TWO EVENTS—TWO SUCCESSES!

19TH ANNUAL ROAD RACE

The start of the 2006 10K Run from the Town Beach. Glen Guillemette (right), the eventual first-place finisher, is one of the leaders from the very beginning. (photo by R.D. Kenney)

The 19th Annual Narrow River Road Race was held on May 20th. The weather was perfect—nearly a miracle given what we got every other Saturday in May and June. Nearly 300 people participated in one of the three events: a 10K run, a 5K run, and a 5K walk. The new course was a big success; the 10K run started and finished at the Narragansett Town Beach, with a turn-around at Treaty Rock Park in South Kingstown where the 5K run and walk started. Crossing the new Middle Bridge over Narrow River is an exhilarating sight and was a favorite of runners and walkers alike.

The Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA) would like to especially thank Citizens Bank—the Presenting Sponsor of the Road Race for the ninth consecutive year, demonstrating their strong commitment to the community and the environment. We also express our sincere thanks to all of the other sponsors and supporters: Amica Mutual Insurance Co., South County Hospital, American Power Conversion, Janelle Silk Screen Printing, River Bend Athletic Club, Roch’s Fresh Foods, Belmont Fruit Co., DiPrete Engineering Associates, Banner Oldsmobile-Buick-GMC Truck Inc., Charlie O’s Tavern, Abbott Action, Nardolillo Funeral Home, Buckley Heating & Cooling, Sweenor’s Chocolates, Twin Willows, Wickford Gourmet, Wilson’s of Wickford, Babcock & Hellwell, Basil’s Restaurant, Camire’s Athletic Soles, Crazy Burger, Damon’s Hard-

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FIRST ANNUAL TURNAROUND SWIM

Chiara and Luca Spinazzola, the first-place finishers in the first Narrow River Turnaround Swim, with Swim co-chair Paul McCaffrey. (photo by J. McNamara)

The inaugural Narrow River Turnaround Swim was held on Saturday, June 24th. Sixty-eight swimmers participated, coming out on a morning that threatened heavy rain (it came) and lightning (it did not come), but the water was calm and welcoming with a temperature in the low 70’s. It was an amazing sight and one never seen before: a sea of orange swim caps moving from the beach at the URI Campanella Rowing Center off Walmsley Lane in North Kingstown, around a buoy half a mile down the River, and back to the Rowing Center beach. The swimmers were cheered on by spectators at the dock and at neighborhood beaches along the River.

The Swim raised awareness of the River as an aquatic resource, as well as promoting swimming as a lifetime activity with a particular importance to South County residents. In addition, the event raised approximately $2000 for NRPA, which will be used to help fund our education, preservation, and protection programs. In the words of Narragansett Ele-

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Two items are at the top of my list of important topics for this issue of Narrow River Notes: contributions and volunteers.

The NRPA/John Elder Dick Endowment Fund, managed for us by The Rhode Island Foundation, has branched out. NRPA has now established a policy to contribute special funds, as designated by the Board of Directors, into NRPA/JED Endowment. In this way, the fund’s capital will grow much quicker than just by the fund’s income. You might ask how can one contribute to the NRPA/JED Endowment Fund. Let me tell you a few ways.

One can contribute directly to the NRPA/JED Endowment Fund by sending in a check to NRPA, (or working with your broker or advisor to transfer securities), noting that your donation is for the endowment. Or, you can specify that donations from something specific can be contributed to the NRPA/JED Endowment Fund. Recently, three such instances have occurred that have increased the capital in the NRPA/JED Endowment Fund. Betty Ann Howard asked that friends of former NRPA Director, Fred Howard, donate to NRPA in lieu of flowers in memory of her late husband. The Douglas Family asked—in lieu of gifts for their special anniversary celebration—that donations from their friends and family be sent to NRPA. They also made a significant donation of their own as their way of thanking the volunteers of NRPA for the accomplishments over the last 36 years. Finally, the Elkins have contributed in the name of Nancy McCarthy. These contributions are greatly appreciated, and are now forming new “branches” from the main “trunk” of the NRPA/JED Endowment Fund.

