

# The Village Way

October 2006

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## President's Message

### You moved here for a reason!

**W**e have had many changes this year. The Society received a 501(c)(3) designation from the IRS so now all contributions, including membership dues and donations to the Attic Treasures Sale, are tax deductible. Beginning this year we will send out renewal notices in November, and as a result you'll get an extra tax deduction this year.

Thanks to the great work of Annette Mills we have almost doubled our membership this year. Carol Sly has agreed to be our new membership chair as Dave and Annette are moving to Oregon.

Losing Dave Eckert and Annette Mills will be difficult for VPIS. However I am happy to say that many of our members are stepping up. Gordon Theisz, a new board member, will head the Summer Concerts. His wife, Melissa Teates, also a new board member, will be recording secretary. Elizabeth Meade will take over the responsibilities of coordinating the Farmers Market Booth and Seth Heminway has volunteered to co-chair the Neighborhood Tree Program with City Arborist Jill Spence. Let's see, how many people do we need to replace Dave and Annette? **It takes a village!** A special Thank You to Tom Gittens of Art and Frame of Falls Church for hosting the farewell party on October 6.

Finally, Adam Stasio has redone our website to make it easy to update, and we are looking for someone to help maintain it. If you might be interested contact me at [villagesociety@yahoo.com](mailto:villagesociety@yahoo.com).

Be sure to attend the Fall Membership Meeting November 9.

Barry Buschow, President



## VPIS Fall Meeting

Thursday November 9, 2006—7:30 PM

The Falls Church Episcopal

Please join us for the Society Fall Meeting

All Welcome

### AGENDA

Status of VPIS Activities and Issues

Election of 2007 Officers and Directors

Preserving our Historic Assets and  
Community

The Virginia Village Award

Social Reception

The VPIS Board of Directors has voted to honor Joan and George Burgess with the Virginia Village Award for their contribution to the preservation and interpretation of Cherry Hill Farmhouse and barn. The award will be presented at the meeting.

The Village Preservation and Improvement Society, founded in 1885, is an active nonprofit citizen volunteer organization in the City of Falls Church, Virginia. The society works to preserve our natural and built environment and historic structures and landmarks, and it promotes cultural activities. Members are primarily residents and former residents or neighbors of the City of Falls Church and are of all political persuasions. They are bonded by their interest in and commitment to improving the city. Send comments, questions, or letters to the editor to: Village Preservation and Improvement Society, P.O. Box 6824, Falls Church, VA 22040 or e-mail to [VillageSociety@yahoo.com](mailto:VillageSociety@yahoo.com).

# The Story of Big Chimneys Since 1699

by Ric Terman

The Falls Church community accepts 1699 as the date of its beginning. The first structure in the current City area is believed to be Big Chimneys cabin, named for its two large brick chimneys, and 1699 was inscribed on a stone placed in one chimney to indicate the time of construction.

The identities of the builders are unknown, but probably were pioneer squatters. They chose a farmable location on a wagon road with wild game in the forest, and near a fish-filled stream to support their self-sufficient lifestyle. The 20-by 18-foot log cabin was in the Scotch-Irish style with a back door directly opposite the front door to accommodate the indoor milking of cows.

The first legal owner of Big Chimneys' 22.75 acres was Henry Gunnell in 1773. The nearby Falls Church had been completed in 1769, replacing the Upper Church of Truro Parish, which had been completed in 1734. The Falls Church was the center of the community of the same name that grew up in the area.

In 1803, James Gordon bought Big Chimneys. He expanded the cabin to 40 by 18 feet adding the second floor and second big chimney with the date-stone. He opened an inn that was a well-known landmark until his death in 1836

Gordon's heirs sold the property in 1854 and that extended family owned it until 1914; maps from 1862 to 1904 identify it as the Lynch home. The cabin disappeared by 1913. An undeveloped site was bought by Bowl America in 1979.

In 1947, historian M. L. Steadman interviewed his grandmother, the last occupant, and sketched cabin floor plans and the property layout. These and one old photo and another artist's sketch are the basis for a recently published City brochure entitled *The Story of Big Chimneys Since 1699*.

