

# NARROW RIVER NOTES

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

Spring 2008

## 21<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL NARROW RIVER ROAD RACE PRESENTED BY CITIZENS BANK

The 2008 edition of the Narrow River Preservation Association's (NRPA) Narrow River Road Race—the twenty-first overall and the third one on our new course—will be held on Saturday, May 17th. Citizens Bank has once again generously agreed to sponsor the event, and many other businesses and individuals will also be donating their support. The Road Race is NRPA's largest fund-raising event of the year; the proceeds help support all of our land, water, and education programs. It is being planned and managed by a committee from the Board of Directors, again chaired by Blue Wheeler.

The Narrow River Road Race includes a 10K run, 5K run, and 5K walk through the historic Pettaquamscutt Watershed. The course, which was redesigned in 2006, creates a great venue for runners and spectators alike. The race course parallels the Narrow River, crossing both Sprague Bridge and Middle Bridge and passing through the John



*The start of the 10K run in the 2007  
Narrow River Road Race.  
(Photo by R.D. Kenney)*

Chafee National Wildlife Refuge in one of the state's most beautiful estuaries. The 10K run begins at the Narragansett Beach North Pavilion, turns around at Treaty Rock Park on Middlebridge Road, and finishes back at the Beach. The 5K run and 5K walk will both start at Treaty Rock Park and finish at the Beach. The course has been certified by the USA Track and Field Association (#RI06004RN).

Registration begins at 8:30 AM at the Narragansett Beach North Pavilion. All three events will start at 10:00 AM, rain or shine. Participants in both 5K's will be bused to the starting line; departures from the registration area will begin promptly at 9:15 AM. There will be a refreshment table and an awards ceremony at the conclusion of the races at the North Pavilion, Narragansett Town Beach. Prizes will be given to the first-place finishers in each age category in both the 10K and 5K runs, and to the first overall finisher in the 5K walk, plus there will be many other participant prizes. The first 300 entrants will receive 2008 Narrow River Road Race T-shirts, sure to become priceless collectibles.

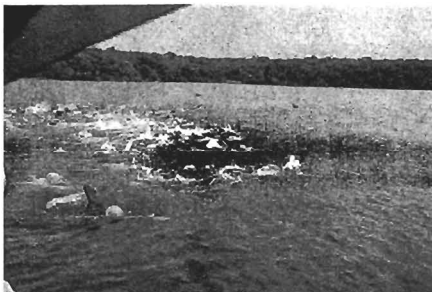
The entrance fee for the Road Race is \$20.00 until May 7th, and \$25.00 afterwards up to the day of the race. Visit the NRPA web site ([www.narrowriver.org](http://www.narrowriver.org)) for on-line registration or to print out an application for registration by mail

*(Continued on page 3)*

## 3<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL NARROW RIVER TURNAROUND SWIM TO PROMOTE IMPROVING WATER QUALITY

It's spring, the alewives are again swimming up the River, and soon another group of swimmers also will be returning to the waters of Narrow River. At 9:00 AM on Saturday, June 28th—the Third Annual Narrow River Turnaround Swim will start from the beach at URI's Campanella Rowing Center off Walmsley Lane in North Kingstown. The swimmers will round a buoy half a mile down the River and return back to the start. The Swim has grown from 68 swimmers in its inaugural year to 125 last year! Because of its popularity, the number of swimmers this year will be limited to 150. Pre-registration by June 18th is strongly encouraged.

The Turnaround Swim raises aware-



*Swimmers at the start of the 2007  
Turnaround Swim.  
(Photo by John McNamara)*

ness of the River as a scenic area and a good place to swim, and also promotes open-water swimming as a lifetime activity for local residents. It also raises money for NRPA to help fund our edu-

cation, preservation, and protection programs. One program is the River Watch volunteer monitoring program, now starting its 17th year, which has been testing and documenting water quality in the River. According to Elizabeth Herron

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# The President's Cove



In a recent conversation, Rob Leeson and I remarked upon the hundreds of people who participate in the management of NRPA. Those enthusiasts who have volunteered for ten years and more have established an extraordinary sense of dedication to our organization. Rob Leeson, for example, served diligently and with aplomb on the Board of Directors for twenty years. Equal credit goes to the great number of people who work in the background. These committed members of NRPA gather River samples for the River Watch program, assist with the AWESome education program for students, and volunteer as associate board members. Having a volunteer work force of such high caliber is unequaled.

