

Tree Tops - *President's Message*

by **Nathalie Noon**, *HOA Board President*

Dear Community:

I hope this message finds you healthy and well. The pandemic has certainly been a challenge for everyone, and unfortunately we were not able to hold the annual community picnic as planned. It has been difficult to come up with alternative ways to connect and gather, but I am hopeful that we will be able to safely gather next year for good company, food and music.

Monthly Board meetings continue to be held over Zoom video conference, and we will continue to hold meetings remotely while restrictions for group gatherings are in place. Each month we send out a community email with the Zoom log-in information and post the information on the website. Please feel free to join us. The meetings are always held on the second Monday of the month at 7:30 p.m. It is a great way to connect with the Board, to hear about community issues that are being addressed and to ask questions or raise concerns.

I encourage you to connect with us for at least one Zoom meeting to try it out, as I anticipate that we will also have a Zoom meeting for the Annual Meeting in February. More information will be forthcoming as to how the meeting will be held and how voting will be conducted.

As always, please do not hesitate to reach out and email the Board if you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions on how to make the community better. The Board email address is board@dufief.org. If you have any architectural questions, please feel free to reach out directly to the ARC at arc@dufief.org.

Nathalie Noon

Since posting the President's Message I have resigned from the Board. I do hope that the community is able to move forward and serve the best interests of everyone. If you have any questions on anything I may have handled or helped with, please do not hesitate to reach out. I am happy to provide information and assist in any way I can.

Nathalie

Inside this issue:

DuFief President's Message	1
Caving from DuFief	2
Welcome Committee Update	3
A Neighborhood Get-Together	4
A Boy Scout Project	5
Treasurer's Report	5
Memorandum to Community	7

Special points of interest:

- *Caving from DuFief*
- *A Neighborhood Get-Together*
- *A Boy Scout Project*
- *Memorandum to Community*



Caving from DuFief—2020 Seasons

by Roxanne Shively

Our spring-summer-fall is usually packed with caving activities: attending regional and national meetups in caving-rich venues, taking grandkids for Adventure Week with caving, hiking, tubing, rafting. The grandkids love the caving adventures, just like their parents before. Our caving started 25 years ago in DuFief when the local Boy Scout troop asked for volunteer parents for a cave outing. (Yes, there are caves relatively nearby.) It was a surreal experience, with crawling, climbing, sloshing through an underground stream, and with even a few pretties, e.g., calcite crystals, speleothems.



The Grandkids Ready for Caving



I was hooked on the underground with its sporting physical activity, mental demands, historical insights, rare biology ecologies, and the unique community of individuals exploring and researching the underworld. Both kids readily adapted to the frequent weekend forays, with camping and caving with multi-generational groups, mostly in WV.

Note: *There are more than 4,300 known caves in West Virginia, 110 of which have a mile or more of passage. There are eleven caves with more than ten miles of passage and six caves with more than 20 miles of passage. Six of the 25 longest caves in the US are located in West Virginia.* (<https://caves.org/grotto/mongrotto/faqs.htm#>)

We are members of local caving communities (DC Grotto, Potomac Speleological Club, Tri-State Grotto, Battlefield Area Troglodyte Society), and part of a national fellowship, the National Speleological Society (<http://www.caves.org>). Speleology engages geologists, hydrologists,

Cave Formation

biologists, archaeologists, paleontologists, historians, conservationists, as well as recreationists, including climbers. We do it because going into a cave is another world, to be explored, understood, and learned from. Also its fun and challenging!

Since 2007, when white-nose syndrome (WNS) was first seen in hibernating cave bats near Albany, NY, most nearby caves were closed in an attempt to limit spread of the disease later found to be caused by a fungus (now identified as *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*). However, the disease continued to spread across most of North America, killing millions of insect-eating bats. See <https://www.whitenosesyndrome.org/> for specifics about WNS and its ecological impacts. Unfortunately, with absence of active caving opportunities, few beginner cavers have joined the fellowship in recent years.



Brown Bat with WNS

continued on page 3

We were able to continue caving safely under strict decontamination guidelines and usually with special permissions from State natural resource agencies in regions that WNS had not yet reached. Both kids since graduated from Wootton and then colleges. Although caving is not a part of their adult lives, the caving skills, confidence and coordination acquired was a major part of their youth.

Note: I changed to WE when Doug and I met in Cave Mountain Cave, a cave named for its mountain in Pendleton County, WV.

