

Friends of Spy Pond Park Newsletter

Fall 2011

HERONS! and other summer wildlife highlights

by Betsy Leondar-Wright

The summer of 2011 was the best Spy Pond bird-watching time in all my 26 years living here. I've never before seen three species of heron in one summer.



PHOTO BY PINAL MANIAR

The night heron

The night heron, green herons and great blue heron each have their own distinct personalities.

The cagiest is the night heron, who favors the shore near the Boys and Girls Club. He spends all day camouflaged under a willow or another bushy tree, standing motionless on a branch. If a human comes too close, he quickly darts into another spot where he's even better hidden. The only way to see him in action is to paddle out around dusk, when he starts flying around to hunt.

The night heron is worth the extra effort needed to spot him, because besides his beautiful white and gray coloring, red eyes and yellow legs, he has a fancy ribbon from the crown of his head down his back. Compared with the night heron who lived in the willows across from Spy Pond Condos in the '00s, our current night heron is shorter and stockier, built like a linebacker. (Perhaps that's why I'm imagining him to be male; in fact both genders have identical coloring, so there's no way to be sure.)

The green herons are much more sociable. They live as a pair on Elizabeth Island, and are usually seen together. Compared with most herons (actually, compared with most wild birds of any kind), they are not very skittish about humans nearby. They don't fly away until a boat or walker comes very near, so I've gotten to see a close-up view of them.

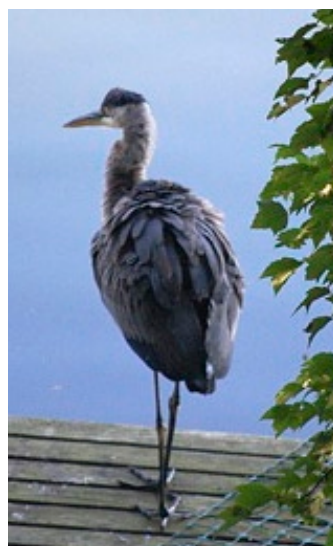


PHOTO BY PINAL MANIAR

The great blue heron



PHOTO BY KAREN L. CROSSMAN

Marshall McCloskey, Jason & Erin Fligg, and Andrew Fischer after the successful resurrection of the FSPP bikepath kiosk

Kiosk Resurrection!

Andrew Fischer recently repaired our Linwood Street/bike path kiosk that fell during a wild storm more than a year ago. This wonderful community service project took Andrew seven hours to complete and install securely. Thanks to Andrew, Marshall McCloskey and Jason and Erin Fligg who helped him put it up, the FSPP can post our information once again for passersby. Go down and take a look at the great place for you to leave your notices on the opposite side, too. It's been 15 years since Andrew originally built it for us and we hope it'll last another 15!

Adopt a Spot

by Anne Ellinger

This weekend, I cleaned up about 20 (no joke!) beer cans, bottles, and cigarette butts near the staircase between the bike path and the Spy Pond playground. I think of those steps as my special spot, because several times a week I take my iPod and dance on the stair landing. And every time I dance, I clean it up a bit.

Do you have a special spot – some place in Spy Pond Park you visit regularly and take care of? If so, want to email me at anne.ellinger@gmail.com to let me know where? Maybe I can make an "adopt a spot" map for the Friends of Spy Pond Park website, and over time every bit of the park will have a special friend.

(Continued on page 6)

Yoga in Spy Pond Park

by Jennifer Anderson

At Black Crow Yoga, we're about three things: yoga, music, and community. We offer free community classes each month for community building and outreach. One of our yoga teachers, Becky Small, had the idea to take these monthly events outside for the summer, and we were excited to work with Arlington Recreation to plan outdoor yoga classes at Spy Pond Park. These classes were great fun and truly represented the community coming together to practice - all ages and all levels of experience, even folks who just happened to be biking or walking by stopped and joined in on the fun. Here's Becky's story:

"I grew up on the North Shore and have been a resident of Arlington for over 4 years. When I first started teaching yoga, I had the opportunity to teach a class on the beach in Marblehead. It was such an amazing experience being outside, hearing the waves and the wind as we practiced. I have spent many afternoons picnicking or lying in the sun at Spy Pond Park and have wanted to teach an outdoor class there for years. Thanks to Black Crow Yoga's monthly community classes, I finally had a chance to teach students at Spy Pond Park. It was so inspiring to look out over a sea of yoga mats and enthusiastic students and to lead them through their yoga practice. There is something so special about practicing yoga outside in the elements."

