

Neighborhood NEWS

Winter 2010-11

Ruxton-Riderwood-Lake Roland Area Improvement Association

It's Not the Ruxton Mall!

by Bliss McCord

Although it seems like a long time ago, there are still area residents who remember the days when wives dropped off their husbands in the morning at the Ruxton train station in time to catch the "Ruxton Rocket" (a commuter train) to work in downtown Baltimore. Perhaps they stopped at Harrington's for groceries on the way home. Grown up little boys, like my husband, may even recall the exquisite agony of patiently waiting at the old Ruxton Pharmacy for an ice cream soda, and how cool and smooth the stainless steel counter felt beneath their folded arms on a hot summer day. These were typical scenes in Ruxton's commercial center of the 1950's and '60's.

Although the neighborhood has no official village center, most people think of it as the collection of businesses stretching along

Bellona Avenue at its intersection with Ruxton Road. Flanking LaBelle Avenue are buildings housing tenants of Ruxton Village Shops to the north and Ruxton Station to the south. These properties are owned and managed by the Graul family and, since 2008, Michael Weinfeld's Kittredge Properties respectively. Just south of Ruxton Station are the Ruxton Pharmacy, M & T Bank, Ruxton Car Care and, across Bellona, Ruxton Service Center, all properties individually owned and operated.

There has long been a grocery store on the corner of Berwick and Bellona. One of the early families to do business there was the Harringtons. Charles Harrington's father had purchased the property

in 1919 from the Foster family (see *Neighborhood NEWS* Fall 2009 issue at RRLRAIA.com) and eventually built most of the brick building we see today. Throughout the fifties and sixties, Charles Harrington operated a grocery store and a liquor store in Ruxton Village. There was also a post office, which had moved from its home in the train station. (Sadly, soon after train service halted in 1959,



Ruxton Village stores today are quite changed from the grocery store in the 1950's.

the station mysteriously burned. The property was sold in 1963 and from the ashes of the railway station arose the Ruxton Township Apartments.)

Harrington also had a second grocery up the tracks in Riderwood. In 1973, Harold Graul, Jr.,

whose family had been in the grocery business since the twenties, acquired

Harrington's and eventually expanded the original structure. Now owned (along with the Mays Chapel store) by Harold's two children, Dennis Graul and Kate Graul Poffenberger, Graul's is the anchor store for Ruxton Village, whose other tenants are Needles and Threads of Ruxton (a needlepoint shop), a hair salon and a women's clothing store.

It was around the same time (the early 1950's) Fred Thune purchased a frame house and property from the Duer family on the other side of LaBelle Avenue. The house was razed and replaced by the structure now known as Ruxton Station. Now home to nine boutique shops, such as J. McLaughlin and Linens and Lingerie, and services such as Rutland

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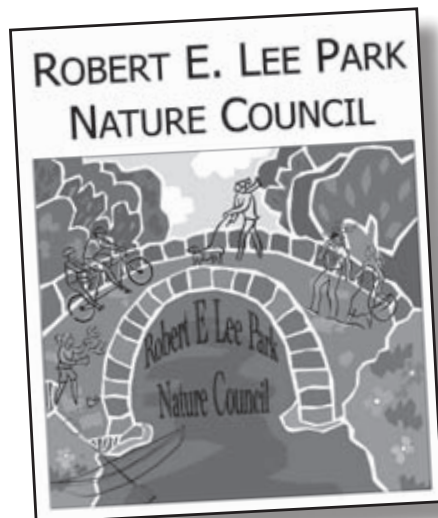
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Robert E. Lee Park Nature Council's First Annual Meeting

It was standing room only at the Robert E. Lee Park Nature Council's First Annual Meeting held in Towson October 20th, 2010. The Robert E. Lee Park Nature Council (RELPMC), one of several nature councils chartered by Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks, was formed by a group of dedicated volunteers meeting as an advisory committee for the park for the past year under the aegis of Rec & Parks. The work of the Advisory Committee included drafting by-laws and planning diverse projects in the park such as an off-leash dog park; park staffing (including rangers); historical and environmental programs; and how to accommodate the needs of the many users of the park, including children, bird watchers, naturalists, bicyclists, boaters (such as kayaks and canoes), families, dog walkers, hikers, joggers, residents and neighbors and those interested in fishing.



