



SPRING
2025

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NEWSLETTER

FORL CELEBRATES 10TH ANNIVERSARY



FORL Team receives Best of Braddock Award 2022....

Time to Reflect...

By Paul Gross

My wife Kathy and I have just returned from a trip to Europe and visited churches, castles and bridges that are hundreds and some even a thousand years old. Many are still in active use. Here, in this Newsletter, we are recognizing our 10 years as an active Friends organization, when, to many, it's a short period of time. So why are we celebrating FORL in this FORL Newsletter and with a community get together on Monday, April 28, at Lakeside Park?

In my view, we are acknowledging two important aspects of our life as members of this Friends community and our love of the Royal Lake and Parks. First, it demonstrates how important volunteering can be to improve the parks and the environment. Please see the pictures and articles in this Newsletter that reflect the extensive cleanup, invasive management, and trail improvement activities that have been accomplishment over the last ten years. Second, it highlights FORL's efforts representing the community to advocate for Royal Lake and Parks. With extensive input from the Royal Lake communities, FORL created a Royal Lake Community Vision Plan that outlined the parks' needs, with supporting rationale. The Plan was accepted and supported by the Braddock District Supervisor and Fairfax County Park Authority officials. Many of the projects we advocated for are completed or in work. The most recent example is the just completed new shade structure for the Lakeside picnic area.

Let's keep a good thing going – continue to volunteer and advocate with your friends and neighbors for maintaining and improving our great Royal Lake and Parks!

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THE EARLY YEARS.....

For Want of a Pull-up Bar, A Friends Group Was Born

By Tony Vellucci

Since the early 1990's the circuit trail around Royal Lake has had a fitness course. The first set of exercise equipment was installed as part of a Wells Fargo grant in support of the President's Council on Physical Fitness. This retrospective article is about how community volunteers advocated, raised funds, and worked with Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) to replace the original equipment.

In October 2010, community member **Beth Miller** contacted **Mark Rogers**, FCPA Area 4 Maintenance Manager, about repairing or replacing three pull-up bars that had become loose during years of usage. That same month, **Ben Maplethorpe** of the Lakepointe Community Council, echoed these concerns.

Mark Rogers noted that, while he appreciated park patrons' desire to see the pull-up bars replaced, exercise equipment was not considered a normal park amenity. Also, the FCPA was not funded to replace the system since it was donated to the Park Authority in the early 1990's. Unfortunately, nothing happened for a number of years.

In May 2013, **Paul Hardy** expressed concern about the condition of the exercise stations – especially the pull-up bars, offering to pay for the replacement himself. He approached **Dawn Gunning**, the KPWCA Parks and Lake Chairperson, who contacted FCPA's **Ed Richardson**, the new Area 4 Maintenance Manager.

Ed Richardson noted that the donated fitness stations around Royal Lake fell into a gray area concerning equipment replacement. There was no plan to replace the pull-up bars when they were removed in October 2011. The manufacturer had gone out of business.

The Park Authority didn't have parts/owner's manuals or any other documentation that would have allowed the pull-up bar to be maintained to the appropriate standard of care, i.e., as designed by the manufacturer. For this reason he had to decline Paul Hardy's generous offer to provide a new pull-up bar.

Ed noted that the Park Authority hadn't removed the fitness stations because that would likely prevent installation of new equipment. The land around the lake is in the Resource Protection Area (RPA) pursuant to the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance. Fitness stations aren't a permissible use in the RPA, but since the fitness stations around Royal Lake were installed prior to establishment of the RPA, they were exempted. Ongoing maintenance of existing facilities was allowed. Replacement of equipment that has exceeded its useful life span is part of ongoing maintenance, but removing it without a plan for replacement ends ongoing maintenance. Therefore, installing new equipment violates the RPA.

Paul Hardy contacted **Tony Vellucci** who was the Braddock District Representative to the Park Authority Board at the time, asking what could be done. Tony and Paul worked with Area 4 Manager Ed Richardson and **Gayle Hooper** in the Planning & Development Division to determine that the entire Wells Fargo exercise station system had to be replaced to satisfy RPA requirements; all to the tune of about \$20,000.

