

Friends of Spy Pond Park Newsletter

Spring 2010

Anthem for the Joy of Play: Spy Pond Park Playground Resurfaced

by Eric Berger

For all who love play and the joy it weaves into the lives of children and adults, the new playground surface in Spy Pond Park (SPP) is a wonderful change. No longer will the playground be shut down for endless weeks during our glorious summers because of sand wasp infestation. How did this happen and what is this new surface?

Through the combined efforts of the Friends of Spy Pond Park (FSPP) and Arlington Town Officials, money was allocated from Town and Community Development Block Grant funds to resurface the playground. Childscapes, a company located in Marshfield, MA, was hired for this important assignment. In late October, 2009 Mike Trainor and Scott Judgkins from Childscapes removed the sand and then the playground's rubber and asphalt subsurface along with the cement foundation of the



PHOTO BY KAREN GROSSMAN

Mike Trainor and Scott Judgkins rake the wood fibers topping off the playground surface

Additional improvements included the placement of rubberized mats under the swings to prevent wear and the conversion of the sand box into a gravel pit for digging.

Doris Birmingham, an active FSPP member who has taken an active interest in the playground, interviewed some parents at the site last November to get their reactions to the new surface. The consensus resounded that it is very popular and well received. Comments like, "It's a good thing. We prefer wood chips to other surfaces." and "Thank you for the wood chips!" underscored their enthusiasm.

Fun time all spring, summer and fall returns in grand style to the playground in SPP.

To find out more about the FSPP, to get involved in Work and Fun Days in the Park that begin on April 10th, or to become a member go to: friendsofspypondpark.org.



PHOTO BY KAREN GROSSMAN

Scott Judgkins uses a back hoe to dump gravel in the digging pit

old playground. They added some earth to level the area, then a felt weed-barrier carpet to protect from decay the one foot layer of engineered hard wood fibers. These fibers coalesce with one another to prevent them from blowing away. They are third party certified for playgrounds, meeting the many required standards for playground resurfacing. It is important to know that the material meets health and safety standards because so much was used for the job. The company delivered six truck loads to provide the 300 yards of fiber for the resurfacing. Maintenance of these fibers requires occasional raking to move some of the fibers to areas, like at the bottom of the slide's ladder, that become thinner from high usage.



PHOTO BY DORIS BIRMINGHAM

Enjoying the resurfaced playground this spring

March Rainfall Record

by Bill Eykamp

There is nothing like a March rainfall record to remind us of the water level in Spy Pond. It is straightforward, but not completely simple.



PHOTO BY DORIS BIRMINGHAM

I've watched the water come up my lawn several times in the past four decades. March 2010 is right up there, close to the highest water I've seen.

A change in pond level is a manifestation of accumulation, equal to input minus output. The input part of the picture is straightforward. In practical terms, Spy Pond is rain fed, and is "flashy." Rain that falls in the Pond watershed tends to make it into the Pond pretty fast. Water that falls on "hardscape," meaning pavement and roofs, is there within hours. That falling on vegetation takes somewhat longer, but when everything is saturated, it comes in pretty fast. "Saturated" is the perfect descriptor for March 2010!

For estimating purposes, the watershed of the Pond is about 700 acres, and the Pond itself is about 100. One would think,



PHOTO BY DORIS BIRMINGHAM

therefore, that an inch of rain would raise the Pond by 7". In fact, we measure 3" or 4". That part gets a little more complicated. The output is all from one pipe leading to Little Spy Pond. The outfall structure was built in the '60s when Route 2 was expanded. It is located along the highway most of the way toward the Spy Pond Parkway end. While there is some evaporation and seepage, when it's raining, the outfall is the ballgame.