Event organizer Charlotte Galley began the evening by welcoming everyone and outlining the program. She thanked County Executive Jim Smith and Councilman Kevin Kamenetz for their work in obtaining funding for improvements to the park and in their persistence in realizing the transfer of control of the park from city to county supervision. Charlotte also recognized key players from Baltimore County Recreation & Parks for their assistance and guidance in creating the Nature Council: Director Bob Barrett; Bud Chrismer, Deputy Director for Nature & Recreation Resources; Beahta Davis, Area Coordinator for Nature & Recreation Resources; and Steven Kroll, a member of the Baltimore County Board of Recreation who served as chairman of the Advisory Committee.

Planner and consultant Al Barry was then introduced. Mr. Barry discussed the park's prominence in the recently completed Ruxton-Riderwood-Lake Roland Area Improvement Association's *Community Plan 2010*. Next, RRLRAIA board member Jeffrey Budnitz briefly reviewed the history of the transfer of the maintenance of the park from Baltimore City to Baltimore County. Bud Chrismer from Rec & Parks gave an update on improvements to the park and Elise Butler gave an overview of the Nature Council. Chairpersons of several RELPMC committees gave updates, including: Howdy Knipp, Recreation Committee; Peter Maloney, Dog Park Committee; Elise Butler, Environment, Education & Historic Preservation Committee; and Charlotte Galley, Residents' Committee. Other committees include: Civic and Community, Membership and Nominating.

Prospective board members standing for election were introduced. The following individuals, nominated by the RELPMC Nominating Committee to serve on the Board, were elected unanimously for the terms of office as indicated:

One year terms: Bruce Boswell, Aviva Hord, Marsha Ramsay, Gail Stetten

Two year terms: Jeffrey Budnitz, Nancy Horst, Howdy Knipp, Helga Morrow, Timmy Ruppberger

Three year terms: Elise Butler, Dwight Johnson, Peter Maloney, Rick North, Larry Zeafla

Following the election of the board, the following officers were elected:

President: Peter Maloney

Vice President: Larry Zeafla

Treasurer: Jeffrey Budnitz

Secretary: Nancy Worden Horst

Want to get involved or learn more about the park? Contact us at releepark-rp@baltimorecountymd.gov

or 410-887-4156.

Design Review Required for New Construction and Substantial Additions

Did you know? Before you can build a new house or add a substantial addition to an existing structure on any property within Association boundaries your plans are subject to approval by Baltimore County's Design Review Panel.

The Design Review Panel (DRP) was established by Section 32-4-203 of the Baltimore County Code 2004, as amended. The goal of the DRP is to encourage design excellence through the application of design guidelines contained in Baltimore County's Master Plan, the Comprehensive Manual of Development Policies, and adopted community plans, as applicable. The general charge for the DRP is to assure the overall quality of a project. In residential DRP areas, the panel may increase setback requirements for a proposed development. The DRP acts in a technical consulting capacity; its recommendations are binding on Baltimore County hearing officers and county agencies.

For more information, contact: Lynn Lanham at 410-887-3480 or mlanham@baltimorecountymd.gov or Jenifer Nugent at jnugent@baltimorecountymd.gov.

The Serpentine Barrens of Bare Hills

by Jessica Paffenbarger

On a recent autumn walk through the serpentine barrens in the Bare Hills area Dwight Johnson pointed out the unique flora to a group of local residents. Bare Hills, located on both sides of Falls Road between the I-695 to the north and the Baltimore City line, is a focus of the RRLRAIA *Community Plan 2010*. As such the area will receive considerable attention over the next few years.

Johnson, a member of the Maryland Native Plants Society, described the area as "a remnant prairie community." As you can see in the photograph, the landscape includes rocky grasslands dotted by Virginia scrub pine, scrubby black jack and post oak trees and a number of rare and endangered



Native plant specialist Dwight Johnson points out the unique flora and fauna in Bare Hills to a group of local residents. Photos courtesy Nettie Washburn

plants, including the fameflower, whorled milkweed, serpentine chickweed, panic grass and little bluestem grass.

