

Neighborhood NEWS

Spring 2012

Ruxton-Riderwood-Lake Roland Area Improvement Association

The Known Ranger

by Bliss McCord

It's 11:00 a.m. on a Sunday morning in mid-January and my teeth are chattering as I cross the entrance bridge to Robert E. Lee Park to meet Shannon Davis, the head park ranger. Shannon mercifully ushers me into the rangers' 'office', the stone building just inside the entrance that formerly housed rest rooms and equipment. There are plans afoot to restore it but, with a rowboat leaning against the wall and picnic tables for desks, the office has a long way to go. It does, however, have one thing going for it – heat, glorious heat! – and I am most grateful.

Shannon is one of six inaugural rangers hired by Baltimore County when the Park reopened in October 2011. They are on duty from sunrise to sunset (Park hours) with most working a 34-hour week

and they work in all kinds of weather. This frigid day Shannon is joined by Heidi Greenleaf and Ben Porter, who are out patrolling. The other rangers are Bart Viguers, Autumn Kahl and Kevin Kelly.

Shannon, like all the rangers, has the required bachelor's degree, as well as a master's in Parks and Natural Resource Management. A native Californian, she was always interested in animals (her family even owned an ape named Cheetah), in growing things and – big surprise – loved the outdoors. According to Shannon, a summer job at a Yellowstone concession following her freshman year in college exposed her to professionals who "actually got paid for doing what I loved" and opened her eyes to the possibility of a career as a park ranger.

When fall rolled around, the former computer science major switched to Parks and Recreation Administration and the rest is history. She held ranger positions in California before moving to Maryland and, like Ben, was previously a naturalist at Oregon Ridge Park.

All the rangers wear several hats, figuratively, though some have specialties. All must have a good knowledge of the natural world and the native flora and fauna, though some may specialize in birds and others in wildflowers, for instance. All are goodwill ambassadors, cheerfully dispensing animal lore and band-aids with the same aplomb as directions to the nearest bathroom, trail

or the dog park, Paw Point. As the public face of the restored Park, they set the welcoming tone for visitors and encourage them to get the most out of their visit.

An important aspect of a ranger's job is supervising and maintaining park safety. Rangers make sure that people abide by park rules for the safety of all. A ranger has to be a good observer of people, pets and wildlife, able to foresee danger before it is on the doorstep. One place the rangers frequent is Paw Point, the fenced enclosure at the end of the park peninsula. Members of the dog park must enter a code to open the gate and this is a common area to



Ranger Ben Porter with Great Horned Owl

Photo courtesy Bliss McCord

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Paw Point – Where a Dog Can Be a Dog

by Bliss McCord

If my dog could talk, he would tell you how much he loves Paw Point. He might even drool a little describing the one feature that makes it unique among dog parks in Baltimore County and why this is so important to him and others of his ilk. But more about Gus later.

This playground/playgroup for dogs and their owners was an instant success when the Park re-opened in October; there are now over 700 registered dogs! Dogs are social animals and need friends and exercise as much as we do. At Paw Point they can run freely and, as doggy people will attest, most dogs are friendlier to other canines when they are not on a leash.

The administration of Paw Point is entirely voluntary although the park rangers are frequently on hand to



Gus to RRLRAIA's Peggy Squitieri: "Aw gee, but it's so nice outside!" Photo courtesy Bliss McCord

spot check for the blue membership tags member dogs are required to wear. These membership tags mean more than just a disc showing you have paid your Paw Point dues. When rangers request dog tag information it goes into their records on overall Park and Paw Point usage and this information significantly impacts the justification for government funding/grants for future park projects. Entry to the gated enclosure is by code. It is imperative that the members-only rule be enforced and sharing the code is not allowed. Fairness to registered users aside, this is for everyone's own good; for health reasons, membership requires a current rabies vaccination and a County or City dog license. The rules are safety-related and reasonable: pick up after your dog (there are disposable biodegradable bags available at several locations); no bones, rawhides or squeaky toys (which may encourage aggression in some dogs); no aggressive dogs, etc. Paw Point organizers



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encourage people to think of the dog park as a volunteer co-op that anyone can join, and as 'shareholders' our 'ownership' encourages us all to be respectful of the rules and courteous to other users.

Because the Park opened in the fall, the newly seeded grass had little time to become established; consequently, by late winter, bare muddy areas were crying for attention. Davey Tree generously donated wood chips to help with the mud; wood chipping the entire enclosure may be the best permanent solution to paw traffic. In the meantime, please avoid congregating in those well-worn areas. The other seasonal change is the one Gus is most excited about. With warm weather comes the opening of the 'ole swimming hole, which the County closed for the winter for safety reasons. This attractive novelty allows our local water dogs to doggy paddle to their hearts' content in a safe, roped-off area of Lake Roland. Accessed by passing through a double gate, dogs and owners can descend some very large stone stairs that cascade to the water's edge. The gate ensures that dogs

who don't love swimming (or whose owners don't like wet dogs) can't access the lake. In January, additional fencing at the water's edge was installed, preventing dogs from leaving the dog park along the lakeside. Also, the water faucet now has a short length of hose attached to facilitate washing your dog or filling the water bowl. Please be sure to direct the water toward the concrete pad when using it.

