

# NARROW RIVER NOTES

Narrow River Preservation Association: Preserving the Narrow River and the Watershed

Fall/Winter 2008

## NRPA 38th ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

On October 7th NRPA held their 38th Annual Meeting at URI's Coastal Institute in Narragansett. This year's meeting featured a new format that offered time for informal discussions between members of the community and Narrow River Watershed experts. Special guests were invited from federal agencies, municipalities, and local organizations to share information about their projects and activities on the River or in the Watershed. Brief summaries of the topics and materials presented are described below.

Diane Johnson, Narragansett's Assistant Town Engineer, provided an update on the Narrow River Storm-water Abatement project. The Town has officially signed for a combination of \$1.6 million in grants and loans from the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) and the Clean Water Finance Agency (RICWFA) and is in the process of completing final design plans for the installation and construction of Best Management Practices (BMP) in the Pettaquamscutt and Edgewater neighborhoods. The design incorporates a sand

filter, level spreader, vegetative filter strip, approximately 4,000 linear feet of disconnected catch basins, and storm-water infiltration systems in the roads and other available rights-of-way (ROW). Test pit information and survey data have been collected in the past few months and the design has been revised to accommodate utilities and ROW locations. Hired design consultants, Fuss & O'Neil, anticipate applying to CRMC and RIDEM for permits by the new year. Construction is hoped to begin in the spring. The Town has requested and received a letter of support for the implementation of this project.

Elizabeth Scott from the RIDEM Office of Water Resources participated in the meeting and highlighted the major investments that have been made over the years to implement storm-water best manage-



NRPA Board member Annette DeSilva (left) shows the new poster display to Kathy Kelleher from the Friends of Canonchet Farm. (photo by D. Smith)

ment plans and other water-quality improvement programs on the Narrow River. RIDEM continues to support the River by providing funds for Narragansett's storm-water abatement project.

Dr. Veronica Berounsky, NRPA Board member and a researcher at the URI Graduate School of Oceanography, presented a slide show on the 2007 overturn of the Narrow River. On October 12th, 2007, neighbors living on the north end of the Narrow River noticed a peculiar smell and a milky color to the water. "What's that smell?" they were asking. The northern basin of the river had overturned. The water at the bottom of the basin, which is naturally devoid of oxygen, was displaced

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Invited guests at the 38th NRPA Annual Meeting in October—from left) David Smith, Kathy Kelleher, and Chuck Lee, Friends of Canonchet Farm; Peggy O'Connor, Gilbert Stuart Birthplace & Museum; Diane Johnson, Narragansett Asst. Town Engineer; Elizabeth Scott, RIDEM Office of Water Resources; and Larry Oliver, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. (photo by A. DeSilva)

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# The President's Cove

Each year for the past 38 years the Narrow River Preservation has advocated for changes that will protect and preserve the Narrow River Watershed for all of the communities of life that reside within its confines. We held our annual meeting on October 7th, where, as President, my assignment was to summarize's NRPA's achievements over the previous year. This President's Cove, in essence, is derived from my presentation at the 2008 annual. Here is the NRPA's year in review—by the numbers.



- 38 The October 7th meeting was the 38th NRPA annual meeting.
- 37 It was my 37th.
- 13 The board of directors of NRPA numbers 13. Each board member has a part in steering the ship that comprises our Land, Water, and Education Programs.
- 14 The new board has 14 members steering.
- 60 60 volunteers pull the oars to make the programs happen.
- 40 The River Watch program has 40 oars, with volunteers at 10 sites monitoring water quality.
- 3 This was the 3rd year for the Narrow River Turnaround Swim.
- 21 In May we held the 21st Narrow River Road Race.
- 14 It was the 14th year that NRPA has provided college scholarships.
- 6239 NRPA's United Way number is 6239.
- 6277 NRPA's telephone number is 783-6277, where you could call to volunteer to help with one of our programs.
- 8 Our post office number in Saunterstown is 8, where you could mail a membership form or donation.
- 02874 is the Zip code for Saunterstown.
- 5 This year NRPA held its 5th Environmental Awareness Day at the Town Beach.
- 15 Every 15 years or so the River turns over. It did this year.
- 14 NRPA presented Science Fair awards for the 14th year.
- 22 Rob Leeson retired from the NRPA board after 22 years of service.
- 3 NRPA will create its 3rd endowment fund—the Robert Leeson, Jr./NRPA fund at the Rhode Island Foundation.
- 1 The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed the first comprehensive habitat restoration study of the Narrow River.
- 18 The 18th Friend of the River Award was presented to Robert Kenney.
- 3 NRPA published the 3rd edition of the Narrow River Handbook.
- 6500 NRPA mailed 6500 Narrow River Handbooks to residents and friends of the Watershed.
- 1 Our Board meetings are the 1st Tuesday of every month; all NRPA members are welcome to attend.
- 6 NRPA worked with regulators and contractors on 6 proposals for building or development in the Watershed.
- 11 is the number of storm-water management projects eventually planned along the River in Narragansett.
- 3 is the number completed so far.

