Friends of Spy Pond Park Newsletter

Fall/Winter 2026

Rained Out, But We Raised Fun!

By Betsy Leondar-Wright, Chair, Park Activities

In the future, when we look back at Fun Day 2026, what will we say about it?

Will we note that it was only the first rain postponement in a quarter century of annual festivals? Or that as a result, the turnout was only about half the usual crowd? That one band couldn't make it, so we only had one hour of music? That we had to move it to the Linwood end of the park and so had fewer built-in facilities? That so many volunteers couldn't make the rain date? That we had fewer activities than usual, including canceling the beloved boat rides to the island?

No, let's remember another special milestone instead: how many young people led activities! The face painters included two 9-year-olds, Charlie and Isley, who decorated many children's faces, and one high school student, Alana Came, an exceptional

PHOTO BY FRED MOSES



Isley patiently waited for the next client's face to paint

face artist. And Nora Chan, a three-time-Fun-Day high school volunteer who is an ArtsArlington Commissioner, created an activity with magnetic fishing poles picking up brightly colored paper herrings; she was joined by three of her friends, Lily Arnold, Bailey Marden and Ariella Johnson. As some of us long-time volunteers are aging, it seems that a new generation of Fun Day volunteers is stepping up!

In addition to the herring-fishing, we had another first-time activity, origami butterfly-making, led by Takako Sugihara. Kids were running around holding their butterflies and their fish, as well as their fairy houses, their prizes and any bark boats they decided not to launch in the pond.

PHOTO BY FRED MOSES



Diana Maggini volunteered to help those making bark boats from the varied natural materials FSPP collected around

Lynn Horgan expanded her role from simply facilitating bark boats last year to become an all-purpose Fun Day co-coordinator with me, curating and cleaning the prizes, sharing her tarps, tables and cartons, and gathering flowers and berries to decorate the boats. She and Begabati Lennihan spent most of an afternoon cutting big sheets of birch bark into smaller seaworthy rectangles. Lynn and Diana Maggini creatively adapted the bark boat activity to work at a less-conducive place in the park.

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PHOTO BY FRED MOSES



Alana painted the picture that Cario selected to enhance his countenance

Fun Day 2026

(continued from page 1)

The hard-working pack-up, set-up and clean-up crew was ultra-efficient this year. I rented a U-Haul that fit all the furniture and supplies, and it was so much easier that I want to rent one every year. Christopher Wilson, Diana Maggini, and Byron Yi, each strong and clever, worked from beginning to end, starting Saturday evening and finishing late Sunday afternoon. And Deborah Henson-Conant pitched in as we emptied the park of hundreds of objects, and she brought home the A-frame signs.

PHOTO BY FRED MOSES



Wow! The busy children chose awesome decorations, creating wonderful fairy houses to take home

Leah Cirker-Stark outdid herself by bringing even huger amounts of colorful paper and varied decorations so that fairy houses could be as creative as kids dreamed up. Little box donations throughout the year supplied her with hundreds of future fairy homes. Her always-mobbed table could keep up thanks to her mother, Rachel Stark, by Lally Stowell, and by second-time volunteer Cordelia McCarthy.



This child listened intently to the FSPP volunteer's explanation of fairy house construction

PHOTO BY FRED MOSES



Tori (mom) joined her children, Timothy and Eloise, on the ground tarp to play with this engaging toy

The Toddler Table was slower than usual (I guess our alternate time of day is nap time for some preschoolers), but Jenny Babon and Maggie Carey entertained little ones with toys, coloring and prizes. Some got out of their strollers to plop down on a ground tarp with animals to play with, push, or even ride on to their delight.

PHOTO BY FRED MOSES



Alessio and Salma loved making their bark boats

Jan Lonzaric and I stayed very busy at the puzzles and scavenger hunt table. It was thanks to Gail Leondar-Wright's year-round avocation of gathering used items and circulating them to good homes instead of landfills that we could give away more than 200 stuffed and plastic animals that live in and around Spy Pond to those completing puzzles and hunts. The leaf hunt was, surprisingly, just as popular as the hunt for facts about bunnies; about 50 families gathered leaves of four species of trees, and about 40 kids went home with stuffed bunnies.



