

Friends of Spy Pond Park Newsletter

Winter 2015

Volunteering in Spy Pond Park

By Demi Tsitsopoulos, GOYA Youth Group President

PHOTO BY JAMES MCSWIGGEN



Betty Athanasoulas and volunteers from the St. Athanasius Great Greek Orthodox Church, members of Arlington's Greek Orthodox Youth of America (GOYA), gather with James McSwiggen's dog, Daniel

In September, Betty Athanasoulas approached our Saint Athanasius GOYA Youth Group and asked us to help the Friends of Spy Pond Park with the park cleanup on October 18th. We had been thinking of ways to give back to the Arlington community and decided this would be a wonderful opportunity to volunteer our time and help beautify the park!

We assembled a crew of workers from within our GOYA, and came to the park thinking that it looked great even before we started the cleanup. We were given gardening tools, bags and a cart, and followed Miss Betty, our team leader, towards the Linwood Circle end of the park.

We trimmed hedges that were obscuring the view of Spy Pond. This task was no walk in the park; we are all perfectionists, so we took it upon ourselves to try to trim the entire expanse of bushes in a perfectly uniform line. While most of us worked on trimming the hedges, a number of the group also worked on making the shrubbery look more uniform and bagged the clippings left behind.

(Continued on page 2)

Thanks to All Volunteers

By Lally Stowell, Beautification Committee

Spy Pond Park continues to be a unique and welcoming place, thanks to the hard work of all who volunteered this past spring, summer and fall during our monthly Saturday Work Days. Some of you came on your own, some with family and friends, and some with a group from your school, church, business or non-profit organization. The park would not be the special place it is without all of your support and dedication. We hope you will return next year and we encourage other individuals and organizations to become involved.

We would like to give special thanks to the groups who participated this year; several have worked with us many times over the years: People Making a Difference®, BU students and alumnae who participated during the BU Global Service Month; members of the Arlington/Belmont Crew Team, students from Matignon High School, the GOYA Youth Group from St. Athanasius the Great Greek Orthodox Church, students and instructors from the Zhen Ren Chuan Martial Arts Center, and volunteers through Singles Volunteers, Volunteermatch.com and GiveBackTime.com. Our thanks, also, goes out to all of you who collect trash on your own as you walk through the park or on the way clear storm drains of leaves and snow.

We hope you will continue to visit Spy Pond Park over the winter months and return next spring to help us nurture new plants and flowers, remove invasive growth, weed the cobblestone path, meet other volunteers and welcome visitors.



PHOTO BY KAREN L. GROSSMAN

Matignon High School Key Club President, Jasmine Leal, and other members who participated in the October Work Day rest after cleaning up, pruning, weeding and raking

A Fresh Eye From Our Annual Meeting Speaker

By Betsy Leondar-Wright

Carol R. Johnson didn't stop thinking about Spy Pond Park when her firm's redesign work was done in 2005. In fact, though officially retired, she returns over and over to check up on the park and take photos.

At the annual meeting of the Friends of Spy Pond Park in December, we benefitted from Carol's ongoing attentiveness. She showed us "Before" and "After" photos of the spiffy new park in 2005 and the park today. "When we designed the rock outcroppings", she commented, "we had no idea that so many people would use and enjoy them." We saw how the park has deteriorated, despite FSPP's and the Town's efforts at maintenance. For example, initially there were two stone steps down in the zigzag stone wall going to the beach (the wheelchair ramp) by the playground, but now there are three since the bottom paving stone has become dislodged and exposed by erosion. 'Goat paths' carved by human feet have destroyed plants and allowed more erosion, dirt running down from the bare spots into the vulnerable wetlands environment at the water's edge.

Carol's photos made me realize how much I don't notice slow, gradual changes, and how many problems I've been ignoring.

The good news is that there are simple fixes to many of the problems Carol pointed out. Eroded sand can be shoveled back up onto the wheelchair ramp. New plantings can fill in the bare spots and discourage walkers too close to the water. Stepping-stones on goat paths can encourage people not to walk on planted areas. Some fixes require a design plan and Town approval of a budget, but FSPP volunteers may be able to enact others in the short term. We bought some new plantings last year and could do it again in 2015.