Bare Hills contains a wide variety of natural and man-made settings. One of its most unique treasures is a swath of barrens covered by an olive green rock known as serpentinite or serpentine, which takes its name from the Latin '*serpentius*' or '*serpent rock*'.

Indeed, it does snake its way through Bare Hills

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and was responsible for attracting the area's first industry in the form of mining. Serpentinite rock contains large amounts of chromite, an ore used to make stainless steel and other chemical compounds. When chromite was added to steel, the end product offered greater resistance to corrosion and discoloration. Isaac Tyson, Jr. was the first enterprising chemist who found the chromite ore in Bare Hills serpentinite rock and began searching throughout northern Baltimore and southern Pennsylvania for more of these barrens. He started mining chromite ore in Bare Hills in 1808 and expanded his operations throughout the early 1800's. From 1828 to 1850 Maryland was the world's largest producer of chrome! Eventually the mines were depleted

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and world trade shifted to Asia Minor where a vast deposit of chromite was discovered in Bursa, Turkey. Local chromite mining and chrome production all but ceased by 1900.

There are only a handful of serpentine barrens in the eastern United States that have remained undeveloped, including Bare Hills, Soldiers Delight Natural Environmental Area in western Baltimore County and the State Line Serpentine Barrens (which run along 20 miles of the Maryland-Pennsylvania border) in Nottingham County Park, PA. Small pit mine openings and some larger mine shafts can still be seen along the trails of these three barrens, though they have long since been secured against entry. Copper was also mined in the area.

While great for mining, the high concentration of heavy metals in the soil of serpentine barrens makes them poisonous to most plants. The degradation of the metals over time leaves few nutrients such as nitrogen or calcium in the soil. Additionally, the metallic soils have such a small clay content that they do not retain water. The lack of water retention forces the few plants that do grow to adapt to very dry conditions. According to Kirk Dreier, Senior Park Naturalist at Marshy Point Nature Center, rainwater and any collected natural flows of water quickly dissipate. The lack of water and the metals combine to make a very acidic topsoil, with base deeper soils. This odd combination gives flourish to a special flora (and fauna) that thrive almost exclusively in serpentine barrens.

Because of the hostile environment these plants have developed special adaptations to survive. Some have to do with the internal chemistry of the plants such as a reduced need for calcium, while others are more visible. For example, the leaves and stems of the serpentine chickweed are covered with tiny hairs that deflect sunlight and prevent the plant from overheating. The hairs perform the double duty of also trapping moist air close to the plant, minimizing wilt during hot dry weather. The little bluestem grass has the quirky adaptation of rolling its long, narrow leaves inward during peak high-temperature hours and prolonged droughts, lessening moisture loss from the plant. The fameflower has developed fleshy leaves and stems which store water. Other plants have leaves that grow around the base of the plant in a rosette shape, which helps to prevent drying-out of the leaves by the wind. An example of this is the lyre-leaved rockcress which has small white flowers and a basal rosette of leaves. This plant, with its special adaptations, in turn provides a habitat for the falcate orangetip, a "small uncommon butterfly", says Mr. Johnson, whose larvae use the plant for food. Other rare insects also take advantage of the unusual plants on the barrens.

The next time you take a walk in Robert E. Lee Park, we hope you will take time to seek out the serpentine barrens and admire the tenaciousness of plants able to live in such an inhospitable environment. The plants' beauty lies not so much in their looks but in their ability to adapt and survive. In that same spirit, we hope that a newly energized Bare Hills community will adapt, thrive and bloom well into the future.

Happy Holidays



New Bridge and Other Improvements for Robert E. Lee Park

Baltimore County is renovating the Robert E. Lee Park bridge in the Lake Roland area. The project, which is estimated to cost \$1.5 million (and is on schedule), will be finished by February 2011. During construction Lakeside Drive is closed.

In addition to the new bridge for the park, Baltimore County is investing \$1.5 million in various improvements, including a half-mile long boardwalk across wetlands to the light rail station, along with a new walking trail, a parking lot, a dog park and a program to stabilize banks. Work began in August and should be finished by the end of spring 2011.



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