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## Ralph White is Featured Speaker at Association Meeting on January 10th

By Phil Licking  
FHNA President

The James River Park System is truly unique among urban parks. Here's your chance to meet the man who, more than anyone, has had a direct impact on making the James River Park System what it is today: Ralph White.

Ralph joined the Richmond Department of Parks and Recreation in 1980 as the naturalist for James River Park. The park was in dire need of help. Runoff sewage

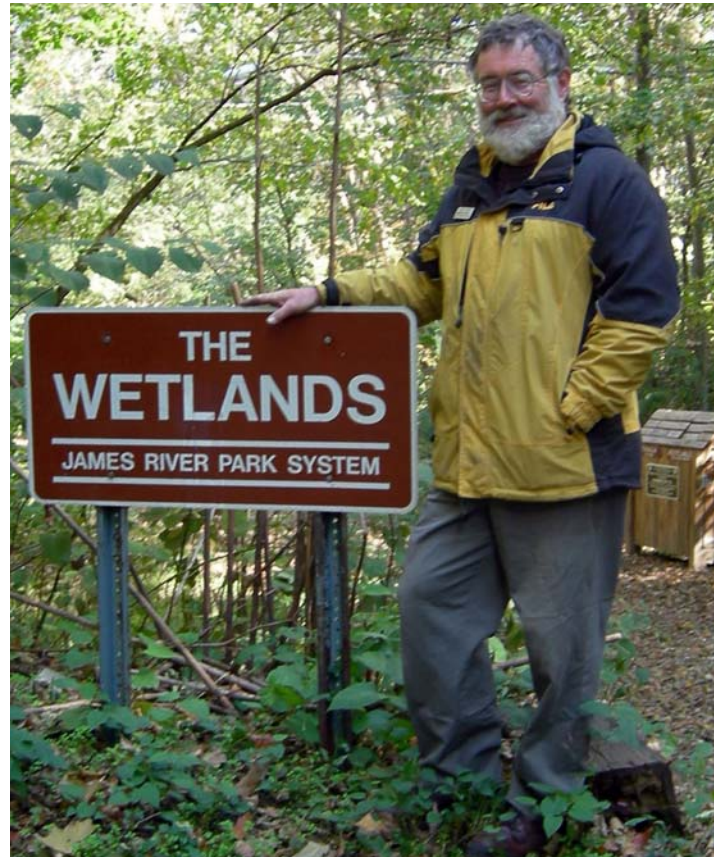
living, working and recreating near the river. The park now has superb access, amenities and programs including the Belle Isle footbridge, miles of multi-use trails, butterfly gardens, salamander counts, moonlight photography sessions, wildlife observation blinds, inner city school outings, a climbing wall, multiple boat launches, and a plan for a continuous bike path to link all sections of the park via a greenway.

The James River Park System now routinely wins awards as one of the best urban parks in the nation. It serves as a model to other city wilderness parks on a national level. And the man behind it all, Ralph White, is winning some awards of his own. He most recently received the 2006 Sierra Club Award for Distinguished Service. This national award is one of the highest honors a steward of our public lands can receive. The competition is rigorous and only one individual nationally is awarded for each category.

In addition to park administration, general maintenance and education, Ralph has written manuals, guides, pamphlets and interactive tours to guide visitors around the 550 acres of shoreline and islands that compose the James River Park System.

Ralph's commitment, philosophy and understanding of the fragile state of the envi-

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Ralph White, James River Park Manager, will be available to answer questions after his featured presentation at the January FHNA meeting.

**Meeting at Forest Hill Presbyterian Church at 7 PM, Wed., Jan. 10. New Association Officers will be elected, too.**

and pollutants in the James were common. Trails and park facilities along the shoreline were woefully lacking. Working with a shoestring budget of less than \$5,000, Ralph enlisted the help of dedicated community volunteers and got to work.