Doug and I continued to cave until COVID-19 arrived, when group physical activities precluded retreats into underworlds. We do have a rope rigged in a side yard tree to periodically keep our climbing skills honed.

When travel opportunities rebound, we have a list of publicly and privately owned show caves open for public visitation. Check out <https://cavern.com/> for information on show caves across the U.S. that can be visited while traveling. These offer diverse insights into Nature's underground artwork and ecology.

The silver lining for us, in the absence of caving, has been the specialness of the DuFief community with the nearby hiking trails along Muddy Branch, miles of biking opportunities, and the Potomac paddling options. And for the first time in years, we are outside with our neighbors walking newly adopted dogs, monitoring the change of seasons, and tending our landscapes for the next year of rebound. The annual DC Grotto holiday banquet will be by ZOOM this year instead of at the Westleigh Recreation Club, a tradition for over 20 years.



A Tight Crawl

Welcome Committee Update

Elizabeth Shakespeare, Ph.D.
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I recently moved to the DuFief community with my husband Jared and son Theodore (Teddy). We were so excited to buy our first home in this neighborhood, with the beautiful architecture and natural scenery. Having recently moved to the area, we came to DuFief ready to meet new neighbors and make new friends in this neighborhood, which is why I'm so excited to be joining the Welcome Committee. Upon move-in, we were graciously welcomed by our lovely neighbors with thoughtful gestures and messages. I look forward to paying it forward by meeting and welcoming newcomers to DuFief and to sharing the benefits of living in our wonderful community.

Thank you in advance!
Beth

A Neighborhood Get-Together

by **Mary Bell**

On the bright, sunny afternoon of Sunday, October 18, DuFief residents in and around the cul-de-sac at the north end of Pebble Hill Lane got together for an outing, all the while wearing masks and practicing social distancing. Three dogs also attended. Although such events have occurred under normal conditions in the past, this was the first attempt to gather during COVID-19 times, and the overall assessment is that everyone enjoyed greeting each other, and, especially, welcoming the more recent new neighbors to the area. Stipulations included that no food or beverages would be shared, and tables and chairs would be brought to the end of the driveways of the residents. However, in the end, no one sat down anywhere, and all were still standing and talking animatedly after a couple of hours. Reenactments of this event are enthusiastically being proposed for the future.



Early Arrivals



Photos taken by Alina Sharma

Thank-you to Lori Levine and Sandi Shapiro

Lori Levine and Sandi Shapiro recently resigned from the Architectural Review Committee and the Welcome Committee respectively, but not before completing the challenging task of updating and recreating the faded original charts for allowable siding and trim colors. This should make it much easier for homeowners to choose exterior paint colors in accordance with the DuFief ARC guidelines before they submit their ARC application for approval. An illustration of the color palette boards was published in the Fall 2019 issue of the Readwood, and the actual boards may be borrowed from the ARC. A sincere thank-you to Lori and Sandi for a very worthwhile and successful effort!

Before doing exterior work to your home, please go to

www.dufief.org Architectural Review

to apply for prior written approval for additions, alterations, and/or improvements.

DuFief Community Picnic Boy Scout Project

Hope to see you there next year.



Hello Everyone,

My name is Kade McKeown and I am a boy scout in Troop 3. As a scout, I feel that it is my duty to give back to the community. I have always enjoyed walking around the pond and on the trails in the woods in the DuFief neighborhood. So I decided, as my Eagle Scout Project, to do a service to the DuFief community. My project consists of removing and replacing the three benches around the DuFief pond. The existing benches are rotten and unsafe to use. The ones to replace them will be built with pressure-treated wood, have a backrest, and be fixed to the ground. I hope this project will provide a safer and more pleasant atmosphere when visiting the pond.

Thank you,
Kade McKeown



Example of existing benches to be replaced

Treasurer's Report on Annual Assessments

by **Brian Frank**, DuFief HOA Treasurer

The Board of Directors has voted to increase the dues for 2021 by 3% as permitted by the Declaration of Covenants. **The dues amount for 2021 will be \$226.88.** Dues Notices for 2021 are expected to be sent out by email in early January. If you have not provided us with an email address, your invoice will be sent by first-class mail.

