



WESTMORELAND CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

July 2003 Editor: Shelly Tichy (724) 325-5523 baghera@adelphia.net

2003 Membership Dinner



The lovely Mountain View Inn in Latrobe was the site of this year's W.C. Membership Dinner. Thirty-two members gathered to celebrate past successes as well as future goals.

In a private room with a view, guests were welcomed to Spring in the form of numerous flower arrangements as well as a complete pictorial display of our local flora and fauna. Many thanks to Cary Bohl, Richard Wagner, Shelly Tichy and Katie Blackmore for the collection and arrangement of the displays. Party favors greeted each guest in the form of Dick Byers' Nature Calendar booklets and seed packets of liatris.

Entrée choices of Orange Roughy or Breast of Chicken whetted appetites while lively conversation flowed at all tables. Dinner was topped by a lovely and delicious cake donated by the Murrysville Giant Eagle.

The evening's highlight was the informative presentation by Court Gould, founder and director of Sustainable Pittsburgh. His organization represents the link between those passionate about saving green spaces and those who find economic growth equally important.

A wonderful example of community support came from The Buttercup Florist Shop with a lovely Spring arrangement. It was raffled off at the end of the evening. The winner was Mount Fitzpatrick. He took the arrangement to Clara Feibelman, who had been unable to attend. Many thanks to all who made this lovely evening possible.

2003 Annual Meeting and Elections

The Annual Membership Meeting was held Wednesday, April 23rd at the Municipal Building.

Stepping down after 2 consecutive 3-year terms as Governors were Joe Werns and Maury Hanes. Our sincere thanks for their efforts and contributions during their tenure. Taking on the task at hand, Katie Blackmore and Don Harrison have joined the Board in their stead.

Following the induction of the Governors, the Officers were elected. The 2003 roster of officers: **President:** Cary Bohl; **Vice President:** Mount Fitzpatrick; **Treasurer:** Cindy Werns; **Secretary:** Joanna Franz. A complete list of the Board of Governors can be found later in the newsletter.

American Eagle Print on Display at Library



A magnificent drawing of a bald eagle is now on display in the Murrysville Community Library. This limited edition print, signed by the artist Roger Tory Peterson, was donated by Jim Dunbar to the Westmoreland Conservancy. Jim expressed the hope that it would be displayed in a public place where all residents

of Murrysville would be able to enjoy it.

Jim is one of the original founders of the Westmoreland Conservancy and was instrumental in the acquisition of the Kellman Nature Reserve. For more than 10 years he has continued to make invaluable contributions to the preservation of green space in our municipality.

The Conservancy proposed the Community Library as the most suitable location for this display, and this suggestion was fully supported by the Library Board. The official unveiling took place at a ceremony attended by Jim and his family, Library Director Denise Sticha, Library Board Member Connie Cauvel, Chief Administrator Don Pepe, and Conservancy members Cary Bohl, Donna Forys, Don Harrison, and Pia and Theo van de Venne. The print is hanging in the main area of the Library, adjacent to the elevator. The next time you visit the library, take a moment to enjoy this work of art.

Community Day 2003 Summer Celebration Saturday Events Rescheduled for Sept. 13

Because of swampy conditions and continuing rain, it was necessary for the Municipality of Murrysville to postpone the outdoor events scheduled for Saturday, June 7th. This included the Conservancy's Hometown Photo Contest and Frank Peters' Reptile Den. But don't despair! The Municipality has rescheduled Community Day for Saturday, September 13th. In the mean time, keep taking pictures of life in our hometown, be it family, community or nature! We will have our Hometown Photo Contest September 13th. Entry deadline will now be Friday, September 5th.

Connections: The Deer, the Bumblebee, and the Trillium

By
Dick Byers

Francis Thompson (1860-1907) wrote a short poem about Nature's interconnectedness:

***All things by immortal power,
Near or far,
Hiddenly to each other, linked are
That thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling a star.***

The web of life in Thompson's poem is a bit overstated, but he gets his point across, that everything is related in one way or another, directly or indirectly, and by various degrees. The science that studies these relationships is called ecology, one of the youngest branches of biological science. Research in this field requires years to control all the variables, consequently, a human understanding of what really goes on in nature is still in its infancy. Ecologists are still gathering, sorting and analyzing information. Sound theories are still in the process of being formed.