Another way to add to the endowment is simply by renewing your membership, or by contributing to a particular event like the Road Race or the Turnaround Swim. Members’ dues and program proceeds go to support our ongoing operations and programs. If we can fully cover our operating budget, then the income from the endowment at year-end can be re-invested back into the Fund.

NRPA is extremely thankful for all of your past contributions of both your dollars and your time. It can really pay off to help. For example, NRPA’s River Watch volunteers have tested their way to progress. Senator Reed called me recently to thank NRPA for the data that our River Watch volunteers had collected over the last 14 years. The data were very valuable in enabling Senator Reed to secure $150,000.00 for the on-going feasibility study by the Army Corp of Engineers, which will result in a habitat restoration plan for the lower River and Cove (see the Fall/Winter 2005 Narrow River Notes for details).

Your contributions and volunteering do make a difference.

—Richard B. Grant

NRPA is proud to be a member of the Rhode Island Rivers Council.

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.
NRPA invites our members and the public to our 2006 Annual Meeting—our 36th. The meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 11th, at the Coastal Institute Auditorium, URI Bay Campus, South Ferry Road, Narragansett. Refreshments will be served at 7:00 p.m. and the meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m.

A presentation by Jeff Ceasrine, Narragansett’s town engineer, will be featured at the Annual Meeting. Jeff will be speaking about stormwater management improvements in the Narragansett section of the Narrow River Watershed going forward under Phase II of Clean Water Act requirements. He will be discussing the plans being developed for the Edgewater and Pettuquamscutt Terrace neighborhoods. He will also talk about the system that was recently completed at Mettatuxett Beach (see the Spring issue of Narrow River Notes) and the lessons learned from it. We are also looking into getting someone from South Kingstown to talk briefly about their plans for Phase II improvements. It promises to be an interesting meeting—bring your questions!

Reports on NRPA activities and highlights from the past year will be included at the Annual Meeting. Updates on important issues affecting the Narrow River will also be provided. These will include water use and habitat management issues, including the on-going process to update the harbor management plans in all three towns in the Watershed; water quality improvement projects; and land conservation efforts. Highlights from NRPA’s education programs will be reviewed. Observations from this year’s River Watch program will be reported and volunteer River monitors will be recognized.

The W.E.R. La Farge Memorial (“Friend of the River”) Award will be presented, and this year’s kayak raffle winner will be announced.

The Annual Meeting provides a forum to meet NRPA members and to learn more about the Narrow River and its Watershed. We hope that you will join us.

—Annette DeSilva

EXPANDED NO-WAKE ZONE APPROVED BUT ONLY TEMPORARILY

At their meeting on July 17th, the Narragansett Town Council approved amending the Town’s harbor management regulations to require a no-wake zone in the Narrow River from 100 feet below Sprague Bridge to 1300 feet north of the bridge. But opposition from an attorney representing a group of power boaters almost derailed passage. It was only after an impassioned plea from Narragansett Police Chief J. David Smith, pointing out the risks to human safety from continued unrestricted boat traffic through the heavily used area, that the Council agreed to approve the change. The approved change is only temporary, however, and is due to expire in September.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has been encouraging better regulation of boating in that area since at least 2002. Refuge complex manager Charlie Vandemoer testified at several Harbor Management Commission and Town Council meetings, supporting a no-wake zone expanded from the 100 feet on either side of any bridge that already was in effect, though rarely enforced. Vandemoer told about sitting for a short while near Sprague Bridge on a summer Sunday in 2005 and seeing more than 80 motorboats pass under the bridge at high speeds, sometimes endangering swimmers, kayakers, fishermen, waders, etc. He was also very concerned about the environmental impacts of boat wakes—especially the serious erosion of the salt marsh edges.

