



One Amazing Team, 111 Tires Out of the North Fork!

BY JULIA SARGENT

When Shenandoah Riverkeeper's Alan Lehman contacted Friends to report a concentration of tires in the North Fork along the Red Banks Road in Mount Jackson, we knew exactly who to call. Donnie Cochran and his amazing crew at Virginia Eagle Distributing Company have helped us collect large tire deposits in the past, and were ready to spring into action again!

Undeterred by the summer sun, heat, and dense vegetation, 23 Virginia Eagle employees joined Donnie, Shenandoah Riverkeepers Alan Lehman and Mark Frondorf, and Friends' executive director David Brotman, on July 18th to pull a staggering 111 tires out of the North Fork. The tires were loaded up on a dump truck, graciously provided by a VA Eagle volunteer and taken to the Shenandoah County Landfill, where they are no longer leaching harmful oil-based chemicals and heavy metals into our community's waterways.

After the tires were loaded up, the crew relaxed over well-deserved cold brews and sandwiches while Donnie raffled off a kayak, generously donated to Virginia Eagle by Sweetwater Brewing Company for this event, along with a few other items.

A big thank you to the crew at Virginia Eagle Distributing Company and to Shenandoah Riverkeeper, without whom this important project would not have been possible. Friends would also like to acknowledge landowner, Todd Bowman, who gave us his trust and support in allowing us to access the site via his property. Here's what he had to say about his experience:

"Working with the team from Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River was both a pleasure and an honor. Not only were Dave Brotman and his team exceptionally thorough in communicating their plans for the river clean-up, they also went out of their way to minimize impacts to the property. This organization provides an invaluable service for the Shenandoah Valley, supporting the quality of life in the community while protecting the health of the river and its environs. I commend them for their efforts and would be proud to partner with them again." - Todd Bowman, property owner

This event shows just how much can be accomplished when engaged local businesses, motivated citizens, and conservation non-profits team up to clean up in and around our watershed.



River's Way Natural Playground and Outdoor Classroom

BY CONCHA MENDOZA

Woodstock, and the state, have a new and very special playground on the way. Groundbreaking is set to begin imminently on River's Way Natural Playground and Outdoor Classroom at Seven Bends State Park. Take a look at its beautiful, landscape-inspired design here: <https://fnfsr.org/seven-bends-state-park-july-update/>. You will be impressed. Throughout the playground and classrooms, kids will explore a mostly natural-material, free-play-encouraged playscape with outdoor classrooms ideal for environmental education. The whole project is designed as a scaled version of the section of the North Fork bordering the Park, including area features like Powell Mountain, the Woodstock Tower, and Burnshire Dam.

The project sprang from a creative collaboration between the Park (with particular inspiration from Chief Ranger, Tom Stevens), FNFSR, and Friends of Seven Bends State Park. Initial funding came through an extremely generous \$12,000 grant from the Garden Club of Virginia. Since then, the project has been bolstered by volunteer support and guidance from Northern Shenandoah Valley



Master Gardeners and Valley Engineering. And now, we are exploring additional partnership prospects with the Virginia Department of Forestry and several local community support organizations.

We are encouraged by the community involvement and expertise already invested in

this project. Even so, this very special project can use your added support. Please contact us at friends@fnfsr.org or 540-459-8550 if you are interested in assisting with River's Way Natural Playground and Outdoor Classroom, financially or otherwise. Partners, supporters, and funders will be acknowledged in playground signage.



BY CONCHA MENDOZA

Joan Chapman has been a fisherwoman for more than six decades, with the past two devoted to fly fishing. In 2018, two of her friends, Friends' member Alice Findler and Elizabeth McCarus, asked her to teach them the sport. The endeavor was a success and the three women, in hopes of expanding, formalized their group into Shenandoah Reel Women (SRW). Elizabeth designed a logo featuring a sketch from a photo of Joan fly fishing, and the group has since grown to over 20 members.

This past fall, in partnership with Friends, SRW submitted a successful grant application to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, now the Virginia Department of Wildlife

Shenandoah Reel Women to Mentor Young Women in Fly Fishing

Resources. The grant supports the development of a mentorship program for girls, which includes daytime summer programs, and the establishment of youth membership for ongoing instruction, support, and peer relationship-building.