At the Annual Meeting Karen Grossman presented Carol with FSPP's Good Citizen citation and two of our T-shirts, in gratitude for all she has done for the park.



PHOTO BY BETSY LEONDAR-WRIGHT

Carol R. Johnson, landscape designer, and Karen L. Grossman, FSPP President, after Good Citizen Citation and t-shirt presentations

Citation

For the many dedicated hours on your own time

Traveling to and from Spy Pond Park

Spring into fall, through wind and drizzle,

Walking the paths through the park,

Viewing the walkway and plants in the planting beds,

Kayaking to evaluate shoreline erosion,

Using your vast knowledge to update design plans, and

Being a faithful fan of our beautiful park,

the Friends of Spy Pond Park

is proud to present this

Good Citizen Award

to

Carol R. Johnson

December 7, 2014

Volunteering in SPP

(Continued from page 1)

As a group, we learned about the park itself, the varieties of plants and shrubs in our section, and more about the Friends of Spy Pond Park, which gave us more incentive to work hard and help as best we could. The cleanup was hard work, but very rewarding. Thankfully, Miss Betty had provided us with plenty of delicious snacks and drinks to keep up our energy!

When we finished our tasks, the view of the pond had increased tenfold. We were shocked that the park could look even more beautiful, after only a few hours of yard work. By the time we finished, we were both tired and appreciative: tired from all the work we had done, and appreciative of the continued beautification efforts by the Friends of Spy Pond Park. We are proud to have contributed to such a worthwhile endeavor, which benefits the entire Arlington community. We look forward to future opportunities to help the Friends of Spy Pond Park!

President's Letter

Dear Friends,

The FSPP has had quite a successful year! We obtained a design, got approval for planting bed #6 along the shoreline and saw an increase in the number of groups working in the park. The volunteers controlled invasive plant growth, trimmed dead tree branches, groomed the path, cobblestones, and tot lot and removed litter. As I walked through the park after the final cleanup, I concluded we had done a very good job with park maintenance this year.

Activities in the park were wonderful on Fun Day! We continue to be thrilled with the creation and installation of the beautiful granite swan sculpture, "Penny", by Kevin Duffy at Linwood Circle. Next May the Public Art Commission will sponsor a temporary public art installation for "Elements: Art Rocks Spy Pond". To find out how you can submit an entry by the February 15 deadline go to: <http://us5.campaign-archive1.com/?u=30de7636ecef9e5c7857ae381&id=19bf0cd39d&e=4c45475a41>. The FSPP is also coordinating efforts with the Spy Pond Committee of Vision 2020 to have our 2015 Family Fun Day in conjunction with another "Spy Pond Splash"! We will have more about this in our Spring Newsletter. Spy Pond Park will be an exciting place to be in the spring!

Until then, for those of you walking on Linwood Street or Pond Lane on the way to or from the park, please look for the storm drains along the curbs on those streets and make sure they stay exposed. If water can go down those drains, erosion in the park can be minimized. You can all help out in that respect. The Town of Arlington has partnered with us to maintain the park, thankfully. We received mulch, got new playground equipment, a smoother path, recyclables removed, and plans for bench replacement. We are happy the DPW has agreed to put up a jersey barrier to protect our shed from snowplow damage this winter. With your assistance, too, we can continue to work together to keep our beloved park looking great!

Thanks to Carol R. Johnson for her recent Annual Meeting presentation with short and long-term ideas for SPP. I hope in 2015 we will enact more positive changes in our park. Related to this, I provided written comments concerning Spy Pond and Spy Pond Park that were not included in the draft of Arlington's Master Plan that has been developed. All comments have been compiled and may be viewed online, along with the draft plan, in the Master Plan section at arlingtonma.gov/planning. Please bring any additional thoughts you'd like to add to the plan to the community hearing on January 12, 2015 at 7 PM at the Arlington Town Hall, hear from others and give your input, too.

