

Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council, Inc.

13555 Beaver Dam Road
Cockeysville, MD 21030

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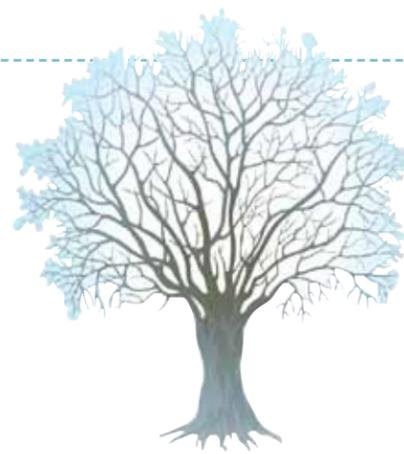


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Is Your Membership
Current?



DRIVE CAREFULLY:
USE YOUR SEAT BELTS



**RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP
AND SIGN UP A FRIEND, TOO!**

Just as it takes many branches to make a strong tree, it takes many members to make a strong Council. The expiration date and letter on your mailing label reveal your membership status. "C" means current, "E" means expired, and "X" means this is your last issue unless you renew now. Use this form to renew, or give it to a friend who would enjoy the Nature Center. Better yet, gift it to them. **Read "Jack the Starling's Top Ten Reasons to Renew (and Join)" on page 4.**

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ State _____ Zip _____

- \$ 15 Individual
- \$ 20 Family
- \$ 12 Senior Citizen/Student
- \$ 25 Non-Profit
- \$ 50 Sustaining
- \$100 Corporate
- \$100 Patron
- \$150 Lifetime



Checks payable to ORNC Council, 13555 Beaver Dam Rd., Cockeysville, MD 21030

TRAILBLAZER

Feb/March 2012



Supporting Oregon Ridge Park
and Nature Center for 29 years

**WINTERTIME IS
MAPLE SUGAR TIME!**
Time to Start Stoking
the Evaporator!



MAPLE SUGAR DAYS

February 18 and 19, 25 and 26
10 AM to 4 PM

Winter slipped in as quietly as a mouse, but it may roar like a lion on its way out. How can you beat those "tired of winter" blahs?

Tap and Taste at Oregon Ridge

. . . and everything in between. Hike to the sugar bush, tap a maple tree and collect sugary sap. Then warm up in the steamy Sugar Shack and watch what it all boils down to. . .

Sweet Syrup for the Tastin'

Just pack the car with family or friends and head over to the Ridge.

IT'S FREE and FUN!

**ENJOY A STACK OF PANCAKES
WITH PURE MAPLE SYRUP
AT THE ANNUAL
PANCAKE BREAKFAST**

Oregon Ridge Lodge
March 3 and 4 8 AM to Noon

Tickets at Door: Adults - \$7; Kids 2 to 8 - \$3

Gobble up some grilled sausage, too. Try to win a box raffle, buy some syrup and spring flowers, visit our gift shop and. . .

Support Us by Joining the ORNC Council !

ORNC'S GUIDING LIGHTS: Trail Guide Training Begins February 7

Oregon Ridge trail guide volunteers are guiding lights to many children who rarely have a chance to explore the outdoors in areas where houses, cars and streets are nowhere to be seen. Trail guides benefit from these rewarding experiences, and they get some exercise, too.

Training occurs in winter and fall. The only prerequisites are a hankering for the outdoors, enthusiasm, and a willingness to share. The winter session takes place February 7 through February 10, from 10 AM to 1 PM. Your \$25 fee is totally refundable after leading your first solo hike.

During February's training, you will learn how to lead a maple sugar hike, follow Teacher/Naturalist Andi Musser in search of frogs, turtles and other amphibians and reptiles, learn about birds from ORNC Naturalists Courtney Peed or Winny Tan, and hear from a special guest speaker.

After training, you will be encouraged to tag along with a seasoned Trail Guide as often as necessary to feel comfortable taking out a group on your own. You will discover that the children's gusto is contagious as you traipse with them through the woods, sweep insects from the meadow, or splash in the stream in search of crawdads and other critters. You will observe how Trail Guides engage the children so they will want to learn more about nature and the environment. It is all about fun, not scientific facts.

