

The Piermont Newsletter

VOLUME XXXVII NO.2

PUBLISHED BY THE PIERMONT CIVIC ASSOCIATION

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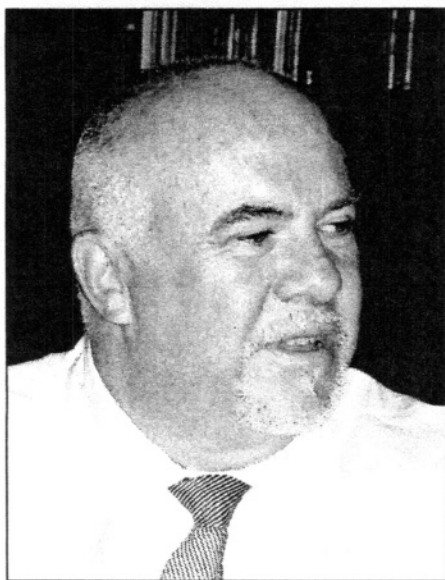
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Water over the dam. High water in early summer. Photo by Sally Savage

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Bill Walsh and Joe Serra. Photo by Fred Burrell

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By the time the police arrived, the two fish scoopers, a third man, their 18-foot open boat and the generator were pulled up to the shore across from Kane Park as kids watched. They told the police that they belonged to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and were doing their job. Bill noticed a small DEC sticker on the side of the boat. There was also a sign saying "High voltage. Stay clear."

Bill can drop a fishing line into the water from his porch. He knows a great deal about the River and the Marsh. His business, Paradise Boats, rents out kayaks and canoes, and Bill takes city-folk on tours. He cares a lot about the Marsh and its birds and animals and fish. He quite rightly considers himself "Keeper of the Marsh."

Bill was appalled that the DEC itself was electrocuting fish. He talked to Kathy Hattalah, fishery biologist in the Bureau of Marine Resources in the



Photo by Fred Burrell

DEC. She said the DEC was indeed "electro-fishing." She said it is a standard annual procedure and they've been doing it in the Hudson for years. The purpose is to sample various species of fish in different parts of the River to see how much mercury or PCB's they contain.

Ms. Hattalah said that they use electric generators to stun the fish, so they will float to the surface. After they are scooped up, the different species from various locations are sent to a laboratory where they are mashed up in a blender, then tested for mercury and PCB content.

As to how much "collateral damage" there was—incidental fish stunned or electrocuted, Ms. Hattalah said she couldn't say. But Bill has plenty to say: "They shouldn't be electrocuting fish where kids can see them from Kane Park. They can sample fish other places, but not in my Creek."



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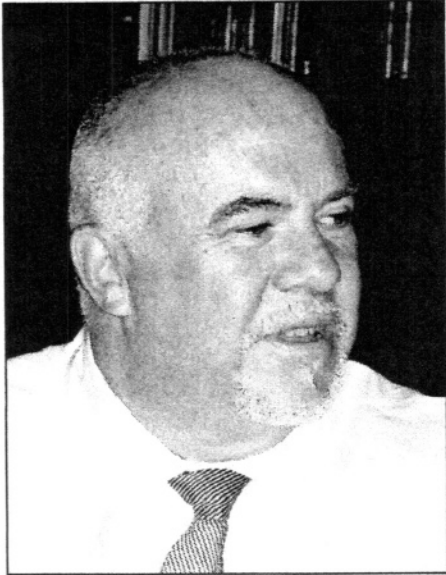
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By the time the police arrived, the two fish scoopers, a third man, their 18-foot open boat and the generator were pulled up to the shore across from Kane Park as kids watched. They told the police that they belonged to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and were doing their job. Bill noticed a small DEC sticker on the side of the boat. There was also a sign saying "High voltage. Stay clear."

Bill can drop a fishing line into the water from his porch. He knows a great deal about the River and the Marsh. His business, Paradise Boats, rents out kayaks and canoes, and Bill takes city-folk on tours. He cares a lot about the Marsh and its birds and animals and fish. He quite rightly considers himself "Keeper of the Marsh."

Bill was appalled that the DEC itself was electrocuting fish. He talked to Kathy Hattalah, fishery biologist in the Bureau of Marine Resources in the



Photo by Fred Burrell

DEC. She said the DEC was indeed "electro-fishing." She said it is a standard annual procedure and they've been doing it in the Hudson for years. The purpose is to sample various species of fish in different parts of the River to see how much mercury or PCB's they contain.

