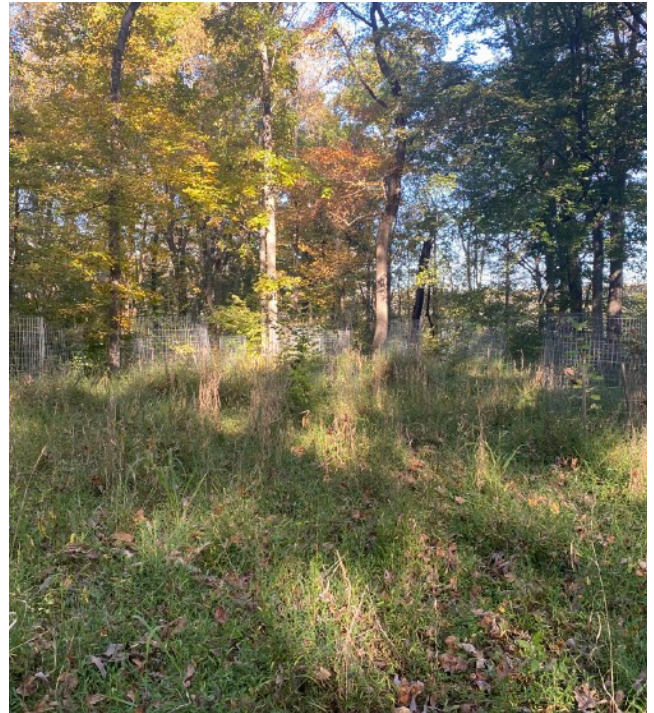


The Valerian plant is rare in Virginia, appearing along the Potomac River in the most northern part of the state. It blooms in late spring or early summer.

Another type of environmental project involves the removal of invasive plants and replanting the area with native plants. Dakota Brookfield carried out such an activity in April 2016 in a remote area of the park, in the uplands above the river near Great Falls National Park. This area was a later acquisition of Riverbend Park and had been the site of a large house, demolished just six months earlier. Dakota and his crew cleared this meadow of invasive plants and shrubs, including azaleas which the house owner had planted, and reforested the site with trees and native shrubs. These trees have had an excellent survival rate and Dakota's project contributed to the re-wilding of this area.



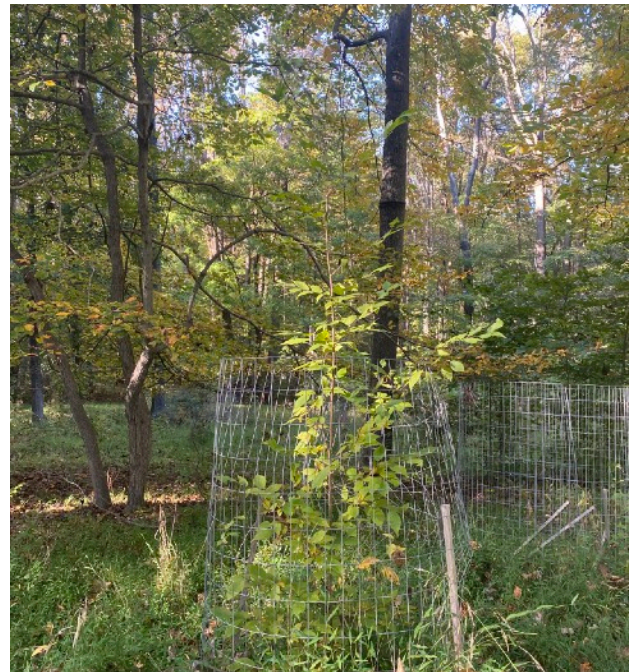
The Scouts removing invasive plants and preparing to plant native plants, April 2016.



This upland region today, in October 2022.



The new native plants right before planting, April 2016.



One of the plants 6½ years later, October 2022.

Dakota is currently a junior at Rochester Institute of Technology, with a major in computer engineering.

As part of the preparation for an Eagle project, the Scout must raise funds for any costs, and is not supposed to rely only on his family. FORB is one of the organizations from which a Scout may apply for such funds. FORB will consider applications for materials costs, and not surprisingly, the infrastructure projects, such as bridges and steps, typically require more fund raising than trail projects. There are a set of guidelines that a Scout must follow; most important is providing documentation of the project's approval from both the Scoutmaster and the park, along with estimates of the materials costs. FORB will then approve the request up to a certain amount. Upon completion of the project, the Scout provides receipts for the expenses and FORB then issues a reimbursement check. For current Eagle and Gold Star Award applicants, Riverbend Park's needs include trail restoration projects, invasive plant removal and control, and bank stabilization projects along the river.

Several additional Scout projects, including a Girl Scout Gold Award project, will be featured in a subsequent newsletter, along with a park map of these activities.

Riverbend Park Forest Preschool Update

This is the second year of Riverbend Park's Forest Preschool, and the first in which the school could operate in-person right from the start of the school year. Amy Cullen, the preschool director, reports that they have had an excellent start this fall. The preschoolers are having a great time exploring all of the different environments that Riverbend has to offer. The fall's highlights so far include raising monarch caterpillars and releasing them in the meadow and learning about how seeds move and know just when to start growing the next spring. The teachers and kids are now exploring how the trees are preparing for winter.