PHOTO BY FRED MOSES

Betsy Leondar-Wright is happy to see the stuffed animals and other toys she accumulated all year go home with activity participants

For once we didn't have long lines waiting for face painting, not just because of the smaller turnout, but because of the abundance of painters: Annie Goldstone, Begabati Lennihan and Anne Ellinger, as well as the three young people.

CK Brass was a different brass band than we've had at past Fun Days, with two overlapping members from LBE Brass; their music was just as lively and spirited. Hopefully they will play again next year!

Stalwart leader Karen Grossman was solo at the FSPP info booth, where she sold 9 t-shirts and collected names for the mailing list. Her also-stalwart husband Fred Moses took photos of the festivities with Jenny Babon tagging along with Fred to collect data for the photo captions. Some of the photos you will see in the next FSPP newsletter and in the 2026 photo gallery to be posted next year on the FSPP website.

The publicity team did double duty due to the rain postponement. Jenny Babon designed the beautiful poster, and then re-did it for the new date and curtailed activities. Lally Stowell and I ran both original-date and new-date posters around the neighborhood. Similarly, Julie McBride created Facebook and website art twice.

We faced a set-back with the monsoon, and we coped with it well. Doesn't that show that we're a resilient community of people who care about the pond, the park, kids and each other?

Editor's note: Kudos to Betsy Leondar-Wright for her flexibility and steadfast determination in making Spy Pond Park Fun Day happen this year, for the joy of all participants who have been looking forward to this event. The children and families will remember the activities and our wonderful park for the rest of their lives. Thanks, Betsy!

President's Letter

Friends,

As Fall comes into full color here, we are happy to announce that we've had a wonderful year so far grooming Spy Pond Park, the playground and the planting beds. We appreciate the hard work of the volunteers under the guidance of the Stewardship Team (see back page). Christopher Wilson has done a great job filling his new position as Lead Steward, learning the details of his job in full swing. The Stewards are pleased that many volunteers have stepped forth to take care of our beautiful park time and time again to be trained in Spy Pond Park maintenance and work more indepaendently.

There have been a couple of articles in YourArlington, our local means of learning about the news here that I think you'll appreciate:

- For local anglers, the quiet waters are the lure

https://yourarlington.com/2026/10/arlington-fishing-100626/

Trapper Markelz, a local fisherman, spends his free time outdoors doing "catch-and-release" fishing. Photos by Samantha Mandala

and

- Grazing goats clear invasive plants for new 'secret garden' park project

https://yourarlington.com/2026/10/grazing-goats-pond-lane-101926/

YourArlington.com is a great resource for local news.

I hope you'll come to our potluck supper 5PM and annual meeting 6 PM at the Mystic River Watershed's office on January 24. Our speaker will be Laura Kiesel, Save Arlington Wildlife, who will discuss local birds she has photographed in the area, discuss their habits and behaviors. We welcome anyone who wishes to attend our meeting to hear our long-term plans and offer your comments.

Sincerely,

Karen L. Grossman

Karen L. Grossman
President
Friends of Spy Pond Park

For local anglers, Arlington's quiet waters are the lure

October 9, 2026 | By Alexandra Ruane



PHOTO BY SAMANTHA MANDALA

Arlington's ponds, lakes and rivers may be an overlooked fishing destination, but local anglers say they offer a quiet escape close to home.

Along with fish and wildlife, though, they encounter discarded fishing line and trash — reminders of the responsibility that comes with enjoying the sport.

Fishing can be about much more than catching a fish. It can be a way to slow down, connect with nature and spend time with others.

Recreational fishing draws new fans

Remy Shannon, a Belmont resident, said fishing is about finding the right balance between relaxing and staying engaged. "It's like a puzzle," Shannon said. "It's at the intersection of gambling and skill."