Ms. Hattalah said that they use electric generators to stun the fish, so they will float to the surface. After they are scooped up, the different species from various locations are sent to a laboratory where they are mashed up in a blender, then tested for mercury and PCB content.

As to how much "collateral damage" there was—incidental fish stunned or electrocuted, Ms. Hattalah said she couldn't say. But Bill has plenty to say: "They shouldn't be electrocuting fish where kids can see them from Kane Park. They can sample fish other places, but not in my Creek."



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Progress On The Cowboy Fields

In a letter to Our Town a few weeks ago, self-defined "old timer" Piermonter George Lynch wrote about his memories of growing up with the Cowboy Fields. His grandfather was given a cottage at the end of Piermont Place by the Whiton family, who owned the property at that time, in exchange for his watching over what were then called the Whiton fields and pond. His grandparents raised 8 children there, with no running water, indoor plumbing or electricity. And the children of his generation spent many happy hours playing in the fields. He expressed his hope that the land would not be sold to developers and that "its pond and stream could someday be returned to its original serene beauty overlooking Piermont and the Hudson Valley."

A great deal of progress has been made towards that end in the last several months, as support has been building for the acquisition of the land

by Rockland County. In early July, a group of elected officials and conservation professionals took a walk to see what exactly was being discussed so eloquently by so many at public meet-



ings and in print. County Legislator Connie Coker, Rockland County Coordinator, Division of Environmental Resources Allan Beers, Orangetown Supervisor Thom Kleiner, Jayne McLaughlin of the NYS Office of

Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Piermont Village Trustee Chris Sanders, and Seth McKee of Scenic Hudson were guided on a tour of the property by Nata Traub, a resident and strong supporter of the conservation efforts. Everyone was impressed with the beauty and significance of this piece of land, described by one as a "key" property.

Subsequently, the Environmental Committee of the Rockland County Legislature, led by Ms. Coker, passed a resolution to approve an application for a \$500,000 grant from the state to help in the acquisition of the property, and the following week the application was also given the go-ahead by the Budget and Finance Committee. The hope is that the county can find partners, such as the state and Scenic Hudson, to help raise enough money to buy the Cowboy Fields from the South Orangetown Central School District, which

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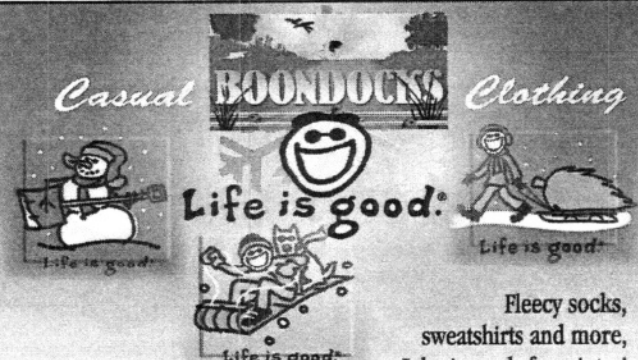
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has been discussing the sale of so-called "surplus" lands in an effort to raise funds to augment its budget. The sale of the Cowboy Fields for the purpose of permanent preservation as green space, habitat corridor and watershed is viewed by many as the quintessential "win-win" situation, in which the School District receives much needed funds while the Rockland community retains this valuable piece of land.

To further the effort, a meeting was held in late July with Dr. Zambito, South Orangetown Superintendent of Schools, and Senator Thomas Morahan, County Executive Scott Vanderhoef, Connie Coker, Allan Beers and a representative of Scenic Hudson. The school district's appraiser was also present, and Supervisor Thom Kleiner was there on speaker phone. All of the elected officials were very supportive of the effort to preserve this land, making the point that the appraisal figure of \$8-10 million, based on the potential value of the land to a developer, would have to be adjusted, taking into consideration the immeasurable long term value of

preservation to the community.

In his letter, George Lynch related that Whiton Pond had been "our skating rink in the winter and our summer fishing and frog hunting spot and our nature preserve. In fact," he said, "our teachers in the first and second grades would walk us up the hill from our Hudson Terrace school to the pond and stream on field trips." There is no reason why the children of the school district should not continue to enjoy the benefit of having such a nature preserve and field laboratory for their use. In fact, it should be considered vital in these days of diminished natural resources and "nature-deficient" childhood experiences. The county would maintain the fields for passive recreational use, and the school would be able to use the area for nature study once again.

