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SPRING 2008

Rappahannock Views

Caledonia Farm—1812 TO HOST Rappahannock Evening View

BY HAL HUNTER

Phil Irwin's Caledonia Farm—1812 will be the site of RCCA's fourth annual Rappahannock Evening View. This year's event will be held on the evening of May 16, a Friday.

The House

Caledonia Farm—1812 looks today much as it did when it was built nearly 200 years ago.

The stone manor house is only the second dwelling that was constructed on the 2,000 acres Lord Fairfax granted in 1735. The home, the adjoining land, and nearly two miles of stone fencing remain intact today.

The two-story Federal-style stone house was built in 1812 for Captain John Dearing, a veteran of the Revolutionary War. The Dearing family cemetery is on the property. Phil bought the home in 1967 and gradually added adjacent lands, now totaling 135 acres. Today this working farm is the top-rated bed and breakfast in Virginia.

Caledonia is the ancient name for Scotland, from the Latin for northern Britain. The house has 2-foot-thick walls and 32-foot solid wood beams. A distinguishing

interior feature is a mantle hand-crafted by Hessian soldiers—German mercenaries in the British army—who settled in the area at the end of the war. The house features six working fireplaces, paneled window wells, and pine floors. The summer kitchen dependency has been converted to a honeymoon suite, accessed by a 30-foot-long covered portico. The living room, with its huge stone fireplace, is downstairs. The upstairs bedroom was formerly quarters for six house servants.

Caledonia Farm is listed on both the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. The farm also is the first stop of twelve on the Front Royal loop of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. Phil maintains fifteen bluebird boxes, each producing up to three broods per year, a bird feeder, hummingbird nectar-feeder, and a birdbath.

Phil will host tours of the house for groups of up to five before dark on the night of the gala.

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Caledonia Farm—1812, owned by Phil Irwin (above left), is the site of the first conservation easement in the county and of the 2008 Rappahannock Evening View.

>>> *Caledonia Farm—1812*, from previous page

The Easement

In 1974, Phil was the first landowner in Rappahannock County, and believed to be only the third in the state, to donate an easement to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF). Over the years, Phil donated three additional easements, which presently total 115 acres.

In 1972, Phil and representatives of eight adjoining counties met in the Oatlands Carriage House. The result of their deliberations was the Piedmont Environment Council. Phil and Nick Arundel, Chairman and Publisher of the seventeen Times Community Newspapers, are the only surviving PEC founders.

Two years earlier, in 1970, Phil had founded the Rappahannock League for Environmental Protection to successfully fight a proposed Potomac Edison (now Allegheny Power) transmission line. He served as president of RLEP for the first 17 years of its existence and continues to sit on its board.

The Trains

If you Google “Caledonia 1812 trains,” the first entry is a half-hour YouTube video of Phil in the basement of Caledonia, demonstrating his scale



PHOTO BY RICHARD LYKES

*Caledonia Farm—1812 owner
Phil Irwin*

model railroad displays. One scene features environmental threats related to Rappahannock County.

Phil maintains powered model locomotives in all gauges, representing train technology from the 1830s to contemporary machines. More than 600 light sources and 100 feet of track run from the utility room, through a historically designated stone-wall tunnel, into the winter kitchen.

Hour-long train tours for individuals and small groups are available by appointment, but not on the evening of the gala.

About Phil

In addition to running his B&B, working on his amazing model-train set, and doing the conservation work noted above, Phil is a director of the Rappahannock County Farm Bureau and serves on the Farmland Preservation Program committee and the Agricultural and Forestal District committee. In 1988, he was named Rappahannock News Citizen of the Year.

Before retiring in 1985, Phil was director and host of the Voice of America’s English-language morning broadcasts, then heard by the world’s largest radio audience.



We must be getting smarter, because

RCCA recently moved from the little schoolhouse to the big schoolhouse. In November, we moved our office space into The Link at The Schoolhouse in Sperryville. The RCCA office is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays and is on the second floor of The Schoolhouse, 12018 Lee Highway in Sperryville.