To learn more about Black Crow Yoga and our monthly free community classes, please visit blackcrowyoga.com.

Theater at Spy Pond Field: Picnic and Pleasure

by Sally Hempstead



PHOTO BY LINDA SHOEMAKER

David Atkins and Kate Miller at a crucial moment for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth

Sunny summer afternoons are meant to be spent watching Shakespeare and eating alfresco in Spy Pond Field; Sunday, July 10, was perfect for doing just that. An enthusiastic audience of approximately 200 people gathered on the hillside to enjoy picnic dinners as well as fine acting by a talented Arlington Children's Theater teen cast led by David Atkins as the tormented Macbeth and Kate Miller as his ambitious and ruthless wife. Sponsored by the Arlington Center for the Arts (ACA), the Arlington Children's Theater (ACT), the Friends of Menotomy Rocks Park, the Friends of Robbins Farm Park (FORFP), and the Friends of Spy Pond Park (FSPP), this performance of "Macbeth" was supported in part by a grant from the Arlington Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency. Just as Shakespeare's plays were staged outdoors, the ACT rose to the challenge using only four microphones and limited, but effective, scenery, props and changing area. You can read more about David's experience on his ACA

PHOTO BY JENNIFER ANDERSON



Becky Small, yoga instructor from Black Crow Yoga, led two classes in Spy Pond Park this summer.

blog: <http://arlingtonarts.wordpress.com/2011/07/18/macbeth-from-theatre-to-field-2/>. Some members of the audience later remarked that the shady slope at Spy Pond Field was an ideal spot for watching a play, especially one written by Shakespeare.

For those who did not bring a picnic, the FSPP and the ACA sold beverages donated by the FORFP and homemade baked goods some of which were generously supplied by Maura Albert, Beth Cohen, Ellen Cohen, Helen Krikorian, Erin McCoy, Kathy McNeil, Charlotte and Marina Milan, and Nancy White. The ACA also gratefully accepted donations that, together with the bake sale, amounted to over \$700. FSPP members Karen Grossman, Sally Hempstead, Lally Stowell and Gail McCormick sat under our canopy on the side hill where visitors were able to learn more about the FSPP, become members, sign-up for the newsletter and purchase t-shirts. Not only did we sign up a new member and sell five t-shirts, but we also benefited from some free advertising—one young girl immediately donned her new FSPP t-shirt, wearing it around as a dress. All and all, the afternoon was a cultural delight and with the help of our new Friends, Erin and Jason Fligg, we folded our canopy and headed home.

Twenty-five Years of Friendship by Spy Pond

by Anne Ellinger and Betsy Leondar-Wright

On Labor Day weekend, the two of us invited friends and family for an afternoon by Spy Pond to celebrate the 50th anniversary of our friendship. (We made friends in kindergarten, when we were five years old.) We realized that Spy Pond itself has played a treasured role in our lives together, ever since we moved here in 1985. We celebrated our 25th friendship anniversary on these same shores.

The Friends of Spy Pond Park has been one of our biggest shared involvements. Anne was one of the first presidents of Friends of Spy Pond Park, and Betsy enjoyed the post after her for several terms. Back when we were trying to convince the town to fund the park renovations, we used to perform together by the shore in a play about caring for Spy Pond. “Critter” and “Slime” and “Terry Townfolk” and a giant blue puppet called the “Spirit of Spy Pond” were among our characters. Together, we organized the big festival to celebrate the park’s opening after renovations.

We’ve both seen hundreds of summer sunsets by the shore, and together paddled canoes around Elizabeth Island. We’ve weeded and planted bulbs side-by-side at many Work Days. We’ve called each other up on mid-winter afternoons saying, “Hey, the ice is perfect! Wanna skate?” Mutual love of the pond and park has woven our lives together.

