



2019

Annual Report

Friends of Riverbend Park, Inc.

Riverbend Park

Riverbend Park is a natural resources park first established in 1975 along the Potomac River in Great Falls, Virginia. It encompasses over 400 acres of woodlands, trails, riverfront and wildlife in Fairfax County and is one of five natural resources parks within the county and the only one which is a riverfront park. The park is a great favorite of many in Fairfax County and beyond, and enjoys over 300,000 visitations per year. Riverbend Park is owned, operated and maintained by the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA), and is funded by both its own internally generated revenue and by funding from the Park Authority. The park at present has four full-time staff and a number of part-time naturalists and maintenance employees. John Callow serves as overall Riverbend Park Manager while Julie Gurnee is its Visitor Services Manager. Rita Peralta is Natural Resources Manager which includes maintenance operations, and Jordan Libera is Senior Interpreter and Programs Manager.

Friends of Riverbend Park, Inc.

The Friends of Riverbend Park, Inc. (FORB) is an independent, non-stock, non-profit corporation, established in the Commonwealth of Virginia on August 5, 1999, with the purpose of protecting, enhancing, and preserving the physical, cultural, and natural heritage of Riverbend Park by educating the public to the value of environmental protection generally and of the park's wildlife habitat specifically; providing volunteer services to the park; channeling donations of money, property, and materials to the park; providing citizen input to plans that may be proposed for the park; and performing any other activities or services necessary or convenient to carry out such purposes, to the extent permitted by Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The Friends of Riverbend Park maintains a Memorandum of Understanding with the Fairfax County Park Authority and channels its

contributions through the Fairfax County Park Foundation for the benefit of Riverbend Park.

Brief History of FORB

FORB was founded in 1999 by Catherine D. Mayes who also served as its first President up through 2005. Paul Anderson was President during 2006 and 2007, while Serena Wilson occupied that position from 2007 through 2012. Tim Hackman became President in 2013 and served through August 2016 when Hugh Morrow was elected and continues to serve up to the present.

FORB's Officers and Directors

During 2019, FORB's Board of Directors and Officers were as follows:

Hugh Morrow, Director and President
Eleanor Anderson, Director and Vice-President
Nancy Waugh, Director and Secretary
Kevin Dillon, Director and Treasurer
Jack Bowles, Director
Cynthia Fisher, Director
Karen Hershey, Director
John Hughes-Caley, Director
Kurt Laubinger, Director
Frank Zeng, Director
John Callow, Riverbend Park Manager, *ex-officio*

FORB-Supported Programs and Equipment at Riverbend Park

Over its twenty year history, FORB has supported many programs and provided funds for much equipment and supplies. A few of these include:

Interns for Riverbend's Summer Camps
Scholarships for Title I School Field Trips

Purchase of a New Bass Fishing Boat
Purchase of Ten Mad River Canoes
Supplemental Funding for Staff Continuing Education
Visitor Center Tabletop Displays
Nature and Science Books for Children's Library
Water Quality Measuring Equipment
Support for Eagle Scout Projects at Riverbend Park
Support for Educational Pavilion Dedication
Support for Riverbend Park Volunteers Luncheon
Support for Riverbend Park Staff Program Scheduling Software
Funding for Riverbend Park Native American Festival
Funding for Riverbend Park Bluebell Festival
Riverbend Park Telescope
Maintenance Tools and Equipment

A complete summary of the financial support provided to Riverbend Park by FORB from 2002 through 2019 is summarized in the chart on the following page. Over the past twenty years, the Friends of Riverbend Park has contributed more than a quarter of a million dollars for the benefit of the park and its programs and activities.

2019 Accomplishments of Friends of Riverbend Park

During the current year, FORB has carried out a number of initiatives to raise funds in support of the park and has utilized those funds to accomplish the following objectives:

- Donated \$14,400 to support the Riverbend Park college-level summer staff that helps run the park's summer camps and programs which provides a substantial portion of its income.

- Provided \$3,000 in scholarship funding for field trips to Riverbend Park for Title I school children, and obtained an additional \$1,000 from the Fairfax County Park Authority to support more of these outings for disadvantaged students.
- Supported Riverbend Park's Annual Bluebell Festival by paying the \$700 expense of the shuttle bus for festival attendees.
- Supported Riverbend Park's Virginia Native American Festival by underwriting the \$2,400 expense of the Rappahannock Indian Tribe Dancers.
- Participated in the design, dedication and opening ceremony of Riverbend Park's new Educational Classroom and Picnic Shelter, and provided \$250 for refreshments at the ceremony.
- Established a Facebook page for Friends of Riverbend Park to promote park events, FORB membership and public interest in the park. FORB's Facebook page received as many as 3,500 views in a four-week period.
- Conducted our Native Plant Sale in May which realized almost \$10,000 in sales and a net profit of \$6,000, 50% higher than in 2018.
- Celebrated the Twentieth Anniversary of the Friends of Riverbend Park at the Visitor Center which yielded \$1,000 in extra donations. The event also resulted in major articles in local newspapers, the *Sun Gazette* and the *Connection*, and an interview on local television station WDVM.
- Provided approximately \$1,000 to Riverbend Park to cover its costs for a Park Volunteer Luncheon and computer software for programs, activities and staff scheduling.
- Continued to work with the Fairfax County Park Authority towards construction of a dedicated maintenance facility for Riverbend Park. Construction of this facility is now expected in 2021.
- Sponsored an Eagle Scout Project at the park for \$595 to repair the steps leading from the Visitor Center to the Nature Center.