From the President...

I have long believed in the power of volunteerism. People can do really wonderful things by offering a little of their time, talent, and treasury. We live in a unique county, loaded with opportunities to volunteer and truly make a difference in the quality of life here. No matter your interest, Rappahannock has a nonprofit that could use an hour or so of your time, a dollar or two of your purse, or help in your area of expertise.

RCCA’s largest volunteer effort is on the horizon. The fourth annual Rappahannock Evening View is scheduled for Friday, May 16, and will be held at Caledonia Farm—1812. This very special evening raises funds for the county’s Farmland Preservation Program, a program that purchases development rights from working farmers in exchange for providing easement protection on their land. The event also recognizes all easement donors of the past year. Make note, this year we have moved the event from its normal Saturday slot to Friday evening so not to conflict with the Relay for Life, another of Rappahannock’s volunteer efforts.

Last year, I estimate that RCCA had at least 175 hours of volunteer effort. That work would have cost us much more than \$5,000. Volunteers have a huge impact on small organizations such as those in Rappahannock County. So, volunteer for the Rappahannock Animal Welfare League, Ki Theater, Headwaters, the Scrabble School Foundation, or any number of the not-for-profit organizations in our county. Of course, we invite you to put your love for the county into action by helping us protect its open spaces and natural resources.

Thank you for your interest in and support of RCCA.

—Susan Strittmatter, RCCA President

BOB DENNIS: Johnny Appleseed of Easements

BY HAL HUNTER

Just as the legendary pioneer nurseryman John Chapman (a.k.a. Johnny Appleseed) planted apple nurseries across the early American frontier, Bob Dennis has been planting easements in Rappahannock County for more than 30 years. He donated one on his own property in 1977 and was prepared to donate 10 years earlier, but the Virginia Outdoors Foundation wasn't ready yet.

Long before computer-generated maps became available, Bob pasted individual pages of the county parcel map onto a three-by-four-foot board, colored the parcels in easement green, and carried the board to neighborhood and community meetings, explaining the benefits of easements.

For example, seven years ago, Bob brought his board to a meeting that led to the formation of RCCA. He pointed to a gap in easements that ran east-west through Wakefield District and said that, if the gap were closed, Rappahannock County would be protected from utility incursions from the north.



PHOTO BY RICHARD LYKES

Bob Dennis receiving the RCCA Distinguished Service Award from RCCA President Susan Strittmatter

The gap was closed last year when Cory Koral donated an easement to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, in large part because of Bob's efforts. Yes, easement donations take time.

Over time, Bob's board included more and more easements. Now, 30 years later, his board shows almost 20 percent of all of privately owned land in Rappahannock County is in easement. Bob is personally responsible for most of those donations.

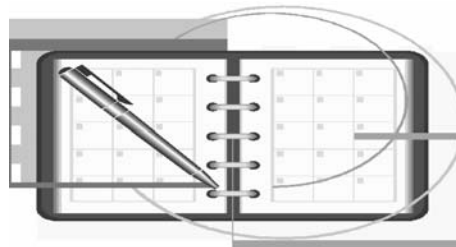
Even today, Bob is the go-to guy for any question about easements. He sends announcements of new donations to the *Rappahannock News*, explains easement specifics to anyone who

Things you might not know about Bob Dennis

- ✚ He is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Dartmouth College, with a master's degree in geology from Johns Hopkins University.
- ✚ He was president of PEC when that organization led the charge against Disney's effort to turn a Manassas Civil War battleground into a theme park.
- ✚ He originated the idea of the "Virginia Piedmont Reserve"—to save 1 million acres in PEC's nine-county service region (about half the region) through voluntary landowner actions, such as easement donations and Agricultural and Forestal Districts.
- ✚ He played key roles in establishing the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, the Assateague Island National Seashore, and the Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

asks, even verifies VOF pronouncements about the total number of donated acres in the county.