We know there are other long friendships centered around Spy Pond. For example, when FSPP members DP Powell and Eva Balazs are asked how long they’ve been friends, they start

reminiscing about how Eva taught DP’s kids to swim in the pond in the 1950s, as described in Eva’s book *Spy Pond Stories*.

Do you have a friendship you’d like to celebrate — whether or not connected to Spy Pond? Google “Celebrating Long Friendships” to find our website. If you’d like to post a few paragraphs or photos about your own friendship(s), email them to Betsy@ClassMatters.org and we’ll add them to the site.

President’s Letter

Dear Friends,

We want to catch you up on what’s been happening in Spy Pond Park (SPP) in this newsletter. We’ve had a very busy summer with maintenance and cleanups thanks to the many volunteers who have stepped up to meet the tasks. Park visitors tell me they appreciate the vast beauty of the park and pond and are forever grateful to the workers. We’ll distribute this newsletter at our Town Day booth, September 17. Hopefully, you’ll look for us, drop by and say “hello”. The timing of this issue means that you’ll have to wait for our report about Fun Day, September 10th. So, look for coverage of that event and Town Day in our winter newsletter to remind us of these warmer days. For now, I hope you’ll enjoy the great articles and photos in this Fall 2011 newsletter.

There are many ways we strive to reach out to people in Arlington and others in the community of SPP visitors. We’ll have children’s activities at the Town Day booth; it’s always a fun time. We’ve replenished our stock of t-shirts and will have all sizes there, on September 10th, and at our last Work Day on October 15th. Wearing a t-shirt is a great way to show support for what we do and to spread the word about the Friends of Spy Pond Park (FSPP) to others. Providing another way for us to advertise our organization in Arlington, acmitv has offered us the opportunity to record a PSA at the station. So watch for it on the local cable channel. The more we convince people to join our efforts, the more effective we can be. Please “Like” us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/friendsofspypondpark, too.

I hope to see you in the park soon.

Sincerely,



Karen L. Grossman

President

Friends of Spy Pond Park

Nature's Diversity and Abundance: Self-Sustenance in Trying Times and Beyond

by Uta-Marion Low

In 1971 my husband and I moved from Europe to Arlington with its glorious Spy Pond. He became a graduate student at MIT in Systems Dynamics and I became a student at Harvard in Foreign Languages and Literature. We were both influenced by Rachel Carson's book, *The Silent Spring*. We had to live on a fairly tight budget and had numerous friends who were into nature and self-sustenance. They had self-sustaining gardens, spun their own wool, weaved, and did all sorts of country chores, owning domestic animals for wool, eggs, milk and meat. Some of them moved into the hinterlands of Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine and managed small self-sustaining farms while continuing to teach.

Such self-sustenance reminded me of the war years in Germany with my mother and me as refugees in Austria, Bavaria and later Duesseldorf, near Cologne, on the Rhine. At the end of the "Anschluss" we were transported in an American Army truck from Austria to Bavaria. Those were difficult times: no food, no clothes. My mother made us dresses out of potato sacks and dyed them. She mended our shoes.

We had to walk three hours back and forth to the next bigger town to get some rationed supplies like an ill-fitting pair of shoes or a little meat using depression stamps. We had fruit crates with dyed potato sack curtains as furniture, an army cot to sleep on, and no toys. Thank goodness we could escape to nature's diversity and abundance, and both Austria and Bavaria were beautiful, with breathtaking natural surroundings.

I remember my mother and grandmother taking me out to nature regularly, into the meadows and woods to gather all sorts of edible plants, mushrooms, berries, other fruits, nuts, and medicinal herbs for teas. We picked a variety of mushrooms. My mother knew many different types and how to distinguish edible from the poisonous ones, and she taught me to identify them. (My grandmother had problems identifying them and tasted them first after cooking, waiting to see if they would make her sick, before she had her family eat them. My family used to laugh about that.) My mother knew how to make rosehip jam and tea. Here and there wormy apples, plums, and pears which had fallen off the farmers' trees sustained our diet.