Every now and then a relationship is discovered and added to the puzzle. Such is the case with the slow disappearance of trillium grandiflorum in Western Pennsylvania.

Trillium grandiflorum is the large white flower that covers our forested slopes and moist woodlands in mid-April through most of May. When I first moved to Murrysville in 1966 the slopes below my house were literally covered with this wildflower. When I moved away in 1998 there were just scattered patches of this species left. The huge expansive beds were mostly gone. The reduction of the abundance of this plant was almost imperceptible. I knew they were declining, but looking at my old slides taken in the late 60's made me acutely aware of the extent of the depletion that had taken place over the years.

A seed of trillium grandiflorum takes two years to germinate and 17 years to flower. The plant can live for 70 years. (Growth rings can be counted on the rootstock). Large trillium beds are, therefore, quite old. Deer, rabbits and groundhogs browse on the leaves and flowers. There is nothing wrong with this. Herbivores have to eat. A browsed trillium might stay dormant or in a non-flowering stage for a year, but it will rebound and bloom again. Each trillium flower, if pollinated, can produce up to 30 seeds, but germination success is only about 20%, so it takes some time for trillium to spread. Also trillium is not a self-pollinating species. It must be visited by an insect

for fertilization to occur. Bumblebees are the main pollinators. For centuries, trillium reproduced enough to offset any browsing by wildlife, so why were they suddenly disappearing?

Tiffany Knight, a graduate student at Pitt, decided to find out. She studied 12 natural trillium populations in the northern tier of the state over a period of several years. Deer were being blamed at the time of her study as the main culprit in the decline. At this point, one should understand the difference between browsers and grazers. Browsers eat every here and there and never deplete the entire food source at any one place. Grazers eat everything in sight at a single location and therefore do much more damage to the environment. Deer and birds are browsers. Cattle and sheep are grazers.

Grazers can quickly clear out the understory of a forest. Browsers leave most of the understory intact. However, an unusually high population of browsers, given enough time, can make the forest understory look grazed. That's the current situation with our deer herd.

Tiffany noticed trillium were abundant and spreading on steep slopes where deer are inhibited from browsing. Trillium reproduction at such sites was normal. Where deer browsed, however, trillium reproduction was inadequate, even though many plants were left uneaten. This seemed strange and contrary to most evolution scenarios. Reproduction usually increases when mortality is high, and falls when the population exceeds the carrying capacity. Trillium seemed an exception. Why were the plants left uneaten by the deer not reproducing?

Anyone who has read Bernd Heinrich's *Bumblebee Economics* might guess the answer to this riddle. Bumblebees, the main trillium pollinator, must refuel often in their foraging flights. The payback in nectar and pollen from small patches of flowers is not worth the expenditure in flight energy. Bumblebees seek out huge patches of flowers so they can visit many plants with the least investment in energy. Were there fewer bees visiting trillium sites where deer were browsing? To test this idea Tiffany transplanted trillium to plots containing 1 to 160 plants per plot. Plots with lots of plants had more bees and therefore more seeds. Also, by artificially pollinating some small plots by hand, she found there were more seeds produced than in small plots left to natural pollination. Deer browsing in trillium beds were simply decreasing the flowering plants enough that bees were not visiting them and reproduction dropped off. In heavily browsed areas, with no reproduction, trillium populations, even though they can live for 70 years, faced eventual extinction.

The situation could be solved by either finding a better pollinator for trillium or bringing the deer population back into balance with the land. The latter is hard to do humanely in suburban areas.

