



RIDGE AND RIVER NEWS

Newsletter of the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council (RACC)

February 2022

Lexington program seeks more people to collect food waste

Over the past four months, a local resident and member of RACC's Waste Reduction Committee has been collecting food residue for composting from up to 20 volunteer households. Lauren McCaughrin gathers the material at her home and delivers it to organic farmer Mitch Wapner, who incorporates it into aerobic compost to improve his farm's soil.

This is a pilot project designed to reduce the amount of food residue that goes into the trash and is delivered to the landfill, where it produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming.

"We are converting the impact of this food residue from harmful to beneficial," McCaughrin says. She credits RACC co-president Eli Fishpaw for spearheading this effort and continues, "I began the daunting task of canvassing my own neighborhood for prospective contributors in late September of 2021. Many of my neighbors already compost their own food residue, achieving the same goal; I am happy to report that 15-20 households are currently participating in our project."

See Composting, Page 3

It's cleanup time again!

Tired of being stuck at home and worrying about the environment? Get outside and help with the 27th annual Community Cleanup, March 19-27. The event is sponsored by RACC and VDOT, which



together provide the signature orange safety vests and trash bags for removing litter from along our roads, trails, and streamside.

The cleanup features the Litter Cup, awarded to the team that fills the most bags, which are picked up later by VDOT crews. You and your team can choose your location and day(s) of action by signing up now on the cleanup info page at (rockbridgeconservation.org/clean_up.php).

Annual Meeting Nov 7 combines fellowship and business

RACC's Annual Meeting took place at Kendal's elegant Sunnyside House. The first activity was a walk over the creek to the 12-acre plot recently donated to RACC, where a crowd assembled to dedicate a white oak sapling planted in memory of RACC founders Ed and Betty Spencer (photo below). The Spencers' daughters attended the ceremony.

Longtime board member and past president Lee Merrill spoke movingly of the Spencers' dedication to Rockbridge conservation, and others added stories. For return to the house, much of the crowd followed guide Bruce Dwyer up a long hill and then down a partially-developed switchback trail back to Sunnyside House, where all were welcomed to a feast of pot-luck finger-foods with beverages provided by RACC. Friends who had not met in a long time due to the pandemic relaxed together on the porch or out on the lawn.

At 3 p.m., about 50 people assembled indoors for the business meeting. Co-President Gregg Amonette summarized RACC's activities and accomplishments over the past year. Co-President Julie Youngman then presented awards to several local people for their outstanding contributions to area conservation (see also page 2).

The meeting elected four new members to the RACC Board of Directors (story on Page 3) and confirmed new 3-y terms for current board members Brian Jenkins, Lee Merrill, and Charles Winder, as well as a 1-y term for Larry Evans. Retiring board member David Harbor was applauded for his many years of service. The following officers were elected for 2022: Co-Presidents Eli Fishpaw and Bob Biersack; Co-Vice Presidents Julie Youngman and Lee Merrill; Co-Treasurer Larry Evans (with Bruce Bytnar); Co-Secretary Kit Huffman (with Sally Nunneley).



Conservation seminar series is in full swing

RACC is continuing a series of educational seminars at 7 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month using Zoom. You must sign up in advance for real-time access, but the videos will be available at rockbridgeconservation.org.

Local farmer Steve Hart will present the next seminar on Feb 16 at 7 p.m., "Can Planned Rotational Grazing be Beneficial for the Climate?" He will discuss the advantages, challenges, and benefits of rotational grazing practices for both the individual farm and at a national scale.

January's topic was "Solar Solutions for Non-profits and Low-income Households," discussed by Jeff Heie, founder of Give Solar (website give.solar), a program that provides photovoltaic panels for Habitat for Humanity houses in Harrisonburg and other Virginia communities. A recording of that seminar is available together with those from 2020-2021 at rockbridgeconservation.org.

RACC's co-president, Bob Biersack, notes that the local Habitat affiliate (rockbridgehabitat.org) may join this effort if their board determines that the program is a good fit; he predicts that RACC would eagerly join in their efforts to provide solar energy to Habitat homeowners.

New RACC board members elected for three-year terms

Chris Connors is a Professor of Geology at W&L. He has led local field trips and given public presentations on the geology of the area, and has volunteered assistance to local organizations and individuals on subsurface environmental, geotechnical and geophysical topics. Chris and his wife Lisa have been members of RACC since they moved to Rockbridge County in the late 1990s. They live in the county where they try to take care of their land in an environmentally conscious way.

Jim Manley has strong family roots in Rockbridge and moved here in 2013. He has been a member of RACC for many years. With a background in geography and planning, he has worked in technology related to urban planning, water quality, city and county planning, and land-use generally. He founded and led for 40 years a software development company with customers across the US. Jim is interested in promoting alternate energy sources including electric vehicles as well as solar, wind, and geothermal energy.

Gretchen Sukow moved to Lexington with her family in 1999. She has raised two children here (Carl, now 22 and Ingrid, 19) and taught at the Shenandoah Preschool for the past 14 years. She is a longtime RACC member, but recently became more involved through her concern for the health of local waterways. She currently serves on RACC's Watershed and Waste Reduction committees and is an occasional visitor at meetings of the Land Conservation Committee.