Thanks again for your support and I wish you a happy, healthy, and fulfilling New Year!

Sincerely,



Karen L. Grossman
President
Friends of Spy Pond Park

Former FSPP Newsletter Editor Deceased

By Karen L. Grossman, FSPP President

John J. Gearin, of Arlington, formerly of Boston, died Friday, Aug. 22, 2014 on his 90th birthday. He was a graduate of B.C. High and Boston College, a retired teacher, Boston Public Schools and Past President of Boston Teachers Union.

I got to know John Gearin through the Friends of Spy Pond Park (FSPP). He was a dedicated advocate for renovation of Spy Pond Park from the beginnings of the Friends organization, attending meetings and overseeing the installation of the parks designs through the 2006 opening. He was the recipient of the FSPP Good Citizen Award in January of 2010 for "tirelessly soliciting content, editing and laying out articles and photographs, and publishing 3-4 FSPP newsletters annually." As a resident living near the park, John was a beloved member of our organization who really made a difference. On behalf of the FSPP, I offer sincere condolences to his family and friends.

We recognize those who have made contributions to the FSPP in 2014. This money has enabled us to pursue the mission of supporting the preservation, enhancement, and enjoyment of Spy Pond Park and Spy Pond as natural and community resources. We extend our sincere thanks for the generosity and commitment of these 152 individuals and households.

2014 Donations

\$500

Harvard Pilgrim Community Grant
via Laura Smith

\$100-\$200

Lt. Eric Hall Anderson
Anonymous
Cristin and Alex Bagnall
Lionel Fergus & Gerda Brown
Dell Make A Difference via Scott
Smith
Lisa Fredman
Dr. Norman Garber
Helena and Bertrand I. Halperin
Betsy & Gail Leondar-Wright
James McSwiggen
Martha & Dick Pereli
Mathias Rosenfeld
Kari Schlicht
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Daniel Calano & Kate Thompson
Marcelo & Ellen Torres

\$50-\$99

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Mimi & Kevin Barbera
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\$25-\$49

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Karen Edwards & Tom Roby
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Eric Kurtz

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Lydia Mongiard
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Ellen V. Robertson
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Petre Rontea
Richard Rubinstein
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Mithilesh Sharma
Nathaniel Stevens
Barbara Wexler
Jane Whitmore

Report on Annual Goals

By Beverly Williams, Secretary

PHOTO BY MAZHAR QURAISHI



Elizabeth Karpati, Beautification Committee, is happy to clip the invasive plants, keeping their growth under control

Standing Goals:

We achieved all but increasing active membership and selling more t-shirts, perhaps due to weather that brought fewer park visitors during Work Day outreach.

Goals for 2014:

We met all goals except having more craft events (an outdated goal), and advocating for the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) to collect water quality data. The latter was discussed and noted that MyRWA only wants to collect long-term data and is not particularly concerned about the pond. We will not pursue these goals next year.

Goals for 2015:

1. Seek funding for design and shoreline project.
2. Put loam and more plants at the water's edge in bed #6.
3. Do more planting in upper section of beds where feasible. (Town may do work on shoreline in the future.)
4. Re-install benches with the Town's cooperation.
5. Control erosion in beds and grass, replanting some if possible.
6. Create short, written job descriptions for all board positions.
7. Assess number and placement of trash barrels in the park.

8. Install portable restroom April - October and make permanent signs to alert park users.
9. Continue with maintenance in planting beds.
10. Promote "Elements: Art Rocks Spy Pond" and the "Spy Pond Splash" event.

Mergansers in Spy Pond

By Bill Eykamp

Mergansers are diving, toothed ducks, and their principal diet is fish.

Mergansers are seasonally active in Spy Pond, in fall and spring. The fall season has them here longer, as they seem to stick around until ice almost completely covers the pond.

In early December, there was the usual large flock of common and hooded mergansers floating in the south basin. I estimate their total number at around 100. They tend to dive synchronously, perhaps as a defense against the seagulls lurking to steal their catch. They are also quite willing to steal from each other.