Today, Big Chimneys Park is located on West Annandale Road. For their Eagle Scout projects, in 1999 Matt Jackson prepared cabin footprints at the south end of the park, and in 2002 David Massant prepared them at the north end, with help from the City, Falls Church Historical Commission, and VPIS.

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# Neighborhood Tree Program Going Strong

by Seth Heminway

The Neighborhood Tree Program (NTP) is bidding a fond farewell to our founding chair Annette Mills. We will sorely miss her smiling presence, her enthusiasm, organizational skill, resourcefulness, and, of course, all the time and energy she has dedicated to this thriving endeavor. In Annette's absence, a founding member of the NTP steering committee, Seth Heminway, has volunteered to chair the NTP along with the close consultation and support of Jill Spence, City Arborist, and Steering Committee members.

Annette leaves the NTP with a substantial list of accomplishments. Two of the major ones are the planting of over 350 street trees and a strong organization of citizen volunteers and City staff. Through planting trees we are increasing the number and quality of trees that line our streets. Educating our citizens gives them the information they need to choose the right tree for their location, choose a competent tree care company, and properly plant and maintain their trees.

This August we conducted our first tree maintenance event during which we refreshed (weeded, applied mulch) the mulch rings of over 80 trees. We will be doing more maintenance work in the future to give recently planted trees a better chance to survive and thrive.

The Steering Committee has scheduled the following events (check with us for locations and final confirmation).

- October 14—Tree Squad doing tree maintenance (refreshing mulch rings)
- October 28—Tree Squad planting trees
- November 11—Tree Planting Party
- November 18—rain date

## Frequently asked questions about the Neighborhood Tree Program

### What's the difference between a tree party and the tree "squad?"

A *Tree Party* involves active neighborhood participation including a neighborhood liaison

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who helps promote the event by encouraging neighbors to request trees and to help with planting and maintenance. In addition to planting trees we have a planting demonstration and refreshments. The event is confined to a narrow several block area. We aim for one such event in the Spring and again in the Fall.

*The Tree Squad* consists of a team of dedicated tree planters who work with the City Arborist to plant trees on designated days anywhere in the City they are needed. Whether you are an experienced tree planter or not, if you want to help, send Seth Heminway your e-mail address and he will add you to the event notification list. Events take place on Saturday mornings (rain date Sunday) a couple times in the Spring and Fall and last around three hours.

### Is NTP a VPIS group or a City program?

NTP is a partnership of citizen volunteers and City staff under the auspices of the city manager. City staff from the Division of Urban Forestry provide critical expertise and logistical support. VPIS volunteers raise funds to purchase trees (along with City funds), provide tree planting and maintenance labor, and conduct educational outreach about the benefits, selection and care and of trees.

### How can I help?

Talk to your neighbors about having a tree planting party in your neighborhood. Offer your labor several times a year as a planter on the Tree Squad or help with lots of other critical roles like communication, outreach and fund-raising. Your financial help is always welcome.



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## Parting Words *By Dave Eckert and Annette Mills*

Village Improvement was a movement that began in the 1850s and came to Falls Church in 1885. It was prominent from Bar Harbor, Maine, to Pasadena, California, and was responsible for developing the idealized “American Town.” It is a social philosophy based on citizen activism, centered on the principle that citizens determine what they want their community to be like, raise the money to make it that way, and then do the work themselves. In 1891, when the metal roof of Falls Church’s three-story public school blew off during a terrible storm, local citizens and business people mobilized and replaced the roof in three days.

Unfortunately, most communities have deviated from those principles. Too often, citizens abdicate their role and become mere spectators as government and experts plan the community, adopt codes of law, and then hire consultants and contractors to do the work. What would happen if the roof of the public school blew off today? Would citizens and business people come together to put the roof back on?

We came to Falls Church City in 1988 because a friend told us that this was a community where people participate in the life of the community and individual voices matter. Over the past 18 years, we have found our friend to be right. In

Falls Church City, people do participate and individual voices do matter.