The Trillium Trail in Fox Chapel borough was famous for its spring wildflower bloom for years. But during the 1980's the trail was nearly completely depleted of trillium. Erecting a deer enclosure fence produced a swift recovery of the flowers. Not only did the trillium population recover inside the fence, they pushed out the garlic mustard that had invaded in their absence. Ecological balance is always delicate. Populations of organisms normally fluctuate up and down depending on conditions, but they usually stay around a mean level. Unusual and continued disturbance usually brings about permanent change. Whether the change is good or bad depends on your point of view. In this case a high deer population means less biodiversity and ecologists are learning that a certain degree of biodiversity is much more important than they previously thought over the long term.

Anyone interested in training to become a Nature Guide in our Reserves, please contact Shelly Tichy at 724-325-5523.

[Editors note](#)—Ordinarily, Westmoreland Conservancy Newsletter space is not used for outside advertising. However, the Backyard Buffers workshop is of conservational interest, and the Traffic Safety Committee addresses concerns within our local community.

Backyard Buffers Workshop

Got a waterway in your backyard? Stream, pond, or wetland? Don't know what to do with it? The **Three Rivers Habitat Partnership**, a project of the **Wildlife Habitat Council**, will host a **Backyard Buffers** workshop at Dominion's Oakford Buffer, suitable for the whole family. Adults will receive hands-on training to design their own backyard buffer while kids get their boots muddy exploring the life of Beaver Creek.

Event: Backyard Buffers Workshop

Date: Saturday Aug 16, 2003

Time: 10AM-12PM

Location: Dominion Oakford Station, Rock Springs Rd, Delmont, PA

Cost: Free

In addition to door prizes and refreshments, the first 20 participants will receive a native plant to take home (limit one per family).

Space is limited so sign up now!

Website: <http://www.wildlifehc.org/threerivers/dominion/>

Contact: Colleen Filicky

Organization: Wildlife Habitat Council

Phone: (412) 777-2462

Fax: (412) 777-2072

E-mail: colleen.filicky.b@bayer.com

The **Wildlife Habitat Council** is a nonprofit, non-lobbying organization dedicated to increasing the quality and amount of wildlife habitat on corporate, private and public lands. More than 1.2 million acres in 46 states, Puerto Rico and twelve other countries are managed for wildlife through WHC-assisted projects. For more information, visit WHC's Web site at www.wildlifehc.org

For more information on how to create or enhance a streamside buffer in your backyard or to request a brochure, please contact Colleen Filicky at colleen.filicky.b@bayer.com. Over 2,500 acres on 22 sites throughout the region have been managed for wildlife through TRHP at corporations such as BFI, Bayer Corporation and PPG Industries. Learn more at www.wildlifehc.org/threerivers.

Murrysville Traffic Safety Committee Overview

Because the Municipality has received so many calls about speeding and aggressive driving, a Traffic Safety Committee comprised of the mayor, chief administrator, police, public works, and volunteer citizens has been formed. The program was kicked off with a major media day on September 20th, 2002 at 11AM at the Municipal building arranged by PennDOT. This group will continue to work with PennDOT on a statewide anti-aggressive driving campaign because they will be using our local program to promote theirs. They have also invited the mayor, chief administrator, and the police chief to serve on their Harrisburg panel. Please support our Traffic Safety Committee by using one of our bumper stickers and by continuing to DRIVE SAFELY!



Member Spotlight – Shelly Tichy

by Cary Bohl

Shelly Tichy was born Rachele Marie Bugeja in Detroit, Michigan, and lived the early part of her life in the Flint area. Her family moved to Ohio in 1970 where she attended Springfield Local High School, graduating with honors. She had many interests, and studied three majors (archaeology, history and English) at Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin. It is surprising to some that know Shelly and all of those interests that she kept it to only three majors...

Shelly enjoyed dancing and became a choreographer and techniques coach, later opening **Stardust Dance Studio** which was located in Tennessee and then, briefly, in Poland, Ohio. She and her husband, Dennis still enjoy dancing and do so regularly at the Palisades Ballroom in McKeesport.