Fast forward 26 years, and the James River is revitalized. It is the centerpiece of Richmond's commercial growth. The James River Park System contributes greatly to the new urban trend of people

## Forest Hill Avenue Traffic Study Results

By Susan Winiacki  
FHNA Vice-President

In the spring, the Forest Hill Neighborhood Association asked City Councilwoman Kathy Graziano to pursue a traffic speed and traffic volume study for Forest Hill Avenue. Concerns were voiced about the difficulty of exiting and entering neighborhood streets during rush hours and about the difficulty of crossing Forest Hill in general.

The study was conducted from the evening of Oct. 20 through the evening of Oct. 27, 2006, in the 4200 block.

The posted speed limit is 35 mph.

According to the report, the mean speed during this study was 32.6 mph. There was a maximum speed reported of 92.9 mph and a minimum speed of 6.4 mph. "The 85 percent speed was 37.1mph."

According to the report, weekday peak average traffic volume was 1485.8 vehicles per hour from 7:45 to 8:45 am and 1810.75 vehicles from 5 to 6 pm. The weekend peak average was 890 vehicles between 10:45 and 11:45 am

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Meet Your Neighbors:

# Ron and Peg Walters: Happy to Call Forest Hill Home

By **Monica Rumsey**  
*FLYER Correspondent*

When you first meet Ron and Peg Walter you'll know you've met two of the nicest people around. Their ready smiles, sense of humor, and open conversation make you feel at ease no matter what the topic, and they always seem ready to chat.

Since moving into their home on West 43rd Street last December, they've put their creative touch on both home and garden. Their back yard, for example, changed from a vacant lot with four dead trees to a lush landscape of native and ornamental plants that add color to the view and nourishment to wildlife.

Their garden shed, which they painted bright turquoise and hot pink, lends color to the garden no matter what the weather.

Throughout the summer they watched hummingbirds sip nectar from their flowers and feeders, and Ron reaped the rewards of his row of sunflowers when flocks of goldfinch fed on the seed-heads.

Before coming to Forest



**Peg and Ron Walter** shown with their rescue dogs, Tootsie (on left) and Maggie Mae (on right). The two pets are well-mannered and playful, apparently flourishing under their masters' loving care and attentive training. Photo: Monica Rumsey

Hill, Ron and Peg lived at Lake Monticello in Palmyra, Virginia; Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and Atlanta—places they enjoyed for their southern hospitality and relaxed setting.

When Ron's business required a move to Richmond, what made them want to live in Forest Hill? "We decided that what we were looking for," says Peg, "was an older house in an older neighborhood, with a park nearby, a variety of architecture, a diversity of people, friendly independent spirit among the residents and, of course, a dog park. Forest Hill fit all our criteria, and we love it here."

mental education, and assisted in creating a nature center at a national park in southern Thailand. Ralph returned to the states to continue higher education at Wesleyan University, Middletown CT, and attended Yale University His love for nature led him to positions in Ohio, Washington, D.C., North Dakota, and Arizona.

If you've not yet met Ralph while walking, running,

What do they like best about living in Forest Hill?

"The people are friendly even to total strangers, from retail staff to professionals like doctors and bankers. Forest Hill also has the feeling of living in a small community, with the little shops and quiet streets, but it's so close to downtown or anything else farther out," concludes Peg.

What would you like to see happen in this neighborhood? "We believe a neighborhood is strong if its homeowners' association is strong, so we'd definitely like to see the Neighborhood Association continue its current path of growth and development. We also would love to have

three more things close by: a movie theater, a great bakery, and a really good bookstore (though we will continue to use the Westover Library). We're hoping," they added, "that Phase 2 at the Shops at Stratford Hills will have some of those."

So if you see them around—and you probably will sooner or later—say howdy and welcome Ron and Peg Walter to Forest Hill.

## **White is Featured Speaker**

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ronment relates back to his childhood in Thailand and the Philippines where he witnessed first hand the loss of animal and plant habitats and its effect on the people surrounding them.

Before arriving in Richmond, Ralph attended Chulalongkorn University and worked on issues of rural public health and environ-

cycling, paddling or floating through the James River Park System, here's your chance to do so! Just come to the next Forest Hill Neighborhood Association meeting on January 10th.