In his letter, George Lynch also reported that since the children of his era had played at being cowboys in the fields, they had chosen the name "Cowboy Fields." Another, more fanciful, source of the name is suggested in reading about the Revolutionary

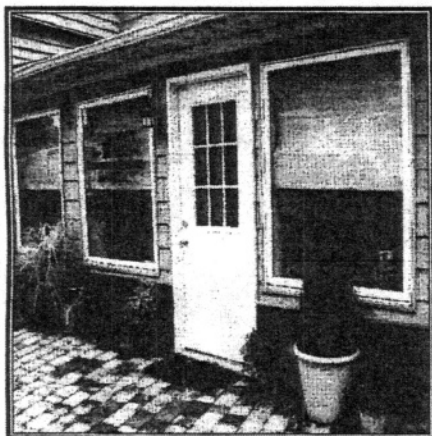
War era "Cowboys" that roamed the Hudson Valley. They were Loyalists, or just plain thugs, who raided farms, stole livestock and produce, and traded with the British for a living. One famous Cowboy, Claudius Smith, was the scourge of "Orange County", which at that time included what is now Rockland. Since Piermont, then called the Slote or Tappan Slote, was a major trading post and transportation hub, there is some reason to believe that it might have been a target for the Cowboys, who would have camped out in the Cowboy Fields waiting for the latest shipment of goods to come up the creek. A memory of that name could have carried into the twentieth century.

Of course, we'll probably never know the whole story of the origin of the name, but perhaps through this building community effort the property can remain for all time as a home to wildlife, and to the dreams and play of children.

~Grace Mitchell

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40 Years Of The Newsletter

One of the best sources for the recent history of Piermont is the library's collection of the *Piermont Newsletter*, beginning with an issue from July 10, 1967, and running up to the present. There are a few gaps in the collection, and some readers received a plea earlier in the year from Bob Samuels asking residents to check their own archives for missing copies. So far we have had contributions from three "private collections," but are still looking. The library and the PCA are planning to join forces to have the issues bound for future generations of use, with the able assistance of Carolyn Kent, a former president of the PCA, who is now volunteering to help with local history at the library. She has done a thorough inventory of our boxes and binders of *Newsletters* to come up with the current list.

An article in that 1967 issue entitled "Happy Birthday to We" talks about the founding of the organization the year before. "Just about a year ago," it says, "a small group met informally to share their common bond—a deep affection for Piermont's uniqueness and desire to help it grow along the right lines. The result: the Piermont Civic Association...." The lead article discusses the controversy over a proposal for a new bank building on Main Street, designed in ultra-modern fashion and clad in some sort of blue reflective material. The village was up in arms against this design, insisting that a new building should be "in keeping

with the architecture of Piermont." The issue also includes a discussion of rezoning the Thompson property on 9W across from the then "new school," as well as that of the proposal to build more apartments in the style of the already existing Lawrence Park units. In his President's column, Bob Bradbury voices a concern about the "character of the village."

In the second issue from our collection, published in 1968, we read about a Mayor's committee being formed to help improve the business district and learn that a group of Piermonsters, led by Lisa Ordahl, was chronicling Piermont houses as part of the national Historic American Home Survey. There is a report that the library, then being revitalized by a volunteer group, was expanding its hours, program and exhibits. A local history column called "The Day the Erie Came to Piermont," related the story of the birth of Piermont as a railroad boomtown and the President's column considered a proposal by Columbia University to build up to 2000 attached house on Clausland Mountain.

Reading through the back issues, one notices definite threads... Perhaps the longest thread deals with as land use issues, followed closely by that of civic involvement and pride of place. Historic importance and environmental significance are woven in as we read about the Piermont Pier and marsh, for example. How many of today's readers know why the Pier exists or

that it didn't always belong to the Village or that the Piermont Marsh—now protected as part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve as a very significant environmental resource was once threatened with schemes for development of railroad lines and housing subdivisions?

What emerges as these threads are interwoven is a picture of an ongoing struggle of sorts—a struggle to maintain a small and vital community in a rich and unique environment. The political disputes, the issues of taxes and services and the stories of the various community groups organized for battle or for public service, add to this picture. Residents old and new have become involved in the struggle, recognizing the uniqueness of Piermont, its incredible natural environment, valuable architecture, interesting people and institutions. In reading these articles one comes to a very clear understanding that Piermont does not remain unique by accident or good fortune. An ongoing democratic process has been at work here, chronicled for four decades by the *Piermont Newsletter*.

Please contact Grace Mitchell at the library, 359-4595, x 102, if you have back issues (particularly early issues) of the *Newsletter* that you'd like to contribute. We are also interested in photographs and other memorabilia of local history interest. Newsletters and photographs can be photocopied and returned to you if you wish.