For Joan, the goal is to get more women and girls into the river to try their hand at fishing, but also to engage in other pursuits together like hiking, birding, and nature photography. "There is always an environmental and conservation element to our gatherings. We have members who are knowledgeable about the local streams and rivers, mountain ranges, animal tracks, and plant life," she explained.

With the current pandemic, there's been a snag in the line of the first year rollout, but it certainly won't stop Joan whose passion for the project blows any obstacles out of the water. "I've always loved being outdoors, in the trees and the flowers, no cement. While I enjoyed fishing 'with the guys,' I became aware of how few women were on the river. Not fishing, not canoeing. I was never convinced I was unique in my outdoor enjoyment and when Alice and Elizabeth joined in, I felt we were on

our way to a unique experience together in our own state park" (a reference to the project's focus at Seven Bends State Park). While plans have been postponed, Joan and the group continue to work behind the scenes and are eager to commence CPR trainings, bug identification, knot tying, fishing necklace crafting, and rolling out the group's brand new SRW banner.

Any women or parents or guardians of girls age 12 to 18 interested in joining Shenandoah Reel Women may contact Joan Chapman at 703-507-2276 or joan.chapman@fnfsr.org.



Work that Matters



BY DAVID BROTMAN

Flows of conversation, rivers, and culture

Folks say I talk a lot. And none of them are wrong. Thankfully for all, there's a listening side to this work too. In truth, both are helpful in finding the special work—the stuff people are saying they need, or want, without saying they need or want it.

So why am I talking with SCUBA divers from D.C. about the North Fork (just for an example)? In part, because rivers inspire bridges. And we're working on a bridge between our fresh-aired Shenandoah Valley lives, and the dense commingling of life in the city. We're working on a cultural bridge.

The River Exchange Program

This project, for which we're currently seeking funding, brings together young people from the Valley with young people from the city. Through activities on our rivers and explorations at cultural landmarks, these youth encounter both the differences between their lives and the unexpected links between them. Just as much as these are geographically diverse explorations, our approach is intentionally culturally diverse.

Central to the program, is giving this next generation the chance to work together on something outside of their divides, and to find themselves learning about one another's experiences. Brought together to explore two rivers—the Shenandoah's North Fork and the Anacostia—and the cultures that grew up around them. And they'll discover along the way that most rivers (especially cultural) flow in more than one direction.

Out of the woods and into the woods we go...

Another voice we heard this spring came from out of the woods—out of the U.S. Forest Service. The

word was that vandalism on USFS property was up. What we heard was that, in the midst of the pandemic, boredom was up, and meaningful occupation down. We were working on the alchemy of turning our week-long summer camps into our new, 5-week long, online-aided, family-based Summer Stream Adventures when this came up. It seemed to us that some portion of our older teens might want an alternative to summer camp-styled projects.

Chief Ranger, Tom Stevens (Seven Bends State Park) and I drafted an outline for the North Fork Youth Conservation Corps later that day. With a full summer, we wouldn't get this off the ground before the start of school. But with no reason to limit the season of the Corps' work (particularly with COVID's strains on indoor schooling) we have pursued this. When rolled out, teens in the Corps will take on projects at the State Park, and elsewhere in the Valley.

But we saw more than this. To answer that earlier voice (from the woods) we felt that community mentors could add mortar to the foundation and would more solidly address the underlying need. And so, we are in the process now of lining up mentors from around our community.

You have a second address

There has been one more voice still, and it's my own. The one that has been pointing out repeatedly that there is a bigger river picture to address. And pieces of it have been revealing themselves throughout the year (the 14-months since I started with Friends). From Bergton and Yankeetown, Blue Hole and the fringes of Harrisonburg, to the Fort Valley, Star Tannery, Middletown, and Strasburg

on to Riverton, we live, work, play and rest in one watershed. We make up a singular, unique Watershed Community. It's a fact, a circumstance, that need not be forced. It is simply so. As unavoidable as water running downhill. Literally.