Our annual Road Race, Turnaround Swim, and Kayak Raffle would not succeed without the assistance of sponsors, paid workers, and participants. The support we get is what gives NRPA its permanence. It is much like a wheel. The Board of Directors makes up the hub; the spokes represent the hundreds of people who contribute to make the rim—our Water, Land, and Education programs—strong, stable, and secure.

NRPA encourages endowment funding. This creates a permanent source of income—a sound practice. To date, we have established the NRPA John Elder Dick endowment and the NRPA Carl Otto endowment, both managed for us by The Rhode Island Foundation. Several individuals have donated to these funds, which are both growing at a good rate. We ask that you consider adding your name to the list of contributors or even creating an endowment fund in your own name.

The Board meets monthly to plan programs that have far-reaching results for the Watershed. The habitat restoration study by the Army Corps of Engineers, two completed storm-water management projects and a third in the planning stage, River Watch, and the AWESome program are accomplishments that highlight NRPA's wheel of progress.

We hope that you will consider making a contribution, even if it is a token amount, to help keep the Narrow River Preservation Association rolling along permanently. In appreciation,

—Richard B. Grant

## "WHAT'S THAT SMELL?"



*An aerial view of the Upper Ponds during the fall 2007 overturn in Narrow River, showing the milky coloration in the water. (Photo courtesy of Nate and Don Bousquet)*

Neighbors living around the north end of the Narrow River in South County, Rhode Island, noticed a peculiar smell and a milky color to the water on October 12th, 2007. "What's that smell?" they were asking. The River had overturned (see the Fall/Winter 2007 issue of *Narrow River Notes* for more details). Dr. Veronica Berounsky, an

NRPA Board member and a researcher at the URI Graduate School of Oceanography, enlisted the help of family, friends and colleagues to study this unique phenomenon over the fall of 2007. There had been two other overturns in recent memory, in 1971 and 1990, but information was scant.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## 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 within the Narrow (Pettaquamscutt) River Estuary and Watershed.

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

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Published tri-annually by Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA)

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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.

## NRPA SCIENCE FAIR AWARDS



NRPA 2008 Science Fair Award winners Maxwell Gear (left) and Katherine Young (right). (Photo by V.M. Berounsky)

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 towns in the Watershed—North Kingstown, South Kingstown, and Narragansett—for NRPA Science Fair Awards since at least 1989. During the past school year, NRPA Board members and volunteers have been visiting science fairs to judge students' projects and present awards. One "Award" is given 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" are given to students in each school in recognition of participation in a well-done, environmentally oriented science fair project with relevance to NRPA's goals.

The students receiving the "Narrow River Preservation Association Science Fair Award" received a certificate, a \$50 U.S. Saving Bond, and a 1-year membership, and took part in a reception at the April 1st NRPA Board of Directors' meeting. They will also be recognized at NRPA's Annual Meeting in October. Students receiving "Honorable Mentions" were also recognized at that

NRPA Board of Directors' meeting, and will be again at the Annual Meeting.

At North Kingstown High School, the winner was Katherine Young, with the project: "Can the Location of Water Sources Change the pH and Alkalinity of the Water?" The four Honorable Mentions at North Kingstown High School were:

- Lauren Poirer, "Bad Ozone and Where to Find It"
- Kiffin Ward, "Soil Pollution: Which Type of Soil Absorbs the Most Pollution?"
- Vicki Beron, "Does Increasing Population Density Equal Increasing Water Pollution?"
- Meg Ziegler, "Oceans to the Rescue!"

At Curtis Corner Middle School in Wakefield, Maxwell Gear had the winning project, called "Effect of Salinity on Green Algae." There were four Honorable Mentions at that school:

- Zach Campo & Eric Ims, "Putting a Stop to Pollution"
- Ben Pesant, "Do Green Beans Need Space?"
- Marena Richardson, "House of the Future"
- Marisa Albert, "Kidney Beans Growing Pains"

If you know of other schools in the Watershed planning science fairs, please contact NRPA, P.O. Box 8, Saunterstown, RI 02874 or via email at [nrpa@narrowriver.org](mailto:nrpa@narrowriver.org). In addition to judging at middle schools and high schools, Board members also visit elementary school science fairs to give out "Narrow River Preservation Association Science Fair Participant Award" certificates to students with appropriate environmentally-themed projects.

