

Riverbend Naturalist

Spring 2022



Riverbend Naturalist is the newsletter from the Friends of Riverbend Park (FORB). Riverbend Park is located at 8700 Potomac Hills Street, Great Falls, VA 22066
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Riverbend Emerging from COVID!

We are pleased to report that Riverbend Park has returned to full activity, with a new preschool and a full slate of summer activities on offer. The Visitor Center re-opened in December, and canoe and kayak rentals will start at the end of May. Bluebells were spectacular this year and lasted almost a full month!

Sad News — Passing of Paul Anderson, Former FORB President

It is with deep regret that we announce the passing of Paul Gene Anderson (1943-2022). Paul was a long-time resident of Great Falls and an active member of the Friends of Riverbend Park (FORB) for many years. He



served in volunteer roles at the Visitor Center, held positions as a Director of FORB, and was its President during 2006 and 2007. Tributes have been pouring in from many of his former colleagues including Riverbend Park Managers, Marty Smith and John Callow, praising his love of and dedication to the park. Paul could be seen almost daily hiking through Riverbend Park with his dog, Spike.

Paul's widow, Eleanor, has established a Paul Anderson Memorial Fund to benefit future programs and activities at the park. Donations in his memory may be made at www.forb.wildapricot.org, click on "donations" and note "Paul Anderson Memorial Fund" in the comments section. Already more than \$2,500 has been donated to this fund in Paul's memory.

The full obituary can be found at: <https://adamsgreen.com/tribute/details/12556/Paul-Anderson/obituary.html>.

Welcome to New Riverbend Park Staff

Kylie Starck joined the Riverbed Park staff as its Visitor Services Manager on February 14, replacing Julie Gurnee, who left to become the Manager of the Colvin Run Mill Historic Site. Kylie grew up in Northern Virginia, and received her B.S. degree in Conservation Biology from George Mason University. Before coming to Riverbend, she served at Huntley Meadows Park for ten years. She began at Huntley as a naturalist intern and later became a Senior Interpreter. Befitting someone who loves the outdoors, her hobbies include hiking, canoeing, and kayaking. The Friends of Riverbend Park welcomes Kylie to Riverbend Park!



2022 Native Plant Sale

FORB President Hugh Morrow reported that its 2022 Native Plant Sale was a great success. It took place during the weekend of April 9-10, a month earlier than in years past. During that weekend, those who pre-ordered online could pick up their plants at the Educational Pavilion, while others could buy the ever popular bluebells at the Visitor Center deck. Total gross sales of online pre-orders were over \$15,000, and total gross sales of plants sold at the park on April 9-10 was over \$3,300. This resulted in total gross native plant sales of \$18,255, FORB's largest total plant sale revenue ever.

Eleanor Anderson and Brenda Bohlke sorted, organized and distributed 1,667 pre-ordered plants into 112 separate orders, also a FORB plant sale record. After deducting costs of the Babikow plant stock, Virginia sales taxes and transaction fees, net profit is expected to be above \$10,000, another plant sale record.



Hugh Morrow
FORB President



Eleanor Anderson
Manager of the Native Plant Sale

In addition, 38 Virginia Bluebells were sold earlier that week on April 6 in conjunction with the *Bluebells and Bald Eagles* event sponsored by the Women's Club of Great Falls (WCGF) to raise funds for FORB. FORB sold these bluebells to WCGF members at cost (\$5 per plant) resulting in sales of \$190.

A great thanks to Eleanor Anderson, Brenda Bohlke, Frank Zeng, Kevin Dillon, Nancy Waugh, Hugh Morrow, and Susan Keating for making the FORB 2022 Native Plant Sale such a huge success.

New! Riverbend Park Forest Preschool

The Nature Center and the area around it have now become the site of the new Riverbend Park Forest Preschool! Starting in the fall of 2021, the



preschool was the brain child of Julie Gurnee, now the Manager at Colvin Run Mill. She was looking for an outdoor forest preschool for her children years ago and found that there were few available. Julie got the idea for a school at Riverbend started, got approval from the necessary agencies, and then began the process. Amy Cullen is the star of bringing the preschool to reality, working

tirelessly throughout the inspection and licensing process, and is now its lead teacher.

The preschool is for kids ages 3-5 and offers two-day, three-day, and five-day a week options, from 9:30-1:30. The monthly fees range from \$305 to



Amy Cullen, Director and Lead Teacher of the Riverbend Park Forest Preschool

\$690, depending on the number of days chosen, and discounts are available for a second child attending the preschool. The preschool currently has 18 children enrolled.

The three teachers at the Forest Preschool focus on encouraging learning through nature, and introduce their young pupils to the park and all it has to offer. The children spend most of their time outdoors, and while in nature, engage in early learning activities, have fun, and develop social skills through play.