The opposition from the power boaters, calling themselves “Concerned Boaters of Narrow River,” focused on a kayak ramp north of Sprague Bridge that was improved by USFWS. They claimed that the improvements were done illegally, without approval from CRMC, but Vandemoer stated that USFWS completely followed legal procedures at every step of the process. The power boaters’ opposition conveys the impression that they really don’t like sharing the River, especially when the boating “rules of the road” clearly give the right-of-way to kayaks, canoes, and other non-motorized vessels over motorboats. As part of the agreement reached with the Harbor Management Commission, USFWS has posted signs at the kayak launch advising kayakers to stay near the edges and to give way to motorboats in the main channel—but that doesn’t seem to be the case.

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2006 NRPA SCHOLARSHIPS

For the 12th year, NRPA awarded $500 scholarships to seniors graduating from high schools in the Narrow River Watershed. The 2006 NRPA Scholarships were awarded to Mario Forte of Narragansett High School (NHS) and Allison Malo of North Kingstown High School (NKHS). Applicants for the scholarships were judged on the quality of an original essay about the impact of human activity on the River and Watershed, their participation in environmentally-oriented activities in and out of school, a science teacher’s recommendation, and academic achievement in science and math courses.

Allison and Mario were active in environmental programs during high school. Allison participated in NKHS’s Environmental Club for four years, its Science Fair Exhibition and History Day activities, and local Earth Day shore cleanups. Mario devoted many volunteer hours to maintaining poultry flocks at NHS and South County Museum, and also participated in Rhode Island shore cleanups. Both students exhibited environmental awareness in implementing best management practices when siting outdoor animal facilities.

—Melissa Hughes
NRPA SCIENCE FAIR AWARDS

In order to encourage the curiosity of young scientists and to help them gain respect for the environment, NRPA has judged high school and middle school science fairs in the three Watershed towns for NRPA Science Fair Awards since at least 1989. One “Award” is given to a student in each school in recognition of the quality of the student’s research and its relevance to NRPA’s goal of protecting the Narrow River, its Watershed, and its communities as a unique, dynamic, and fragile ecosystem. “Honorable Mentions” may be given to students in each school in recognition of their participation in a well-done, environmentally oriented science fair project with relevance to NRPA’s goals.

This year, NRPA Board members visited science fairs at two schools and pre-}

FIRST ANNUAL TURNAROUND SWIM

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can be found on the NRPA home page, www.narrowriver.org.

NRPA and the Turnaround Swim committee would like to thank the sponsors, the press, and the many volunteers who contributed to the success of this event. Our sponsors were: Graphic Expressions, Wakefield; Varsity Swim Shop, North Reading, MA; URI Women’s Rowing; Christopher and Regan Insurance, North Kingston; Mr. and Mrs. Michael J. Murphy, East Greenwich; Roch’s Fresh Foods, Narragansett; Ryan Center, Kingston; White Rose Real Estate, Narragansett; Richard and Gloria Limbird, Saunderstown; Dave’s Marketplace, East Greenwich; and Picture This, Wakefield.

Local news coverage was provided by the South County Independent, with photographs and an article in the June 29th issue. NBC Channel 10 highlighted the Swim in their Watershed Report that aired on June 22nd. Watershed resident and photographer John McNamara captured the Swim with digital photographs.

On the weekend of the Swim, there were numerous volunteers who participated as lifeguards, safety kayakers, safety boat operators, or course setters, while others manned the registration table, the food table, and the NRPA information table. NRPA’s River Watch volunteers took water samples and Watershed Watch Director Linda Green and Program Coordinator Elizabeth Herron made sure the samples were run in time to affirm that the River was safe for swimming. The Swim committee (Paul McCaffrey, Mick Westkott, Felix Sarubbi, Jason McNamee, Lori Pugh, Tina Paniel, Perry Moylan, Richard Grant, Pat Gannon, Karen DeQuattro, and Veronica Berounsky) worked hard before, during, and after the Swim.