Memorable this year was one afternoon when I watched for about 30 minutes when their success rate was extraordinarily high. They would come up with a fish every second or third dive. I often thought, "those fish are too big to get down their throat!" but with a few flips to get the fish pointing head first, they always got them down. There were about 50 in the group I watched, and they had obviously come upon a rich shoal of fish.

I have an ideal viewpoint to observe them, and a good pair of binoculars located in a warm room. On rare occasions, when conditions are just right, and clear ice has just about made it to shore, we can see them diving and swimming under the ice in pursuit of fish. It is a marvelous sight—always wondering if they will make it back to open water. Since they can stay under for up to two minutes, they always do.



PHOTO BY TONY HISCETT

Common merganser duck

Friends of Spy Pond Park next meeting at Karen Grossman's Sunday, February 8, 2015 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.

President: Karen L. Grossman	(781) 646-5990
General Vice-President: Open	
Treasurer: Marshall McCloskey	(617) 548-9877
Recording Secretary: Beverly Williams	(781) 316-1917
VPs for Communication & Outreach:	
Sally Hempstead	(860) 944-1370
Jamie Ciocco	jamcio@gmail.com
Chair for Publicity: Elaine Crowder	(781) 648-1927
Videographer: Mithilesh Sharma	(781) 777-2157
Beautification Committee:	
Betty Athanasoulas	(781) 646-1343
Gail McCormick	(781) 646-0614
Richard Norcross	(781) 641-2404
Lally Stowell	(781) 777-2759
Beverly Williams	(781) 316-1917
Elizabeth Karpati	(781) 643-4172
Webmaster: Fred Moses	fred@fmoses.com
Co-Chairs for Outreach/Park Events:	
Erin Freeburger & Jason Fligg	(781) 724-7638
Fundraising Chair: Jason Fligg	(781) 724-7638

Newsletter contributions and general comments can be sent to
fspp@friendsofspypondpark.org

Friends of Spy Pond Park • <http://www.friendsofspypondpark.org> • P.O. Box 1051 • Arlington, MA 02474-0021

FSPP Gets Non-profit Mailing Status

By Marshall McCloskey, Treasurer

Friends of Spy Pond Park will save a considerable amount of money in the coming years on mailings to our database after obtaining our nonprofit mailing status in early September. We took our fall solicitation mailing to the bulk mailing facility at 200 Smith St. in Waltham on November 7. Total cost of postage was \$137.97 vs. what would have previously been \$492.94 for 1005 pieces of mail @ \$0.49 apiece, saving \$354.97!

Our savings weren't quite this rosy, as the permit costs \$220 per year, and (as we found out later) we need to pay an extra \$40 per mailing for address validation.

Postage costs for a single mailing at non-profit rates are:

860 addresses in 024 zip code @ 0.128/piece =	\$110.08
+ 146 mixed zip codes @ 0.191/piece =	\$ 27.89
	<hr/>
	\$137.97

...as opposed to 1005 x \$0.49/piece = \$492.45, a savings of \$354.48 per mailing. Taking into account the costs for the permit and the address validation, the total savings is \$733.44 each year, based on 3 mailings per permit. (We can actually do as many mailings as we might like during the year the permit is valid.)

So, aside from the extra effort to take the final mailing to the Waltham Bulk mail facility, and having to pay the difference in postage from the \$0.05 stamps at an Arlington PO (Waltham doesn't accept money), along with the learning experience, we think we can say it's certainly been worth it to go through getting a nonprofit mailing permit, even for an organization of our size. By the way, while we're talking about doing mailings, we can always use extra help to stuff the envelopes and get them ready to mail, so please contact us at fspp@friendsofspypondpark.org if you are available to join us during the day, and we'll be in touch.



Lally Stowell, Beautification Committee, wearing water boots, trims bushes from Spy Pond at Linwood Circle

PHOTO BY BETTY ATHANASOULAS