Shannon started fishing on Labor Day weekend last year after a camping trip in Vermont. She bought a $30 rod and reel and caught a fallfish. Since then, she has caught more than 500 fish. Much of that fishing has happened in Arlington. Shannon regularly goes to the Mystic River, Mystic Lakes and Arlington Reservoir.

While reeling in a bluegill at Menotomy Rocks Park, Shannon said she is often surprised by how unfamiliar people are with Arlington as a fishing destination. "One of the most common questions that I get asked by other people that aren't fishing is, 'You catch fish in here?'" she said.

Trapper Markelz, who grew up in Alaska and moved to Arlington in 2008, also discovered the convenience of fishing close to home in spots like Spy Pond and the Arlington Reservoir.

For him, the sport offers a chance to connect with nature and his surroundings. "You end up paying a lot of attention to everything," Markelz said. "To every little touch, to every little feeling, to where you cast."

Markelz views the sport as a game between him and the fish, where he tries to figure out what will entice them to bite. As he explained this approach, it quickly proved fruitful when he hooked a white perch in the Mystic River. "It's an opportunity to hope over and over again," he said.

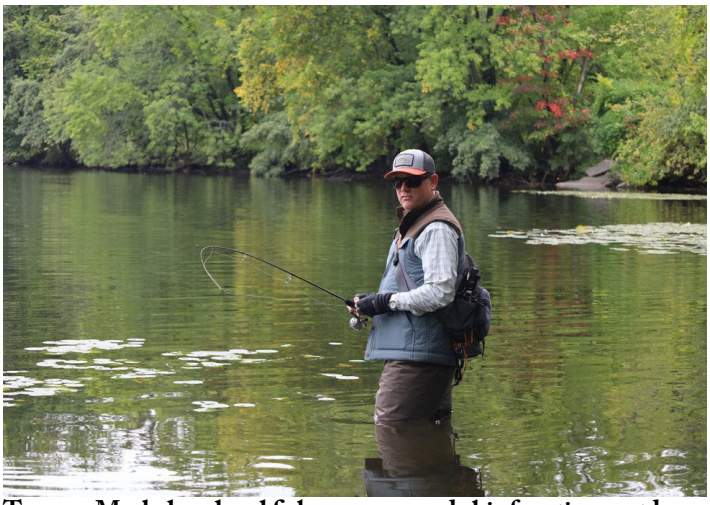


PHOTO BY SAMANTHA MANDALA

Trapper Markelz, a local fisherman, spends his free time outdoors doing "catch-and-release" fishing

Longtime angler weighs in

Rodney Zukowski has spent more than 60 years fishing. His father introduced him to the sport when he was 5, and he now owns Arlington Bait & Tackle, which he has operated for more than 17 years.

He sees the sport as a way for people to step away from their daily routines. "Just being outdoors, being with family and friends, clearing your head from the day of work," he said.

Cleaning up lines, lures and pollution

But enjoying local fishing spots also comes with responsibility.

Shannon said she is impressed by how often she sees people pick up after themselves in local communities, but she has noticed pollution left behind by other anglers. "The number one thing is fishing lines and lures," Shannon said. (The issue has prompted local wildlife advocates to call for bans on fishing.)

This is an issue Markelz and Zukowski are familiar with. "People will cut their line and just let it hang there, and it's like, 'You are ruining it for all of us,'" Markelz said.



PHOTO BY SAMANTHA MANDALA

A container for recycling used or tangled fishing line to keep it from harming wildlife

The problem is not limited to fishing lines. Zukowski has seen worm containers, beverage containers and other trash left behind.

Zukowski said he understands that Menotomy Rocks Park may soon close for fishing because of the pollution.

"People are casting and not being aware of where they are,"

Zukowski said. "Line is getting stuck in the trees and birds have gotten stuck in it, a couple have died."

Markelz said these issues surrounding local fishing spots are missed opportunities to bring anglers into the discussion.

While some people made poor decisions, he said, the response should be a call to action rather than an immediate shutdown of a fishing spot.

"Regulation is required and accepted, but I think what people want is to be involved in that conversation," Markelz said.