Tony Vellucci, Cont'd)



Paul Hardy and



Tony Vellucci

PAUL HARDY: I left Fairfax in 2023, but not before benefiting from and enjoying the lake for 30 years, a treasure hidden in the middle of busy Fairfax. At times, looking over the lake's Fall colors, it was easy to imagine not even being in an urban area. The community has a wonderful resource because so many people decided volunteering and devoting time and energy to FORL was worthwhile.

p. 2 (Paul Hardy Cont'd)

Vellucci, Cont'd

Using a Mastenbrook Grant effort, they contacted the presidents and chairpersons of surrounding Royal Lake communities asking for representatives who would form the Friends of Royal Lake Trail Exercise Committee to assist with fund raising and determining what stations would be installed. In November 2014, the Friends of Royal Lake Trail Exercise Equipment Committee comprised a loose confederation of neighboring communities having an interest in supporting the effort: Chatham Towne, Glen Cove Homeowners Assn, Hillsdale Townhomes, Kings Park West, Lakepointe Townhomes, New Lakepointe Townhomes, Rolling Woods Estates, The Reserve at Martins Point, and Village Park.



Paul Hardy was a driving force in the organization's development over the next few months. The confederation of communities transformed itself into the Friends of Royal Lake.



The Fairfax County Park Foundation helped with the Mastenbrook Grant application process.

The neighboring communities contributed some \$10,000.00 to the effort.

Paul Hardy stayed on for the next year to assist in the selection and placement of the exercise stations, dovetailing with the Royal Lake Dredging Project. In March 2016, Paul Gross took over from Paul Hardy as the president, implementing greater organizational structure, and the rest, as they say, is history.

An enthusiastic supporter of Royal Lake's fitness course powers his way to the top of the jump platform.



(Hardy, Cont'd)

I was involved in guiding the exercise station program, completed in 2016. That project was guided by a local resident, like those who followed, who wanted to contribute to the well-being of the Kings Park West Community. There have been many who "paid it forward", such as that unknown resident, Anthony Vellucci, Paul Gross, and of course the Fairfax Park Authority. There are many others who contributed on work days, planned, raised funds, made phone calls, and contributed to the myriad of other inglorious tasks essential to keeping a volunteer organization functioning and effective.

This is being published at a good time, just as the weather improves. Take this as a motivator to get out and enjoy the fresh air and exercise! The design incorporated about 14 stations so there would be a variety of challenges and muscles used (push-ups, chin-ups, box step ups, walk/run as examples). Further, the design included duplicate stations for the super motivated and creative, but also should someone visit just a section of the park—tennis courts for example—there would be an adequate breadth of exercises. Start easy, but, **do** start.

In closing, a warm "thank you" to all the hard working and dedicated volunteers who made FORL a successful organization.

Paul Hardy

The Next Early FORL Project: The Dredging of Royal Lake

By Kathy Gross

Royal Lake was created in the 1970s primarily for flood control by impounding the water from Rabbit Branch and Shanes Creek within the Pohick Watershed. Over the years, the lake silted up and needed a major dredging to preserve its environmental benefits.

Future FORL leaders (including Paul Gross, Greg Sykes, and Andy Karp) got involved in understanding the planning of the dredging project as early as April 2013 by attending Braddock District Supervisor John Cook's Community Information Meeting at which Department of Public Works & Environmental Services (DPWES) and the dredging design firm explained the design of the project and the dredging and restoration plans.



In May 2013, these leaders also attended a meeting held by the DPWES and the Northern Virginia Soil and Water District to learn about the dredging methods and the benefits of the dredging project.

In April, 2016, Tony Vellucci held a Royal Lake Kickoff Meeting to encourage a positive relationship with the Department of Public Works & Environmental Services (DPWES), to advocate the role the community can play in the dredging effort, to learn the impact of the dredging on local flora and fauna, and to consider the impact of storm water's runoff in the future.

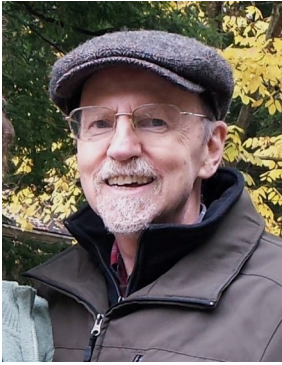
The \$6.6 million was projected to result in protecting water quality by the removal of 31 tons per year of sediment, 150 pounds per year of phosphorus, and 2,500 pounds per year of nitrogen. An important component of the project was the creation of forebays in the lake that provide water quality benefits and facilitate future maintenance dredging.