Friends of Riverbend Park's Income and Expenses

The Friends of Riverbend Park's financial results for the past four years are summarized in the table below.

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Income</u> | <u>Expenses</u> |
|-------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 2016 | \$31,105 | \$28,211 |
| 2017 | \$34,672 | \$30,778 |
| 2018 | \$35,567 | \$38,627 |
| 2019 | \$28,853 | \$34,160 |

FORB's annual income, on average, has been increasing slightly over the past four years due to increased memberships, donations, matching grants and foundation grants, but was significantly lower in 2019 than in 2018 because a major foundation grant and a major private donation which were received in 2018 were not received in 2019. Expenses have varied more widely depending on the specific programs and projects supported during the year. In general, FORB hopes to maintain a year-end bank balance sufficient to fund the following year's programs, to realize between \$25,000 and \$35,000 in income annually, and to hold expenses to a level consistent with maintaining the desired year-end bank balance.

FORB's specific sources of income may be broken down as follows:

| | <u>2018</u> | <u>2019</u> |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Membership Dues | \$4,600 | \$5,800 |
| Native Plant Sale | \$7,897 | \$9,204 |
| Donation Boxes | \$3,712 | \$4,899 |
| General Donations | \$10,792 | \$8,174 |
| Foundation Grants | \$5,000 | \$ 0 |

FORB's support for Riverbend Park comes roughly equally from five sources – net income from its native plant sale, donations, membership dues, foundation grants and its two donation boxes. In 2019, income from the Native Plant Sale in May, memberships and the donation boxes all increased. However, total income for the year fell below expectations because two major grants totaling \$10,000 in 2018 were not forthcoming in 2019.

FORB's expenses for 2019 as may be summarized as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------|
| Administrative | \$3,545 |
| Virginia Taxes and Fees | \$ 623 |
| FORB Anniversary Celebration | \$3,749 |
| Native Plant Sale | \$3,308 |
| Insurance | \$1,227 |
| Riverbend Park Support | \$20,709 |
| Eagle Scout Project Support | \$ 595 |
| Village of Great Falls Support | \$ 405 |

Administrative expenses include FORB's Post Office box fee, the Wild Apricot website, office supplies, and PayPal and Square transaction fees. Administrative fees in 2019 were higher than usual because FORB paid its Wild Apricot database fee (\$1,836) for July 2019 through June 2021 in 2019 to take advantage of a lower yearly rate. All other administrative costs were similar to previous years. Another one-time expense in 2019 was associated with FORB's Twentieth Anniversary Celebration on August 4, 2019. The event, however, did result in major publicity for the Friends of Riverbend Park and over \$1,000 in additional donations. Major articles on the event appeared in the local newspapers, the *Sun Gazette* and *Connection*, and FORB President, Hugh Morrow, was interviewed on local television station WDVM.

FORB Membership

The Friends of Riverbend Park has only recently begun to keep historical data on its membership. In the Wild Apricot database, there are two principal lists, one which includes all contacts whether they are Members, Native Plant Sale participants, event attendees or those who have expressed an interest in Riverbend Park. The second list is made up of the fully paid-up Members of FORB. In October 2016, there were about 150 entries on the Members list, and just under 250 names on the total contacts list. As of January 1, 2020, the total contacts list has grown over the past three years to 430 names while the number of dues-paying Members has increased to 239. These increases correspond roughly to a 20% growth in membership and contacts per year over the past three years. In 2019, 27 new Members joined FORB, but, at the same time, 15 existing Members did not renew their Membership during the year. Thus, while there is membership growth, there is ample room for its improvement.

Future Needs of Riverbend Park

The 2013 Master Plan for Riverbend Park calls for a number of eventual developments at Riverbend Park. FORB has long advocated the concept of moving the gatehouse on Jeffery Road much further down Potomac Hills Street to prevent traffic backups, facilitate traffic flow and provide additional parking wherever possible. This concept is already included in the Conceptual Development Plan of Riverbend's Master Plan, and is deemed necessary for Riverbend Park's major events such as the Virginia Native American Festival and the Bluebells-at-the-Bend Festival. At present, this item does not appear to be a priority for the 2020 Park Bond Issue.

In 2019, the Fairfax County Park Authority completed construction and dedication of its Outdoor Classroom and Picnic Shelter on Potomac Hills Street. FORB is pleased that we have learned that the formulation of plans for the design and construction of a dedicated maintenance facility for Riverbend Park right across the road from the Outdoor Classroom have been accelerated. Construction is now anticipated to occur in 2021, and all maintenance functions for the park, including restroom facilities, will then be centralized in one location.

Most importantly, however, FORB believes that the initial phases of planning and design for an Interpretive Center, located above the Potomac River floodplain, must move ahead. This project is part of the Conceptual Development Plan of the 2013 Riverbend Park Master Plan, but it will be a long and costly undertaking. Nonetheless, river flooding during the past few years has amply demonstrated that the present Visitor Center is in very real danger of eventually being swept away by flooding. Therefore, plans must be made to accommodate that eventuality, and to relocate much of the park's offices and functions to safer grounds. FORB is happy to note that funding for the initial design study for an Interpretive Center has been included in the FCPA's proposed items for the 2020 Park Bond Issue.

It is equally true that our population, the number of Riverbend Park's visitors, and the demands placed on the park and its staff will only increase in future years. FORB would advocate the development of a comprehensive plan for Riverbend Park that considers all these factors and determines how the park will be managed in the future, how it might become more self-sustaining, what part FORB might play in helping the park be more self-sustaining, and, most importantly, how Riverbend Park can be maintained as a natural resources refuge in the face of increasing visitors and demands.