An extra perk is a monthly adventure just for the Trail Guides -- a spring wildflower hike in Oregon Ridge park, a canoe trip on a local river or lake, or a visit to a neighboring nature facility. Please join us. We need you. (MJS)



Sue Leslie (front) and Andi Musser canoe at Anita Leight Estuary Center

COUNCIL SPEAKER SERIES

BUILD IT, GROW IT, EAT IT: Constructing Wooden Grow Boxes

By Stan and Karen Cohn

Monday, March 19, 7:30 PM



March is on its way. With it comes a craving for fresh, tender salad greens. You can satisfy that craving in an inexpensive and uncontaminated way. First, you need to listen to your "inner gardener," even if you suspect you have a black thumb. Then, rev up the car engine and head for the closest hardware store for some supplies. (If Old Man Winter gets grumpy, you may be going there anyway for a bag of Ice Melt!) Later, drive to the garden center to buy some lettuce, tomatoes, and spring onions. Finally, immerse yourself in a morning of unskilled labor with some simple tools to build your own Grow Box and plant your salad greens for cultivation a few weeks down the road.

Stan and Karen Cohn will demonstrate, step-by-step and piece-by-piece, all you need to know to build an easily constructed, portable wooden Grow Box. Once you've completed your first Grow Box at home, you may even want to progress to a Salad Table like the one pictured above.

Stan and Karen Cohn are enthusiastic amateur gardeners who are interested in sustainable and organic farming on a backyard scale. When Stan is not practicing veterinary medicine, and when Karen is not teaching needlework, they can be found planting natives, removing invasives, and adding just one more Grow Box to their container garden.

[Note: There is no speaker scheduled for February]

BELLA WANIS: A Well-Rounded Ridge Runner

At age 14, Isabela (Bella) Wanis is already a well-rounded individual and an asset to the Ridge Runner team. She and her family have attended ORNC activities and events for many years, so Bella knew early on that she wanted to volunteer when she was old enough, signing up for the program as soon as she turned 13. She says, "I was always interested in learning about nature and helping animals, and I also love to volunteer."



Bella most enjoys helping with activities such as camps and weekend events, as well as taking care of the animals. Jasmine the Opossum is her favorite because, "...she is sweet and does not hurt people. She is easy to handle, and she reminds me of my old dog. She is not aggressive." She recently lost Cutie, her black Lab, and misses feeding, brushing, playing and walking with her. Bella still helps care for Fishy, her goldfish.

Bella has many hobbies and interests. She has been on a robotics team for four years, and her team went to the world championship last year. She participates in honors chorus and chamber singers, and she hopes to try out for All County and All State. She has played soccer for most of her life, but also enjoys archery, hiking, biking and skiing. In her spare time, she makes jewelry.

It's not surprising that environmental science is Bella's favorite subject. Overall, she just enjoys science courses. She

was picked to be in the Young Science Explorers Camp in 2010. She says, "I would like to be a lawyer/psychologist when I grow up because I enjoy and am good at making arguments, and I do well when we do mock trials in school." She enjoys studying human psychology, and thinks she would like to be an environmental lawyer.

Somehow, Bella finds time to read, too. She enjoys fantasy, including Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, and of course, *Harry Potter*. She also reads some Shakespeare. Her taste in music leans toward alternative such as Cold Play, Snow Patrol, and One Republic.

Yes, Bella Wanis is definitely a well-rounded young lady, and we sincerely hope she remains part of the Ridge Runner team throughout her high school years. It would be a feather in our cap to say we helped her along her journey toward becoming a top-notch environmental lawyer. (MJS)

USE LINE 35 ON YOUR TAX RETURN TO RESTORE THE CHESAPEAKE BAY!

You can help restore the Bay and conserve endangered species by donating to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund. Simply fill in the amount you wish to give on a line in your Maryland Income Tax Return: Line 35 of Form 502 or line 13 of Form 503, and if applicable, line 26 of Form 504 and line 39 of Form 505. Tax donations provide Chesapeake Bay education and restoration projects for students, stream cleanups and tree plantings by community volunteers, habitat research, protection and enhancement for threatened plants and animals, and so much more. Donations are divided evenly between the Bay restoration grants program of the Chesapeake Bay Trust and the non-game and endangered species programs of the Wildlife Heritage Service of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

Your donation, which will be deducted from your refund and added to your tax payment, is tax-deductible in the following year.





OREGON RIDGE NATURE CENTER COUNCIL SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Each year the ORNC Council awards scholarships to college-bound high school seniors from Baltimore County and City. Recipients should show a high level of commitment to the health of the environment, and plan to continue their studies in environmental science and nature education.

**This year our goal is to support at least
two scholarships, each up to \$3000!**

We hope you will help by giving generously to the 2012 Scholarship Fund.

To make a tax-deductible donation, checks should be made payable to the *ORNC Council*, specifying *Scholarship Fund* on the note line, and sent to:

Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council, Inc.
13555 Beaver Dam Road
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The names of all donors will be published, so if you would like to make a gift in another's name, please specify the donor's name as it should appear on the list.

