



WESTMORELAND CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

www.westmorelandconservancy.org

April 2004 Editor: Shelly Tichy (724) 325-5523 baghera@adelphia.net

Presenting Our New Web Page

We are currently in the process improving our web pages, and now have a new domain name: www.westmorelandconservancy.org. Our new e-mail address is contact@westmorelandconservancy.org and will appear at the bottom of each web page. By the time you get this newsletter, these changes will be complete. New Look, New Content, including:

- Stunning new photos taken by members
- Conservancy corner articles by Dick Byers
- PayPal Memberships and Donations done directly from our new membership page
- News page where we keep you up to date
- Coming events with a clickable calendar
- History page contains more detailed accounts and backgrounds of some of our reserves
- More maps and descriptions of our nature reserves
- We are expanding our related links section
- More newsletters are available online

- Even a 'Trees' section with interesting pages like a Nature Reserve Botanical Survey

We are committed to keeping these pages up to date and as exciting as possible. We hope you take the time to visit and enjoy our new web pages and look forward to your comments and input.

Annual Meeting and Elections to be held April 28th

It is time for our members to nominate and elect the 2004 Officers and Board of Governors. This meeting will be held Wednesday, April 28th in the meeting room of the Murrysville Library. Our monthly meetings are open to all members and interested parties, and this one is no exception. In fact, we encourage you to join us!

Park Chat Walks

FREE!

Rain or shine. Join us for monthly walks and informal chats in various parks and nature reserves in Murrysville. Plan with friends to meet at the park and then go somewhere for breakfast after the walk. Co-sponsored by Murrysville Recreation and Westmoreland Conservancy. **No fee**; just call Recreation Director Michele Clarke to let her know if you are coming. (724-327-2100, Ext. 115.) Leave your name and telephone number

Day and Time: 3rd Wednesday of each month. Meet at park or reserve lot at 8:30 AM.

April 21.....Duff Park

May 19.....McGinnis Nature Reserve

June 16.....Townsend Park

Lower Pavilion

July 21.....King Nature Reserve

August 18.....Kellman Nature Reserve

Evergreen Road Entrance

September 15.....Tomer Nature Reserve

October 20.....Murrysville Community Park

& Walter Nature Reserve

Walter Reserve Parking Lot

Spring 2004 Dinner with The Westmoreland Conservancy

Saturday, May 15th is the date of our [*Dinner with the Westmoreland Conservancy*](#). It will be held at **Tivoli's** on Rodi Road at 6pm. and is open to all members and interested parties. Guest speaker will be Dr. Walter Carson, an Associate Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh. [See insert for menu and reservation information \(click here\)](#), as well as a brief description of Dr. Carson's projects, credits and interests. Please join us, and bring a friend!

Restoring the American Chestnut Tree

Douglas A. Bauman, February 2004

At the end of his book "The Lord of the Rings," J.R.R. Tolkien describes the Hobbits, as heroes, returning home to the Shire to find many of their prized trees destroyed, replaced by developments and factories. Through the magic of the Elf Galadriel, the Hobbit Sam restores all of the lost trees in one year's time, including one large and glorious Mallorn tree.

Somehow, when reading this story, the imagery immediately brought to my mind was of the fate of the American Chestnut Tree. While man's development and logging certainly has caused havoc to trees in general, in the case of the American Chestnut tree, it has been a blight introduced at the beginning of the 20th century which has brought about its near demise. In the last century we have lost over 4 billion of these real-life grand and glorious trees. Except for very small shoots, virtually all trees in the eastern half of North America are gone, and of the larger trees in the mid-west, only a few stands remain, and those have recently become infected by the blight.

Many have been searching for a way to save and even restore the American Chestnut trees. Rather than the magic of Elves, they have employed scientific research to achieve this goal. Recently the American Chestnut Foundation (www.acf.org) has embarked upon a promising journey to develop a hybrid Chestnut tree, which is 94% American and 6% Chinese. By producing many of these trees they hope to statistically chance upon an almost pure American Chestnut hybrid which retains only the one characteristic of the Chinese Chestnut which makes it resistant to the blight. They predict that in 5 to 10 years we may see the *return of the king* of Eastern North American trees to our woods and forests. Let us cross our fingers and roll up our sleeves.

Just as in the world of the Shire, as described by Tolkien, a living memory of an old age may continue into a new age. In fiction it was the Mallorn, but in our reality the American Chestnut, with any luck and diligence, shall be that living memory, reintroduced into all our intensely colored forests that remain.