~Grace Mitchell

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RESTORATIONS

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Now You Know—It's A Restaurant

An impressive new building on Route 340 in Sparkill will open as an Italian restaurant this fall. The structure has been going up in fits and starts for three and a half years, intriguing motorists as they round the curve by the old oak tree.

Salvatore Coppola, owner of the building, said it would open as Coppola's Tuscan Grille "hopefully by Thanksgiving." It will seat 175 people on two floors connected by stairs and an elevator—a novelty in Sparkill. The cuisine will be Italian and the kitchen will feature a wood-burning oven.

Mr. Coppola's original concept was to renovate the white frame building that used to be Tony's Lobster House. But during the renovation, the kitchen

collapsed into the basement. An engineer declared the top two floors too fragile to support a roof, so they were torn down to basement level. Then further examination showed that the foundations were crumbling and couldn't support a new structure. So the old frame building had to be totally demolished and the new one constructed from scratch.

Construction delays and permit revisions slowed construction of the new structure. It isn't likely to collapse. Framed by steel I-beams, faced with stone and brick, covered with a metal roof, it is completely up to code.

Mr. Coppola, who lives in Fort Lee, owns two restaurants in New York City—Coppola's East and Coppola's



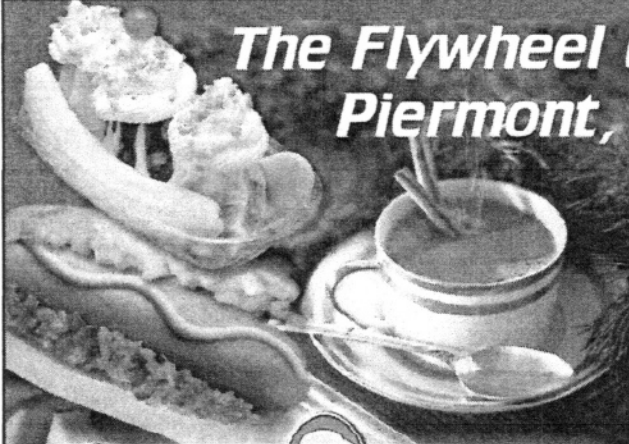
West. He's been in business there for 18 years and regards himself as a chef—a trade he learned in Naples. Although he won't be cooking the pasta in Sparkill, "someone from Italy will."

Asked if he was related to the film director Francis Ford Coppola, the restaurateur said, "We're close friends, but we're not related. I'm from the City of Naples and he's from outside." He said he knows Nicholas Cage, the director's nephew, "very well."

This is Mr. Coppola's first restaurant venture outside of the City. "We'll have to see how it works," he said. With the stamina he's demonstrated, it can hardly fail.

~Fred Burrell

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Not all Pier Wildlife is From the Arctic



Two rare arctic birds, a snowy owl and an ivory gull, drew excited visitors from up and down that East Coast to our pier this winter. Exotic sightings spark interest

and attention, but the pier is always alive with excitement for those who make the effort to look for the beauty in what seems commonplace.

One night, my wife Misha and I heard a huge crashing in the underbrush on the pier as darkness fell. We waited expectantly, hardly daring to breathe, wondering what the immense creature could be. The immense creature turned out to be a skunk. Or there was the February afternoon we sat by the river ice and were entranced to see what must have been a small rat following a labyrinth of tunnels just under the ice at our feet.

Deer, fox, screech owl, muskrat, skunk, raccoon, rabbit and rat (snowy owl food) use the pier by night and by day. To the animals, the pier's south side

woods are an extension of Tallman Mountain State Park. These creatures leave signs that you can observe by training your eye, ear and intuition. Although sightings can happen anywhere, a key area to look is along the sides of Ferry Road as it goes from the pier gate by the ball field towards the bend in the pier known as the "dog leg."

Animal tracks abound on both sides. Most easily spotted are the deer tracks. They are more common on the south roadside by the woods, areas where the deer regularly move through the reeds and across the road. These are wide enough for human adults to walk into and look like human trails created in the reeds.

