

Christmas Lake Homeowners Association Newsletter

December 2021

Hello everyone. Quite a bit has happened since our annual membership meeting in May. The Board would normally ask me to put out a newsletter in the spring, but we agreed that we need one now as well. Going forward I hope to get out a newsletter to the membership twice a year and then more often as there is meaningful news to share.

While I'm happy to draft newsletters, I'm not good at making them look more professional, or easier or more fun to read. So, if you'd like to help with doing that, let me (or any CLHA board member) know. We can use your talents.

It's nearly the end of the year, so sit down, put your feet up, and settle in now for a little bit of a read.

I. 2021 Memorial Day Fun Run

Remember May 31 when the summer lay in front of us? Many turned out for the annual fun run/walk/bike event, with winners announced, prizes distributed, bananas peeled and eaten, and joy shared. Laurie Pohlada created the design for the t-shirts, as she has done now for many years. Proceeds from the registration for the event total \$4026. The CLHA donates these gross proceeds each year to a local charity or charities. Recently we have donated the proceeds to the ICA Foodshelves, the Treehouse, which supports local teenagers, and Hope House, a refuge for homeless teenagers in Chanhassen.

I'm glad that the CLHA has a history of giving in this way. Let me or anyone on the Board know if you have a charity that the Association should support. The Board will then choose which charity or charities will receive the proceeds generated this year.

II. Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Prevention Efforts

The Association contracted again this year with Waterfront Restoration to inspect and, if necessary, decontaminate watercraft at the public landing. Yes, we already have Eurasian watermilfoil and zebra mussels, so there's no keeping them out. There are though other AIS in Minnesota and even metro lakes, including spiny water fleas and starry stonewort. Those are the critters we are now trying to keep out of Christmas Lake.

I want to thank Joe Shneider for his continuing work on the AIS front. Joe is respected regionally for this AIS knowledge and prevent efforts. For all of us he also (among other things) coordinates the inspection and decontamination work done daily by Waterfront Restoration, reviews the data provided by the inspectors, handles all or nearly all the regular maintenance on the decontamination unit, shuttles the decontamination unit on its trailer to and from his house on nights when the temperature is expected to be below freezing, and liaises with the

City on issues involving the public landing. In other words, he makes it all work. He deserves our thanks and gratitude.

III. CLHA Budget

Most of our budget goes towards funding our AIS prevention efforts. Over the last few years we more or less have been running a balanced budget. To make our budget balance though we have relied on financial support for our AIS efforts from the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD), Hennepin County, and the City of Shorewood.

Unfortunately, the MCDW is ending its financial support after this summer, leaving us with a \$16,000 hole to fill each year. We continue to look at ways to be efficient with our spend at the public landing, and Waterfront Restoration has been a cooperative partner in that effort. We will need, though, also to look at ways to increase our income. That can be an increase in dues (which we are very reluctant to do), increasing the number of members (today and historically about 75% of lake residents are CLHA members), seeking additional support from the City of Shorewood, Hennepin County and other sources, running a capital campaign as we did a few years ago, or, most likely, some combination of these.

This is an important issue for the Board. You will hear more about it.

IV. And the Survey Says....

Thank you to everyone (and that's a lot of you) who responded to our first CLHA lake residents survey. No, wait, first thanks to those who were key in putting it together, getting it out to everyone, and tabulating the results. That means, among others, Tom Hayes, Gregg Elliot, Kris Hayes, and Harley Feldman. Their efforts created a meaningful survey, allowed us to gather far more responses than anticipated, and help us drill down into the results.

We received over 130 responses. This is extraordinary as there are only about 140 homes on the lake. We obviously did not limit responses to one per household. This was intentional. The response was nonetheless wonderful.

What did the survey results say? I can't adequately summarize it in this newsletter. We will work on getting out a separate summary to members. In the meantime, here are the areas that the survey told us are the most important to you.

1. Boating Safety. This includes both boating practices and general lake use etiquette. We can't control the practices of visitors to the lake, but we can work on improving our own practices that make the lake a safer and more enjoyable place. I think a lot of this is rooted in common courtesy and common sense.
2. Aquatic Invasive Species Control. Our efforts of course are focused on inspecting and, where appropriate, decontaminating incoming watercraft to prevent the introduction of new AIS.

