Community Cleanup and Litter Challenge set for March 21-29

Now is the time to gather a group and select a road, trail or river-reach that needs your help! RACC, in partnership with Rockbridge County and the Virginia Department of Transportation, is sponsoring the 26th annual Rockbridge Area Community Cleanup during March 21 to March 29 this year.

Enthusiastic cleaner-uppers are invited to compete in the challenge for the Litter Cup, designed by Mark Cline. The “Trash Bashers” have won it four years in a row and could use some competition! Rules can be found online (see below).

The cleanup asks volunteers to pick up trash along roadsides and in other public areas to beautify Rockbridge and strengthen our sense of community. We ask Adopt-a-Highway groups to also work during this time to increase our community-wide effort.

In years past the cleanup has had up to 600 volunteers, and last year we collected 500 bags of trash along 51 roadways. Let’s have a crew on every road in Rockbridge!

Please sign up by going to the website rockbridgeconservation.org and clicking the Community Cleanup button to reach an electronic sign-up form and a map showing the roads that are already taken. Paper sign-up forms, bags, and vests will be available starting March 9 at branches of the Rockbridge Regional Library, at the County Recycling Collection Centers and the Office of Community Development in the Rockbridge County Administrative building.

If you know of any particular areas that should be targeted through the Clean Up please notify Barbara Walsh at 463-2330 or cleanup@rockbridgeconservation.org, or mention the area during online registration.

Whale is cleanup mascot

Col. Gerald (Jay) Sullivan and VMI engineering students cooperated with Shenandoah Green to build a life-sized baby whale to educate the public about the dangers of single-use plastics. The display evokes the 80 pounds of plastic recently found in a whale that had died.

“Flippy” will appear at Rockbridge schools in March through May and will also be used to promote the Rockbridge Community Cleanup. School visits will include curriculum on the impacts of plastics on the environment and ways to “reduce, reuse, and recycle.” Students will be invited to bring in plastic items that cannot be recycled (#3 and above). Please contact RACC if you would like to help or to schedule Flippy to visit your school or group (photo from Shenandoah Green website, shenandoahgreen.org).

Edgar W. Spencer, 1932-2020

The RACC Board of Directors and the Rockbridge conservation community are mourning the death of Ed Spencer, Professor of Geology at W&L, a founder and stalwart supporter of RACC. Please see the separate enclosure for a remembrance of Ed’s many contributions and accomplishments.
Annual Meeting nourishes and informs RACC members

The RACC Annual Meeting for 2019 took place on Nov 10 at the Heartstone Lodge, midway between Lexington and Buena Vista. A beautiful day brought an excellent turnout of 80 members, family and friends for an afternoon of fellowship and feasting on pot-luck finger food with assorted beverages.

The guest speaker was Greg Buppert of the Southern Environmental Law Center, an expert on issues related to Dominion’s gas transmission pipelines and one of the people responsible for recent courtroom decisions that have brought environmental concerns to the fore.

During the brief business meeting, Co-President Gregg Amonette reviewed the organization’s activities and accomplishments during the past year. Co-President Julie Youngman reported that RACC now has 445 individual members and asked that everyone make their supporting donation for 2019 before the end of the year.

Retiring board members Paul Bryant and Jay Lewis were recognized for their service, then four new members were elected for three-year terms (see photo), while Bruce Bytnar, Fred Fevrier, and Julie Youngman undertook renewed terms of office.

At the end of the day, awards were presented (story on Page 3) and Michael Kopald won the raffle for the bicycle donated by board member Charles Winder.

Land committee changes name

RACC’s Land Conservation Committee, formerly the Land Use Committee, was renamed to reflect its effort to conserve (rather than “use”) land. It is working on Lexington's plan for Comprehensive Land Use and Green Infrastructure; plans for Jordan's Point Park; designation of a Rural Historic District for the Irish Creek area; efforts to conserve the Arcadia-Buffalo Creek area; and establishment of the Uncas Trail along the Maury River east of Lexington.