We collected juniper berries and bay leaves in the wild. The delicate blossoms of camomille, growing abundantly amongst bachelor buttons and bright red poppies along the edge of sunlit cornfields, were dried to prepare a delicate herbal tea and were also used as a panacea for all sorts of compresses and against many infections. I loved the aroma of linden tree blossoms, their trees adorning the center-plazas of country villages and inner

courtyards of private estates. The town elders gathered under the protective umbrella of the linden tree at noon and at night to converse and exchange news and ideas.

All these things I remembered when I moved to Arlington on the shores of Spy Pond. One feels so close to nature living alongside Spy Pond. Blackberries and raspberries grew alongside Spy Pond, and elderberries, too, on the far side of the Pond along the edge of Route 2. The pulp, which I pressed through cheese-cloth, made a delicious jelly and wine.

There were mushrooms growing on Walden Pond, the beautiful brown-colored *Boletus*, delicious fresh with steak and stews, and, when dried, with sauces and soups. Meadow mushrooms grew in Vermont, and in meadows in the surrounding areas, pushing their bright luminous white heads through the grass. I gathered many pearl mushrooms on the Habitat property in Belmont. They are delicious in omelettes with scrambled eggs sautéed in butter, and also with chicken breast.

There were mushrooms in Menotomy Rocks Park, also. For dark sauces and dark meat, we gathered Chanterelles, one of the most gourmet mushrooms, not to be confused with its inedible alien. I bought a couple of helpful field guides to distinguish the different species since it was long ago that I collected them with my mother. I dried mushrooms on paper and put them in glass jars for preservation.

I got carried away making rosehip jam in a painstaking procedure and gave some of it away to neighbors and friends. Plenty of Concord grapes and blackberries grew in the Concord Meadows, one of my favorite nature reserves. I collected beach plums in the dunes of Cape Cod, which I transformed into jam. I also picked dandelion-greens and prepared them with cured nonfat bacon.

I don't go out to collect edibles these days, only picking a handful of berries here and there. Instead I grow herbs on my balcony together with a rainbow of different kinds of red, pale purple, soft pink, and white tones of geraniums. I pick wild flowers to decorate my apartment: daisies, lupines, black-eyed Susans, and lilies, along with ferns, different types of grasses, colorful berries in the fall, and dried varieties of grasses for the winter. In spring I pick a few forsythia branches, watching them slowly bud inside the house, and on Easter I hang some colorful blown out eggs amongst the profusion of delightfully sunny yellow blossoms. I also make small terrariums from gathered ferns, mosses, other greens, and bark of trees or beautiful stones.

I am grateful for nature's beauty, abundance, and diversity which sustained us physically and spiritually during and after the war, and I am grateful to be living next to Spy Pond and its Park, close to nature and its beauties. May the diversity, abundance, and beauty of nature be preserved forever!

Save the Butterflies!

by Elizabeth Karpati

What's that title doing in an article about invasive plants? Read on.



Black swallowwort flowers

Black swallowwort is a relative newcomer to Arlington. A few plants appeared at the opposite end of Spy Pond, along Route 2, several years ago; by now it grows there in patches despite efforts to pull it. In Spy Pond Park the first strays reared their ugly heads last year. Now is the time to go after them, before they get established.

Black swallowwort is a vine that should be fairly easy to recognize. It has thin, flexible stems and paired, pointed leaves shaped rather like those of a heart-leaved philodendron, but smaller. They are smooth and a little darker green than the leaves of most plants. It has dime-sized, brownish-purple flowers with five pointed petals in June and spindle-shaped pods in late summer. If you have never seen a spindle, look for pods resembling baby okra.

You may not find black swallowwort in the park now because yours truly keeps yanking them out on sight, but you can practice your identification skills in two places nearby. At the far

end of the condo parking lot, between the parking spaces and the bikepath, black swallowwort is tangled among other ground-covering vegetation. And just past the near end, on the far side of the bike path opposite the Little League field, there is another tangle under the lowest branches of the last trees before you reach Linwood Street.