Amy Cullen's background is in pediatric occupational therapy; what she had found the most rewarding aspect of her job was working in classrooms. During COVID, she decided to change the focus of her career to preschool

education and got the appropriate certification. She now combines her experience and knowledge of education with her love for the outdoors (she had worked with the Fairfax County Park Authority during her undergraduate days at George Mason). Amy is assisted at the preschool by Lauren Harper and Cesia Lobo, both naturalists, Lauren at Riverbend Park and Cesia “on loan” to the Forest Preschool from Hidden Oaks Nature Center. Lauren and Cesia both share their amazing knowledge of nature with the children and have been great additions to the teaching staff.



Cesia Lobo showing the kids how you can tell how old a tree is by looking at the rings



Lauren Harper holding a turtle and explaining their habitats

FORB has been very pleased to support the preschool and has provided \$3,000 in 2021 and has budgeted another \$3,000 towards its operation in 2022. The funds that the Women's Group of Great Falls raised for the benefit of FORB have been designated to support preschool scholarships.



Outdoor learning and play area for the preschool

Motto of the Riverbed Park Forest Preschool:

Play, Learn, Get Dirty Outdoors



New Patrol and Rescue Boat

In late 2020, John Callow, Riverbend Park Manager, indicated that the park's most immediate priority was the purchase of a new rescue and patrol boat to replace the park's existing rescue boat, which was dysfunctional and irreparable. This situation required that the park use its Bass Fishing Boat (which FORB bought for the park in 2015 for \$15,000) as their patrol and rescue boat; this interfered with fishing camp programs and was not always available. FORB therefore provided \$15,000 towards the purchase of a new rescue and patrol boat, more than half of its total cost (\$26,000).

The arrival of the new boat was delayed over a year due to supply chain issues during the COVID lockdown. There was only one plant, in California, which produced the jet motors required for the Potomac's shallow waters at Riverbend. However, the delay turned out to be very convenient for the park, as, until the new Maintenance Facility was finished, there was no adequate location to house the boat. Serendipitously, the new boat arrived at almost the same time as the Maintenance Facility was completed in April.



Jordan Libera, Riverbend's Senior Interpreter and Programs Manager, with the new rescue and patrol boat.

New Maintenance Facility Completed at Riverbend Park

Riverbend Park is one of the largest parks in the Fairfax County park system with 418 acres of parkland, 12 miles of trails, one large 14-acre meadow, several miles of riverfront, and over 400,000 visitors per year. It requires a great deal of maintenance, upkeep and refurbishment on a virtually continual basis to keep the trails clear and restore its river banks washed away by erosion from periodic flooding. As part of the April 2013 Conceptual Development Plan of Riverbend Park's Master Plan Revision, it was clearly recognized that the park's maintenance facilities needed to be upgraded and centralized. Up until that time and even recently, Riverbend's maintenance equipment and functions were scattered across the park, with some items stored or performed below the deck of the Visitor Center, some in the basement of the Nature Center, and even some in temporary, outdoor and unprotected locations. The maintenance functions below the deck of the Visitor Center were particularly vulnerable to Potomac River flooding, and were crowded, dark, damp and poorly ventilated.

Discussions with the Riverbend Park staff at that time clearly indicated that a new and centralized Maintenance Facility was the top priority for the park. Thus, in August 2015, the Friends of Riverbend Park began to request funding for this need from the Fairfax County Park Authority which was in the process of establishing priorities for its 2016 Park Bond Issue. Then FORB President Tim Hackman's letter in August 2015 to FCPA Executive Director Kirk Kincannon clearly outlined the need for a new Maintenance Facility at Riverbend and proposed a design based on the maintenance building at Green Spring Gardens; this design with modifications was adopted. The Park Bond was passed by referendum that November, but it was not until 2020 that funding was approved. Estimated total costs for scope and design, permitting, demolition of the existing Park Manager's house, and construction of the new facility was approximately \$1.2 million. Heather Lynch, FCPA Project Manager for the Riverbend Park Maintenance Facility reported recently (April 2022) that this project was now completed

and that the keys to the facility had been handed over to Matt McNeal, Riverbend Park's Maintenance Crew Chief.



The new Maintenance Facility is a heated and air-conditioned, 40' x 50', building with a fenced maintenance yard for large equipment and vehicle storage, interior space for equipment and vehicles and a work area. It includes staff offices, a small kitchen area and a bathroom which is accessible to the public. FORB has already donated \$8,000 in 2022 towards the purchase of much of the equipment for the work area. With the completion of the new Maintenance Facility, Riverbend Park now has a much better capability to handle its maintenance requirements, and the dangers to equipment and materials from river flooding largely mitigated.

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