The actual work began in mid-June 2016. The dredged material was trucked to the I-95 landfill, which resulted in cost savings for dredge disposal and reduced truck emission and traffic. Inconvenience to our community was less than imagined leading to homeowners' positive response to the project.



Upon its completion and in recognition of the success of the dredging project, a ribbon cutting ceremony was held at Lakeside Park on July 15, 2017. Founders Paul Gross (3rd from left) and Tony Vellucci (green shirt center); and Braddock District Supervisor John Cook (blue shirt)

TRAIL MAINTENANCE



ANDY KARP: I've lived in KPW since 1998, and during that time I've come to love the lake and parkland surrounding it. I estimate that I've walked parts of the trail around the lake more than 7,000 times! For several years, when we'd come across a problem on the trail that could be remedied without too much work, my wife and I would fix the problem on our own.

About seven or eight years ago, Tony Vellucci, who was very active with the FORL, ran across me as I was placing some paving stones along a very muddy stretch of trail. Tony asked if I'd be interested in coordinating volunteer trail maintenance for the FORL, which could take on bigger tasks than could be done by just my wife and me.

That led to my joining the leadership team of the FORL, with a personal focus on trail maintenance. I've found the FORL to be a group that is very dedicated to working with the Park Authority and the community to keep our park the wonderful place that it is.

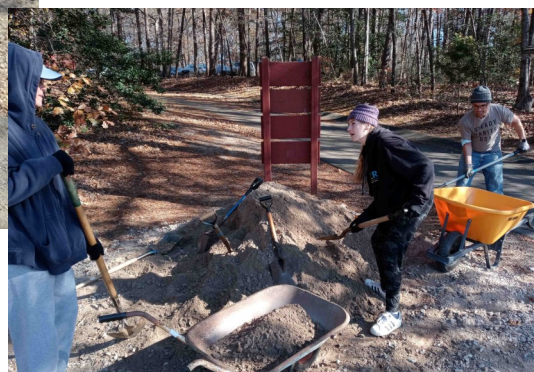


How many volunteer crews have gathered to spend how many HOURS on Saturday morning trail maintenance and improvements projects?

These workdays have been regularly scheduled since the early days of FORL's existence and have been instrumental in keeping the trails in good condition in the face of weather and wear.



Volunteers come in all ages!



How many TONS of stone dust delivered by the Park Authority to be wheelbarrowed to a specified point on the loop trail?



FORL founder Paul Gross and co-chair Sarah Lennon are interviewed by Braddock District Supervisor Walkinshaw

Sarah Lennon: I honestly can't remember exactly when I got involved with FORL, it's been that long! I ran the KPW Civic Association's Parks and Lake Committee and organized the monthly Road Raiders clean-ups, and being a part of FORL just seemed like a natural fit!

As a Girl Scout leader, I loved bringing my scouts to the park to "leave the world a better place" through the clean ups, and even years later to the trail workdays. Royal Lake is such a special part of our community, and helping to protect and improve the parks and trails around it is important to me.

The partnership between the Civic Association, FORL, the Braddock District Supervisor's office and the Fairfax County Park Authority is a very strong one; the FCPA depends on our many volunteers; we rely on them to respond to our needs! I love walking around the lake and seeing all the places FORL has made improvements over the course of 10 years, and I love seeing the smiles on neighbors faces when they experience the improvements. I feel fortunate to be a liaison between our community and the County Government, improving the information flow between us.

PAUL GROSS: Sometimes I'm asked why I'm involved in FORL? Well, my mother passed at age 94 in the same hospital she was volunteering in a month before. She volunteered at church, a theater group, several charity organizations and two different hospitals. I think my involvement in volunteering is -- in the genes!

Seriously, I think it allows me to participate in making things a little bit better.