In Cambridge the Friends of Fresh Pond Reservation have started a “pod patrol” to destroy those okra-like pods before they can spread their seeds. FSPP members should imitate their good example. Black swallowwort may pop up anywhere and likes to climb fences and hedges. Pick any pods you see anywhere, bag them, and put them in the trash to be incinerated. If you can get the whole plant, so much the better. If the ground is soft, you may be able to pull it out with the roots, which are short, straight, and white – another good identifying mark. And try to remember where the plant was and check that spot again next year, as it will re-grow from any roots left behind. A determined and persistent effort may prevent this pest from becoming as ubiquitous as oriental bittersweet or garlic mustard.

Now what about those butterflies? Monarchs lay their eggs on milkweed. Black swallowwort, though rather different-looking, is related to milkweed and has enough family resemblance (perhaps an odor too subtle to be recognizable by humans?) to fool Mama Monarch into thinking that this is a good food plant for her offspring. But when her eggs hatch and the larvae start to feed, they are poisoned rather than nourished by the swallowwort. Monarchs are in enough trouble because of habitat loss on their wintering grounds in Mexico; the last thing they need is a plant that makes war on their babies in the summer. So, please save the monarchs and make war on black swallowwort!



Black swallowwort pods

Heron!

(continued from page 1)

Despite their color-specific name, green herons' most striking feature is their reddish neck, a kind of rusty color that gleams in the sunshine, as does their greenish back. In shadow they appear almost black. They are as short as the night heron, but much more slender - similar in shape to a little blue heron.

Less often seen but most thrilling is the great blue heron. She stands on her long, long legs in the water, motionless, gazing down to watch for fish. She has taken up residence on the Pleasant Street side of the pond, and when startled usually flies to a new spot on that shore, only rarely flying across to Kelwyn Manor or the island.

It's not only her height and unusual gray-blue color but her dignified stillness that makes her so majestic. The curve in her neck and delicate feathers give her a unique loveliness. Unlike other birds' rapid flap-flap-flap, she flies smoothly, seemingly without effort, her long legs stuck straight out behind her. It's like watching a slow-motion movie.

Besides herons, and the usual cormorants, mallards, swans and red-wing blackbirds (not to mention sparrows and crows and a fortunately smaller number of Canada geese), I also spotted an osprey hunting for fish near Kelwyn Manor, a woodpecker on the island, black-and-white ducks, a cedar waxwing, and several yellow birds that probably included an oriole and a goldfinch.



PHOTO BY PINAL MANIAR

Nest and egg

spotting a hidden bird with her sharp young eyes that both adults missed.

The zeal for nature-spotting has spread among local 7- to 10-year-old kids this summer, and among their mothers too. Sneaking up on turtles has been a favorite activity of my neighbors Sanjana and Akshara and my twin nieces Alaya and Sadia. Five of us saw a turtle lay its eggs in the dirt one day. And we all followed the fate of the huge egg on the abandoned nest at the tip of the island, which lay there for weeks before disappearing.

It's going to be a sad day when it's too cold to take the canoe out with my neighbors anymore. Fall is great, but nothing can beat summer by a pond.

Shakespeare got it right!

By Eric Berger

Like summer fading all too soon, the poet, Wordsworth, laments beauty's brevity, but seeks sustenance in what is:

"What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory of the flower:
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;"

Thomas Wolfe agrees: you can't go home again.

Shakespeare has a different take, and I side with him:

"But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of the fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wandr'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,"

Memory returns summer's fairness; its beauty is forever in one's sight.



PHOTO BY PINAL MANIAR

Betsy and Aadya paddling

We've worked out a perfect routine for spotting birds on the pond. I sit in the back of the canoe and supply the brute labor; Pinal sits in the front with her excellent camera, spots birds and tells me where to paddle to sneak up on them; and Aadya sits in the middle of the canoe and keeps up a running commentary, equally enthusiastic about daddy-longlegs in the boat, tiny fish, leaves, water-skaters and birds, occasionally

One reason I spotted so many elusive birds is the sharp eyes of two wonderful birding buddies who moved near the park last year, Pinal Maniar and her 5-year-old daughter Aadya. Pinal is practically running a one-student Nature Study School, with Spy Pond Park as the primary classroom. Aadya is the only pre-K kid I ever met who can identify multiple kinds of aphids and fungi!