I have personally been interested in Chestnut trees since I was a small boy. My grandfather had a large, spreading Chinese Chestnut tree in his yard. As a gardener he taught me much about things that are green and grow. Every autumn, we would enjoy collecting the Chestnuts, and roast them in the oven. Just as I suppose is so of most grandparents, mine would let me have most of the nuts myself. Since that time I have always collected nuts from Chestnut trees anywhere I could find them. Thirteen years ago I discovered five trees in Northmoreland Park. Every fall I go there still, my family helps me pick up the nuts just for the fun of it, I am the only one who actually likes to eat them. I have also been planting the nuts almost every fall. I have one tree on my own property that is now thirteen years old, and various others that range from there to young seedlings. One of my favorite aromas is that of the Chestnuts in bloom around early summer.

I do quite a lot of hiking in various woods around the area, including the woods beside my own property. I have seen Chestnut trees which I have rather suspected to be American Chestnut trees. None of these are very big, they are slender and for their size quite tall, they range from about two to eight inches in diameter. I read a few years back about their plight, and of efforts to restore them. At the time I never paid much attention, except to pause at the foot of few Chestnut trees in the woods that I have seen, to pay my respect to a once mighty king, and reflect upon what it might have been like to have seen these trees when they were grand. I can only imagine that same aroma I enjoy now from Chinese Chestnuts in June, wafting at one time many years ago all through the woods. That must have been something wonderful to experience.

Recently, because of joining the [Westmoreland Conservancy](#), I became interested in the plight of the American Chestnut in a more tangible way. After doing much research on the web, I memorized the characteristics which distinguish the American Chestnut from various other varieties. My plan is to go back to the parks and woods where I know of these few trees to try to identify and verify, beyond my mere original suspicion, that these are really what I think they are. There is one tree in Duff Park on Trillium Trail just beyond the bridge. Another is in Townsend Park. There were once four of these trees in the woods near my house. Two have since died, indicative of the stories I have heard, that the trees will grow only to a certain age. One of the two that died, around 8 years

ago, was larger than the rest, and actually did produce nuts in the final year before it died. I wish back then, that I had the knowledge I do now, and had tried to identify the burs and nuts from that tree. The tree still stands, I hike by it all the time, a no longer living memory, yet I feel blessed to have once known it.

Spring Migration Outing

If you're looking for something fun, perhaps even educational, here's something to consider. Crane Creek, a bird refuge and wildlife sanctuary near Sandusky, Ohio, is a wonderful place to see all kinds of birds as they travel through their migratory routes OR make their homes within McGee Marshes. If you're interested in joining a group to bird-watch or take pictures Saturday, May 8th, contact Shelly Tichy at 724-325-5523 or e-mail at baghera@adelphia.net. We can either head up the evening before, plan to leave Murrysville by 3 AM, or pass along maps and meet there.

President's Report April 2003 - April 2004

We are pleased that the Murrysville Council recently voted five to two in favor of retaining municipal property on Pleasant Valley Road as parkland. To sell or not to sell Pleasant Valley Park was a hotly debated issue and council did an excellent job of creating a format that gave everyone an opportunity to make his or her views known in a calm and orderly manner.

Preserving PV Park is significant. It encompasses in one parcel nearly as much acreage as the Conservancy has managed to protect from development in twelve years.

As most of you are aware, Council was considering selling this large tract of land in order to fund amenities at the new Community Park. The Conservancy's winter newsletter informed our membership of this possibility and many of you responded. Members of our Conservancy and others in the community voiced their objection to the sale of this public land through email, notes and by speaking at the public hearing portion of council meetings. The Conservancy presented two statements urging that the land remain public green space; providing well-researched and relevant arguments to support that position.

While we are pleased that PV Park will remain as green space, we also recognize the contributions to quality of life that active recreational opportunities provide. Murrysville is in need of funds to help develop the Community Park and would welcome any suggestions you may have.

Last September the Westmoreland Conservancy's booth at Murrysville's Summer Celebration was one of the most popular at the event. Plumline Nursery loaned us trees and plants for the day and consequently our area looked like an oasis on the tent-filled grounds. Many visitors came into the Conservancy space where they enjoyed the interactive live reptile display, the first annual Hometown Photo Contest and Conservancy literature and apparel. Many thanks go out to all the Conservancy volunteers who worked to make this event a success. We value the opportunity to participate in this outreach and educational activity, and look forward to it every year.

The Conservancy has two exciting Eagle Scout projects underway. Tim Forrester of Troop 208 is preparing to build three deer exclosures; one on the McGinnis Nature Reserve and the other two in the King Reserve. The

purpose of these structures is to study the effects of deer browsing on the forest ecosystem. Scott Ackman, of Troop 206, is currently designing a walking bridge across Pearson Creek in the Potter's Corner section of the King Reserve near Sloan Elementary School. We are grateful to these Scouts for the valuable contribution that these projects will make to our reserves.