The pipe starts in a four-sided box. Three of the sides are concrete and at the same level. The fourth side is constructed of wooden boards, the highest of which is about 6" lower than the other three sides. There is a staff gauge on the front of the structure, set so the top board is at 40. On that gauge, the distance between 40 and 50 is 10 cm., about 4 inches. As water rises, it flows first over the boards. At a typical water height above the boards, flow is about 2.5 cfs (cubic feet per second). By the time water is flowing over all four sides, it averages roughly 5 cfs. As it rises higher and flow increases, it finally gets to the point where the outflow pipe is flooded, and a further increase in height changes the outflow very little. That limiting value is about 15 cfs.

March 2010 is the only time I can recall when the outflow pipe has been flooded continuously for three weeks. The accumulation in mid March was about 250 acre-feet, or 11 million cubic feet. With the pipe flooded, and no water coming in, it would take about a week to drop the Pond 2 feet. We consider "normal" to be the 6" range between water just flowing over all four sides of the outfall, and water not flowing out at all. We were there most of 2009, but in a dry year, or in a year when the Pond is treated, the level will drop 6 or 8 inches below that. And all can see what happens in a wet year!

People Making a Difference (PMD)

PMD is a nonprofit organization that Lori Tsuruda founded in 1992 to promote informed and responsible volunteerism by involving people in meaningful, hands-on work that meets local needs and by assisting select companies and charities to build successful community involvement programs. We are so fortunate that Lori has arranged for her volunteers to participate in our Work Day on May 15. We look forward to working with them to help maintain Spy Pond Park. Mark your calendar now because the more people who get involved, the better.

You can find out more about this worthwhile organization, PMD, via the following contact information:

People Making a Difference (PMD)
PO Box 120189, Boston, MA 02112
617-298-0025
<http://www.pmd.org>
lori@pmd.org

Neighborhood Characters

by Anne Ellinger

If you're like me, "a regular" on the bike path by Spy Pond, no doubt you start to see some of the same faces. And if you see the same person often enough, soon you might start to exchange greetings: at first a shy little smile... eventually graduating to wave hello... perhaps someday even stopping and saying, "What's your name? Yes, I live near here, too -- isn't it beautiful?" (Of course, I need to ask a person's name a dozen times before it actually sticks in my head.)

I get inordinate joy from these fleeting greetings, from my life touching such a variety of neighborhood characters. There's my neighbor who has a Buddhist chant on her license plate, walking her cute little dogs. And wiry Steve, who spends about five hours a day walking the bike path, humming bee-bop tunes to himself. Do you ever see a bow-legged middle-aged man, speed-walking while reading a book and listening to his ipod? That's my husband Christopher, a neighborhood character if I ever saw one! I laugh to see him zipping along, oblivious to everyone.

I love waving hello to the Asian couple whom I recognize from the dry cleaners on the block, to my Greek neighbors with their new baby granddaughter, and to a couple I've greeted now for nearly two decades whom I think of as "the Russians." (I've no clue about their actual background.) I could name dozens more I've come to treasure. And I know that I, too, must seem a fun character to the regulars who see me exercising on the stairway to the playground: a middle-aged woman dancing her heart out to the silent music of her ipod, a big grin on her face.

Why do these neighborhood scenes make me so happy? They make me feel at home. They remind me that my life by Spy Pond is intertwined (albeit distantly) with the lives of people from every culture and background. Knowing them and being known, I belong.

Help Store a Wooden Canoe

I just moved to East Arlington. I have a small wooden canoe that I would like to leave in a friendly person's yard on or very close (short walk with canoe on shoulders) to Spy Pond. I would be happy to pay a small fee every month, or we can talk about other possibilities like your being able to use the canoe etc. If you are interested, please e-mail me at: kella_louise@hotmail.com

Thank you very much! Kelly

President's Letter

Dear Friends,

Spring brings renewal and so the Friends of Spy Pond Park (FSPP) renews its efforts towards Park maintenance. Despite the rain and flooding, once again we can enjoy beautiful weather and occasional balmy days as we welcome the beauty of the flowers and the arrival of birds from their winter retreat. I encourage you to join in the Work and Fun Days we have planned to enhance our spirits and salute our most treasured possessions, Spy Pond and Spy Pond Park (SPP).