If you see a single set of tracks leading from the growth by the river past



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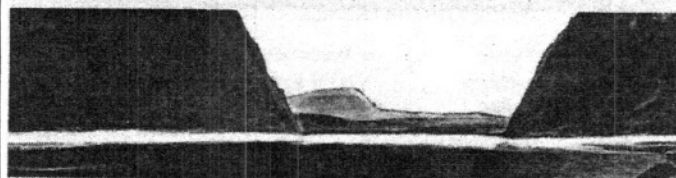
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the sewage station, you are looking at fox tracks. The best time to observe fox tracks, or any tracks, is in the morning before the pier has seen much use. Only an experienced tracker could pick them after that. By the way, an excellent resource is *Animal Tracks, a Peterson Field Guide* by Olaus J. Murie.

But don't limit yourself to tracks. Next time you think someone forgot to pick up after Fido, look carefully. Can you see fur, small bones, seeds or plant matter in the feces? You may have to break the scat to make certain. If you have success, you can consider becoming a scatologist. The Murie book will help you with this, also. In the winter, I often find weathered fox scat containing muskrat hair. The scat is usually on the road edge and looks like a dirty scrap of grey.

The pier is more alive than you may realize. If the snowy owl captured your interest this winter, now is a good time to look for those of our kin who have always been just around the corner. There's more magic around you than you think.

~John Leeds

The Newsletter Is On The Web

The Piermont Newsletter is also available on the World Wide Web. You can find it at:

<http://piermont-ny.com/newsletter/>, free to everyone with an internet connection. It is on a site maintained by fellow Piermonter Richie Stark.

In Memoriam

Molly Masucci (Hunt) Knight, daughter of Joseph Masucci and Leah Witofsky, died on August 7, 2007. She was born December 24th, 1928 in Nyack NY. Molly graduated from Tappan Zee High School, Piermont 1944. Molly was a Piermont resident for 55 years and still has many relatives there.

Her love and kindness were felt by all who knew her, and her love will live on always in our hearts. Molly is survived by her four loving children, Leah Pardillo (Hunt), Lauren Grennan (Hunt), Leonard Hunt, Joseph Hunt, Patricia O'toole and grandchildren Jesse and Matthew Pardillo, Sean and Molly Grennan, Emily and Anthony Hunt. She is also survived by her stepchildren Sally Harder, George Gordon Knight Jr. and Sandra Larkin.

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President's Corner



When Piermont's firefighting volunteers battle a blaze, rescue a boater or march in a parade, they are representing the village and they make us all proud. When they join one side of a political controversy they also are representing the village and it is a very different matter.

For more than four years anti-war protesters have faced counter protesters at the Nanuet four corners, just as they did during the Vietnam War. I've always thought these weekend demonstrations were an inspiring display of freedom of expression.

However, a few weeks ago the protests at the corner of Route 59 and Middletown Road became much more controversial. That's when West Nyack firefighters showed up with a fire truck and joined the counter protesters. Many were outraged that they had used a taxpayer bought truck for political purposes.

The following week more than 100 volunteer firemen—including a contingent from Piermont—joined the counter protesters. This time, in an obvious effort to avoid the argument about the truck, they came with one paid for by Pearl River volunteers themselves.

The firefighters argue that all they are saying is, "We Support Our Troops," and that's not a political statement. It is true that the plain language of the phrase expresses a sentiment that is overwhelming popular. But if you honestly believe that those

words aren't loaded with political meaning you are being naïve to the extreme.

Unfortunately, as the American public has turned against the war in Iraq, the phrase, "We Support Our Troops," has become code for those supporting the war. It implies that people who want to bring the troops home and out of harm's way are somehow against the troops. That argument defies good sense. I have yet to hear of an American who is not supporting our troops.

Our wonderful fire fighting men and women have every right to hold political opinions as individuals or as a group, but please don't drag the good name of the Piermont Fire Department into the controversy.

~Bob Samuels



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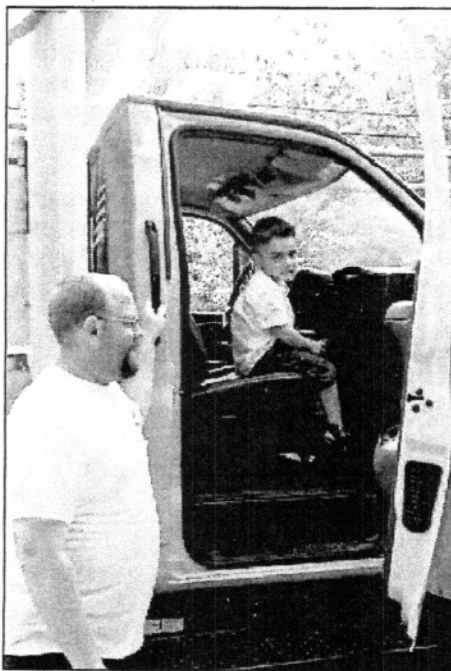
THE FRONT LINE

Police Department:

New number for overnights: The phone number for overnight parking permission has been changed. The new number is 359-1258, ext.345. Please remember that permission to park overnight on Piermont streets is reserved for special circumstances or emergencies, says Police Chief Michal O'Shea. It is not to be used for routine parking.