Join our numbers by becoming a member, volunteering to help with our programs, joining the Board, making a donation to a program or endowment, or remembering us in your will to create an endowment in your own name. Get counted.

—Richard B. Grant  
President, NRPA

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA) works to preserve, protect, and restore the natural environment and the quality of life of all communities with the Narrow (Pettaquamscutt) River Estuary and Watershed.

[www.narrowriver.org](http://www.narrowriver.org)

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### Narrow River Notes

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## 6239

NRPA is part of the United Way Workplace Campaign. This is our donor option number.

If you plan to make a United Way donation, please consider designating a portion of your gift to NRPA.

# 38th ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

*(Continued from page 1)*

and rose to the surface where the hydrogen sulfide precipitated out and the lack of oxygen suffocated organisms that could not escape. Veronica enlisted the help of family, friends, and colleagues to study this unique phenomenon over the fall of 2007. How long would this last? There had been three other documented overturns—in 1957, 1971, and 1990—but information was scant. Retired teacher and new NRPA Board member Rosemary Smith had her first boat ride on Narrow River a few days after the overturn. She learned a lot about estuaries and overturns during seven weeks of weekly sampling trips. She created, with Veronica's help, a PowerPoint presentation that was shown at the NRPA Annual Meeting. "*What's That Smell?: Documenting the Overturn of the Narrow River in the Fall of 2007 and the Beginning of Its Recovery*" explains the overturn with maps, diagrams, and pictures of scientists and volunteers at work collecting data daily for seven weeks until ice formed on the Upper Pond. These data show how the overturn affected the waters of the Narrow River and the organisms that live there. By the end of the seven weeks, the data gave evidence that the ecosystem was recovering. (Note: This presentation is available for showing to community or school groups.)

Larry Oliver of the New England Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers shared information and answered questions about the status of their Narrow River Ecosystem Restoration Project. The Corps has been conducting a study that has evaluated



*NRPA Board member Veronica Berounsky (back to the camera) holds the close attention of the group as she explains the overturn of the Upper Pond that happened in October 2007. (photo by D. Smith)*

potential options for restoring water quality and habitats in the River. Over the years, the Narrow River has experienced degraded water quality that is contributing to aquatic habitat degradation. There have been losses to the salt marshes, eelgrass habitat, and shellfish habitats. Water quality can potentially be improved by reducing the nutrient input from the Watershed, reducing nutrient transfer from the sediments to the water, increasing nutrient uptake by vegetation and shellfish, and increasing flushing of nutrients from the estuary. As part of the study, some of the restoration alternatives considered included buffer zone plantings, sediment/nutrient BMPs, salt marsh restoration, dredging, and eelgrass planting. Larry brought along photos with overlays of the various restoration alternatives that are under consideration. The Army Corps of Engineers is finalizing their recommendations on which option(s) would be most beneficial for ecosystem restoration and the associated costs for implementation.