During the winter lull, I helped write three grant applications for FSPP. Thanks, also, to Betsy Leonard-Wright, Gail McCormick, and Nedret Andre for their time writing and presenting these proposals. We are pleased to be honored on April 12 as recipients of an Arlington Cultural Council (ACC) Grant for \$750 that will help finance an educational art project that will occur at the end of June. We are hoping to have complete funding for this project and one in September by the end of April from an additional grant from the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund (NEGEF). Another interesting project proposal we have submitted seeks money from the New England Fund for the Arts (NEFA). We hope Park visitors and Minuteman Trail users will create art in the Park while others video the activity. Their podcasts of interviews that day and around Town will document people's experiences in the Spy Pond area. We'll keep you posted regarding how you can get involved in these exciting activities. Hope to see you in the Park soon!

As always this time of year, we will soon be sending out our annual solicitation for your membership. Your dues and donations help support everything we do. We ask that you give serious consideration to being part of our efforts by paying FSPP membership dues and giving your time to get involved in one of the many projects that will be happening to keep Spy Pond Park beautiful. Thank you, as always, for your interest in our worthy endeavors.

Sincerely,



Karen L. Grossman
President
Friends of Spy Pond Park

Friends of Spy Pond Park Educational Workshop, Parade and Festival

June 19 & 26, 2010

This project consists of enjoyable art workshops and activities to educate children and their parents about environmental systems in and around Spy Pond.

Parade of the animals:

The FSPP has hired environmental artist, Pam Shanley, to conduct a headdress and puppet-making workshop for ages 5-12 at the Arlington Center for the Arts on June 19, the week before the Festival. She will lead the children, relatives, and friends in a Parade of the Animals through the Park during the Festival on June 26. Contact Pam Shanley to register in advance for the workshop to be held on June 19 1-3 p.m. pam@acarts.org.

Puzzles and scavenger hunts:

The prizes will all be equipment or books that enable people to engage with nature: plastic binoculars, magnifying glasses, bug-catching kits, pond-life activity books and guide-books. Children will not only find and identify, but also uproot invasive plants harmful to the local flora and fauna. Children who participate (and the adults who help them) will learn concepts of balanced ecosystems and how invasive plants harm them.

Nature crafts:

Children will make bark boats, leaf masks and other craft projects using waste materials found in the Park. FSPP will lead these activities and the ones above and is seeking volunteers to help on June 26. Contact betsy@classmatters.org.

Spy Pond Park is an important resource used regularly by thousands from Arlington, MA and surrounding communities. We hope that you will be able to join in these fun activities. This project will enhance the preservation, enhancement, and enjoyment of Spy Pond Park and Spy Pond as natural and community resources. You can find out more about our organization and indicate your interest in getting involved at our website: friendsofspypondpark.org. We thank the ACC for making these worthwhile activities possible, arlingtonculturalcouncil.wordpress.com.



This program is supported in part by a grant from the Arlington Cultural Council, a local agency that is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

Improv Theatre in the Park

by Anne Ellinger

This Spring in Spy Pond Park don't be surprised if a friendly person taps your shoulder and, introducing his two friends, says, "We're part of a local theater group. Do you have three minutes where we could hear about your day, and then play your story back for you?"

If you say, "Sure!" you are in for a treat! First, you might be asked more specific questions, such as, "What are two feelings you have about Spy Pond?" or "Have you had any challenges or surprises this weekend?" Then sit back and watch as the two or three actors turn your story into a 30-second piece of instant theater, using movement, music, and dialogue. At the end, they will always check back with you. "Anything more you want to add?" "Did that capture some of what you're feeling?"

You've just experienced Playback Theatre, a form of improvised drama that is practiced in over 50 countries around the world. Boston is one of the few cities in the U.S. lucky enough to have its own Playback troupe, called True Story Theater. Over the past nine years, True Story has performed for over a hundred community groups in the Boston area -- for teen leaders, cancer survivors, philanthropists, immigrants, ex-prisoners, hospice volunteers, and more, including Arlington town groups working on diversity.