If you know a high school senior who may be eligible for a scholarship, please have the student call the Nature Center for an application form (410 887-1815). Applications should be postmarked no later than Friday, March 30, 2012.

Thank You for Helping Us Educate Future Environmentalists!

JIM CURTIS: Our Shining Star for 2011

Jim Curtis, President of the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council, is our 2011 Shining Star. Jim started volunteering as a Trail Guide at Oregon Ridge after retiring five years ago. He enjoys helping children better understand nature by sharing his love of the outdoors. He quickly became a very active volunteer at Oregon Ridge, and was soon invited to join the ORNC Council as a Director on the Board in 2007, and then as Vice President in 2008. As Vice President, Jim worked to improve the Nature Center's website and created an online forum for the Trail Guides. In September 2010, he was elected to a two-year term as President of the Council.

Jim is an avocational photographer, and his photos of Oregon Ridge Park, trail guide outings, and special events are frequently featured in the *Trailblazer* newsletters. Jim was in the first graduating Master Naturalist class and is now an active member of the

Habitat Team at ORNC. He is one of our hardy volunteers who braves hail and 105 degree temperatures to plant trees and beautify the park.

Jim Curtis developed a love for nature as a teenager while hiking through the woods at Oregon Ridge with his best friend, Tom. In college, he completed a BS in Zoology with plans to become a park ranger. Instead, he joined the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, first as a conservationist and then as a biologist. In retirement, he is still very much involved in environmental causes. He is a member of the Sierra Club, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, and the National Museum of the American Indian. He also serves on the Board of



With Jim Curtis are (L to R) District 3 Representative Todd Huff, Baltimore County Executive Kevin Kamenetz; Recreation & Parks Director Barry Williams

Directors for the Maryland Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation. (MJS)

MARK YOUR 2012 CALENDARS FOR FREE SPRING EVENTS:

"Biodiversity of Maryland's Drainage Ditches"
with Speaker Alan Leslie
Monday, April 16, 7:30 PM

PRIMITIVE TECHNOLOGY WEEKEND
May 5 and 6, 10 AM to 4 PM

MUSIC IN THE WOODS
May 12, 10 AM to 4 PM

"A Naturalist Visits New Zealand"
with Speaker Robert W. Stanhope
Monday, May 21, 7:30 PM

Member Reminder: The April-June *Trailblazer* will contain the 2012 Summer Camp Schedule.

TRAILBLAZER STAFF

Editor/Design/Layout: Mary Jane Shanks
Managing Editor: Joe Salvaggio

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

Writers: Mary Jane Shanks, Winny Tan
Photographers: Jim Curtis, Staff

(Note: Front page photo features volunteer Erin McCleary during Maple Sugar Season 2011)

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410-887-1815

info@oregonridge.org; www.oregonridge.org

Articles for the April/May/June issue are due February 20. (This will be the **SUMMER CAMP** issue.)

JACK THE STARLING'S TOP TEN REASONS TO RENEW YOUR COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

I'm Jack the Starling, or "The Old Professor" to my fellow critters living here at the Nature Center. I'm something of a genius, and I have much to say. After overhearing talk about our Council membership dropping, I gave the matter deep thought. Here are my *Top Ten Reasons to Renew Your Membership* (listed Letterman style):

Reason Number 10: *Trailblazer Newsletter*. Many articles have appeared in the *Trailblazer* informing you about me and other critters, and about everything else going on at ORNC. The *Trailblazer* would not exist without our members.

Reason Number 9: *Rest Stops*. Countless people hike here and often need a rest stop along the way to sit peacefully and watch birds or listen to pileated woodpeckers drumming in the distance. The Council has funded many of the wooden benches located throughout the park. Tired hikers thank you.

Reason Number 8: *Our Library*. It's filled with wonderful children's books and puzzles, and books for adults, too. People come in to read or study, especially on rainy days. There would be no library books without our members' support.

Reason Number 7: *Speaker Series*. I listen to all of the fantastic nature presentations offered here on certain Monday evenings. I've learned about everything from Algonquin Indians to zebra mussels. People attending these talks thank you for keeping our *Speaker Series* going for almost 30 years.

Reason Number 6: *Critter Care*. The Council provides for our habitats and major health needs. Without you, maybe we wouldn't be here. Thank you for our nice cages and aquariums, and for taking care of high-priced medications and surgeries.

Reason Number 5: *College Scholarships*. I meet many of the college-bound, high school applicants while they are here for interviews. The Council tries to award as many scholarships as possible each year. The students are thankful.