FORL has been a great experience being on the leadership team where, through our volunteer work and advocacy, we have helped improve the lake and parks. My initial involvement in FORL was before FORL was a Friends group. I had heard about the desire for new exercise equipment and understood the lake needed to be dredged, so I jumped in to do my part to support those efforts, from raising money to talking to neighbors about the reasons for the projects.

We worked with county officials and at in-home and public meetings to exchange ideas about the projects. With the encouragement of Tony Vellucci, then on the Park Authority Board, we formed FORL. One final thought: I have lived next to the park for 40 years and have always participated in activities and walks around the lake; however, my FORL involvement has allowed personal growth and understanding of the importance of the park facilities and the natural environment to all of us.

.....AND OVER THE YEARS

Another Word from Co-chair, Paul Gross: How did we get here?

I am amazed and appreciative of the work to improve our parks' facilities and the natural environment. To paraphrase from someone else, "It takes a community" to make things happen. In this case the community is Friends of Royal Lake, Civic and Homeowners associations, Boy Scouts, local businesses, Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA), Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) and without question all of you who volunteer.

MANY YEARS' MANAGEMENT OF INVASIVE SPECIES IN PARKS



MARY BOYER: I've been a site leader with the Fairfax County Park Authority Invasive Management Area program at Royal Lake for eight years. I work with volunteer students and adults to pull invasive plants and trees and to cut back vines and branches extending into the trail. I also plant native trees and flowers. I never actually joined FORL on my own! Paul and Kathy Gross saw me working on the invasives along the trail and I just got included and have been with FORL ever since.

Mary Boyer is pictured front row, center with a corporate group of volunteers

I have worked with Operation Stream Shield (OSS) and volunteers from the Lamb Center twice a month for many years. This began with a request to help plant trees at the lake. I worked well with OSS and Lamb Center volunteers so was asked if I'd like for them to work with me. OSS/Lamb Center volunteers work with me twice a month and I pick the spot. Their first and hardest project was to clear the vines off the trees near a property bordering Lakeside Park. A wasp nest fell down from a tree and a worker

was stung. My husband had to come with wasp spray. There is never a dull moment working in the woods!

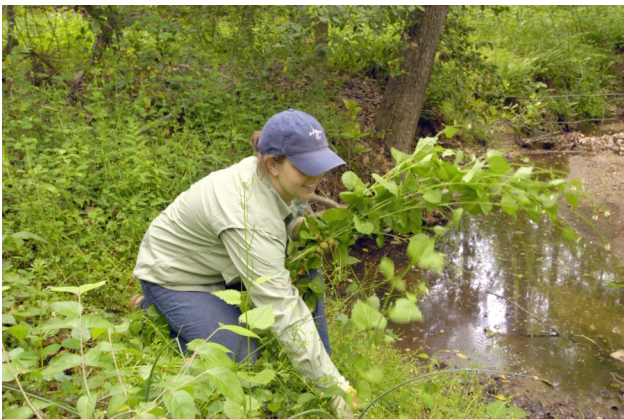


Greg Sykes: Since 2007, I am an IMA site leader. I lead habitat restoration workdays removing invasive plants from parkland, planting native species as needed, engaging in watershed cleanups, and writing about ecological topics for the local communities.

As a biologist, I advocate for the voiceless wildlife. The more people understand the natural world, the more they might respect it. Within FORL, I provide scientific insight.



How many bags of English Ivy, honeysuckle vine, multi-flora rose, porcelain berry vine, autumn olive trees, amur honeysuckle shrubs were collected over the years? Management of the multitude of invasive species in our public spaces is critical to the ecological health of our forests.



The IMA program has also involved several other volunteers from the community. Kelly Katz, Suzanne Doherty (site leaders) and Mirjan Lika work with groups of volunteers in the invasive management program or have contributed to the effort to get invasives under control.

Celebrating Eagle Scout Projects: Community Contributions

Tom McCook: I have coordinated ten plus Eagle projects in support of Friends of Royal Lake and KPWCA as the Parks & Lake committee chair. I've been involved in Scouting since 1999 and FORL since 2018.

In our community, the achievements of Eagle Scouts have always been a beacon of inspiration. These young leaders undertake projects that not only demonstrate their skills and dedication but also reflect the values instilled in them through scouting. These projects not only elevate our community but also set a standard for future generations. As we celebrate these accomplishments, let us honor the values that guide our Eagle Scouts, inspiring us all to contribute positively to our community.