So where to go with that? We started this summer on the What is My Watershed Address? project. The first step being development of a mapping tool for everyone living in, or spending time in, the North Fork watershed—a map-based resource for stewardship opportunities, home and land management decisions, and for education with kids and adults alike. I know you know your street address, and some of your neighbors. But what is your Watershed address? Which stream moves the running rain from your home to the North Fork? And what does that mean your role is in the river?

If you want to begin to find out, stay tuned. We have built the first phase of this interactive, online Watershed Address mapping tool, and we are preparing it for our website so you can find your address there, along with helpful information. We will keep you informed as we make on-going updates to make it more and more useful to you, and to the full Watershed Community. There is a code, a watershed address code or a HUC (Hydrologic Unit Code) for every place on land. We'll help you find out about yours.

The point of all of this is to make a meaningful difference. Thank you for supporting this work, and for being part of it. This year especially, with so much key work at hand, and loud calls on groups like Friends to expand outdoor education, please continue your generous support. We turn it into work that matters. Work that you can call your own.





Jumping into *Summer Stream Adventures with Friends*. A Program to Remember!

BY DAISY BLAKELY

Like many this year, Friends was not able to hold our beloved summer camps in person. So we got creative with staff, local agency partners, board members and volunteering professional teachers all coming together to develop an online camp program focused on nature.

We set out to build a program that would help children and families get outdoors and enjoy nature while providing guided lessons to create easy home, and near-home, learning experiences. What came together was a wonderful, engaging, five week-long program.

Local educator, Stefany Feldbusch, facilitated the team's work, and helped guide the program into fruition through many, many Zoom meetings. Together they designed parallel programs for two age groups, older and younger, and in total, we registered over 100 children between them! Once everything was ready, the kids, parents and teachers were all off to the races of learning together, both online, and out in the world of summer.

The younger age group (4-9 year olds) met twice a week through virtual meetings with Mondays titled Listen and Learn and Fridays Show and Share. Each Monday we presented families with a week-long theme (mud, plants, animals, streams, rivers) and provided a slew of activities and lessons to dive into each of them. To make the meetings fun, instructors started off meetings with poems and songs encouraging students to participate in singing. Friday's Show and Share meetings gave

children the chance to voice what they did during the week. Each student shared at least one of their activities from the week and what they enjoyed about it. Some were so inspired that they shared even more.

Summer Stream's 10-17 year olds also focused on weekly themes: Wildlife Observations, Native and Invasive Plants, Macroinvertebrates and River Health, and Stormwater and Pollution, culminating with a week of review and celebration. Each week began with a kickoff virtual meeting to explore the week's themed lessons and provide explanations of activities. And each week ended with a share session.

Campers kept Nature Journals throughout the program, where they drew and recorded observations while spending valuable time outdoors. Other camper projects included modeling the Seven Bends with tin foil, redesigning an apartment building in D.C. with an eye toward energy conservation and stormwater management, building a mini-watershed, and creating a nature-themed board game.

Parents and children alike shared notes about how much they enjoyed learning more about their environment and how to work to conserve it. One parent shared: "We particularly liked activities that included a touch sensory component... like feeling mud between your toes or feet in the water. It was nice to have a variety of activities... There was always something we had time to do and lots

to do if we had more time... It was organized well and had something that everyone could experience". Hearing about joyful engagements like this told us that our goal to have families outdoors and working together was both accomplished and valued.

Program volunteers were also very happy with their sense of accomplishment and the palpable sense of helping the community, especially in such a chaotic time. Stefany Feldbusch, who coordinated staff and volunteers, shared her experience about the program, "...bringing families an opportunity and excuse to enjoy their watershed during the COVID-19 pandemic brought me so much energy and excitement. I was happy to work with volunteers and FNFSR staff to make it into a reality. My goal was to provide activities and resources that led families outside and helped children develop a deeper appreciation and love for their environment. I am proud of all FNFSR volunteers and staff that overcame challenges brought forth by COVID-19 to bring families a safe and engaging program."

This program gave Friends the chance to jump into the world of online-driven outdoor education, and by all accounts, we succeeded with gusto. Summer Stream Adventures with Friends added to our teaching toolbox. Part of good teaching is being adaptable, and the Friends educational program has done beautifully in moving into the online world of learning. We are so pleased with the feedback we've received from families, children, and our colleagues.