Many Kids and Quite a Few Carp at Spy Pond Park

by Jerome Moisand

Last year, I took quite a few kids fishing for carp from Spy Pond Park the end of June, and this worked extremely well, as was documented in a previous issue of this newsletter. So, I was very eager to have a repeat of this event in 2011, and maybe start making it an ongoing tradition every year.

I pre-baited a few openings with a full bucket of field corn and some horse pellets every morning of the week before the event. Things were looking good as I could notice carp jumping every now and then. Also, two curious passers-by told me that carp were spawning in this area a few weeks ago. Earlier in the year, I met Mike O'Connell and Mike Keiselbach, two fishermen from Arlington curious about the weird guy who fishes for carp in their hometown. I recruited them to help for the kids' event, and we scheduled a little practice session on Friday evening. It took a little while for the bites to start, then things started to heat up, and we landed five carp in no time. Nice.



Young Julia couldn't believe she caught such a big fish!

One last thing, we caught multiple mid-teens, including several 14 pounders and a 16 pounder. The average weight was pretty good, probably around 11 or 12 pounds. And all those fish looked extremely healthy, very strong fighters, muscular fish with big frames. All the work that was done to clean Spy Pond from algae and chemical

products is clearly paying off, and those fish look so much better than the skimpy ones I was catching 5 or 6 years ago. I think we can really expect to find a good number of 20 pounders in there within a couple of years from now, and I'm sure a few of those are already roaming around.

To read the full story and see all the pictures of our event, check my Web site at <http://www.carpiopedia.com>.

Editor's note: Jerome and his students safely returned all carp they caught to freedom back in Spy Pond. Please note that the MA Department of Public Health has issued a fish consumption advisory against consuming fish caught in Spy Pond. For more information, contact MDPH Bureau of Environmental Health at 617-624-5757. Please advise people you see fishing in the pond that fish they catch should not be eaten.

Support FSPP's Mission

Part of the mission of FSPP is to help maintain SPP. Have you noticed how the StaLok® installation at Linwood Circle is holding up? We have asked Stabilizer Solutions to put more material on the surface since it has settled once the weather warmed up. We still hope to mount a major fundraising campaign to help cover the cost of re-grading that would help impede path erosion throughout the park and for repairing the handicapped ramp. And, we want to enlist the Town's support, too. Please notify Karen Grossman if you, or someone you know, have an interest in spearheading these efforts: fspp@friendsofspypondpark.org. It is so important that we make accommodations that ensure durable, long-term access for all.

We have fewer households who have made contributions to the FSPP this year to date. We hope that you will send your dues and donations online through Network for Good or to our PO Box, if you have not done so already. Please fill out the membership form on our website so we can make sure we have correct data in our database, too. Your financial support means so much in helping us pursue our mission.



Samantha, an experienced angler, landed a superb 14 pounder

The day after, things didn't start very well, with a sudden rain outpouring that left us very much soaked and next to no kids coming to fish with us. Luckily, the weather quickly improved, kids started to show up, and carp started to bite. We actually had a fantastic afternoon of fishing, ending the day with many kids landing a big carp, very few fish lost, and a terrific 16 pounder to close the day! We kept going the next morning, with much less luck though, and only landed one more.

Overall, there is no question that the event went very well. We had a total of 13 kids landing a big carp during those two days. If I could get 10 runs every day I fish for carp, I would be really happy! All the kids and parents were remarkably patient and gracious, the mentors helped a lot and had a blast themselves. I think we're all set to do it again in 2012!

Friends of Spy Pond Park next meeting at Karen Grossman's Sunday, October 2, 2011 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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PHOTO BY CHARLOTTE MILAN

Amira Mintz-Morgenthau, Carrie Watkins, Rayleigh Lei, and Lauren Clapp, members of the Climate Summer team bicycling through New England participated in Climate Change Week in Arlington by learning about invasive plants and helping to weed them out in Spy Pond Park.



PHOTO BY KAREN L. GROSSMAN

Brian Dietz and middle school students from the High Rock Church youth group in Arlington provided invaluable help with park maintenance on 8/20/11.

Remaining 2011 Work Day

Saturday, October 15, 1-4 p.m.

(rain date Sunday, October 16, 1-4 p.m.)