Amy is pleased to report that this year that almost half of the students are attending the full week. FORB has allocated \$3,000 to support the preschool, and this funding enables the park to offer scholarships to needy students.



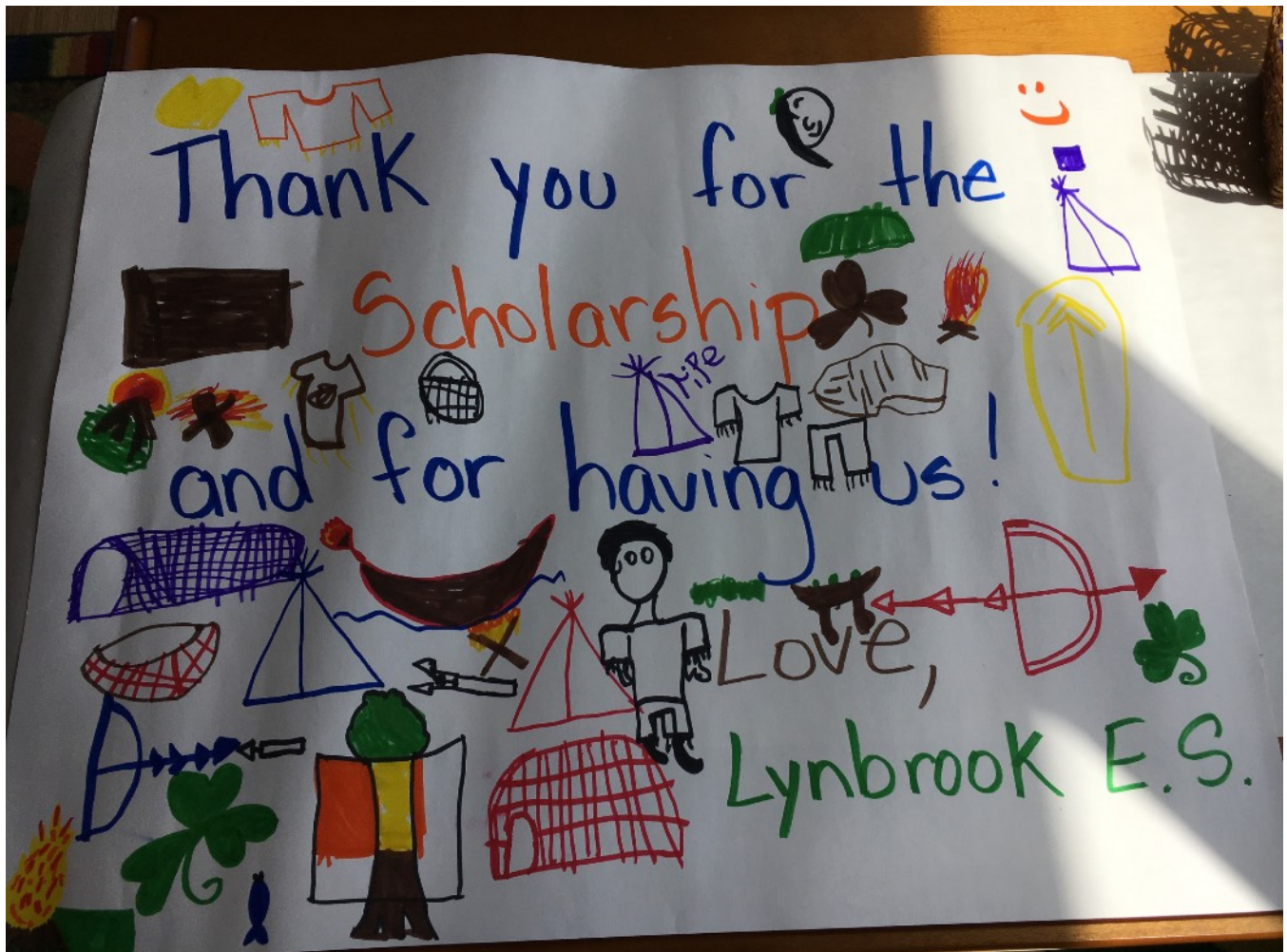
School Field Trips to Riverbend Park

For more than 15 years, Riverbend Park has hosted field trips to schools, both public and private, as well as to home school groups. Participating schools are from all over northern Virginia and from Washington, D.C. Field trip activities include an interpretive program with thematic content based on the Standards of Learning (S.O.L.) objectives which are met during the students' visit. This year, the number of school field trips has returned to pre-pandemic numbers; there were no field trips in 2020, and just a few in 2021.

Field trip students spend most of their time outside, where they can experience the unique resources of the park. Park staff members engage the kids in drawing connections on the trails throughout the meadow and forests, at the pond, and along the river. One of the most popular themes is the *Native Americans of the Potomac*, during which park staff explore what everyday life may have been like 500 years ago at Riverbend, and how indigenous people survived using the natural resources.