Mark your calendar now for the 2nd Annual Narrow River Turnaround Swim, which will take place on Saturday June 23rd, 2007! —Veronica Berounsky & Felix Sarubbi
A MESSAGE FROM THE RIVER

Once per summer we have to take our Italian greyhounds to the dunes—our neighbors’ black male and our fawn female. They run on that strip of sand—an island formed by low tide—at the mouth of the River where it pours into the surf. Just before we reach our playful destination, we pass in our boat under Sprague Bridge. In this still-new century/millennium a hand-painted graffiti announcement declared “Things Are Beautiful If You Love Them.” And the English translation from the French was neatly and accurately acknowledged to the playwright Jean Anouilh, the toast of the Parisian stage in the 1950’s. (I even played the lead, in French mind you, in an Anouilh play titled “Traveler Without Baggage.”) I took a few snapshots of this marvelous passage. And I pondered its message.

Did the anonymous artist mean to say that Narrow River and its surroundings are only as lovely as our respect for them? As an English teacher at an art school—RISD— I love a mystery or a metaphor far better than rhetoric and propaganda. And as a former French teacher, I snobbishly drink the best wines I can afford and pretend that a French sentence has more panache and paradox than a mere American bumper-sticker slogan. I know I’m being silly in all this, but I did love that puzzling calligraphy greeting us and our dogs as we finished our little journey along the poetic meanderings of Narrow River. I send along a snapshot of that miniature monologue by an existential French figure of a by-now bygone era—a reminder of a summer outing in place of love and beauty.

—Mike Fink, Middlebridge

NRPA SCIENCE FAIR AWARDS

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sented two 2006 NRPA Science Fair Awards. Jacob Sargent, from Curtis Corner Middle School in Wakefield, received the Award for his project: “Fish Friendly Fluids.” Orion Wholean, from North Kingstown High School, received the Award for his project: “Tidal Effects of Salinity in Narrow River.” There were also five Honorable Mentions presented at North Kingstown High School:

• Alex Clarke, “Does the Acidity Change in the Water in Jamestown After It Rains?”
• Hannah Mullaney, “The “Basic” of pH”
• Nathaniel Vigneault, “Comparing Wave Height and Water Depth”
• Zach Wilmot, “Corrosion: It Eats Away at Everything”

The students receiving the “NRPA Science Fair Award” were each presented with a certificate, a $50 U.S. Savings Bond, and a membership in NRPA, and were recognized at a reception at the NRPA Board of Directors’ meeting on April 4th. They will also be recognized at the Annual Meeting in October. Students receiving “Honorable Mentions” were recognized at the April Board meeting, and will again be recognized at the Annual Meeting.

If you know of schools in the Watershed (North Kingstown, South Kingston, and Narragansett) who are planning science fairs during the coming school year, please contact us by mail (Narrow River Preservation Association, P.O. Box 8, Saunderstown, RI 02874), telephone (401 783-NARR), or email (nrpa@netsense.net). In addition to judging at middle schools and high schools, Board members also visit elementary school science fairs to present “NRPA Science Fair Participant Award” certificates to students with appropriate environmentally-themed projects.

—Veronica Berounsky

EXPANDED NO-WAKE ZONE APPROVED TEMPORARILY

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enough of a compromise.

NRPA’s recommendations to the Harbor Management Commission last year supported making the entire River from the mouth to end of the Narrows just north of Lacey (Bridgetown) Bridge a no-wake zone to protect human safety for all users and to protect wildlife and their habitats from disturbance, erosion, and other impacts. The much smaller zone supported by USFWS and eventually approved by the Narragansett Harbor Management Commission appeared to be a reasonable compromise. We encourage our members and friends to let the Narragansett Town Council know about your support for enhanced safety and habitat protections in the River.