Ralph will be giving a brief presentation on the past, present and future of the James River Park System, followed by an open Q&A session. This is one you don't want to miss!

**FOREST HILL  
FLYER**

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The Flyer Profile:

# Celebrity Pooch



## Gypsy's Story

as told to **Monica Rumsey**

I'm a shaggy yellow dog, part Chow, part something else. You may have seen me wandering through Forest Hill

over the past several years. Like my cousin "Black Dog" across the river, I've been lost and homeless and hungry for

a long, long time. I didn't trust humans, but I also wasn't sure I would make it through yet another cold, wet winter.

I think I must be about five years old now, and can't remember how I first got separated from my original owner when I was still little more than a pup. As time went by, I learned to use my animal instincts and made a little shelter to keep dry and warm in bad weather. It was on a hillside, under the bushes, down behind the picnic shelters in Forest Hill Park. If it weren't for one stranger, a nice man who left food for me, I should have starved by now. Sometimes, though, that wasn't enough. So I wandered the neighborhood sniffing for food that people left out on their stoops for stray cats, and ate that.

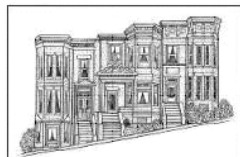
As it turned out, the deep hunger inside me helped grow the litter of six puppies I was carrying. (Yes, there was a brief encounter with an overbearing male, and that was that.) Just before the puppies were born, I dug little holes for them in the dirt around my den, to keep them hidden from hawks and safe from harm.

But this fall, just before winter set in, everything changed. People who kept seeing me sneak cat food on 45th Street noticed that I didn't seem to have a human home. Four of them, all women, got together and

tracked me back to where I was living in the park. They decided that I should not have to spend another winter outside, alone. And they didn't even know about my babies yet. They started feeding me in the park and waiting quietly nearby, and I got used to seeing them around. One of them even touched me ever so gently. It felt nice, I must admit. But I wasn't ready to get close to her.

Once when I left the park and wandered back to 45th Street for food, some of the women went over to my den in the park. They had discovered my puppies, and while I was away they dug them out of their little holes in the ground. Meanwhile, the others back on 45th Street lured me into a fenced-in back yard and shut the gate. I was trapped and frightened. How could I get out? What would happen now? What about my puppies?! It took several hours to calm me down, to convince me that there was nothing to fear. These humans were kind. They brought my puppies to me and they looked so happy in their new soft bedding. I got my first human hug in years, and didn't mind a bit. Things would be better now.

That was all months ago. The pups are weaned and have found good homes. As for me, I'm staying on with one of my rescuers, who gave me a fine new name—Gypsy.



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### Traffic Study Results

*continued from Page 1*

and 998.5 vehicles between 1:30 and 2:30 pm.

The summary of the study stated: "Of all surveyed vehicles, 62 percent of 762 vehicles are traveling faster than 45 mph. From that number 5.25 percent or 6,474 are traveling faster than 40 mph. . . . peak evening traffic volumes do exceed 100 vehicles per hour, the threshold where citizens often become upset at high traffic volume. This level of traffic is common as most

city streets are functionally residential but are also classed as collector streets. Forest Hill Avenue falls into this category."

Note: Both peak morning and evening traffic volumes exceed 100 vehicles per hour during the week and on weekends.

The FHNA voted to pursue asking the city's public works department for a crosswalk or other traffic mitigating measure so residents can cross safely and enter and exit their neighborhood safely.

# Safety Alert: Take Care Opening Doors to Strangers

Here are December bulletins received from Westover Hills Crime Watch leader Noah Rogers, a former law enforcement officer. What's going on across Cedar Lane affects our neighborhood, too:

**Dec. 19:** A homeowner in the 5000 block of King William Road reported that shortly before 6:00 p.m. tonight a white male wearing a red fleece jacket and holding a clipboard, rang her doorbell. The homeowner described the male subject as

appearing to be 35-40 years of age, possessing a thin build and long hair.