### **Building Community**

Community-building is a powerful personal experience we have actively pursued in two ways.

The first is by developing new ways for people to interact with each other, such as the semi-annual City Cleanups, Summer Concerts in Cherry Hill Park, monthly City Walks, Watch Night, Neighborhood Tree Program Planting Parties, Tinner Hill Festival, Recycling Extravaganza, and the Home Concert Series. Educational programs that develop a “sense of place,” such as the T.J. Ecology Club, Neighborhood Watershed Teams, T-shirts with a map of the City hills, valleys, and streams, the City Block Captain program and the Heritage Tour programs bring everyone closer by helping foster familiarity with the community and the land. And paying attention to what is happening around town and developing personal communication networks to spread the word are powerful elements in the community-building process. The friendships we have made through these actions are a valuable part of our lives.

The second way we’ve pursued community-building is by helping to revive the degraded natural environment of Falls Church City. Planting hundreds of trees and other plants in these two square miles has given us a personal connection with every part of the community. Mapping and exploring every above-ground and piped below-ground stream in the City has given us an understanding of this place and the impact we are having. Reintroducing native plants that provide food and habitat to butterflies and other animals and watching those creatures return to Falls Church City is an exhilarating experience that enhances our local connection. Helping people develop more responsible lifestyles through recycling and energy efficiency has made us breathe a little easier.



*Dave Eckert and Annette Mills pose with their daughter, Marta.*

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## Dave and Annette Awarded the “Spirit of Falls Church” Award

The Board of Directors of the Village Preservation and Improvement Society at its September meeting voted unanimously to award the “Spirit of Falls Church” to Dave Eckert and Annette Mills. For over 18 years they have been involved in numerous organizations and committees both public and private that have fostered the fellowship and good will of the citizens of not only the City but the Northern Virginia region. The Village Society, as well as the citizens of Falls Church, have been greatly enriched historically, culturally, and personally by the efforts of Dave and Annette.

The “Spirit of Falls Church” award is given to an individual or couple in recognition of their long-term service to multiple spheres of community life that has resulted in the enrichment, enhancement or significant protection of the quality of life in Falls Church. The contribution, either individually or through the enablement of organizations, has clearly added to the sustainable fabric of the City of Falls Church. This award is the highest level of honor that the Village Preservation and Improvement Society has. It is bestowed infrequently, after research and nomination by committee.

Dave and Annette are moving to Oregon. The award presentation was made on October 6 at their farewell reception. We will miss them tremendously and wish them the best in their future adventures.

Previous recipients include Hal Silverstein, Lou Olom, and Mel and Ruby Bolster.

*Parting Words, continued from page 4*

### Keep in Touch

Although we must leave the area for both family and personal reasons, we will take with us the deep love we have for this community, our citizens, and the land. We encourage all Society members to actively participate in the life of the community. It is a rich and rewarding experience, and it is the only way that true community improvement will happen.

We wish to thank the Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society for encouraging citizens to play an active role in the real work of improving Falls Church City. The Society has played the key role in our ability to participate in the community.

We hope you will stay in touch with us after our move to Corvallis, Oregon. Until we have an address or phone number, please contact us via e-mail at [deckert@viriniavillageproductions.com](mailto:deckert@viriniavillageproductions.com).

**Annette:** 9,000 green bins — 1 city-wide recycling program — 30 backyard composting classes — 30 Mt. Trashmore field trips — 35 Falls Church Environment newsletters — 19 recycling extravaganzas — 4 GMSHS musical pit orchestras — 13 Operation Earthwatch parades — 1 City of Falls Church Employee of the Year Award

**Dave:** \$40,000 raised for trees — 19 streams named — 11 Tinner Hill festivals — 2 parks reforested — 140 Tree Commission meetings — 88 summer concerts — 90 home concerts — 7 documentary films — 1 Falls Church City Film Festival — 1 Tinner Hill arch — 350 Saturdays at Farmers Market VPIS booth

**Together:** 250 Ecology club kids — 170 VPIS Board meetings — 1 neighborhood tree program — 4 watershed-friendly garden tours — 350 neighborhood trees — 1 TJ butterfly garden — 1 Spirit of Falls Church Award 2006 — **countless lives impacted, one city changed for the better**

*Annette Mills and Dave Eckert  
making Falls Church City a better place  
from 1988 through 2006*

*Excerpted from the T-shirt designed by Carol Sly in honor of Dave and Annette.*

# The Spirit of Falls Church *by Lou Olom*

**W**hat is this “Spirit of Falls Church?” Is it waning, vanishing or growing? Is it declining? How can it be resuscitated and enhanced?