Special thanks go out to Stefany, and to the following volunteers who are responsible for creating such a unique and successful Summer Stream Adventures: Kelly Newcomer-Hendricks, Joan Chapman, Allyson Ponn, Kathy Doyle, and Gael Shaffer.

Board Additions Bring Education and Outdoor Recreation Expertise

BY CONCHA MENDOZA

We are very happy to welcome Joan Chapman to the Friends Board of Directors, and to have Gael Shaffer back for another term. Both bring a background in education and a long-held appreciation for the river. Joan and Gael have each been part of FNFSR-organized professional development programs which took them to the Chesapeake Bay to help them broaden their view of their home region within the larger Bay ecosystem. Ever since, they have both been investing what they've learned back into the community. Here is a little bit about each of them.



Joan Chapman

Joan has been a resident of Shenandoah County, living on the North Fork, for more than 20 years. She holds a BS in Computer Science from Mary Washington College. Joan's passion has always been

learning and sharing that learning. She has been recognized as Math Teacher of the Year in Prince William County, Who's Who Among America's Teachers, Volunteer of the Year for Shenandoah

County Public Schools, and Volunteer of the Year for FNFSR. In 2015, she attended a Chesapeake Bay Foundation and FNFSR Teachers Workshop on Fox Island. "The experience in the Bay really emphasized the trickle-down effects that our lives and actions in the Shenandoah Valley have on the waters and communities downstream."

Joan has been a volunteer for FNFSR for over a decade. She is also involved with the Friends of the Seven Bends State Park, and is the instigator/master caster for the Shenandoah Reel Women. She is an avid fisherman, gardener, and summer camp host. "We are surrounded by wonders and, through our work with Friends and our summer camps, we are waking up the minds of tomorrow's leaders," she shared. "And we have the best venue for many outdoor workshops at our own Seven Bends State Park."



Gael Shaffer

Gael is returning to the board after a two-year hiatus. She is preparing for retirement from a career in education, currently as a teacher of the blind and visually impaired for Loudoun County Public Schools.

She is a longtime resident of Shenandoah County, and is a graduate of Central High School in Woodstock and holds both bachelor's and master's degrees in education from JMU. On her return to the board: "The comradeship with the staff, board, and members has always been special to me, and I look forward to more. I have made some solid friendships as a result of my time on the board, that I know will last for a lifetime. As a soon to be retired teacher, I look forward to continued work with children and showing them the beauty and fun and health that they will experience outside." She hopes to see Friends contribute to greater harmony in our community toward a shared pride in our beautiful Shenandoah Valley landscape and waterways.

Gael was teaching in Shenandoah County when she was offered the opportunity to "follow a raindrop to the bay" as part of an environmental education project by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation for teachers in the watershed. Teachers paddled the tributaries in canoes, beginning in the North Fork of the Shenandoah, to arrive and spend a few days on Fox Island, which appeared stable then, but is presently becoming submerged due to global warming.

This experience changed Gael's life, leading her to become a river and environmental advocate. She was instrumental in beginning the FNFSR children's summer education programs, and worked to improve them for many years, recruiting the involvement of more Shenandoah County teachers.

She and her husband Steve, along with their grandson and a beagle, live in a log cabin on the Shenandoah River that they worked on themselves and which continues to be a labor of love. "I daily benefit from the tranquility of just being near moving water," she shared. "We live near the lake of a dam, so we can travel both downstream and upstream. And I get some neat photographs of the wildlife that visits the river, including bears and eagles." In her spare time, Gael enjoys photography, jewelry making, running, weightlifting, and tap dancing.

Notes from Our New Volunteer Coordinator

BY JULIA SARGENT

This isn't just about volunteer programs. When I thought about what I'd like to share with our members, I wanted most to convey the spirit with which we all have worked together through this tough time.

Uncertain Times, Exciting Possibilities

Coming on board at Friends of the North Fork as the Volunteer Coordinator in the height of a global pandemic has been interesting, to say the least. How can conservation non-profits foster community engagement and volunteerism in the face of stay-at-home orders and social distancing mandates? In the last few months and over countless hours of Zoom meetings, I have experienced the determination, flexibility, and creativity that it takes for organizations to navigate these uncertain times.