—Robert D. Kenney
A LONG-GONE RESIDENT RETURNS

At eleven at night on February 6th, Susan Oppenheim and I were on our way home. Sue drove down Bridgetown Road from the tower and turned right on Middlebridge. That first half-mile down Middlebridge Road has given us more than one great look at a red fox vixen and her two kits, a nice spotting of a long-tailed weasel, and looks at numerous possums, skunks, and raccoons as well, so we’re always alert there. About three-tenths of a mile down, the road zigs a bit to the left as it comes to a crest, then zags slightly to the right down a slight incline. We rounded the turn and I saw an animal moving away along the left side of the road. What is it? It’s close to three feet long, very dark, and very furry, with a ten or twelve inch somewhat bushy tail. Not a fox. Not shaped like a mink or otter, nor as sleek. And its gait is new to me. Sue knows there’s no one close behind us, so she brakes, and as she comes to a stop the animal starts across the road 25 feet in front of us. Then it reverses, giving us a full facial view in the headlights, then goes back to the shoulder and disappears over a stone wall. The face clinches it for me. I know I have just seen a fisher, but I’m having a bit of trouble believing it.

At home we got out the books and everything checked out. A fisher! I knew that fishers had returned to Rhode Island after a long absence. (They had disappeared when most of the forests were cut down.) I knew they were now confirmed in the northwest corner of the state, but South County seemed like a stretch. But a day later I called my daughter on Cape Cod and asked if she would believe there was a fisher in Middlebridge. “Dad, a road-killed fisher was recently picked up in Chatham.” That did it. If a fisher could make its way to Chatham, one could certainly show up on Middlebridge Road.

Subsequently, I called the Great Swamp Management Area and talked with Charlie Brown, a RIDEM wildlife biologist. Charlie told me that fishers are showing up in various places in Rhode Island, and that they have been reported in South County. Farming drove them out, but reforestation is bringing them back. Of course, if we cut down most everything to “develop” the state, the fishers will be gone again.

Fishers are creatures of the woods—relatives of weasels, ferrets, minks, otters, pine martens, badgers, and wolverines. They are great climbers, and hunt in the trees as well as on the ground. The fisher is a tough, fast predator. The naturalist Ernest Thompson Seton wrote that the fisher “is probably our most active arboreal animal. The squirrel is considered a marvel of nimbleness, but the marten can catch the squirrel, and the fisher can catch the marten.” So—for now—fishers are back, and at least one is in the Watershed, or at least passed through it. I don’t know how it came to where our paths crossed, but my imagination has it coming by Silver Lake, making its way to Gilbert Stuart’s Birthplace, and then working south along the west side of the River.

Charlie Brown noted that the Narrow River area was cleared of forest for farming a very long time ago, and added, “It’s safe to say it’s probably the first fisher seen there in some 200 years.”

—Richard Travisano, Middlebridge

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19TH ANNUAL ROAD RACE


Special thanks go to the RIDEM Division of Fish & Wildlife and to artist Robert Steiner for letting us use the first (1989) Rhode Island duck stamp—showing a pair of canvassback ducks fly-

[Editor’s note: At around the same time of year, I saw a fisher early one morning scampering through the front yards across from my house in Edgewater. And later in the spring I saw one on South Ferry Road near Old Boston Neck Road. The one in Middlebridge may have been the first in two centuries, but it’s not the only one and won’t be the last—at least for a while. —RDK.]

Women’s 10K winner Tara Cardi crosses the finish line at the Town Beach. (photo by R.D. Kenney)

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A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY: JONNY-CAKES

Mention “jonny-cakes” among any group of “South County-ites” and you will immediately have a discussion, if not an argument, going. Thick or thin? Some milk with the scalded corn meal, or none? Sugar or salt added, or none? Eaten plain, with butter, or with butter and syrup? Moist interior or well-cooked? And on and on it goes. But all agree that meal, stone-ground from Indian flint corn, is at the heart of a true jonny-cake.

The definitive description of a jonny-cake, which might surprise you, we turn to the Jonny-Cake Papers of Shepherd Tom Hazard. This is a wonderfully rambling series of reminiscences of life in our area during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Shepherd Tom Hazard was born in 1797 in the house of his grandfather, which then stood on the east slope of Tower Hill, on the corner of what is now Torrey Road and Tower Hill Road. In his middle years he recorded his memories of his grandfather, himself, and others. We turn to his account of the jonny-cake.