Five of True Story's performers live right on Linwood St. next to Spy Pond! Do you know of other creative treasures housed within minutes of Spy Pond Park? Contact Friends of Spy Pond Park's editor, Eric Berger at berkshire2@juno.com, so we can write about them!

True Story Theater will be offering public shows on June 5 and Sept 11 at the Arlington Center yoga studio on Mass Ave. See www.TrueStoryTheater.org for more information.

Spy Pond Bird Walk

Join us Sunday May 9 at 8 a.m. for a bird walk at Spy Pond. Bring binoculars and a field guide, too, if you have one. Meet at the parking lot at the foot of Pond Lane near the playground. We will look for migrants passing through, and signs of bird breeding activity, as spring will be in full swing. Amateur birders welcome. Led by John Sharp, Arlington resident and amateur birder 8:00 to 10:00 a.m., rain date Sunday May 16, john.d.sharp@verizon.net.

“Just Say Yes”

by Doris Birmingham and Gail McCormick
Co-chairs of Park Beautification

The FSPP work season is soon upon us, and we are extending an ardent plea to everyone who loves the Spy Pond area to support our efforts. Spy Pond Park is a uniquely beautiful green space in the heart of Arlington, heavily used and therefore something of a magnet for trash. Furthermore, it contains a daunting number of planting beds that are perversely hospitable to invasive plants and thus require vigorous weeding and pruning all summer. Once or twice a month, therefore, we send out e-mails and make phone calls asking people to help with cleanup, weeding, pruning, and occasionally, planting. Sometimes we have a sizeable crew, but often it is discouragingly small. Last summer, in fact, the weeds got so far ahead of our work crews that we found it necessary to hire outside help.

We are a small organization with limited funds; therefore we must make every effort to maintain the Park exclusively with volunteer help. The list of workdays for 2010 is below. Mark your calendar now and come as often as possible. Here's a suggestion: choose at least one of those dates, circle it in bright red ink, and promise yourself that you will work on that day, come what may! Remember, too, that while workdays are scheduled for three hours it is not mandatory to work for three hours. Come by for an hour or even half an hour. You'd be surprised how much noxious false indigo you can chop down in a half-hour! Or how about a family excursion to the Park? We are sponsoring two Fun Days this season, which correspond with workdays. Mom and Dad could do a bit of work in the planting beds while the kids enjoy playing games that teach them about nature and the environment. Furthermore, teenagers in your family can earn community service credits by helping out.

For those whose backs, knees or hips protest against too much stooping and pulling, other volunteer options await you. You can sit at the outreach table on workdays to answer questions, recruit new members, and sell tee shirts. Betsy Leondar-Wright (betsy@classmatters.org) and her committee always need extra help on Fun Days. Greg Watt (gregwatt1@yahoo.com), this year's Town Day chairman, will gratefully accept volunteers to staff our Town Day booth in September.

Volunteering for FSPP benefits not only the Park but you as well. It's fun, it's a chance to make new friends, and it's good, healthy exercise. In short, there are many reasons to “just say yes” when you are asked to volunteer. We look forward to working with you this season.

Work Days for 2010

Meet at our table near the playground to sign in and get your work assignment. We have tools, but it is a good idea to bring your own work gloves and a set of small pruning shears if you have them.

Sat., April 10, 1-4 p.m. (rain date Sun., April 11, 1-4 p.m.)

Sat., May 1, 1-4 p.m. (rain date Sun., May 2, 1-4 p.m.)

Sat., May 15, 1-4 p.m. (rain date Sun., May 16, 1-4 p.m.)

Sat., June 26, 2-5 p.m. (rain date Sun., June 27, 2-5 p.m.)*

Sat., July 10, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. (rain date Sun., July 11, 1-4 p.m.)