Clearly there is a demand for dog parks in Baltimore County. There is only one other, the Baltimore Animal Recreation Center at Hannah More Park, and there have been rumblings from the Rodgers Forge, Perry Hall and Loch Raven communities about their desire for such facilities for their pets. At the request of Councilman David Marks, RRLRAIA board member Jeffrey Budnitz, an early Paw Point advocate, spoke at a meeting of those representatives in December. One common problem is the difficulty of finding appropriate community areas and only time will tell if more parks for dogs will become a reality in the County.

Paw Point committee members are hard at work adapting the dog park as experience dictates and they have some exciting ideas for future events for dogs and their owners. Keep tuned to the Paw Point website (<http://pawpoint.org>) for future updates, to register your dog(s) or to volunteer.

Tip: Tie a couple of plastic bags to your dog's leash so one is always available when needed.

Project Clean Stream

Saturday, April 14, 2012, 9 a.m. to Noon

Project Clean Stream 2012 is here! Pull on your waders and gloves, grab a trash bag and head out to one of our streams as part of

this wonderful annual stream clean-up event held across Maryland. In 2011, over 5,100 volunteers turned out at 222 clean-up sites and removed over 305,000 pounds of trash!

Please consider volunteering with the RRLRAIA team to clean up our watershed. All supplies, tools and gloves will be provided, but wear clothes and shoes that can get muddy (boots or waders if you've got 'em). To join our team, call us at 410-494-7757 or send an email to rrlraia@comcast.net.



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The Known Ranger

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observe a ranger greeting two- and four-legged friends, checking dog tags and explaining the benefits of membership. They are also on call should there be trouble with a dog; they in turn rely on Animal Control to check for prior complaints about an animal.

There are approximately 450 acres of park property, much of it wooded, and the rangers are responsible for patrolling all of it, sometimes on bicycle. Shannon particularly likes this aspect of her job because the trails, people and animals change daily. On patrol, rangers monitor general park safety and areas of usage, while enforcing the leash law.

By walking the trails, they can tell which are eroding and need to be temporarily closed, which need shoring up and which need some clearing. At present, biking is only allowed on the main trail (from Falls Road to the main peninsula). Most of the side trails are closed to bikers because of the rare and endangered



Eager learners at The Great Backyard Bird Count

Photo courtesy Nettie Washburn

plant species found in the serpentine areas, which includes most of the Park between the main trail and Falls Road. The Nature Council is in the process of putting up signage to indicate on what trails you can bike and what trails are closed. Hopefully these signs will be put up shortly. Some trails lead absolutely nowhere since they were created by wildlife. The rangers will

block these to prevent hikers from becoming lost. The County is presently hard at work mapping the whole Park to show the interconnected trail system. In time, it is hoped 'blazes' (painted color marks) will be painted on the trees to indicate different trails. Once the map has been completed, visitors will be able to plan their hikes accordingly. No more getting lost!

In addition to patrols around the Park and at Paw Point, Shannon and her staff keep an eye on the lake and its boaters. Lake Roland is a lovely small lake for the kayaks and canoes that are simple to launch from the old boat dock area near the Lakeside Drive parking lot. Boats on trailers, however, are prohibited and boaters are required to wear, not just carry, their life vests while out paddling.

Sometimes the rangers have to issue citations. At present, the biggest offenders are people walking dogs off-leash. First offenders are fined \$25 if there is no record of similar citations from Animal Control, including citations from other County parks such as Meadowood. Subsequent tickets will hurt considerably more - \$100 per offense.

Although the fine may seem steep, it is the same at all County parks. Robert E. Lee Park has long been considered a haven for off-leash dog-walkers and, consequently, it may take harsh fines to bring offenders into compliance. In times past, I, too, loved to let my retriever run free in the woods but I have been brought to heel. It only takes one chasing dog to ruin a jogger's experience or one happy, jumping pup to cause a child a lifelong fear of dogs. Although they wear badges, rangers cannot arrest people for breaking more serious laws in the Park but, if necessary, they can call for backup from Baltimore County Police. Happily, the Park is a safe one and there have been few incidents to date.