In addition to Eagle Scouts, I have extensively worked with FCPA Park Area 4 managers (Ed Richardson, Marcos Suarez, Beth Borostovik and Mike Sines) who have provided endless amounts of help, coordination and spirit – plus Eagle scout project materials, that without their dedicated help, these projects could not have been accomplished.

These remarkable young men provided the following improvements to Royal Lake park area:



Issac Sorensen made significant safety improvements on the trail from the soccer fields to the trail.

Scout Law: A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.



Josiah Park rebuilt the picnic tables at Royal Lake Park.



Jagger Larson, rerouted the trail away from the Lakeside parking lot.



Aidan Murphy, installed 4 fishing line receptacles.



Ryan Pittman spent 2 days' laying culverts on the trail.



Miles Salvo improved the drainage along the trail



Noah Lowe, renovated a large wooden bridge.



Nick Luther diverted water on the trail.



Corbin Aden installed an "eagle nest" platform for Ospreys and Eagles near Lakeside Park.



Peter Sheridan upgraded the fitness stations

Community Survey....

In addition to important volunteer workday efforts, FORL responded to the expressed desire from park patrons for lake, park, and environment improvements. In 2017 and 2023 FORL systematically assessed and documented park patrons' views. FORL's goal was to convey the community's vision to the Fairfax County political leadership, Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) and the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES).

Our desire was to provide those important county organizations with significant community input to help guide operations and maintenance, planning, and securing funding to achieve our vision. I am pleased to say we have been successful with a significant number of projects completed or in work. The dedication of the Lakeside Park shade structure on April 28th is just one example of advocating our needs.



An important side note: The data collection, analysis, and document development were major volunteer efforts for preparing the Vision and supporting document. Along with many others, special thanks to Shelly Tucker who led the 2017 data collection survey and Paul and Julie Strasberg for leading the 2023 survey effort and the development of a comprehensive survey results document.

The **"FORL Community Vision Plan for Royal Lake Parks"** documents the results of our work and is available for everyone's review on the FORL website: **Friendsofroyallake.org**. The Vision Plan contains the capital improvement completed projects, proposed and planned projects, ongoing maintenance and support activities.

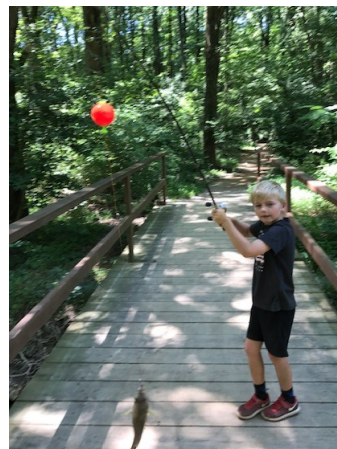
People in the Parks

Kathy Gross: I've been a lucky person to have Royal Lake, specifically Lakeside Park, behind my backyard for forty years. In recent years I've been a volunteer in FORL cleanups, trail workdays, and invasive plant projects and enjoyed the camaraderie working with other volunteers.

However, my greatest enjoyment for the last 14 years has been taking care of my four grandsons, watching them play baseball and basketball at the Lakeside fields, sled down the hills, and play at the playground.



They've also fished, kayaked, waded in the creek, and explored nature in the woods. They've enjoyed the Eggstravaganza and the Halloween Festival. As for me, summer is not complete unless I go to Braddock Nights. On a daily basis, the trail gives me good exercise and the chance to see wonderful friends. Who could ask for more!!



People in the Parks, Cont'd

Logo design and website development



was a major contribution made by Shelly Tucker to FORL's organizational needs in its earliest years. For Shelly's work to date, we are very grateful!

We are pleased to welcome Charlotte Hanagan who has assumed the role of webmaster of the FORL website noted below.



PEOPLE



IN THE



PARKS



NEWLETTER, ETC...

SUZANNE DOHERTY: For almost 50 years I have walked the trails of Royal Lake. Several years ago, I was increasingly horrified by the amount of English ivy growing up the trees throughout the parks. On the afternoon of an Halloween festival in Lakeside Park, I happened to see an exhibition table displaying efforts to combat invasive species in the parks.