—Veronica M. Berounsky

## "WHAT'S THAT SMELL?"

(Continued from page 2)

Rosemary Smith, the newest member of the NRPA Board and a retired teacher, put together a PowerPoint™ presentation to help people understand the overturn. The presentation includes maps, diagrams, and pictures of scientists and volunteers at work collecting data for six weeks, data

that may help us understand how the overturn affected the Narrow River Watershed. Rosemary and Veronica have now "taken their show on the road" to libraries and schools around the region. For more information, or to schedule a presentation, contact Rosemary at [rcaims@aol.com](mailto:rcaims@aol.com).

## KAYAK RAFFLE



*This could be you ... if you have the winning ticket in the Kayak Raffle. And if there were killer whales in Narrow River. (Photo courtesy of Wild Heart Adventures Sea Kayak Tours, Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada; [www.kayakbc.com](http://www.kayakbc.com))*

NRPA will be selling raffle tickets for a chance to win a 9'6", 39-pound "Azul" kayak to raise money for the preservation and protection of Narrow River. The kayak was donated by Wildwood Outfitters in Wakefield. Tickets are \$2.00 each or three for \$5.00. The winning ticket will be drawn at our Annual Meeting on October 7th, so you have all summer to buy tickets. Tickets will be available for sale at any of our events—the Road Race on May 17th, the Turnaround Swim on June 28th, and Environmental Awareness Day at the Narragansett Town Beach on July 19th, as well as at the Kingstown Fair and Wickford Art Festival. Or just ask any Board member, or wait for the Summer newsletter (and annual membership renewal drive) mailing.

## ROAD RACE

(Continued from page 1)

or a map of the course and directions to the Narragansett Town Beach. You can also contact us at (401) 783-6277 or [nrpa@narrowriver.org](mailto:nrpa@narrowriver.org) to get an application. Or feel free to contact me at [richard@rbgrant.com](mailto:richard@rbgrant.com), 782-8077, or 742-4243.

Would you like to get personally involved, but aren't really into running? We can always use volunteers to help with registration, water tables, refreshments, and a pre-race River clean-up. Get in touch at any of the contacts above.

—Richard B. Grant

# URI WATERSHED WATCH FOUNDERS' AWARD

The URI Watershed Watch (URIWW) program held its annual brunch on Saturday, March 1st at the University Club in Kingston. Despite the typically soggy weather (it ALWAYS snows for the brunch), over sixty folks gathered for good food and fellowship, to hear news about last year's program and upcoming plans for our twenty-first season from Program Director Linda Green and Program Coordinator Elizabeth Herron. In addition, Sue Kiernan, RIDEM Deputy Chief of Water Resources, gave an overview of the state's water programs, repeatedly pointing out the value of volunteer monitors' efforts. Hope Leeson, Rhode Island Natural History Survey (RINHS) scientist, discussed the results of the 2007 joint

RINHS & URIWW aquatic invasive-species identification program, which, unfortunately, discovered a number of invasives in Rhode Island freshwater lakes. NRPA's Veronica Berounsky, ably assisted by new volunteer monitor and NRPA Board member Rosemary Smith, gave a fascinating and educational presentation about the 2007 Narrow River overturn event in Upper Pond. Kiernan, Leeson, and Berounsky were surprised to learn that they, along with longtime Tucker Pond volunteer and botanist Sindy Hempstead, were the 2008 recipients of the URI Watershed Watch Founders' Award. This award is presented annually to organizations and/or individuals who have gone "beyond the call of duty" in their

efforts to enhance understanding of water quality and aquatic ecosystems and to promote water quality & restoration, and who have been actively involved in URI Watershed Watch as a volunteer monitor or monitoring coordinator. The award was first given in 1996 to Mitch Salomon, Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association and URIWW founder, and Bart Hurley, the first URIWW volunteer who also created an endowment for URIWW. Other NRPA members, as well as the organization itself, have been prior recipients of this award. Annette DeSilva was a 1998 recipient and Bob Schelleng a 2007 recipient, and NRPA received the award in 2002.

—Linda Green,  
URIWW Program Director

## 3<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL TURNAROUND SWIM

*(Continued from page 1)*

from URI's Watershed Watch, NRPA's River Watch data from that area show that bacteria levels in "the Lower Pond do not exceed recreational contact levels ... even following heavy rainfall."