The male subject said he wanted to set an appointment with the homeowner to talk about replacing the home's windows. The homeowner declined to set up the appointment. The subject then asked the homeowner what time it was and stated he had lost his cell phone. The homeowner gave the subject the time and closed the door.

About 5 minutes later the

homeowner advised that someone came to her door and rang the doorbell. This time the homeowner called out to see who was at the door and no one answered. Shortly thereafter the doorbell rang again and once more the homeowner called out to see who was at the door and no one answered. The homeowner then called the police who responded to the area.

Please be very cautious about opening the door to strangers especially after dark. In this case the fact that the subject asked the homeowner the time is suspicious in that he may have wanted her to step away from the door, therefore giving him access to the house.

In a situation like this always ask what company the person is working for and do they have identification that shows them to be an employee of that company.-

**Dec. 12:** At 2:30 a.m. this morning the residents of a home on Westover Hills Boulevard were awakened by the sound of someone trying to open their front storm door. The storm door of this residence has a dead-bolt lock which obviously makes it much harder to gain access to the home. The residents believe that their dog barking may have scared the person off. The residents immediately called the police who

responded to the scene. The responding police officers walked around the yard to make sure everything was secure and advised they would keep a patrol car in the area.

This is an excellent example of the benefits of installing deadbolts locks on all exterior doors/storm doors. It makes it harder and more time consuming for criminals to enter a residence.

**Dec. 6:** Tuesday afternoon residents in the 4900 block of

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**Report All Suspicious Activity to the Police:  
Call Lt. A.A. Jones  
at 646-1945**

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Riverside Drive observed two black males walking down the alley that runs behind their homes. One homeowner approached the subjects inquiring if he could be of assistance at which time the two black males split up and headed in different directions. Another homeowner approached one of the subjects to speak with him at which time the subject mumbled a few words and after a few more steps broke into a jog and disappeared down the alley. The resident then called the police who responded to the scene.

Two months ago the 4900 block of Riverside Drive experienced at least two incidents of theft. The residents therefore were extremely aware of suspicious persons and responded appropriately by making the subjects aware of the fact that they had been observed and calling the police."

**FYI:** If you notice street lamps that need fixing, please call the City of Richmond's Department of Public Utilities at 644-3000. We need to ensure that the lighting in our neighborhood and specifically in our alleys is operating!"

Kathy Graziano, 4th District City Council

## Some Ideas for the Avenue



Sometimes the things that are supposed to hold us together actually seem to divide us. It often seems

that way with Forest Hill Avenue. What was once a calm suburban street is now a major east-west artery for commuter traffic. In order to get a better grasp on the issue, we have been working with the police department and the Department of Public Works traffic division.

In a recent survey in the 4200 block (see details on page 1), we discovered that almost 20,000 cars a day are using Forest Hill Avenue. In the afternoon peak period

that figure jumped to 1810 vehicles per hour. That's far higher than what is expected for a residential street, but common for a commuter route.

We are working with DPW on some ideas that may continue to help. One idea that seems like it might work is providing a painted crosswalk somewhere in the 42nd to 45th Street area. These crosswalks have been shown to be successful elsewhere in calming the automobile-pedestrian clash.

We will continue to work with the neighborhood association, and we continue to be interested in your ideas.

You can reach my office at 320 2454, or [graziakc@ci.richmond.va.us](mailto:graziakc@ci.richmond.va.us). Thanks.



## Westover Hills Library News

By Laura Dysart

Look out for the construction at the Westover Hills Library in early January! New bathrooms and a new rear door entryway will be installed to be wheelchair accessible and ADA compliant. This was made possible by Councilwoman Kathy Graziano moving funds from

the 2009 budget to the 2006 budget. Wiring, lighting and HVAC improvements will also begin soon. The library plans to maintain regular hours during this construction.

Because of the construction, no date has been set for the annual Children's Winterfest event usually held in

January. Please keep checking the library bulletin board for information.

Please join the Westover Hills Library Advisory Group meeting held the first Saturday of every month at 9:00 a.m. at the library through June. Call the library at 646-8833 for more information.