Sat., Aug. 21, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. (rain date Sun., Aug.22, 1-4 p.m.)

Sat., Sept. 11, 1-4 p.m. (rain date Sun., Sept. 12, 1-4 p.m.)**

Sat., Oct. 16, 1-4 p.m. (rain date Sun., Oct. 17, 1-4 p.m.)

*A children's art festival will be held in the Park on this date featuring a parade with musical instruments, giant puppets, and headdresses for children, parents and friends starting from the Arlington Center for the Arts at 1 p.m., followed by art and other fun activities for children in the Park beginning at 2 p.m.

**A fun/activity day will be held in the Park during work hours on this date.

It is very helpful if you can respond to our e-mails and phone calls with a “yes” or a “no.” It enables us to better plan the work and also to contact you if we have to declare a rain day. Doris: 781-641-2392; e-mail dabirming@aol.com. Gail: 781-646-0614; e-mail gtmccormick@verizon.net.



PHOTO BY DORIS BIRMINGHAM

(Early) Spring by Spy Pond

by Doris Birmingham

Growing up in Kansas, I remember once dancing around the kitchen table on March 21, chanting, "Spring is here! Spring is here!" And I remember my mother smiling rather sardonically and saying, "O-o-oh, no! There's still plenty of winter left!" It is true March in Kansas can be fickle, but as the month progressed, the signs of spring seemed more obvious than they do in New England. My grandmother, for instance, faithfully planted potatoes on St. Patrick's Day, and by late March it was not unusual to harvest lettuce and radishes or to see asparagus heads peaking above the ground. So my mother's words were probably echoing in my ear when I protested to our editor about the March 27 deadline for this article. "But Eric, there won't be any spring to write about before March 27!" I cried. "Don't worry, you can do it," he responded.

I realized Eric had just handed me an exercise in 'keeping my eyes open,' so I resolved to keep a small journal during my March walks in the Park, chronicling whatever signs of spring I could find. On March 1, therefore, I put on my warm winter clothes, grabbed my camera and notebook, and optimistically went out into the cold, grey day.

March 1...Feeble sun, blustery wind, temperature in the low 40's.



PHOTO BY DORIS BIRMINGHAM

The ice has receded about 40 feet from the shore and functioned as a safe harbor for a large flock of shivering gulls. Very few people are out. The willow twigs show a bit of yellow, and an invisible robin warbles happily. This ebullient friend's greeting offers the most salient spring sign: "Isn't it a beautiful day!"

March 3...Light snow, 31 degrees.

The path and playground are deserted, although several folks gaze at the Pond while having lunch in their cars. Despite the chill, the ice has further receded, and the gulls huddle on its

shrinking plate. Can I consider winter's generous deposit of trash along the shore a sign of spring? Soon a couple of geese swim up begging for a handout, while three more self-sufficient mallards forage in the icy water for their own "daily bread." I learn today from a fellow Spy Pond watcher that the swans had returned a few days earlier; but on this raw day, they hide somewhere in snug shelter.

March 6-8...Clear, breezy, temperatures in the upper 40's and low 50's.



PHOTO BY DORIS BIRMINGHAM

On this glorious weekend the Park throngs with people. The playground is packed; the path is full of strollers and bikers; and on the benches and lawns sit readers, dreamers, and lovers cuddling. A few yellow and violet crocuses bloom under the still dormant lilac bushes near Linwood Circle, and a little patch of daffodils at the back of the playground shows some buds.

March 10...clear, temperature in the 50's.

The ice is gone! The gulls swim instead of walking in the center of the Pond, and the willow branches beam bright charreuse.

March 16...clear, 61 degrees.

A day or so after the 'Deluge of 2010!' The beaches and planting beds are inundated! The boulders normally resting on dry land on Linwood Beach have become giants' stepping-stones, and the trees in the planting beds wade in several feet of water. The ducks enjoy a spring snooze among the brown remains of last year's asters. I look up at the trees. Many bud, and, yes, those are willow catkins!