Since the inception of NRPA, thanks to NRPA and others, water quality in Narrow River has improved markedly. In the words of Narragansett Elementary School physical education teacher Paul McCaffrey, who along with URI swimming & diving coach Mick Westkott co-chairs the Swim, "The title Turnaround was indicative of the path we chose for the course of the swim and also for the course of the River; the Narrow River has been turned around from one that wasn't healthy to one that is."

We are pleased to be returning to URI's Rowing Center, a beautiful spot on Narrow River's Lower Pond, and also the location of LaFarge Point Park. WER LaFarge was one of the founders of NRPA in 1970 and remained active in the organization until his untimely death in 1994. He bequeathed a piece of his farm as land for the Rowing Center. The Center will again provide invaluable support.

Many comments have been received about how well-organized and safety-conscious the Swim was, and the same committee will again run it. In addition

to Paul and Mick, other people on the Swim Committee are: Felix Sarubbi, Jason McNamee, Lori Pugh, Perry Moylan, Richard Grant, Pat Gannon, Shelagh Donohue, Karen DeQuattro, Owen Devine and Veronica Berounsky. They will be assisted by the many friends, relatives, and colleagues who have offered to return to help make the Swim run smoothly and efficiently again.

More information about the swim is on the NRPA web site, [www.narrowriver.org](http://www.narrowriver.org). Application forms for swimmers can be printed from the NRPA website and mailed with a check for the registration fee to NRPA at P.O. Box 8, Saunderstown, RI 02874. Pre-registration deadline is June 18th. There will be free T-shirts for the first 100 swimmers!

Forms to be a sponsor of the Swim and to make a contribution in support of NRPA are also available. There are several categories of sponsorship, including the Benefactor category, which will get your company's name on the Swim T-shirt. Any contributions or donated goods or services are tax deductible. If you need further information, please contact Paul McCaffrey at [mccaffreyeg@cox.net](mailto:mccaffreyeg@cox.net) or (401) 884-1223.

—Veronica M. Berounsky

## ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS DAY



*Children are always fascinated by the live marine animals in the "petting pool" at NRPA's booth at Environmental Awareness Day at the Town Beach.*

The 5th annual Environmental Awareness Day at Narragansett Town Beach will take place on Saturday, July 19th, from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. The event is presented by the Rhode Island Rivers Council and the Narragansett Parks & Recreation department. NRPA will be one of several organizations offering information and fun activities to promote awareness of Rhode Island's natural resources and the organizations dedicated to protecting those resources. NRPA's activities at past events have included the sea creatures "petting pool" and a scavenger hunt. For additional information, visit the NRPA web page at [www.narrowriver.org](http://www.narrowriver.org) or the RI Rivers Council web page at [www.ririvers.org](http://www.ririvers.org).



# A SOUTH COUNTY GHOST STORY, PART II

[Continued from the Fall/Winter 2007 issue of Narrow River Notes]

When I rounded the bend, Mrs. Yeomans wasn't standing in the doorway, because she had been gone twenty-five years ago, maybe more, and so had Molle. Only Joe, bearded and old, lived there alone. He'd been there when I had left in the fall, but he wasn't there now because the door was wide open and so were most of the windows. All the animals were gone and so was the sign for eggs, but the post was still there.

I braked hard halfway around the corner, ran up the driveway, and stopped beside the open doorway at the back of the silent, broken old house, headmarker for a dead farm. I climbed the single stone step and passed through the doorway. Ahead, the way was blocked by a fallen ceiling beam. I turned and passed into the kitchen. The walls were charred, cupboards and dishes smoke-tarnished, ceiling streaked and partially fallen. Broken furniture was helter-skelter, chairs smashed, table three-legged, and the plasterboard walls were buckled. Dirty dishes were piled in a washbasin and a set of china burned brown was stacked in a rack beside an open pie press. Fire damage.

The stove had been pulled away from the original fireplace, and it must have been there that the fire started because the heavy, hand-hewn beams behind were burned. I pushed through the door into the back of the main room, where a large section of the ceiling had come down with the beam. On one side a large, over-stuffed sofa, torn and rotten, squatted against the wall. Rips and holes made beds for mice and squirrels, who had left gobs of cotton ticking on the floor. Ragged curtains shivered in the windows. A torn braided rug had been kicked into one corner. An old calendar and a print of Christie's All-American Girl hung crazily over a Morris chair. Smoke streaks were everywhere. The room looked like the far end of the town dump.

