



2020

Annual Report

Friends of Riverbend Park, Inc.

Dedication

The 2020 Annual Report of the Friends of Riverbend Park (FORB) is dedicated to the memory of Catherine Dunlap Mayes (April 29, 1949 – October 30, 2020). Cathy was the Founder of FORB in 1999 and its' First President from 1999-2005. It was her devotion to Riverbend Park, her determination to keep it as a natural resource refuge for the citizens of Fairfax County, and her tireless efforts to see FORB survive during its formative years that have resulted in its strength and effectiveness today.



Given the current covid situation, there was no public funeral or other events. Interment was private. In lieu of flowers, Cathy had asked all to contribute to a charity of their choice. Donations in memory of Cathy are being accepted by the Friends of Riverbend Park at:

www.forb.wildapricot.org

Riverbend Park

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

In October 2020, a long-time former member of the Riverbend staff also passed away. Heather May Shockey-Barrett worked on the staff as a Lead Naturalist for more than 20 years until she was diagnosed with cancer about a year ago. She loved Riverbend Park and its wildflowers, particularly the bluebells, and was devoted to teaching about nature and the park. Heather will be deeply missed by her friends and colleagues at Riverbend Park.



Friends of Riverbend Park, Inc.

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

Brief History of FORB

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

FORB's Officers and Directors

During 2020, FORB's Board of Directors and Officers were as follows:

Hugh Morrow, Director and President
Eleanor Anderson, Director and Vice-President
Kevin Dillon, Director and Treasurer
Jack Bowles, Director

Cynthia Fisher, Director
Karen Hershey, Director
John Hughes-Caley, Director
Susan Keating, Director
Kurt Laubinger, Director
Frank Zeng, Director
John Callow, Riverbend Park Manager, *ex-officio*

FORB-Supported Programs and Equipment at Riverbend Park

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

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

A complete summary of the financial support provided to Riverbend Park by FORB from 2002 through 2020 is shown in the chart on the following page. Over the past twenty years, the Friends of Riverbend

Park has contributed more than a quarter of a million dollars for the benefit of the park and its programs and activities.

2020 Accomplishments of Friends of Riverbend Park

The year 2020 was like no other in the memory of most persons alive today. The covid pandemic which struck the world early in the year effectively closed Riverbend Park for much of the year, curtailed its activities, shut off much of its internally-generated revenue, and resulted in major traffic and parking problems on the residential streets adjacent to the park. Because many of the park's activities were canceled, a number of the programs which FORB normally supports each year did not receive FORB funding in 2020. For example, no summer interns were hired this year to help run Riverbend's summer camps and activities. Therefore, FORB did not send its usual \$14,400 donation to Riverbend Park in 2020 to support these interns. Similarly the Bluebell Festival in April and the Virginia Native American Festival in September were both canceled in 2020, and therefore FORB did not donate monies to support these activities this year. The chief items of support for Riverbend Park were underwriting the purchase of equipment, supplies and services for the Riverbend Park staff. These included:

- \$500 for care of the animals at the Nature Center and Visitor Center during the pandemic when Riverbend staff was reduced,
- \$78 annual fee for Riverbend Park staff Zoom Account to conduct virtual classes and meetings,
- \$240 annual fee for staff software for scheduling camps, classes and other park activities,
- \$428 to support Eagle Scout projects at Riverbend Park,
- Purchased a \$250 power washer for the Riverbend Park staff
- Donated \$1,134 for two Stihl chainsaws for Riverbend Park staff

- In spite of the covid pandemic, FORB was able to sell over \$8,000 worth of native plants online and realize a profit of about \$5,000 from this sale. Native plants were delivered to the home of Board Member Eleanor Anderson and plants were sorted and delivered to buyers by Eleanor and other Board Members.
- FORB-logo baseball caps and water bottles were purchased and sold either online or by mail. Over \$1,000 worth of these promotional items was sold.
- Supported overwhelming passage of the Fairfax County Parks Bond issue to secure funding for a design study for a new Interpretive Center at Riverbend Park to replace the existing Visitor Center which is subject to frequent flooding.

Although Riverbend Park and its parking lots were entirely closed during the covid pandemic, the trails remained opened and the park still received many visitors. However, since the gates were locked, all visitors had to park on neighboring side streets adjacent to the park which led to significant traffic and parking problems on Jeffery Road and Eaton Park Road. In addition, not all visitors who parked on these side streets were as careful and respectful of local residents' properties as they should have been which necessitated a letter to the Editor of local newspapers from FORB asking for respect and consideration of these local residential properties. Donation box receipts on the Potomac Heritage Trail and the huge number of cars parked on these side streets clearly indicated that there were very many visitors who appreciated having a resource such as Riverbend Bend during this time of crisis when other options to enjoy the outdoors were so limited.

Friends of Riverbend Park's Income and Expenses

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

<u>Year</u>	<u>Income</u>	<u>Expenses</u>
2016	\$31,105	\$28,211
2017	\$34,672	\$30,778
2018	\$35,567	\$38,627
2019	\$28,853	\$34,160
2020	\$36,831	\$ 10,625

It is readily evident that the covid pandemic produced a major effect on FORB's financial situation during 2020. Income was at an excellent level due to several substantial grants during the year and a good profit from the native plant sale in spite of the pandemic. Expenses for the year, as expected, were significantly lower because of curtailment of activities at the park such as the summer camps and major festivals as previously indicated. Thus, FORB's year-end bank balance was \$62,196.25 which will enable the organization to support major activities and projects in 2021. As of January 1, 2021, consideration is being given to the purchase of a badly-needed patrol and rescue boat for Riverbend Park to replace the existing dysfunctional and irreparable one. FORB also plans to set aside \$5,000 for the discretionary use of the Riverbend Park staff to provide funding for the many small items they require rather than considering each item separately.