In addition, new anglers should educate themselves so they are ready for any scenario. "You have to be prepared," Markelz said. "Like any hobby, if you're not, you'll do more damage than you need to."

Zukowski echoed this sentiment, noting that anglers need a license to fish in freshwater or saltwater in Massachusetts. "You definitely have to do your research," he said. "Read the fishing regulations. A lot of people don't."

But learning the rules does not have to be a barrier to getting started. In fact, Shannon and Markelz use an app called Fishbrain to connect with other anglers and exchange advice.

"I've met quite a few local people through that," Shannon said. "There's actually a couple people from Arlington that I go fishing with occasionally now."

As more people discover Arlington's fishing spots, the anglers say learning how to enjoy them responsibly is part of participating in the sport itself. "People just have to be more aware, more responsible, of what they're doing," Zukowski said.

This story, published on Oct. 6, 2026, is part of a partnership between YourArlington and the Boston University Department of Journalism's Newsroom program. Story is by Alexandra Ruane, and all photos are by Samantha Mandala.

Stewardship Report

By Christopher Wilson, Lead Steward

Recent Work Days have continued with targeted removal of non-natives from most beds. Aggressive work has been done especially in bed 8, which is now well-positioned for new shrub plantings in the spring. Other species removed include Japanese honeysuckle, common buckthorn, Oriental bittersweet, goutweed, black swallow-wort, garlic mustard, phragmites, multiflora rose, and narrow-leaved everlasting pea.

The new shrubs planted this spring in multiple beds are receiving regular waterings and all are looking healthy and showing robust growth. The watering schedule was completed at the end of July. The coordination of the volunteers was very successful and we are likely to utilize this system again next year.



PHOTO BY ADRIENNE LANDRY

Jason is holding purple loosestrife (Lythrum salicaria) that he pulled up by the roots in bed #8

The new swamp oak on the south side of the playground is healthy and happy. I hung two buckets from the support stakes and both stewards and passersby have been keeping the gatorbags filled, which will improve the chances of the tree's survival greatly. The park is strangely lacking in oaks, so as this grows it will provide needed habitat for birds and insects, as well as provide an excellent shade canopy for a sunny area of the park that currently is just lawn.

Volunteers and I installed some short temporary fencing on the raised bed on the north side of the boat ramp, and a sign was placed there. So far this seems to be discouraging feet trampling the soil and, hopefully, will discourage the lawn service from cutting it again (will need to work with the DPW to change the contract in 2027 so that zone is left alone. Another area in bed 8 that sees trampling was cordoned off with short fencing and a sign. There is still a path to the shoreline for visitors, but this small area is also being targeted for restoration

Around 8 volunteers participated in Work Days, due to withholding large calls for volunteers. This is a good number for the stewards to train volunteers concerning species removal and to work in small teams.

At a Conservation Commission in October I presented FSPP's request for funding 1/2 the cost of new plants and plugs along the Spy Pond shoreline just above and into the coir fascine to curb erosion. The ConComm approved money to continue the maintenance of the Erosion Control Project with the understanding that we will pay the other half and FSPP volunteers will do the planting and watering beginning in the spring next year. There will be a signup sent just before planting.

Karen presented information about the need to replace the temporary fencing to the water with sturdier fencing before planting, hopefully. The ConComm recommended we apply for a Community Preservation Grant, so I filled out the preliminary form and submitted it the next day, the deadline. We hope we can get approval for CPA funding, also. We'll discuss our long term plans at the Annual Meeting on January 24 and hope to see you there. Notices will be sent In November.

Friends of Spy Pond Park next meeting:

January 24, 2027

5:00 p.m. Potluck dinner,
6:00 p.m. Speaker & Annual Meeting
Location TBA

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

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

PHOTO BY FRED MOSES



Guided coloring makes the fish table a family affair

PHOTO BY FRED MOSES



Her mother stood by as Isla constructed a cover for her fairy house

PHOTO BY FRED MOSES



At the toddler table, Isaac and Eloise colored in animals they would find at Spy Pond

PHOTO BY FRED MOSES



Bark boat building is fascinating!