Representatives from organizations on the River were on hand to talk about their organization activities and plans. Margaret (Peggy) O'Connor, Executive Director, Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum, shared information about the Museum and

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## WRITERS WANTED

Help me to make *Narrow River Notes* your newsletter. Do you have a short poem with a river or environmental theme you'd like us to print? How about an article on local history, like the John Elder Dick pieces that we've re-printed? Have you taken a good photograph in the Watershed? Do you have a question about anything in the Watershed that one of our Board members might answer? Or do you just have an opinion you'd like to express? I promise to consider any and all submissions. We publish three issues per year—spring, summer, and fall/winter—with the respective deadlines at the beginning of March, July, and November. Send submissions or questions to me at [NRPA.Notes@verizon.net](mailto:NRPA.Notes@verizon.net).

*—Robert D. Kenney, editor*



*Peggy O'Connor from the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace talking with Sheldon Pratt. (photo by D. Smith)*

# 38th ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

*(Continued from page 3)*

displayed beautiful digital photos of the Museum and grounds. In April 2008 the Museum held a Spring Fair for the start of their 77th year of operation. The event featured corn grinding in the Hammond Gristmill; river herring migration up the fish ladder; spinning, weaving, and rug-hooking demonstrations; an art exhibit; and the opening of their nature trail. The Museum is open annually from April/early May to mid-October. For more information, visit their web site at [www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org/index.htm](http://www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org/index.htm).

Kathie Kelleher, Charles Lee, and David Smith represented the Friends of Canonchet Farm ([canonchet.org](http://canonchet.org); 401-783-3951), promoting the group's guided walks and other efforts to preserve Canonchet Farm, a unique public property at the southeastern corner of the Narrow River Watershed. The farm is an extensive woodland area owned by the Town of Narragansett; it is situated between Pettaquamscutt Cove and Narragansett Town Beach. A small portion of the farm, which was once the summer residence of R.I. Governor William Sprague, is the home of the South County Museum. The remainder of the property consists mostly of wooded areas with numerous trails. Lee and two other Friends trustees are part of the Town Council-appointed Canonchet Farm Master Plan Review Committee, which will soon recommend a new plan for managing and protecting Canonchet.

The Annual Meeting provided an opportunity for NRPA to unveil their new poster display that provides an overview of the NRPA organization and many activities within the watershed. NRPA plans to display the poster at



*Bob Kenney (left) accepting the 2008 "Friend of the River" award from NRPA President Richard Grant. (photo by V. Berounsky)*

events and educational forums throughout the year.

Annette DeSilva, volunteer coordinator of NRPA's River Watch Program, took the opportunity to thank the 2008 volunteer water-quality monitors.

A highlight of the meeting was the presentation of this year's W.E.R La-Farge Memorial "Friend of the River" Award. NRPA was pleased to present the award to Dr. Bob Kenney. Bob served as a member of the NRPA Board of Directors for ten years. While on the Board, Bob served in the position of the organization's Secretary. Bob has been the editor of our newsletter, *Narrow River Notes*, and has graciously agreed to con-

tinue as the editor. He has been involved with NRPA's many activities over the years. Bob will be missed as a Board member and we thank him for his dedicated service to the organization.

The meeting came to a close with the drawing of the winner's name in this year's annual kayak raffle. This year's winner was David Wrenn from North Kingstown. NRPA thanks the special guests who shared their time and information with our membership.

*—Annette DeSilva  
(with contributions from Diane Johnson, Veronica Berounsky, and David Smith)*

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## THANKS TO THE 2008 RIVER WATCH VOLUNTEERS!

NRPA extends a big thank-you to the 2008 Narrow River volunteer monitors. Twenty-nine people contributed their time and energy this year to collect water samples and make measurements. Their assistance and dedication is greatly appreciated.

The 2007 volunteers included: Dave

Adelman, Veronica Berounsky, Bette Carey, Jennifer Carey, Deedee Chatham, Alison Chatham, Will Cumer, Pete Curtis, Annette DeSilva, Ernest Flewellin, Nancy Flewellin, Michael Gardner, Jessica Greer, Debbie Kaprielian, Ken Kaprielian, Jeff Kaprielian, Neil Kelly, Marc Lamson, Dorothy Mann, Dudley

Mann, Judith Paolucci, Dana Sarubbi, Carol Sarubbi, Robert Schelleng, Laura Sisson, Sandra Skaradowski, Rosemary Smith, Evan Sylvia, and Sue Van Ness. Thank you all very much!

