

ROLAND PARK NEWS

Ride as if you were Invisible

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By Mike McQuestion

The tragic death of cyclist Thomas Palermo has focused local attention on road safety. Friends and acquaintances often tell me they are too afraid to ride their bikes in the City and surveys show this fear is widespread. Yet the data show that urban cycling is relatively safe. Ongoing efforts to improve bicycling infrastructure, including a first for the city here in Roland Park, will do even more.

Baltimore has a lot of bicycling potential. The climate is mild, the city area compact, and full of interesting venues.

Baltimore has a lot of bicycling potential. The climate is mild, the city area compact, and full of interesting venues. Recreational riders can enjoy the 11-mile Gwynns Falls or the shorter Jones Falls Trails. Occasional ciclovias give us a glimpse of what a bike-friendly Baltimore would be like. But just 0.7% of Baltimoreans (around 2,000 of us) regularly biked to work in 2012, ranking us 40th of the 70 largest American cities. In comparison, Washington, DC had around 15,000 bike commuters (4.5%), ranking second to Portland, Oregon.

According to the 2013 American Community Survey, bicycle commuting has increased by 46% since 2005. Maryland ranks 39th among states on this indicator.

It is no coincidence that biking in DC increased more dramatically as the city invested in new bike lanes, a bike share program and further cycling infrastructure, all steps Baltimore has considered but not fully employed.

While commuting to work and schools has increased over the past decade, further gains could be made if the city completed several proposed and oft-delayed projects aimed at improving safety for riders. It is no coincidence that biking in DC increased more dramatically as the city invested in new bike lanes, a bike share program and further cycling infrastructure, all steps Baltimore has considered but not fully employed.

Federal and state funds, including safe routes to school and other programs, provide funding for all

sorts of bike and pedestrian projects, both of which are key to both improving safety, and alleviating morning and afternoon traffic congestion around the schools in Roland Park.

Bicycling is not as dangerous as many people think, though there are risks. In 1975, the year the federal government began tracking data, 1003 bicycling deaths occurred nationwide. In 2012, the number had fallen to 726. Injuries have averaged around 50,000 annually, even as the overall population and number of riders has increased sharply.

Nationwide, bicycles account for 2% of traffic fatalities but just 1% of all trips in the US. Cycling is thus twice as risky as other modes of ground transportation. In Maryland, there are an average of 745 bicycle and pedalcycle-involved crashes each year, resulting in 617 injuries and seven fatalities, reports the Maryland Department of Transportation. Around one-third of these accidents occur in Baltimore City.

Maryland law treats bicycles the same as automobiles; the same rules of the road apply to both. Cyclists must take reasonable safety precautions, and car drivers must give the same consideration to a bicycle as they would to another car. Maryland cyclists got an assist with the passage of the "three-foot rule" in 2012. It states that "...the driver of a vehicle must not pass any closer than three (3) feet to a bicycle or motor scooter if the bicycle is operated in a lawful manner." The law does not apply, however, if the



Cycling in Roland Park. Photo: Anne Stuzin

Robert's Rangers

By Nancy Worden Horst

Growing up in a log cabin near a lake in New Jersey didn't preordain Ranger Bart Viguers for a career as a ranger in Robert E. Lee Park, but it clearly had an effect; Bart spent time fishing, boating and playing outside every day.

And he loved being out of doors, "hanging out with all types of critters and playing in the dirt." It turns out that those childhood activities were the building blocks of "a...future involving nature and wildlife. We didn't have...rangers in South Jersey, so I was thrilled to discover that the college I attended had a program in Outdoor Recreation. When I discovered the job of a ranger, I knew it was right."

A Bachelor of Science degree in outdoor recreation led to such jobs as ski and snowboard instructor; bicycle technician; adventure camp counselor and ranger in Baltimore City and Montgomery



Ranger Bart Viguers demonstrates kayaking skills. Photo courtesy of Bart Viguers, Ranger, Baltimore County Recreation and Parks.

County; and finally a Naturalist at Marshy Point Nature Center before being chosen as a ranger for Baltimore County's newest regional/historical park in 2011.

Ask Ranger Melissa Tillery, who grew up near Gaithersburg, how she decided to become a ranger and she answers: "sometimes it feels like the field chose me!" Her love of wildlife was apparent in her teens when she "volunteered as a wildlife rehabilitator at Second Chance Wildlife Center, as an exhibit interpreter and an animal behavior monitor with the National Zoo."

Seeking out similar opportunities in the Baltimore area, she became a naturalist at Oregon Ridge Park and then followed her supervisor, Shannon Davis, to Robert E. Lee Park.

A college degree in studio art and theatre may not seem like a direct career path, "but you might be surprised how often those



Ranger Melissa Tillery holds Cornelia, a red albino corn snake.

Photo courtesy of Ranger Melissa Tillery.

Volunteer at the Park!

"Our volunteers are a big asset to [Robert E. Lee] Park," says Ranger Bart Viguers. "They put in so much of their time and energy to make this park the best it can be. We couldn't do it without them."

"We have developed a program called the Habitat and Trail Team, a group of volunteers who...perform various projects, including downed tree removal, clearing invasive plants, bridge and walkway repair, and trash removal. This team is open to the public and meets the second Saturday of each month."

Ranger Melissa Tillery adds: "I'm especially thankful for the volunteers who help us with those programs and allow everything to run smoothly. Volunteers are especially important for our most popular programs, which often require a lot of setup and cleanup, but they're also essential to our maintenance projects — the beauty of our trails is in large part due to the hard work of our Habitat and Trail volunteers."