As of December 14, 2020, the Board has collected annual dues from 271 of the 306 homes in our neighborhood (roughly 88.5%). The annual assessments that we use to maintain our common areas in order to keep the DuFief neighborhood a popular area for homebuyers **ARE NOT OPTIONAL**. Every household must pay the annual dues. The original notice for 2020 dues was sent to all homeowners at the beginning of January 2020. **IF YOU ARE A GMAIL ACCOUNT HOLDER, PLEASE CHECK YOUR SPAM, AS WE HAVE BEEN ADVISED THAT THERE SEEMS TO BE A PROBLEM WITH DELIVERY TO GMAIL ACCOUNTS.**

Any homeowners who have not paid their dues are subject to potential lawsuit, which will include a request for interest and attorney's fees and may result in a lien on the property.

We have been very successful in collecting dues. All assessments have been collected for 2010 and all years prior. There is one homeowner that has not paid dues from 2011 through 2017; two homes that have not

paid 2018 dues; eleven homes that have not paid 2019 dues, and 35 homes that have not paid 2020 dues.

The Board does not enjoy having to take neighbors to court. However, the homeowner assessments are not any different from having to pay real estate taxes on your property. If you owe more than one year of dues, a lawsuit is likely to be filed.

To those of you who have paid your annual assessments in a timely manner, "THANK YOU". For those of you who have not yet paid the 2020 dues in the amount of \$220.27, please do so as soon as possible in order to avoid additional costs, and a potential lawsuit.

If you have questions or would like to discuss your annual assessments, please feel free to contact me at 240-606-5100 or email me at treasurer@dufief.org.

***We have collected
88.5% of 2020 dues.***

Brian Frank

**DuFief
Homes
Association**

DuFief Homes Association Board
board@dufief.org 240-242-9678

**Mailing Address:
PO Box 3034
Gaithersburg, MD 20885**

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***DuFief HOA Board Members:**

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Vice President: open
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Nominating Committee for Election of four new Board Members:

Fred Mingo, Linde Fuller,
Susan Luff—smkluff@gmail.com

Webmaster:

Barbara Brenkworth—brenkworth@gmail.com

Announcement

The election of board and committee members is usually scheduled to take place at the Annual Homeowners' meeting In February. Because of Covid-19, the Annual Meeting 2021 may have to be conducted via Zoom. If you are interested in joining the Nominating Committee, please contact Fred Mingo.

Further information regarding the Annual Meeting will be sent to DuFief homeowners in the coming weeks.

Note: For the homeowners who do not have email, the *Readwood* was printed at cost as a community service by **Alpha Graphics Shady Grove** in Gaithersburg (agshadygrove.com).



The DuFief Pond

photographed by Jean-Louis Staudenmann

DuFief Homes Association

P.O. Box 3034
Gaithersburg, MD 20885

December 14, 2020

MEMORANDUM TO COMMUNITY

This letter is being sent to update you of a recent discovery made by the Board of Directors. While researching the possibility of holding our 2021 Annual Meeting remotely, we learned that the proxies that the Board has been distributing and using for several years have improperly been used for the purposes of electing Board Members. The Montgomery County Code does not permit General Proxies to be used for the purpose of election of directors. Only Directed Proxies (those that have the specific names of the individuals being voted for) can be used for the election of directors. This ultimately means that the results of the last election are put into question.

No wrongdoing is being assigned to the winners of the 2020 election. The Board was wrong in preparing, distributing, and accepting general proxies for the purpose of the election of directors.

The results for the 2018 election would not be affected, as the positions were filled by a motion made by the members, which passed unanimously due to only three people being nominated for the three positions up for election.

After reviewing the election results for the 2019 election, the Board believes that the results of the 2019 election would not be affected as the margin of votes for the directors elected far exceeded the number of proxies accepted. Specifically, there were nine proxy votes accepted for the 2019 election and the margin between those members elected and the others running against them was 30 or more votes. By contrast there were over 30 general proxies used in the 2020 election.

After reviewing this issue with legal counsel for the Association, it was determined that to address this issue the next Annual Meeting should include an election for six directors. Three of the directors elected will serve two-year terms, and three of the directors elected will serve three-year terms (as usual). In the meantime, the three individuals who were elected at the 2020 Annual Meeting have resigned from their positions.

Further, Nathalie Noon, who has served as President of the Association for several years, has also resigned. The term of Nathalie's position as director was not to expire until the 2022 Annual Meeting. Pursuant to Article IV, Section 3, of the By-Laws, the remaining Board members will select her successor.

We welcome anyone who has questions to attend our next Board meeting (January 11, 2021) or email us at board@dufief.org.

We also welcome anyone who would like to serve our community as a Board Member to reach out to us.