

Supporting the Nomination of the Friends of Accotink Creek for Friends of Trees Award:

Philip Latasa started the non-profit organization, the Friends of Accotink Creek in 2005. FACC currently coordinates, or participates in, 72 Invasive Management events annually, 24 Stream Cleaning Events, four Stream Monitoring Events, and (pre-Covid) school educational workshops. FACC has 744 members on its email list and 846 followers on Facebook.

In addition to coordinating, and/or lending his expertise to events, Philip is also an advocate for local wooded areas not being destroyed by development. For example, in March 2020, he organized a walk through with local officials, including the Braddock District Supervisor, James Walkinshaw, DPWES staff, Park Management, and local citizens, to discuss alternatives to cutting down five acres of forest as part of the planned Lake Accotink dredging plan.

Any development requiring local tree loss is high on FACC's monitor.

Philip Latasa also helped fellow Friends of Accotink Creek members, Elaine Sevy and Beverley Rivera, establish an invasive management site at Lake Accotink Park and he continues to provide assistance, knowledge, guidance and support, even though he leads his own weekly invasive management site at Americana Park. His actions have a ripple effect throughout the community, with people taking their own initiative to support projects to protect trees.

At the Lake Accotink site, it has taken seventeen months to clear enough invasive plants to get to the stage where trees can be planted. Initially, volunteers couldn't even access the existing trees, some of which had already been killed, pulled over or smothered by invasive multiflora rose, porcelain berry and oriental bittersweet.

Before a planting could even be planned, heavy vines that were killing the existing trees had to be removed along with their thick and entangled root systems.

Volunteers had to dig literally square foot by square foot to remove the well-established root systems of the invasives (see photo, some of the porcelain berry root systems are thicker than a person's wrist and extend probably 20 feet).



At the Lake Accotink Park site, every Saturday there are anywhere from ten to 25 volunteers. Sometimes there are larger groups such as school and Scout groups.

Education and community support are an important part of what FACC does. For example on a recent Saturday morning, five patrols of Scouts with their Leaders and parent chaperones collected about thirty bags of Japanese Stilt Grass and constructed approximately forty protective wire cages to prevent deer browse for the trees and shrubs for the upcoming Fall planting.

The Fall planting has been the major one so far, but a few months ago enough of the site had been cleared of invasives to have a small planting of ten pin oaks and 15 bitternut hickories.

On the last weekend in September there was the first major planting. Willows were planted to stabilize the stream bank, ironwood, black gum, pin oaks and sycamores. In addition to the trees, shrubs were planted to contribute to the balanced plant community. These included viburnums, elderberry, ninebark, spicebush, hazelnut, silky dogwood, witch hazel and buttonbush, all local eco-type from Earth Sangha.

Because of the location alongside a stream, all of the trees being planted are very tolerant of wet conditions and even occasional flooding. Many of these species already exist at the site and the new trees and shrubs have been planted where similar species were thriving prior to the invasives taking over.

All trees and shrubs have been caged off with wire protectors to protect from deer browse and are monitored weekly and watered when necessary. Invasives at the site are not usually bagged, unless they have seeds, like the Japanese Stilt Grass. FACC has more than 36 work days at this site each year and compost piles are monitored to prevent resprouting.

Future goals include:

- Working more closely with Operation Stream Shield, an initiative to pay people who are currently experiencing homelessness to pick up trash – the program is being expanded to include invasive removal, typically a crew of ten guests of the Lamb Center. Members of the Friends of Accotink Creek worked with the crew during the pilot project, advocated for the pilot project to be continued, and have since coordinated a work day with them to remove invasive Chinese Wisteria vines which are destroying trees along the Lake Accotink trail. FACC is undergoing further training to try to ensure the success of the program.
- Planting more trees – the area immediately adjoining the Lake Accotink Park site consists of a few hundred square feet of pure lawn - it is tucked away, behind the children's play area and is unused. It would be ideal to plant oak trees in that area (caged off so the mower can easily go around them) providing a transition between the recreational aspect of the park and the environmental work at the Invasive Management site. Oaks could provide shaded areas for park benches while contributing wildlife value to the nearby invasive management site.



Lastly, I would like to thank the Tree Commission nominating committee for their time in reviewing this nomination, and for their contribution to environmental issues within this community.

Respectfully,

Beverley Rivera