PAL News: The Rittenberg field dedication was well attended and the field has been improved, thanks to the generous donation made by the Rittenberg family. The Police Athletic League would like to thank the Rittenberg family, the Village Board, the Fire Department and the many volunteers who helped with the dedication.

Fears that the Pier would be swamped with vehicles under the new rule permitting car traffic for all have not come to pass, according to Chief O'Shea. Traffic has been moderate. It is expected to pick up somewhat when new signs are posted outlining the new parking rules. Parking for everybody is allowed only at the DEC-marked spaces at the end of the Pier. Parking elsewhere is reserved exclusively for permit holders. Piermont residents can get a free permit at the Village Clerk's office.



Highway Department Annual Open House, Tommy Temple and JJ Savage. Photo by Sally Savage

Highway Department:

Next in line for maintenance work in the village, according to Al Bartley, DPW Supervisor, are the following projects: Sidewalk replacement on Piermont Avenue from the Grandview village line south to Bay Street.

Sidewalk replacement for house #595 south to #503 Piermont Avenue and at the end of Paradise Avenue. New curbs on Hester Street, Tate Avenue and Franklin Street.

Other infrastructure repairs and maintenance that are scheduled are described at the Department of Public Works website, www.villagedpw.com. Projects Department of Public Works include repairing a breach in the dam on Ferdon Ave. and seeking funds to rebuild the historic bridge over Sparkill Creek.

Fire Department:

Their just desserts: The 19th annual Rockland Road Runners race benefits the Piermont Volunteer Ambulance Corps. Proceeds from the 10-mile race along the Hudson River were divided between volunteer responders from Piermont, Nyack and South Nyack.

After 9/11, the Runners Runners race committee has focused on benefiting first responders in the local area. For past races, Piermont's and the other river communities' ambulance corps have stayed on standby, ready to assist, if necessary. In return, the Road Runners have chosen this way to repay them for their services.

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Is This Next Year's Fashion?



Piermonter Jon Satin is on a mission. Three months ago he quit his job after working for years in junior fashions. As the trend toward "green" extends from food toward clothing, Satin wants to turn away from clothes made of cotton to those made from organic and recycled materials.

He is starting a new company based on organic fabrics. Products used in making them include hemp, bamboo, soybeans (for stretch) and wood pulp. Satin's fabrics will also use recycled rags, acrylic, cashmere and cashmere blends. He will use hemp bags for packaging, boxes made from recycled cardboard and labels from recycled paper.

Satin will be funded largely by the Podar conglomerate group in India, owners of 11,000 acres of organic farms, with a designated 100,000 acres

in sight within the decade. To create organic farms, millions of earthworms were brought to the Podar fields. Their castings become a soil nutrient and fertilizer. "If the crop is grapes, for example, the grapes grown organically are now twice the size they would have been, with a lot more flavor," says Satin.

Three countries produce organically-grown crops—India, Turkey, and the United States, with Turkey accounting for 50% of the total. In the U.S. the companies who have led the way in putting "green" clothes on their shelves have been Walmart (which has received much-needed good press for their efforts) and Sam's Club. According to Satin, Walmart hired an expert to determine what this change would cost them, expecting to hear millions, and was told it would not be costly and that they would, in fact, make a huge profit by going green.

Other companies getting into organic fabrics are Champion (athletic

wear), Chaus, Liz Clairborne who has started a division called Pure and Jor-dache, which is also backing Satin's company. Target and H&M are putting organic clothes in all of their stores. Whole Foods put "green" clothes into 25% of their stores' space and the response caused them to make it 50%, with the rest of the store devoted to food. For shoppers' information, "organically all through" means 95% of the fabric has been organically grown.

Satin is motivated by the suicide rate of farmers, plus the fact that thousands of farmers in India raising cotton die from cancers caused by insecticides. As he puts it, one tee shirt equals one cup of insecticide. Cotton may no longer be king. As a crop, it is number one as far as the amount of insecticide used in its production (coffee is number two.) "We drape ourselves in chemicals," Satin says.

He put it in a nutshell: "It's my passion, it's my mission."

~Rosemary Cone



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