In the corner across from where stood, an upright piano had been placed to face diagonally to the front door. What an odd place to find a piano! It must have been non-functional for years and now—watered and smoked, scorched and battered, strings broken and sounding board warped—it was wrecked

beyond repair, but the keyboard was clean and white. Dusk darkened the room as I climbed over the beam, pushed through the broken furniture, and reached across the table to the keys. The room was nearly dark. A wisp of the night passed through the window, rustling the curtains as I pressed a key with a single finger, ready for a dull thump to sound. But middle C was clear and sweet. *Mirabile dictu!* I ran a scale and then some chord modulations. The pitch was true and the tone vibrant and full, and the action as smooth and precise as my Steinway grand.

Later I found from an inquiry at the post office that there had indeed been a fire, and old Joe, the last of the Yeomans who had lived there alone, fell ill in the winter cold. He was found near death and rushed to the hospital. He wanted to die in his old home, but he never made it back. The place was to be sold. One night talking to WER LaFarge, the poet and playwright, I told him about the piano.

"What do you suppose it was doing there where no one could play? And the miraculous condition—how do you account for that?"

WER, who is sensitive and knowledgeable about such things, told me that the old farmhouse had been a gathering place for song long ago. A few people who loved music and loved to sing often gathered there to sing the songs of yesteryear. Many of them could play, and so did the Yeomans. "As for the good condition of the piano," he said, "I can't account for that. It's been years since the people sang."

Near the end of May, late one night, I happened past the old house again. The moon was high and mist wisped up from the River, hiding the sharp outline of the house in a diaphanous shroud. I stopped and stood at the corner, took a breath of the night and a last look at the old place before the bulldozer came. As I watched, the mist grew heavy and the house disappeared for a minute or two. And then, as if a curtain were raised, the place would come into sharp focus. As it reappeared, I saw light through the cracks in the boards across the windows. It was then that I heard the piano play a beautiful counterpoint to

the soft, distant chorus of songs from centuries past. They were singing in there, and the piano was playing a background all of its own. I heard Mrs. Yeomans' voice, "It's time to turn down the lamp." The house disappeared in the night. When the mist blew clear, I peered hard at the house, but the light was gone and the night was still.

—Shane Saunderson

[Editor's Note: This story is about the house at 235 Bridgetown Road, near Lacey Bridge (sometimes called the "hermit house"). "Shane Saunderson" was a pen name used by the late Rev. Francis Bayard Rhein, an Episcopal priest and theology professor who summ-  
mered in a house that his parents built on Waterway Drive in Saunderson. The story was sent to us by Betty Sheldon Aschman, who grew up next door to Rev. Rhein, and now lives right around the corner from "the old Yeomans' place" on Walmsley Lane. If you are a new reader and missed Part I, you can download the last issue from [www.narrowriver.org](http://www.narrowriver.org).]

## GUIDED WALKS AT CANONCHET FARM

Canonchet Farm is a 174-acre town-owned property in the Narrow River Watershed in Narragansett. The property includes a working farm, the South County Museum, and about 150 acres of undeveloped land with a variety of habitats, crossed by several hiking trails. The Friends of Canonchet Farm is a non-profit organization formed in 2007 that is dedicated to preserving the property for the benefit of all the residents of the Town and the region.

The Friends of Canonchet Farm have been offering a series of guided walks by local experts in a great many different areas (birds, wildlife, history, stone walls, geology, etc.). So far, more than 350 people have attended about 30 different walks. Walks are on Sundays at 1:00 PM, but are not scheduled very far in advance. For their latest program schedule, check on-line at [canonchet.org/activities.php](http://canonchet.org/activities.php) or email Kathie Kelleher, Secretary of the Friends Board of Trustees, at [DKelle2358@aol.com](mailto:DKelle2358@aol.com).

# Save The Date!

Sunday, June 8th, Dunes Club, Narragansett

Reception in honor of Rob Leeson's 20+ years of service to the Narrow River.

Watch your mail-box for details, or check the NRPA home page ([www.narrowriver.org](http://www.narrowriver.org)).



**Rhode Island Rivers Council**  
Working together to protect and restore Rhode Island's rivers and their watersheds

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

## WANTED: A FEW GOOD WRITERS

Help me to make *Narrow River Notes* your newsletter. Do you have a short poem with a river or environmental theme? 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

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