Instead of stepping back or slowing down, under the intrepid leadership of executive director David Brotman, Friends has been a flurry of (remote!) activity and adaptation. Against the backdrop of the ever-changing COVID landscape, the full FNFSR staff launched quickly into brainstorming, consulting, researching, and designing new approaches to adapt and even expand our programs.

When schools shut down, education support specialist, Daisy Blakely, swung into action, consulting with Shenandoah County Public School officials to create a "choice board" of environmental activities and lessons. Through it, Friends provided educational activities for students of all ages to do from home, many of which could be taken up together with family members. These lessons were also shared with Rockingham County Public School students.

When it became clear that in-person summer camps would not be an option, Daisy and Operations Manager Concha Mendoza dove head first into designing our first-ever virtual camp, "Summer Stream Adventures with Friends." With devoted work and the invaluable guidance of Stefany Feldbush, Summer Stream 2020 program coordinator, and FNFSR board members Joan Chapman and Gael Shaffer, camp was in session!

continued on page 6

Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River

David Brotman *Executive Director*
Daisy Blakely *Education Support Specialist*
Concha Mendoza *Operations Manager*
Julia Sargent *Volunteer Coordinator*

PO Box 746
305 West Court Street
Woodstock, VA 22664

(540) 459-8550

fnfsr.org





PO Box 746
Woodstock, VA 22664

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Save the Date!

16th Annual Fish Fry and Auction (A Ticketless Event)

BY CONCHA MENDOZA

We are going online with our annual “Fish Fry” Auction this year. **Bidding begins on Sunday, September 27 at 8am**, and **closes between 6:30 and 7:45pm on Sunday, October 4**, with each item closing in sequence.

There will be terrific items on the block as always, and they will be viewable online throughout the week. And, we will post teaser videos to give you some early looks and bidding instructions. Join us as we share our successes, celebrate the Valley lifestyle we love and maintain, and raise a glass together on October 4, even if remotely.

No tickets are needed to bid. Simply register in advance at Laughlin Auctions (<http://www.laughlinauctions.com/>), and follow registration instructions there.

We would love to have you Sponsor the event. Visit <https://fnfsr.org/annual-fish-fry-and-auction-2020/> to become a sponsor today. In thanks, we are sending our Sponsors gift certificates to some of our special local businesses. Your support, this year especially, will make waves in sustaining our future

programming and outreach efforts. Thank you for being a part of our vibrant and resilient River Community.

Thank you to these corporate sponsors for their 2020 support:

Champion: Regulus Group

Leader: First Bank, Muse Vineyards, Shentel, Trex, Woodstock Brewhouse

Partner: Perry Engineering, Veterinary Diagnostic Pathology

Friend: Bowman Andros, Bushong Contracting, Carmeuse Lime & Stone, Dupont Community Credit Union, Fort Valley Nursery, Laughlin Auctions, Valley Health-Shenandoah Memorial Hospital; Yount, Hyde & Barbour



continued from page 5

With group-oriented stream cleanups also off the table, we immediately began organizing the first of our monthly “North Fork Trash Challenges,” engaging individuals and families to take up many separate cleanups throughout the watershed. Our three Trash Challenges have so far generated over 25 separate clean ups and have led to the removal of an estimated 600 lbs of trash. As restrictions eased and Virginia entered Phase 3, Friends and our partners at Shenandoah Riverkeeper and Virginia Eagle decided to go ahead with a planned tire cleanup on July 18th, with 23 volunteers removing 111 tires from the North Fork.

With all of this, it is plain to see that the passion and capacity of our community to protect our waterways has not diminished, even as our ability to come together physically has.

It is difficult to envision how COVID will evolve and what measures will be necessary in the coming months and year to protect the health and safety of our community. However, Friends will keep our creative stride going, and will continue to bring you opportunities to connect and get involved. I am excited and inspired to see Friends of the North Fork’s programming moving through this crisis even stronger, more resilient, and more accessible to our community around the watershed.