Another important ranger job is planning and supervising park programs. Although they are employed by the County's Department of Recreation and Parks, rangers work cooperatively with the Robert E Lee Park Nature Council to plan fun family events that teach about nature or local history while entertaining

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via games and other activities. During the winter months, the rangers led a nighttime 'Owl Prowl', taught children aged 12 and older how to make snowshoes out of natural materials and led 'The Great Backyard Bird Count'. One February weekend, families and members of the Baltimore Bird Club helped Cornell University's Bird Lab with its annual winter event tracking bird populations and ranges. As spring arrives, the number of planned activities increases and the April weekends are filled with exciting family events. Why not kick off the arrival of spring by attending the Earth Day Family Campout on April 21? Sleeping outdoors in a tent is a real experience and what s'more, for intrepid campers, the rangers have planned a night hike under the stars.



Rangers Ben Porter, Heidi Greenleaf and Shannon Davis dressed for winter patrol
Photo courtesy Bliss McCord

Rangers will occasionally give tours for groups that request them and sometimes oversee school and community service activities. One local Eagle Scout has exciting plans to build three kiosks

in the Park! Similar to those seen at national park trailheads, they will display trail maps and other pertinent park information. Although most of Shannon's time is spent in the great outdoors, she, just like the rest of us, must occasionally retreat indoors to write reports, plan programs and attend Nature Council and County Recreation and Parks meetings.

Now that you know a little more about your friendly park rangers, introduce yourself to them the next time you are out for a stroll. They will be glad to meet you and help you enjoy beautiful Robert E. Lee Park.

For a full description of the Park and its activities, please visit the Nature Council website at www.relpnc.org.

For more information about Paw Point, visit www.pawpoint.org.



First trim of the year. Thank you to Grounds and Gardens LLC for donating their services to the Rider House. Photo courtesy Debbie Burkner



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Hop on Board for a Trip to Acorn Hill

Plans for Children's Park Taking Shape

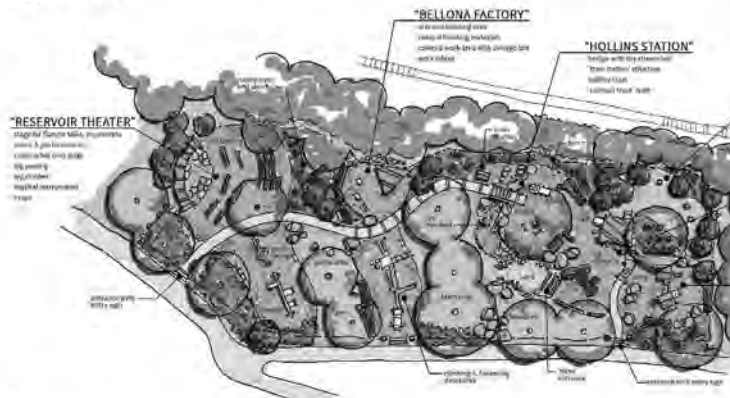
by Nancy W. Horst

Picture this: children, their families and friends clambering over and through hollow logs, making crafts from 'found' materials, exploring 'Mine Town' and riding a wooden 'train' through 'Hollins Station', right in our back yard!

Acorn Hill will be such a place – a natural play area geared to children, their families and friends – planned for a one-acre site in Robert E. Lee Park overlooking Lake

Roland. It is the creation of a group of Nature Council volunteers working with the architectural firm Hord Coplan Macht, Inc. to design an area of the Park that focuses on children's activities.

Acorn Hill



Schematic of proposed children's park Courtesy Hord Coplan Macht.

Various play stations, including structures for climbing, swinging, exploring and balancing are planned. These will be designed to help children develop physical skills using natural materials in an open environment where they can learn while having fun. The

station names highlight the history of the Park including its factories, mines, railroad and reservoir. In addition to the stations, Acorn Hill will have picnic and quiet areas, a bird sanctuary and spaces for art projects. Programs will emphasize environmental conservation and exploration of animal and plant habitats, with talks by park rangers and a theater for productions by, and for, children.

To make Acorn Hill a reality, the Acorn Hill Committee of Robert E Lee Park Nature Council needs contributions of time, energy and funding from volunteers and interested friends, neighbors and the business community. For more information, visit Acorn Hill on the web at AcornHill@replnc.org or contact rhmorrow@verizon.net.



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April 1, 2012 - 7:30PM Maundy Thursday, with the Lord's Supper

April 6, 2012 - 7:00PM Good Friday Service

April 8, 2012 - Easter Sunday

7:00AM - Sunrise Service

10:30AM - Mark 16:1-8: "An Unfinished Story," with the Lord's Supper

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April 6, 2012, 8PM - Kevin Burke, Irish Fiddle Master,

Common Ground Concert

Series: www.commongroundonthehill.org

May 1, 2012 - 12 Noon Holocaust Observance with Kol HaLev Synagogue: Dr. Uta Larkey, Goucher College