"What are you all doing about the English ivy growing EVERYWHERE in this park?"

Greg Sykes handed me a volunteer sign up sheet and invited me to the next meeting of Friends of Royal Lake.

Ever since, I have been an active member of FORL as well as a volunteer with the Park Authority Invasive Management program. With FORL, I have been editor of the quarterly newsletter, now that role more of a collaborative effort shared with Paul and Kathy Gross.

When I look around Royal Lake parks now, with ongoing trail improvements, clean up days, and IMA involvement I see that we have one of the BEST maintained parks in Fairfax County.



Clean-up workday crews across the years....

Why I Got Involved in the Royal Lake Parks & FORL

By Kelley Newsad

Our family moved to Kings Park West in June 2023 after spending a year in the Pacific Northwest, where we had the amazing opportunity to visit six national parks. That experience deepened our appreciation for nature and helped shape our decision to make KPW our forever home. We were drawn in by the beautiful parks, wooded trails, Royal Lake, and the welcoming vibe at Lakeview Swim Club.

As a Navy family, we've moved around quite a bit, but this time we were ready to put down roots—and our love of the outdoors played a big part in that. I want my young children to grow up not only enjoying the environment but also learning to care for it. That's why I stepped up to lead the Parks and Lake Committee in 2024. It's my way of giving back to this incredible community we're lucky to be part of.

One of our committee's biggest initiatives is the *Road Raiders of KPW*. We meet on the second Saturday most months from September through June to spend an hour cleaning up a designated park or green space. We also host a few 2-hour cleanups on holiday Mondays. Most recently, we held our *Earth Day Cleanup* at Royal Lake Park on Saturday, April 19th (photo below; Kelley in blue shirt) and it was amazing to see so many neighbors, especially kids, getting involved.



Clean-up workday on Earth Day 2023



These events are great for the environment and also a fun way to connect with others in the neighborhood.

Right now, my husband is midway through a 40-week deployment, and the final two of our upcoming cleanup dates are conflicting with my kids' activities. I could use a few extra hands to help make the last two cleanups happen. If you're interested in leading one or just want to learn more about what we do, please reach out at parks@kpwca.org. Together, we can keep Royal Lake Parks beautiful!

Onward to the Future

By Paul Gross

This newsletter contains articles and pictures of the past 10 years on the success of many of our work efforts and fun activities such as trail walks, baseball, soccer, tennis, fishing, using playground equipment, and just marveling at nature from the blue heron, beavers and to the turtles on logs. I have heard many times from friends and neighbors that Royal Lake and its parks are the “jewel” in our neighborhoods. I agree.



The question is where do we go from here? How do we (citizens and government) continue to maintain and polish our “jewel.” In many ways we are already doing those things that move us forward. Our extensive IMA program is making progress on an important environmental issue. Major improvements in paving the Lakepointe dam trail, repaving and expanding the trail from Richardson Drive and a new bridge across Rabbit Branch are projected to be completed this year. These efforts are long improvements to park access and use. Another significant access development is the new trail from Commonwealth Blvd. to the Royal Lake circuit trail. This will allow others in our community to walk in to the park instead of driving. Getting there will be part of the enjoyment.

FORL is always looking for inputs from the many patrons of Royal Lake. Please feel free to let us know what's on your mind. As a final note, we would urge everyone to continue to volunteer for the various projects and workdays. I attest to the old saying: “many hands make light work”. Thanks for your support of Royal Lake.

COMING SOON.....

The Annual Summer Photo Contest! Many folks enjoy our Royal Lake parks with a camera at the ready. We invite all amateur photographers to send undoctored photos (cropped or light adjustment acceptable) to be considered for publication in the summer issue of the FORL newsletter.

Email a jpeg file with your entry by JUNE 30 to:

jewelboxgardensbysuzanne@gmail.com

Include your name and a statement giving permission for your photo to be published in the newsletter.

**The five photo entry categories are: Art (natural); Animal; Plant; People; Scenic
Enter up to five photos in each category**

**EDITORS: Paul and Kathy Gross
LAYOUT: Suzanne Doherty**