Craig Vinecombe relocated from San Diego to Rockbridge in 2016 after completing a honeymoon through-hike on the Appalachian Trail with his wife Tonia. He now works in marketing and development at the Rockbridge Area Health Center and has worked at Boxerwood and the Walkabout Outfitter. Craig has been part of the RACC Land Use Committee since 2017. Craig serves on the Boxerwood Board of Directors, volunteers for Friends of the Chessie Trail, and was a youth literacy volunteer with the Rockbridge Regional Library. Craig and his wife spend their spare time spoiling their three rescue-dogs, taking long walks, gardening and cooking.



Chris Connors



Jim Manley



Gretchen Sukow



Craig Vinecombe

RACC awards presented to local conservation champions

RACC presents awards annually to people or organizations deemed by the board to have performed exceptional service to the Rockbridge conservation community. Co-President Julie Youngman presented framed certificates to the honorees and led a brief discussion of the work each has done.

Chuck Smith received a Community Champion Award for his faithful stewardship of the environment while serving on the Lexington City Council. Most recently, responding to appeals from RACC members, he led a committee that reinstated the city's recycling program. He also supported RACC's initiative to reduce plastic pollution and the volume of single-use plastics going into the landfill.



A unique Nature Nurturers Award went to a trio of hard workers, **Jan Smith, David Rosher, and Peggy Dyson-Cobb**, for their tireless efforts to improve the public's enjoyment of nature by

clearing trails at Brushy Hills and the Chessie Trail, working to rid those areas of invasive plant species, and creating self-guided wildflower walks for all to enjoy despite the pandemic.

A Clean Connections Award was presented to **Mike Keyser** for his visionary leadership at the BARC Electric Cooperative in setting a goal of 100% carbon-neutral energy sales by 2035 and providing broadband service to rural areas, allowing Rockbridge residents to work, study, shop, and socialize from home during the pandemic.



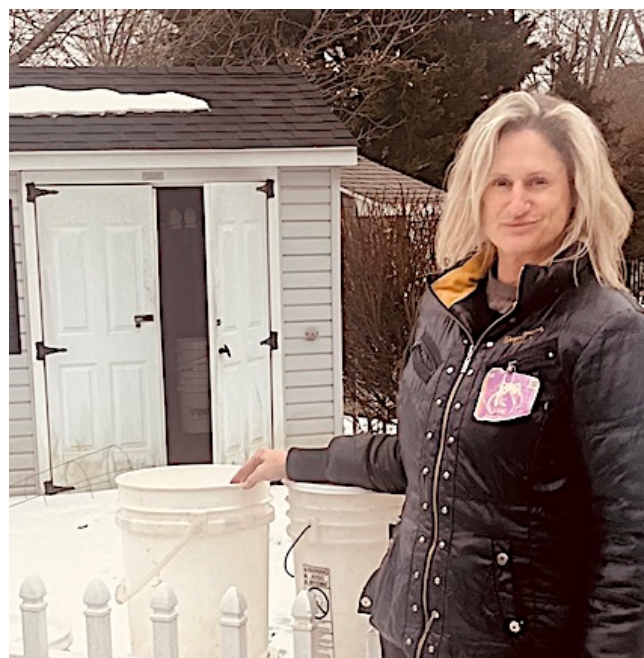
Phyllis and Fred Fevrier were honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award for their many years of devoted service as board members, committee chairs, and hands-on volunteers, notably Fred's efforts in the local promotion of solar energy and other green options, and Phyllis's leadership in sustainable gardening practices, native plant protection, and water quality improvement, as well as their joint work on reforestation.



Composting *Continued from Page 1*

Participants are given special buckets for home collection of residue and are expected to maintain careful separation of food scraps from potential contaminants. They drop off their full buckets on Sunday and pick up empty ones. The full buckets are weighed, emptied into a larger container, and rinsed on site. The comingled food waste is then picked up by Wapner.

McCaughrin says, "After working out a few kinks, Mitch and I have created a well-oiled machine. We are now more than happy to receive additional material. If you live close to my neighborhood on Alum Springs Road in Lexington and are interested in joining our effort, please contact me at (323) 309-9657, or email me at GlobowlCafe@gmail.com. Together, we can enhance life-resilience on Earth, one bucket at a time!"



Lauren McCaughrin prepares some of the buckets used in her pilot composting project, which aims to reduce food waste in the landfill and thus decrease methane production there.

Ridge & River News

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Send suggestions, articles or letters to
racc@rockbridge.net or mail them to the
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Fred and Phyllis Fevrier reflect on thirty years of conservation

We did not realize how fortunate we were in 1991 when we bought a parcel of pasture in the northern part of Rockbridge County near our relatives and moved here from Miami Florida. We had some experience in guiding a small piece of land towards a more natural state and we started reforesting our little patch of Rockbridge County. We learned about conservation easements and planted thousands of native tree seedlings as well as many, many acorns with great hopes for establishing a forest in our lifetime. The process has been rewarding, may the forest outlive us all!

We found great wisdom and inspiration in local organizations including RACC, Boxerwood, the Valley Conservation Council, and the local chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society. We met wise people at the Upper James River Soil and Water District to help us understand our watershed. We learned to monitor water quality through Save Our Streams. The Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners brought lessons and experience in landscaping. We found community spirit in our local volunteer fire department and the Ruritans.

Now, along with reforestation efforts, we face an urgent need to address renewable energy to power our electric grid and change our transportation energy source from fossil fuels to solar and wind power.

We need to act together now to prepare for climate change, the greatest challenge for all of us.

Note: The Fevriers were presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award at RACC's 2021 Annual Meeting (see story and photo on Page 2). They wrote this as a thank-you for that honor.

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