Reason Number 4: *Lifelong Nature Education*. The Council's goal statement emphasizes promoting education about the natural world. All programming and exhibits are educational. The Naturalists who care for all the critters and provide all the programs also need continuing education. They thank the Council for sending them to courses and conferences to help them do a better job.

Reason Number 3: *Exhibits*. The Council designs and funds all exhibits, inside and out. Without the Council, the building would be empty and the park much less interesting.



Visitors and I thank you for giving us so much to look at and experience. (I must confess, however, that the woodpecker exhibit drives me a little crazy.)

Reason Number 2: *Free Admission*. It's 2012, and I hear times are still tight — but, visiting the Nature Center is still FREE! Free to enter, free to hike, free to learn, free to be you and me. Your support makes this possible.

JACK'S NUMBER 1 REASON TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP TODAY!

YOU LIKE US! You really like us! And we really like you. Please visit again soon. Don't forget to come and see me. I love chatting with people, especially council members.

Now that you know how important your support is, start out the New Year by renewing or making a donation today. Encourage your friends and neighbors to join, or gift a membership as a birthday, anniversary, or holiday treat. Remember, just as it takes many branches to make a strong tree, it takes many members to make a strong Council.

If you're unsure whether your membership has expired, check your mailing label. An expiration date and a letter appear next to your name. The letter "C" means your membership is current, "E" means expired, and "X" means this is your last *Trailblazer* unless you renew now. Just fill in the membership form on the back page of this newsletter and send it in today.

OH! One more thing — members receive a few perks: Discounts on programs (including our wonderful SUMMER CAMPS), priority registration, and a 10% discount on gift shop purchases of \$30 or more. Membership fees have remained the same for more than 10 years. A family membership is \$20, individual \$15, and seniors and students \$12. A Lifetime Membership is \$150. (MJS)

IT'S THE BEST DEAL IN TOWN!

HOW MUCH WOOD CAN A BEAVER CHEW?

By Naturalist Winny Tan

One nice, sunny day in early January, Jim Curtis and I took a walk to look for trail maintenance projects and admire the landscape. We were on the orange trail, peering down along the bank of the lake, when we saw a couple of young trees with the bark scraped off their lower trunks. Looking at one another, the same incredulous thought occurred to us. It couldn't be a *Castor canadensis*! There hasn't been a *Castor canadensis*, North America's largest rodent, a.k.a. *Beaver*, in decades at Oregon Ridge. After looking around some more, we found other trees along the bank, up the ridge and even beyond the trail, which were gnawed in the same way. Beaver chews all over the place!

As we looked around for more signs, hoping to catch a glimpse of the aquatic rodent, there it was at the bottom of the hill on the water's edge — a beaver busily eating the bark and twigs off a small branch. It was 12 o'clock in the afternoon! Beavers are primarily nocturnal

and seen most often around dusk and dawn. We got off the trail and watched from the picnic tables on the beach side of the lake. The beaver seemed oblivious to our presence and stayed busy eating away. Beavers eat the leaves and inner bark of many tree species like maples and black cherries, but prefer willows and aspens. They eat other vegetation like grasses, ferns, mushrooms, duckweed, algae, and cattails. They store their food caches underwater, which allows them to survive the winter months huddled together in their insulated lodge.

We didn't see the familiar dome-shaped lodge built of branches, sticks and mud, but beavers also build dens by burrowing deep into the banks of lakes and rivers. The entrances are always underwater to prevent predators from entering, while the den stays dry above water level where the beaver can raise a family. Young beavers will stay with their parents for up to two years until Mom kicks them out to raise her new babies, about 4-6

"kits" in early spring. The newly independent beavers strike out to find new territories, as did our Oregon Ridge beaver.

An adult beaver can cut up to 300 trees in one year! (The average tree is less than 3 inches in diameter.) Chewing so much wood is hard on a beaver's teeth. To avoid being worn away, beaver teeth are constantly growing.

Beaver are troublesome for some people. Landowners fear the loss of too many trees, and their dams can flood pastures and roads. However, beavers usually stay within 200 feet of the water's edge for a quick escape from danger. They are nature's engineers, and their work creates habitats for many water birds and amphibians, which in turn attracts raccoons and ospreys to the rich diversity of life and food.

The beaver's thick fur is considered valuable and their castoreum, an oily substance they use to mark their territory, is used for medicines and perfumes. Once trapped to extinction in many states, they are making a comeback and are amazing to observe in the wild.

Come by Oregon Ridge and find the beaver chews along the orange trail. If you are lucky, you may catch a glimpse of the beaver at a reasonable distance. But beware — a sharp slap of its paddle-like tail is a signal that you are too close!