Conservancy members enjoyed several opportunities to get to know each other better. At membership dinner in late April at the Mountain View Inn, Court Gould, Founder and Director of Sustainable Pittsburgh gave an interesting presentation. Attendees were treated to a magnificent display of flowering trees and shrubs as the planning committee for this dinner made great use of what nature had to offer at the time. In August, a casual picnic in Townsend Park, and the Fall Membership Walk were held; the latter on a sunny day under a canopy of color in the McGinnis Nature Reserve. This walk, however, was lightly attended and we sent everyone home with leftover refreshments. Please consider attending the walk this fall- it's a fun activity for a lazy Sunday afternoon.

People surfing the World Wide Web can now visit a new Westmoreland Conservancy website (www.westmorelandconservancy.org). It has additional information and a more professional look thanks to the generosity of two talented people: Joseph Brady, a web designer from Pittsburgh, and Doug Bauman, a new Conservancy member. Joe designed a sample homepage for us about the same time that Doug joined our conservancy. Doug is very skilled with the computer and was able to take Joe's great design and move ahead from that point, creatively adding a calendar page of upcoming events, a page of photographs by our own small group of budding nature photographers, and much more. We're excited to introduce you to this new look- please check it out and offer us any suggestions you may have as this is a work in progress. Perhaps you'd like to offer some of your own photographs, or interesting wildlife stories.

Our Conservancy has always functioned through the talents, hard work and generosity of people who care deeply about conservation. Thank you for supporting the Westmoreland Conservancy as we work to preserve natural areas for the benefit of biodiversity, wildlife habitat and contribution to the quality of life of the people of our area, now and for years to come.

Cary M. Bohl, President

Alternate Transportation

For those who enjoy bicycling or hiking and would like to visit our nation's capital, there is a trail in the works leading from Pittsburgh International Airport to Washington, DC along the Great Allegheny Passage. This is being made possible by a coalition of seven rails to trails organizations known as the Allegheny Trail Alliance. The Great Allegheny Passage is a 152-mile bicycle/walking trail from Pittsburgh to Cumberland, MD that will eventually link to the C & O Canal Towpath, a trail that leads to Washington, DC. Eventually the total length of the trail will be 335 miles! For event calendar, trail construction updates, help with planning long trips, printable maps, and other resources, visit the Allegheny Trail Alliance's Web site at: www.atatrail.org.

Westmoreland Conservancy

P.O. Box 446

Murrysville, PA 15668

contact@westmorelandconservancy.org

Calendar of Events

4/10/2004: Walter Reserve Maintenance, Boy Scout Troop 213, 9am

4/21/2004: Park Chat Walk at Duff Park 8:30 AM (See Page 1)

4/24/2004: PA Cleanways Old William Penn Hwy Clean Up. Meet at Tarr Hollow at Old William Penn. 9AM, bring work gloves.

4/28/2004: Annual Meeting & Elections. 7:30 PM at the Murrysville Library Meeting Room.

5/15/2004: [6PM Dinner at Tivoli's](#) with the Westmoreland Conservancy. Guest Speaker Dr. Walter Carson.

5/19/2004: Park Chat Walk at the McGinnis Nature Reserve 8:30 AM

6/16/2004: Park Chat Walk at Townsend Park (lower pavilion) 8:30 AM

Reserve Maintenance Dates will be posted on the [Website Calendar](#). Keep up to date by visiting us at www.westmorelandconservancy.org

Send your photos and/or nature anecdotes to us at contact@westmorelandconservancy.org

Community Day, or Summer Celebration 2004, is to be held September 18th.

Winter Photo Display



Our Winter Photo Collection was on display in the lobby of the Murrysville Municipal Building from Tuesday, Feb. 24th through Monday, March 15th.

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Westmoreland Conservancy

An all volunteer, non-profit, 501c-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

The 2004 Annual Meeting and Election will be held Wednesday, April 28th. As always, the meetings are open, and we look forward to seeing you there. Meetings are held the 4th Wednesday of each month at the Murrysville Library at 7:30 pm.

April 28th

May 26th

June 23rd

The next newsletter will be out in July.

Contact Numbers

*Volunteers for **Walters Reserve** work on Wiestertown Rd., please call Theo van de Venne at **724-733-2770**.*

*Volunteers for **McGinnis Reserve** work on Hunter Drive, call Shelly Tichy **724-325-5523**.*

*For **PA Cleanways** and information about reservations for the May 15th Dinner at Tivoli's, call Clara Feibelman*

724-327-3454.

Support us and the 2nd Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas project (Carnegie Museum) by purchasing this T-shirt [Click here for details..](#)

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