*—Annette DeSilva*

# THE OAK TREE

I have a magnificent tree. No, strike that. Nobody owns a tree. The tree I refer to is a Pin Oak that is the highest, widest, broadest, and most beautiful in at least South Kingstown. It may even be the same in all of South County or Rhode Island—I just don't know. Several years ago some people took a picture of it and you can see it in an album at the Peace Dale Library. But it resides on the property my house is on therefore I am its caretaker. Recently I got a letter from the Division of Forest Environment regarding its status as possibly being a Champion Tree.

The oak tree may have been just a sapling when the Narragansetts lived in the area and fished for food from Narrow River. If I want shade and some cool air on the hottest summer day, I take refuge under the tree. Sitting on a lounge, reading a book—I find myself drifting off. I hear whispers of people and the soft laughter of little children among the leaves of this wonderful tree. I get a mental picture of what this field looked like before the white men came. There are almost naked young girls and boys playing in the water, splashing each other, when suddenly one feels a shell underfoot, dives down, and comes up with the prize—an oyster. They all start screaming “I want one too” as they go under and dig around. Many find clams and oysters and some have their toes nipped by a passing crab. The elders stare at the children as they laugh and play—so proud of what

# NRPA SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Since 1993 NRPA has awarded \$500 scholarships to seniors graduating from high schools in the Watershed as part of our Youth Environmental Education Program. In 2007, the scholarship was renamed the Lesa Meng/Narrow River Preservation Association Scholarship in honor of a former Board member who passed away in 2006. Ms. Meng was a Board member for six years and chair of the Narrow River Road Race during that time. Her husband and friends provided additional funding for the scholarship, enabling NRPA to increase the scholarship awards to \$1000 beginning in 2008.

The scholarship applications are judged on: the student’s environmentally

oriented activities in and out of high school, the quality of an original essay on the theme—“Choose one environmental problem/issue relevant to the Narrow River and discuss what you as an individual could do to mitigate the problem,” a science teacher’s recommendation, and academic achievement in math and science courses.

Applications are generally available after the February school break from the Guidance Departments at Narragansett High School, North Kingstown High School, and South Kingstown High School, and also from the NRPA web site. Applications will be due April 6th, 2009.

—Melissa Hughes

they do. Soon they have gathered enough for the entire tribe, a fire is lit in a hole in the ground, and before long they eat happily.

Now it is fall and the acorns are many. They fall in clusters hitting the roof, resounding almost like gunfire. Sometimes I look up and see a squirrel scampering along a thin limb—as he see me he takes glee in throwing some acorns at me. After all it all belongs to him, he thinks. The leaves are yet to turn multi-colored and fall to the ground. Maybe all oak trees are the same, but this one just likes to hold on to its leaves, with the last ones falling in early spring.

—Rose Epstein



Narrow River Preservation Association welcomes your support:

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- Benefactor (\$500 or more)
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- Patron (\$100 – \$499)
- Individual (\$30)
- Donation (\_\_\_\_\_)

**Mail to: NRPA, P.O. Box 8, Saunderstown, RI 02874**

The Narrow River Preservation Association is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.



# SAVE THE DATES!

**22nd annual Narrow River Run  
May 16th, 2009**

**4th annual Turnaround Swim  
June 2009**

**6th Environmental Awareness Day  
July 2009**

## HELP WANTED

With Bob Kenney's departure from the NRPA Board of Directors, we find ourselves in need of someone willing to record our meeting minutes. Bob says the job isn't really that difficult and doesn't require a substantial time commitment. It would require attendance at board meetings (second Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. on the URI Bay Campus) and emailing the edited minutes to the Board. There are two alternatives. Someone could volunteer to join the Board and be elected Secretary (our bylaws require that officers come from the Board). Or someone could volunteer to serve as recording secretary without actually joining the Board. If you are interested in helping out, please contact me at [richard@rbgrant.com](mailto:richard@rbgrant.com) or by leaving a message at (401)-783-6277.

—Richard B. Grant



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