FORB supports the park field trip program by providing the field trip program fees for students of Title I schools, which are schools which have a high proportion of low-income students. FORB's contribution enables these students to enjoy the park and learn about the environment. FORB has provided more than \$5,500 for this support since 2016. The photo below of a very thoughtful thank you note from Lynbrook Elementary School, gives an indication of the value of this support. Lynbrook ES is located in Springfield, Virginia, and has a student body of 70% low-income students and English language learners.



Riverbend Park in the Fall



Photo courtesy of Anne Morrow

Each season at Riverbend Park is unique, offering a multitude of experiences from the early spring ephemerals to the frost and snows of winter. The fall season at the park is especially colorful, crisp but not yet cold, and worth a pleasant walk along the Potomac Heritage Trail.

Both the Visitor Center and the Nature Center stand amidst brightly colored trees whose leaves adorn the surrounding grounds.



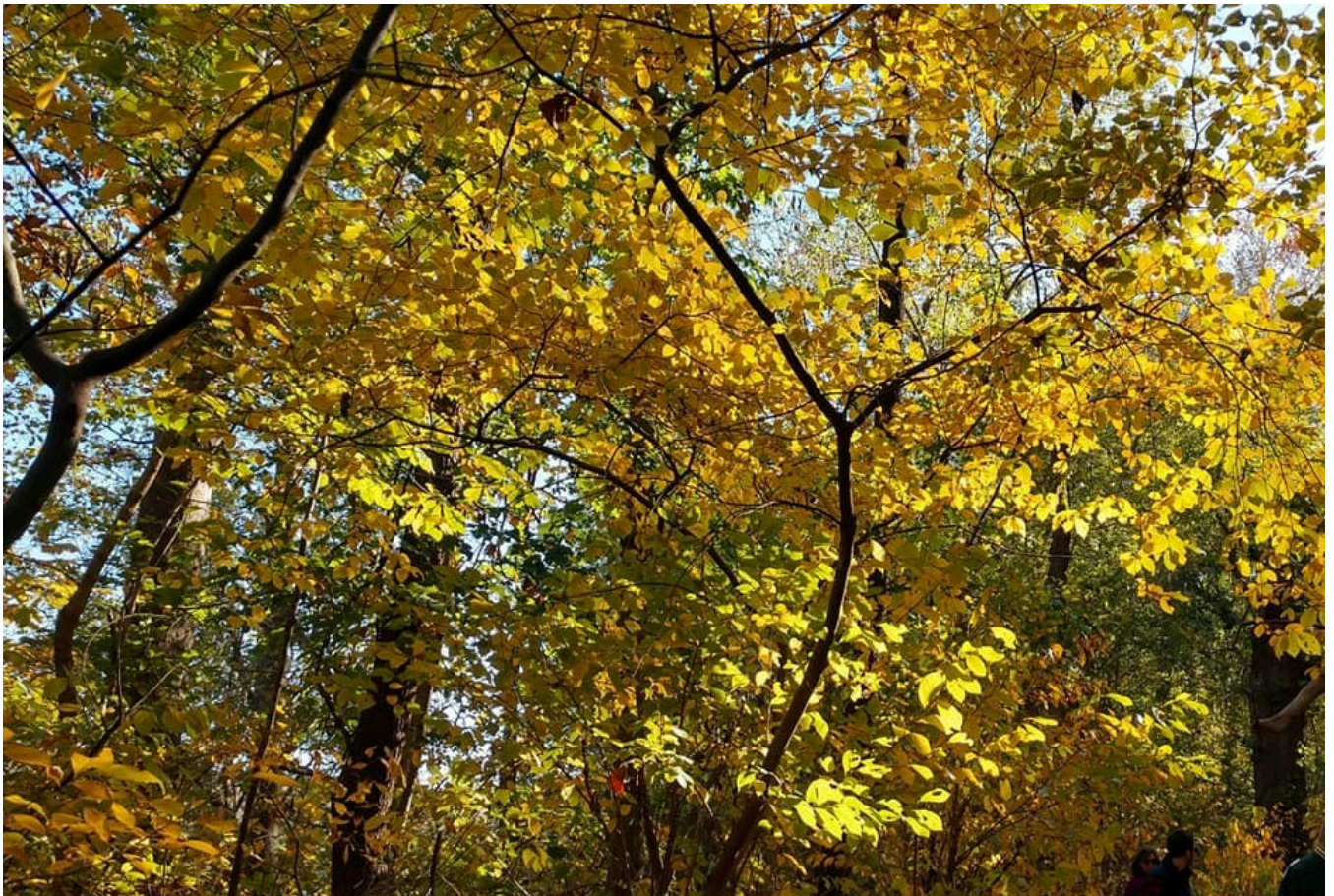
Leaves take on shades of red, orange, yellow and brown not ordinarily seen in the spring and summer seasons (*photos courtesy of Paul Laurenza*).





Even the river reflects a calm as if anticipating the approaching hibernation of winter, and the white bark of the leafless Sycamores is abundant everywhere.





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