

ESSEX NEWS DAILY

Friends of Clark's Pond gather for their annual cleanup

By: **Daniel Jackovino** - Staff Writer



Photo by Daniel Jackovino

Jane Califf uses a rake to snag a plastic pool in Clark's Pond as Carrie Miller lends a hand to provide balance. The two women were successful.

BLOOMFIELD, NJ — The 20th annual Friends of Clark's Pond cleanup of the Clark's Pond was held this past Sunday. About two dozen volunteers and Friends gathered under clear, 80-degree skies behind the playing fields of Bloomfield Middle School.

The cleanup group included 2nd Ward Councilman Nicholas Joanow and assistant schools superintendent Jaynellen Behre-Jenkins, who was with her daughter Molly. Help also came from members of the Brookdale Brownie Troop No. 20668. The Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission, which would dispose of the collected trash, was there with garbage and recycling bags, tools and gloves.

Ross started the group in 1996 with her husband, Paul Schneider. He had a special chore to accomplish Sunday. That was to free a hemlock tree from the overgrowth of neighboring plants. He was helped by Mark Kamphausen. Native trees had been planted in a corridor to separate the pond from the BMS playing fields. Two other hemlocks had been planted but they had died.

A variety of trees had been donated this year to Bloomfield by the New Jersey Arbor Society. Some were distributed by the Open Space Trust Fund Committee and Greener Bloomfield. This occurred during the recent Earth Day celebration in front of the public library. The Friends of Clark's Pond received about 40 small Douglas firs. What was not distributed on Sunday, Joanow said, would go to the Brookdale Park Conservancy.

The corridor of trees, which is sizable, perhaps 40 feet wide by 500 feet long, was planted in two days a number of years apart. To see the abundant vegetation now, and to know that it all came from two days of work and, no doubt, smart planning, is truly a sight to behold.

The first planting was in the early years of Friends. Schneider recalled that John Bukowski was mayor. The planting was funded by a \$4,000 grant.

"It was raining, pouring," Schneider said.

They were assisted by the Boy Scouts. Birch, elderberry, pussy willow, pond pine, bald cypress, and other varieties of trees were planted on that day.

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“This area is just the northern end of where bald cypress grows,” Ross said. “It loses its needles in the winter. The redbud is another beautiful native tree we planted. It’s flowering now.”

Ross was happy with the corridor.

“We picked the right plants,” she said. “And we had the Boy Scouts make bluebird houses. But tree swallow moved in. They’re blue but not bluebirds.”

The second planting, which extended the corridor, was in 2006 and was part of a \$1.5 million waterway protection grant. According to Ross and Schneider, it did not go well at Clark’s Pond. The contractor failed to dredge the pond adequately of silt and, against their protests, planted shoreline flora too late in the season. The winter destroyed the plants before they could root.

Most of the volunteers worked the shoreline along the corridor. But most of the big garbage items in the pond, which is created by a damming of the Third River, was on the other side of the dam toward Scott Road. There were some large objects in the water there, including cut tree stumps and a child’s wading pool. One of the younger volunteers asked if maybe someone had used the pool as a boat on the pond. But Joanow said that unfortunately, when people want to get rid of things, they toss them into the pond.

The abandoned wading pool was in deeper water and no one except resident Jane Califf was wearing boots. But Joanow walked out gingerly to the edge of the water where there was a cut tree stump and pushed it firmly into the mud. He checked it for stability. When it looked right and did not shake, he told Califf to stand on it and to use a rake to haul in the pool. She did not think she could do it. Joanow told her when she leaned over, to hold the hand of Carrie Miller, another resident on the scene.

“It’s critically important that we connect our residents to our passive recreational areas,” he said, watching the team of Califf and Miller perform their balancing act. “Clark’s Pond is a treasure. We need to maintain it litter-free.”

Califf leaned, Miller held, and a prong caught the wading pool.

“OK, haul it in,” Joanow shouted.

She did, shouting back that pieces of styrofoam will kill wildlife when they mistakenly swallow it as food. Joanow continued.

“It’s critically important that we educate residents of the toxicity of dumping,” he said. “We have a recycling program for bottles and cans. Environmental sensitivity is the onus of this cleanup. A lot of stuff here shouldn’t be here. It should be at the curb. Bottles, cans and styrofoam have a negative impact on the wildlife.”

When the wading pool came to shore, Joanow quickly bundled it into a garbage bag and headed back for the PVSC dump truck which was near the doughnuts and the playing field. Califf and Miller spotted another item of urban detritus, a little further out, and went for it. They managed to get this one, too.