PHOTO BY DORIS BIRMINGHAM

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March 20...clear, 70 degrees!



The first official day of spring, and what a day! The Park “jumps” with happy people of all ages; the floodwaters have receded slightly, but the lawn near Linwood still squishes. The season’s first kayakers have just anchored their boats. A ribbon of purple crocuses decorating Pond Lane near the viaduct now blooms in all its glory because the DPW (Bless them!) has picked up the trash and raked out the leaves which only a day before cluttered their beds.

March 27...clear, crisp, temperature in the upper 30’s.

That perfect first spring day has been followed by a spell of cold, damp weather, yet the arrival of spring is relentless and ever changing. Now the birch trees display their hanging pink catkins, and, not to be outdone, the maples show off red-violet “baby” leaves, and drooping willow and forsythias sprout their bright yellow blooms. The crocuses are almost gone, with the daffodils slowly taking their place. The asters in the planting beds push up bits of green; alas, the weeds cannot be far behind!



I learned from Eric’s assignment to be more aware of nature’s subtle processes. Just as importantly, I learned to be more optimistic about spring. The signs of spring lived everywhere in Spy Pond Park. My mother was right that winter lingers in March, but in the end, Spring Rules!

Spy Pond Art

by Betsy Leondar-Wright

Does any small body of water inspire more art than Spy Pond?

Stroll around Town Day booths or the annual Heart of the Arts festival and you’ll see many lovely images of the Pond. A few examples:

1. Oil painter Adrienne Landry is nationally known, so she has spread gorgeous Spy Pond views around the U.S.
2. Photographers Nancy White, Anne Black, and Fred Moses have each exhibited and sold many beautiful photos of Spy Pond Park in all seasons.
3. Eva Balazs not only wrote the wonderful book *Spy Pond Stories* (available at the Book Rack and Robbins Library), but she illustrated it too. When she turned 80, Eva learned to watercolor, and recently she painted some lovely Spy Pond landscapes.

Friends of Spy Pond Park activities have often incorporated visual arts:

1. About ten years ago Eva Balazs sponsored a contest for the best painting of Spy Pond, and the winner was a FSPP member DP Powell’s son, Jamie Powell for his fanciful watercolor map.
2. The Park fence is decorated with colorful signs drawn by Hardy School students.
3. One of FSPP’s first festivals in the Park included a parade of children wearing masks and carrying puppets they had made under the supervision of environmental education artist Maya Apfelbaum.

And more FSPP arts will be coming. This summer’s festival will include a parade of children wearing headdresses and carrying giant puppets, representing the animals, flora and fauna found in and around Spy Pond, created in a workshop led by Pam Shanley from the Arlington Center for the Arts. Nedret Andre has applied for a grant to do an Arlington Creates project on May 1 involving giant animal sculptures in the Park and a collaboratively created web collage with video interviews of Park users and people around Town relating their impressions of and experiences with Spy Pond and Spy Pond Park.

Now, a new generation of artists is coming up. The picture on the back of this newsletter was created by high-school student, Quentin Stipp. Two of Quentin’s passions are art and Spy Pond, and this year he has begun to combine them, with creative results.

**Friends of Spy Pond Park
next meeting
at
Karen Grossman's
Sunday, May 9, 2010
at 7:00 p.m.
32 Hamilton Road #402**

RSVP (optional) to 781-646-5990
email fspp@friendsofspypondpark.org

Park on Linwood Street off Mass. Ave. or on Lakehill off
Lake St. at the far end of the complex.

To join Friends of Spy Pond Park...

Send your annual dues (\$15 individual, \$25 household, \$5 low-income) to:
FSPP, P.O. Box 1051
Arlington, MA 02474-0021

For more information, call a Friends officer.

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For newsletter contributions, contact berkshire2@juno.com
General comments can be sent to fspp@friendsofspypondpark.org

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