For more information on how to volunteer, visit RELPNC.org and go to 'committees' for contact information.

skills come in handy as a ranger," she says. After completing the Maryland Master Naturalist course, "which was like a crash course in local ecology," she became a ranger in 2012.

Bart and Melissa are enthusiastic about their jobs, especially when they are educating people about nature, the environment, and all the fun activities that can be enjoyed out-of-doors.

Bart says he enjoys "sharing a couple of facts about, say, a bird that just flew by and then watching people get so excited to learn that new fact, almost as if I am doing a mini-program on the spot." "Even better," he says, "is when a park patron...hits me with a cool fact about that same bird that I didn't know. I probably learn something new every day."

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Melissa likes to introduce people to some of the animals cared for at the ranger station. "I love seeing people of all ages express their curiosity when they see wildlife up close, or befriend an animal they expected to be frightening usually our snake or cockroaches!"

Typical Day

"There is no such thing as a typical day as a ranger" according to Bart. "Every day is different and you never know what is going to surprise you on any given day. The winter is a good time for us to work on park projects. For example, right now I am working on routing trail signs for the back trails."

During the more hectic summer season there are more people visiting the park. "You may find a ranger teaching a summer camp, running a boating program, or even directing traffic to our larger adjunct parking lot by the Light Rail," adds Bart.

Bart, who frequently commutes by bike to the Light Rail Hamburg stop and then into the park, divides his time between "helping people, answering questions, talking to families, and keeping the people safe." Since the park is open from sunrise to sunset, a ranger's first duty is to unlock the park gates and do a "quick sweep through the main sections of the park" (often on his bike). At closing time, he "rounds up the people and gets them out safely, locking the gates behind me."

Melissa says that between opening and closing the park, "we patrol the walkways and trails to ensure cleanliness, safety, and the overall health of the park. In our first or last round of the day, we might [see] wildlife activity such as beaver construction or a flock of migratory birds [or spot] safety concerns such as icy patches or fallen trees."

Both Melissa and Bart like the camaraderie of fellow rangers—Bart describes them as "a wonderful group of people to work with," who make "coming to work much more enjoyable." "I look forward

in particular...teach me new games (sometimes of their own invention) and share their interests and hobbies."

Putting an educational or nature-themed spin on the kids' favorite games and sharing what is unique to Maryland and the Lake Roland area "is a big hit," according to Melissa, who also enjoys sharing her passion for some of her favorite creatures via "a snake-themed program during which participants will have the chance to meet some friendly serpents."

When he plans programs, Bart "thinks of what I love to do and... then try to imagine a way that I can get the public excited too. Some of the programs I run are the canoeing and kayaking tours, hiking the serpentine, geocaching, night hikes, and bamboo wind chime making."

"Teaching someone what you love to do and seeing them react in a way that they are even more excited than me is what it's all about. Helping someone get that sense of accomplishment and watching their excitement over what they have experienced is priceless," adds Bart.

"We have some fantastic programs planned for the spring such as Bamboo Wind Chimes, Flashlight Egg Hunt, Natural Egg Dyeing, Spring Break Camp, Project Clean Stream, Earth Day Celebration & Clean-Up, Spring Wildflower Walk, Native Plant Sale, Something to Croak About and we host a Maryland Master Naturalist Course" enthuses Bart. "You can find our programs on our website at roborteleepark.org. Come on out and enjoy what your local park has to offer." ❖

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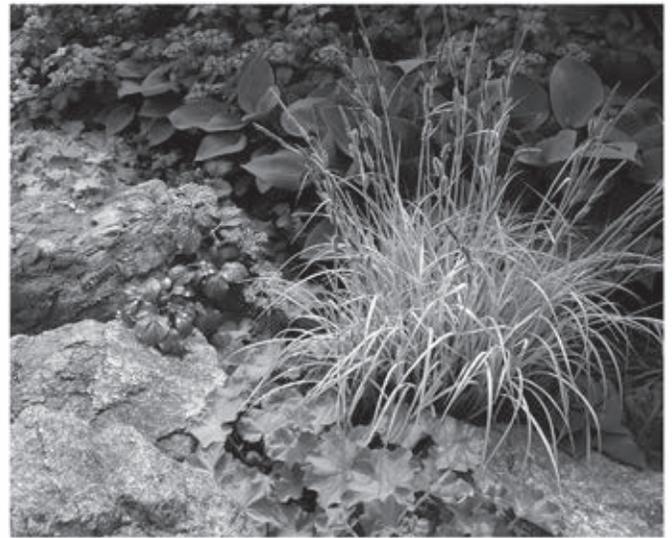
to learning new things about ecology and Maryland's history from both my fellow rangers and from visitors to the park," Melissa adds.

But there are difficult parts to the job as well. "The hardest part about my job is seeing litter every day, even after I picked it all up the day before. It just keeps coming back," opines Bart. "My least favorite aspect of the job would have to be issuing citations," says Melissa, "although I'm always grateful to hear from visitors how much of an improvement our team of rangers has made toward their enjoyment of the park."

Programs

Melissa says "winter is the park's quietest time of the year. We spend winter taking inventory of our program supplies, removing invasive plants before they begin to bloom, and preparing for our busy season. In summer, I spend a lot of time planning and leading summer camps [and] weekend and after-school programs."

She adds "The kids who attend our programs are my biggest source of inspiration when I plan activities in the park. Our campers



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