He wrote that his grandfather had a cook, Phyllis, who was considered to be the best in South County. Phyllis insisted that the only corn meal to be considered had to come from that ground at Hammond’s Mill. This gristmill was situated next to Gilbert Stuart’s Snuff Mill, at the head of the Narrow River! Phyllis claimed that all other meals were harsh. Only millstones from Narragansett granite rock produced such a fine meal. Tom Hazard lamented that with the introduction of coal-fired stoves, the technique of making jonny-cakes had become a lost art. (We must remember that in his grandfather’s day, most cooking was still done in the massive stone fireplace in the kitchen.)

Having carefully sifted her meal, Phyllis scalded it with boiling water away in November 2003. It originally appeared in the Winter 1998 issue. —RDK

Having carefully sifted her meal, Phyllis scalded it with boiling water freshly drawn from the well, sometimes adding a little milk, and then kneaded it. The dough was then put on the jonny-cake board, covered with rich sweet cream, and placed before the open fire. The jonny-cake board was of particular importance. Only the middle red oak board, 5 to 6 inches wide, from a flour barrel would do. The cake was propped up before a green wood fire and supported with a heart-shaped flat iron, and when cooked on top, leveled to finish. Then, inserting a knife, it was turned over and sweet cream poured over this side. And that was a truly grand, glorious jonny-cake! A bit different from the pancake type served today!

Jonny-cake meal was also used by Phyllis for coating smelts (caught in the Saugatuck River) prior to frying in pure leaf lard. Tom Hazard waxed almost poetic over her eels. They were caught in January and February from Pettaquamscutt Cove, breaded and fried, and then served with butter made from the milk of cows that grazed on the meadows overlooking the Narrow River.

Hammond Mill is long gone. If it were rebuilt at Gilbert Stuart, and if Narragansett granite grindstones could be found, we might once again have jonny-cakes as they were once made near the shores of the Narrow River.

—John Elder Dick

[Editor’s note: This is the sixth in our series of “re-runs” of articles on local history published in Narrow River Notes by the late John Elder Dick, who passed away in November 2003. It originally appeared in the Winter 1998 issue.—RDK]

19TH ANNUAL ROAD RACE

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Geisler, Saunderstown, 28:25
• Men’s 5K, 50-59, Fred Bartlett, Narragansett, 18:59
• Men’s 5K, 40-49, Colin Chinn, Hanford, CA, 20:03
• Men’s 5K, 19-39, Jeff Stevens, Coventry, 19:28
• Men’s 5K, 18 & under, Matthew Lysike, Wakefield, 22:20
• Women’s 5K, 50-59, Mary Camire, South Kingstown, 21:46
• Women’s 5K, 40-49, Elise Hedglen, Wakefield, 24:42
• Women’s 5K, 19-39, Kate Hirsch, Warwick, 24:00
• Women’s 5K, 18 & under, Kristin Rugg, Narragansett, 28:15

The complete Road Race results can be found on our web page at http://www.narrowriver.org/roadraceresults.htm.

—Rose Epstein

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LATE BREAKING NEWS FLASH

NRPA will be closing its office on Boston Neck Road in Narragansett sometime early this fall. We will continue to operate as usual in all other ways; however, the building is being sold, and we expect that rents will be increased.

We are able to do so much of our communication with the members via email now, and the office is being used less and less. It seems to have become mostly a large storage closet.

Nothing else will change—our mailing address, telephone number, email address, and web site address will all remain the same as always. All of our activities will go on as they have for many years now.

Most importantly, we will continue all of our efforts to preserve, protect, and restore the natural environment and the quality of life of all communities within the Narrow River Estuary and Watershed.

—Robert D. Kenney

PLEASE JOIN US OR RENEW!

Narrow River Preservation Association welcomes your support:

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