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

	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>
Membership Dues	\$4,600	\$5,800	\$2,375
Native Plant Sale	\$7,897	\$9,204	\$8,393
Donation Boxes	\$3,712	\$4,899	\$3,612
General Donations	\$10,792	\$8,174	\$9,160
Foundation Grants	\$5,000	\$ 0	\$12,000
FORB-Logo Sales	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$1,120

Again, because of the covid pandemic and park closure for a significant portion of the year, income from membership dues and the donation boxes were all lower than in previous years. However, FORB was able to realize good income from the Native Plant Sale due to online sales, and was very fortunate to receive three sizeable grants during the year. The Munson Foundation which has supported FORB for many years made two \$5,000 grants in 2020, and The Hodge Family donated \$2,000 to support Eagle Scout Programs at Riverbend Park. FORB also did manage to realize about \$1,100 in income from the sale of promotional items such as logo baseball caps and water bottles, but did not register much of a profit. We will be evaluating such sales further in the future to determine whether or not this type of fund-raising effort is effective. Another limited source of revenue in 2020 was matching funds from corporations for their retirees or employees who have donated funds to the Friends of Riverbend Park.

FORB's expenses for 2020 as may be summarized as follows:

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>
Administrative	\$3,545	\$1,106
Virginia Taxes and Fees	\$ 623	\$ 606
Native Plant Sale	\$3,308	\$2,715
Insurance	\$1,227	\$1,101
Riverbend Park Support	\$20,709	\$3,086
FORB Logo Items	\$ 0	\$1,178
Eagle Scout Project Support	\$ 595	\$ 428
Village of Great Falls Support	\$ 405	\$ 405

Administrative expenses include FORB's Post Office box fee, the Wild Apricot website, office supplies, and PayPal and Square transaction fees. Administrative fees in 2020 were much lower than the previous year because FORB paid its Wild Apricot database fee (\$1,836) for July

2019 through June 2021 in 2019 to take advantage of a lower yearly rate. All other administrative costs were similar to previous years. The largest difference between 2019 and 2020 expenses resulted from very little funding spent on Riverbend Park projects because the park was closed for so much of the year. FORB did also purchase \$1,178 worth of logo-item merchandise, but managed to sell an equal amount of these baseball caps and water bottles.

FORB Membership

The Friends of Riverbend Park began to keep historical data on its membership in September 2019. In the Wild Apricot database, there are two principal lists, one which includes all contacts whether they are Members, Native Plant Sale participants, event attendees or those who have just expressed an interest in Riverbend Park. The second list is made up of the fully paid-up Members of FORB. In October 2016, there were about 150 entries on the Members list, and about 250 names on the total contacts list. As of January 1, 2021, the total contacts list has grown over the past four years to 494 names while the number of dues-paying Members has increased to 264. These increases correspond roughly to a 20% growth in membership and contacts per year over the past four years. In 2020, 27 new Members joined FORB, but, at the same time, some existing Members did not renew their Memberships during the year, perhaps because of the long-lasting park closures. Thus, while there is membership growth, there is also ample room for its improvement. Part of this effect may also be due to the fact that FORB has many Benefactor and Supporter Members who renew for two or three years at a time, and thus it is difficult to compare directly from one year to the next.

Future Needs of Riverbend Park

The 2013 Master Plan for Riverbend Park calls for a number of eventual developments at Riverbend Park. FORB has long advocated the concept of moving the gatehouse on Jeffery Road much further down Potomac Hills Street to prevent traffic backups, facilitate traffic flow and provide additional parking wherever possible. This concept is already included in the Conceptual Development Plan of Riverbend's Master Plan, and is deemed necessary for Riverbend Park's major events such as the Virginia Native American Festival and the Bluebells-at-the-Bend Festival. Traffic backups at the entrance gate, lack of parking in the existing lots, and extensive parking on neighborhood streets adjacent to the park proved to be a major problem during the pandemic of 2020 when the park was completely closed. These same issues were also found to be a major problem at the Virginia Native American Festival in September 2019, and will have to be addressed in the future.

In 2019, the Fairfax County Park Authority completed construction and dedication of its Outdoor Classroom and Picnic Shelter on Potomac Hills Street. Design and construction of a brand new maintenance facility for Riverbend Park right across the road from the Outdoor Classroom are now in process. Construction is now anticipated to occur beginning in the Fall of 2021, and all maintenance functions for the park, including restroom facilities, will then be centralized in one location.

Most importantly, however, FORB is pleased to report that the initial phases of planning and design for an Interpretive Center, located above the Potomac River floodplain, will move ahead. This project is part of the Conceptual Development Plan of the 2013 Riverbend Park Master Plan, but it will be a long and costly undertaking. Nonetheless, river flooding during the past few years has amply demonstrated that the present Visitor Center is in very real danger of eventually being swept

away by flooding. Therefore, plans must be made to accommodate that eventuality, and to relocate much of the park's offices and functions to safer grounds. FORB is happy to report that funding for the initial design study for an Interpretive Center was approved by voters in the Fairfax County 2020 Park Bond Issue, and has been included in the Fairfax County Park Authority's plans.

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