In 1988 Shelly went into retail, and soon afterward met Dennis. He was the owner of the cleaning company that maintained the floors of the business in which she worked. Shelly and Dennis married in 1993 and she then joined the family business: Commercial Cleaning. That family is growing and Shelly and Dennis will be first-time grandparents to twins in December.

Shelly joined the Westmoreland Conservancy in 2000. She has been a valuable addition to the Board of Governors, serving as Secretary in 2001 and as our newsletter editor since April 2002. She has volunteered for

or chaired a number of committees, most recently those for the planning of the Membership Dinner and for Summer Celebration. The Conservancy is grateful to Shelly for her many contributions!

Shelly volunteers her time and talents at Sunrise in Monroeville. Here she brings song and dance to the residents, who enthusiastically gather every Wednesday to enjoy her wonderful selection of music from eras past.

Shelly enjoys gardening, cooking, singing, dancing and nature photography. This last hobby has become a favorite pastime during the time that she's been involved with the Conservancy, partially because she enjoys sharing her avid interest in nature photography with other Conservancy members.

Membership Picnic Scheduled

The Westmoreland Conservancy will be having a family picnic on Saturday, August 2nd at 11am at the lower pavilion of Townsend Park. We will have full use of the trails and other facilities, so come spend the day with us! Pot luck-style meal, call Clara Feibelman at (724) 327-3454 for suggestions. Come share a day of food, fun and family. We all look forward to seeing you!

Calendar of Events

7/12/03: Dick Byers to lead a walk through the Tomer and McGinnis Reserves. Meet at the Tomer parking lot (north end of Twin Oaks Road) at 9am.

7/13/03: Bring your camera and walk the McGinnis Reserve with Shelly Tichy and friends. 9am.

8/02/03: Membership Picnic at Townsend Park. 11am.

9/13/03: Community Day Summer Celebration rescheduled date. **Enter our photo contest!**

Boy Scouts Clean at McGinnis



A trail crew led by Troop 207 spent a chilly, wet Saturday April 26th removing debris from the McGinnis Nature Reserve. They are Ajay Feczko, Stan Murawsky, Adam Murawsky, Jim Feczko, and Curtis Rauscher. They removed three large piles of shingles, as well as other items dumped on the property in the past.

Rotary Clean-Up at King Reserve



The Murrysville-Export Rotary Club volunteered for trail maintenance in the King Nature Reserve and Wednesday, May 28th was the date set for their Spring Clean up. They clipped and trimmed invasives from along the trails. The King Reserve is near Murry Woods and Sloan School on Crowfoot Road.

Great Turnout for Spring PA Cleanways

Each Spring and Fall the Westmoreland Conservancy cleans Old William Penn Hwy, one of the most visible areas of Murrysville. April 5th brought a terrific turnout for the cause. Our thanks to: Dave & Katie Blackmore, Cary Bohl, Paul Bramson, Mount Fitzpatrick, Joanna and Chris Franz, Don Harrison, Noreen Ignelzi, Richard Rudolph, Shelly Tichy and Theo van de Venne. Hopefully we'll have a similar response for the October event, keeping Murrysville beautiful for everyone.

Westmoreland Conservancy

An all volunteer, non-profit, 501(c)-(3) Corporation dedicated to acquiring and preserving rural and rustic lands for the public good.

2003 Board of Governors/Officers

Officers: Cary Bohl: President

Mount Fitzpatrick: Vice President

Joanna Franz: Secretary

Cindy McCormick: Treasurer

Governors: Katie Blackmore, Paul Bramson, Dick Byers, Charles Conway, Don Harrison, Shelly Tichy, Richard Wagner, Theo van de Venne

Meetings are held the **4th Wednesday** of each month at the Murrysville Library at **7:30pm**.

July 23rd

August 27th

September 24th

The next Newsletter is scheduled for **October 1st**.

Westmoreland Conservancy
P. O. Box 446
Murrysville, PA 15668

contact@westmorelandconservancy.org

Westmoreland Conservancy Membership Application

Individual.....\$10.00

Family.....\$15.00

Sustaining membership.....\$40.00

Steward.....\$100.00

Additional Donation. _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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