If it is growing, how can we make more people, especially newcomers to the city and transients aware of what is to be conserved and what is to be preserved, and not only what is to be improved?

What proposals and new developments are inimical to the SPIRIT of FALLS CHURCH or enhance and improve it?

But what is it, this sprit of Falls Church? I believe it to be the kind and sensitive treatment of this small piece of land in which we and our predecessors live and have lived. The protection of our residential streets and homes of the many “nooks and crannies” that are scattered throughout the city. I never dreamed that buses would drive up and down Poplar Drive and West Street, for example.

## **A City of Trees**

The unusual historic origins of our city, what do they constitute? A city of trees—to plant them, to protect them, and where their deterioration or destruction by sudden unheralded storms are viewed with astonishment if not horror by those who care. Compare the landscape of East Broad Street, the tree-lined entrance to the city from South Washington Street (or are they Fairfax County trees?), compare that with the so-called CBD (Central Business District) and that of the disjunctive West Broad Street except its immediate entrance from the west. One important difference is the fine attractive, planting in the middle of Broad Street to Haycock Road. Why can't the rest of the street be done in this manner? It can be done; it should be done, for it can be dramatically improved.

A city that cares and works at protecting and improving the environment, A Tree City USA city, A Bill of Rights City, an All America Award City, a public school system that is ranked with the finest in the nation, and its high school

ranked as the fourth best in the Northern Virginia Area, and garnered with “one of the finest if not the best IB high school programs in the world—if not the best.”

Little Falls Church? Yes, because there has been citizen concern and participation to a maximum in these areas, with school boards and city councils in full support. It is a city concerned with the importance of water, its conservation and purification, a city of libraries—public and school—a city of small parks and recreation facilities. It is a city of neighborhoods and civic organizations like ours where residents and renters know one another, sharing joys as well as grief together—which helps give us this sense of community and sense of place that so many reach for, a city in which citizen participation in community affairs and especially voting, are among its prime features. It is a city of large historic, religious institutions, large because of our small size and those who attend them from elsewhere, a city of arts and music. It is a city of concern over the aged and the homeless and the underprivileged, a city in which so many of its citizens take a great interest in the government of their city and participate by volunteering for office in the city boards and commissions and a city where thinking globally becomes consummate with thinking and working locally. It is a city which cares for the needy and for those who require homes and institutions, a city that cares for the mentally disabled, handicapped, or a city with a diverse population.

## **A Patriotic City**

It is a city that is patriotic and honors its veterans and those men and women who once honored and defended our country as well as those who now serve here and abroad, a city which honors and remembers four of our nation's founders—Washington, Jefferson, George Mason and Madison—on every Independence Day in its City Council chambers.

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All of the above we are and more, we aim for and preserve and practice and take much pride in. All of the above are supplemented or complemented by the work of citizen organizations, citywide festivities and events—all of the above together with its small but enterprising business community which also helps support so many citizen organizations and their events—all of the above, we aim for and do—THIS CONSTITUTES THE SPIRIT OF FALLS CHURCH. It reflects the history and tradition of those who started this town of Falls Church in 1885, its churches which date from 1734 and mid-nineteenth century, the early Village Society of 1885 and the records of our achievements since 1965 when VPIS was reconstituted.

So many of our members have contributed to this record. May we continue to do so and invite others, especially economic developers, newcomers to join us—to preserve and protect as well as improve this small piece of land, our city that strives and should continue to strive to remain an oasis in this huge metropolitan area that surrounds us. In doing so, this will continue to constitute the spirit of Falls Church.