The LCC meets at 4:15 the first Wednesday of each month at the RACC office. Please contact Chris Wise at jwise@wlu.edu or 540-784-9258 if you are interested attending, as times sometimes change.

New head for Water Monitors

John Pancake has taken over from Sandra Stuart as coordinator for the Maury Watershed Monitors, who check streams in the Maury’s watershed by collecting and identifying aquatic invertebrates to index stream health. They are always looking for volunteers. To learn more, email jspancake@yahoo.com.

County boosts solar for VFDs

The Rockbridge Board of Supervisors has created a fund to help finance installation of solar electric panels on the roofs of volunteer fire departments. Such installations are expected to pay back their cost in 12-14 years.

Ridge & River News

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Send suggestions, articles or letters to racc@rockbridge.net or mail them to the address shown on the cover.
RACC presents annual conservation awards

At its Annual Meeting RACC presented awards to several local citizens for their exemplary conservation-oriented efforts in the community (all photos by Conrad Matiuk).

The Bartenstein family, represented by Arthur Bartenstein, was applauded for generously donating a parcel of land off Ross Road to enable development of the Sunnyside Trail, an important link in the "Brushy Blue" network of public trails.

The 2019 RACC Visionary Action Award was presented to the Walkers Creek Volunteer Fire Department for installing solar panels to make theirs the first emergency services facility in Rockbridge powered by solar energy.

Attorney Jared Jenkins received a special “David and Goliath” award recognizing his defense of the Rockbridge community’s rights in stewardship of the House Mountain Preserve. He donated an extraordinary amount of time and effort beginning in 2015 when the Virginia Outdoor Foundation walked away from a longstanding management agreement and ending in 2018 when the Virginia Supreme Court failed to allow appeal of a judge’s ruling that overturned a jury verdict in favor of RACC.

RACC breaks even for 2019

Due to the generous support of our contributors, including the many friends and family who honored the memory of Sallie Sebrell with their donations, RACC closed out 2019 with a balanced budget. Thus, we did not need to tap endowment income as in recent past years. Although total contributions to RACC were about 7% under expectation, expenses were also lower, so the year ended with little difference between the two.

We continue to be an extremely effective yet monetarily conservative organization and look forward to robust fundraising in 2020, including a new challenge to become fully vested in our endowment account held by the Community Foundation for Rockbridge, Bath and Alleghany (www.cfrba.org). View a video on this effort on our Facebook page at Rockbridge Conservation - RACC, and look for an announcement in the mail soon!

— Larry Evans and Bruce Bytnar, Co-Treasurers
Outreach: RACC’s activities in the Rockbridge community

- Conferred with city officials on planning for the Jorden’s Point Park
- Met with several legislators in Richmond on Conservation Lobby Day
- Worked on an easement for public use of the Uncas Trail along the Maury cliffs
- Announced the need for volunteers to help plan and manage the Sunnyside Trail
- Co-sponsored with W&L’s SEAL, “Green Fire,” a film about Aldo Leopold, conservation pioneer
- Attended the annual banquets of the local NAACP and the Farm Bureau
- Participated in the Nonprofit Showcase hosted by the Chamber of Commerce

Tree-planting set for Maury banks above damsite

Planting along the Maury River’s banks exposed by removal of the dam at Jordan’s Point will take place in phases:

**Phase One** will be conducted by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries with help from a couple of volunteers to plant up to 800 tree cuttings on the river bank below the high-water mark. The activity is scheduled for March 2 with a back-up date of March 9.

**Phase Two** is more labor-intensive and needs multiple RACC and community volunteers to plant approximately 200 root-ball trees above the high-water mark. Timing will be decided once participating landowners agree to the special requirements for these trees. To volunteer, contact the RACC office at 540-463-2330 or rac@rockbridge.net.