In short, more than any other person, Bob Dennis is responsible for easements in Rappahannock County. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Bob was awarded the first RCCA Distinguished Service award at the annual meeting last fall. Congratulations, Bob!



CALENDAR

- March 18 Board Meeting
- April 20 *Considering an Easement?*
An Informational Gathering for Prospective Easement Donors
- April 15 Board Meeting
- May 16 Rappahannock Evening View
- June 17 Board Meeting
- July 15 Board Meeting

*The public is welcome at all RCCA board meetings.
For more information on any of these events,
call the RCCA office at (540) 987-9118.*

Since the last newsletter, the total amount of private land in Rappahannock County that is in conservation easement jumped to 26,193 acres (19.2 percent) through easements recorded on the following dates:

🏡 November 29—the county's smallest easement (less than ¼ acre), granted to Virginia's Board of Historic Resources by Annette ("Mitzi") Young on "Campbell House," on Mt. Salem Avenue in the Washington Historic District. This easement prohibits subdivision of the property and protects the house itself from alteration or addition.

🏡 November 30—an easement given to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation by John Marshall Clark, Jr. It restricts to three parcels any future subdivision of 291 acres in Harris Hollow, previously two tax parcels on Route 622 abutting a designated unit of the National Wilderness Preservation System in Shenandoah Park, and allows no building above the 1,300-foot elevation line.

🏡 December 13—an easement given to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation by Hodge Miller (Karolyn Miller also signed the deed) protecting 135 acres on Business Route 211 just south of the Town of Washington. This easement provides protection for Big Branch and limits future subdivision to no more than two parcels.

Also recorded on this date is an easement granted by Brett Jackson to protect 92 acres on the Hazel River. The property is visible from Route 231 and lies about half a mile from the Appalachian Trail. The easement provides a riparian buffer for the Hazel and prohibits both future subdivision and any buildings above the 960-foot contour.

🏡 December 20—a conservation easement protecting 88 acres on Fodderstack Road to VOF, granted by Nancy Dillon. The easement effectively merges two tax parcels into a single parcel that may never be divided.

🏡 December 21—an easement granted by Stew and Eve Willis to the Piedmont Environmental Council. It prevents any future division of 52 acres on Slate Mills Road and provides for their stewardship.

Workshop helps farmers prepare for the next generation

BY STEVE KERCHNER

"Estate tax laws are complicated, confusing, and uncertain."

That statement by attorney Julie King set the tone for the seminar "Estate Planning for Farmers," held at The Schoolhouse in Sperryville on Thursday, January 24. The Rappahannock Farm Bureau sponsored the event, and RCCA acted as the lead coordinator, collaborating with the Rappahannock NonProfit Center, Rappahannock Cooperative Extension Office, Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District, and Piedmont Environmental Council.

Attended by more than 75 people, the evening was a mix of local and professional advice on estate planning options for farmers who demonstrated strong interest in protecting farmland. Rappahannock County farmers Lindsay Eastham, Dick McNear, and Bryant Lee spoke about what estate planning choices have helped their family farms.

The panel of speakers also included attorney Julie King, of McGuire Woods, and Certified Public Accountant Rebecca McCoy. They detailed current tax obligations and exemption policies and stressed the need for advance planning and periodic review.

Don Loock of the Piedmont Environmental Council and Ashley Matthews of RCCA provided information on conservation easements, while Rappahannock County Administrator John McCarthy presented an overview of the county's Farmland Preservation Program. Jon Dean, Estate Planner with the Virginia Farm Bureau Insurance Services, concluded the evening with a description of estate planning services available through the Bureau.

The evening provided a wealth of information regarding the process for preserving farmland. The audience left with many dos and don'ts about how to get started. It is never too early to get started and those who wait may find it's too late to preserve their farms for future generations.



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Easement Update