### **Farmers Market Needs Volunteers**

If you've been to the Farmers Market over the last decade or more, you've probably seen the VPIS booth. And perhaps you've purchased a cup of Starbucks coffee to help raise money for the Neighborhood Tree Program. In order to keep this fine Falls Church tradition alive and well, we need you! If you can spare an hour or two volunteering at the Farmers Market, please contact Elizabeth Meade at 703-536-2333 or e-mail to [harkinsmeade@earthlink.net](mailto:harkinsmeade@earthlink.net).

### **Why was the Neighborhood Tree Program created?**

NTP was created in 2000 by concerned citizens because the City was losing mature street trees due to old age, disease and development faster than they were being replaced. NTP's volunteer labor coupled with the City's logistical support multiplies the City's ability to plant and maintain trees.

### **Why can't you plant the tree farther from the street?**

The NTP only plants trees in the narrow City right-of-way that exists between the curb and your property. The width of the right-of-way varies from street to street in the City.

### **How much mulch do trees need?**

To maximize the chance for survival trees should have a 2-inch-thick layer of mulch out to the drip line. The flare at the base of the trunk should be visible. Too often mulch is heaped against the tree, which can trap moisture and cause disease leading to the eventual death of the tree.

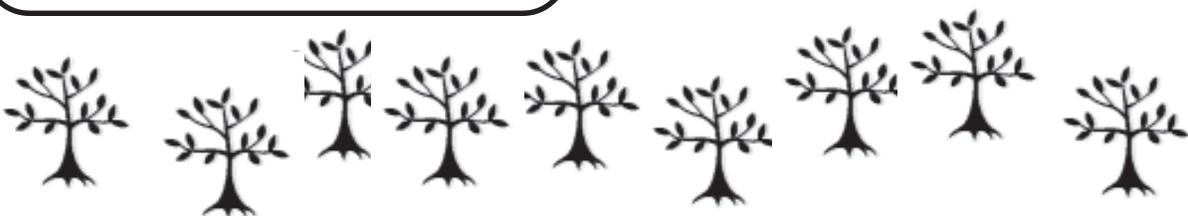
### **Steering Committee Members:**

Seth Heminway, Chair; Jill Spence, City Arborist; Barry Buschow; Anne Camper; Tom Clinton; Karl Ensign; Tom Kaye; Elizabeth Meade; Keith Thurston.

For more details visit the NTP website:

[www.fallschurchva.gov/government/developmentServices/CityofFallsChurchNeighborhoodTreeProgram.html](http://www.fallschurchva.gov/government/developmentServices/CityofFallsChurchNeighborhoodTreeProgram.html)

There's much more to do, so if you can help please get in touch with Seth Heminway, at 703-536-3049, [heminway65@earthlink.net](mailto:heminway65@earthlink.net) Thanks for your support.





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**NONPROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
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FALLS CHURCH, VA  
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## Upcoming VPIS Events

- Every Saturday:** Coffee and book sales at  
Farmers Market  
**October 14:** Tree Squad tree maintenance  
**October 28:** Tree Squad tree planting  
**November 9:** Fall General Membership  
Meeting  
**November 11 and 18:** Tree Planting Parties  
**December 31:** Watch Night  
**April 21, 2007:** Arbor Day Ceremony at Frady  
Park  
**May 5, 2007:** 39th Annual Attic Treasures Sale

## Report of the VPIS Nominating Committee for 2007 Officers and Directors

The Nominating Committee is pleased to  
present the nominees for 2007:

President: Barry Buschow  
Vice President: Jeff Peterson  
Recording Secretary: Melissa Teates

Board of Directors for Term Expiring 2009:  
Nancy Brandon      Keith Thurston  
Mark & Ellen Gross      Jon Hundley  
Elizabeth Meade

We are continuing to search for someone to  
manage the VPIS Website. This is an important  
need as the Website is essential in publicizing  
VPIS issues and activities. If anyone would like  
to volunteer or has a suggestion for this posi-  
tion, please call or e-mail Michael Volpe at 534-  
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