3. Lake Stewardship. People wanted more guidance on how we can be better stewards of the lake. This reflects, I believe, an unselfishness by our residents when it comes to the lake. That's refreshing.
4. Controlling Boat Traffic. This is related to boating safety generally. The Association together with the City of Shorewood are already taking steps to address this issue. Read more about that in Section IX below.

I'm also pleased to note that most responses approved of the work being done by the Board. That is heartening to hear, especially as we have some challenges in front of us. I'm also glad that we have 11 board members. That means many viewpoints, skills, experiences and resources on which the Board can draw. Thank you for your support, and please feel free to reach out to us at any time with your comments. We are always happy to hear from our members.

As this is our first survey in, well, at least my memory, we do intend to follow it up with another survey; probably one every two or three years. That will show us how we are moving directionally on matters of importance to our members, and perhaps give us a better view on why some residents are not members.

Finally, this is an opportunity for you to get involved with the CLHA. The Board is going to set up one or more committees to report to the Board on what we should do to take action on these survey results. **If you would like to participate let me or any Board member know.** Thank you!

V. Dock and Lift Installation and Removal

Roger Norberg, as you all know, again led the dock and lift installation and take-out this boating season, with some help from other board members including Joe Shneider and Paul Cossette. This is a time consuming and thankless task. Roger and the CLHA nonetheless takes it on as part of its overall AIS prevention efforts. Remember, these service providers have boats and barges that move quickly from lake to lake in the area, including of course Lake Minnetonka. Many service providers say that they decontaminate their equipment before entering another lake, but if they do so we are concerned that they do so quickly, not thoroughly, and thus are potentially carriers of significant AIS such as spiny water fleas and starry stonewort, both of which are in metro lakes (but not Christmas Lake).

Roger worked with four service providers this fall:

- Lakeshore Equipment Co.
- Hallin Boat Lifts & Dock
- Waterfront Solutions
- Mike Shaffer

These providers work with us so that we can meet them at the landing and decontaminate their barges before they enter Christmas Lake. We let Mike Schaffer use the ski toon to move a crew around to handle docks and lifts manually – the old-fashioned way – so this crew does not pose

any AIS risk. The service providers also benefit from our program as Roger has set this up so that they have one point of contact for all the docks and lifts they service, higher productivity as they realize more work per launch, consolidation of billings, and faster payment. We see this as a win for CLHA members, the service providers, and of course the lake.

We are aware of some other companies that service docks and/or lifts on the lake who do not work with us. They show up without notice, launch without notice, and are not decontaminated. The companies that we know of that refuse to work with our AIS contamination prevention program include:

- Great Northern
- RecTec

We don't have the authority to tell lake residents who to use. We do ask you, or better said we implore you, NOT to use those service providers who refuse to work with us. It just takes one rogue service provider to come in with a contaminated barge to ruin all the work and money we have put into our AIS prevention efforts and this program.

Of course (as Roger has mentioned in his emails several times) if your service provider accesses your dock and/or lift by land to install or remove them without a barge or boat, then they do not pose an AIS risk. If this is how you manage your dock and lift and you are happy with their work there is no need for you to coordinate with Roger.

VI. Morehouse Motorsports in New Germany, MN

The Association normally does not promote any business, and we do not intend to generally allow businesses to promote themselves in these newsletters or our website. We have received a proposal from a business in New Germany, however, that could both benefit CLHA members, as well as the Association and its efforts to protect Christmas Lake from AIS.

The business is Morehouse Motorsports in New Germany. Several CLHA members have been using Morehouse Motorsport to winterize and store their watercraft during the winter. Ethan Morehouse, the owner, approached Joe Shneider and I with a proposal. Ethan agreed to provide the CLHA with a trailer at no cost that can handle both typical pontoons with two pontoons, and the increasingly popular "tri-toons." We can keep this trailer at the public landing and use it to launch and take-out pontoons of lake residents that do not have their own trailer. This eliminates the possibility that a marina or other third party would use its trailer to launch or take out these pontoons. Third party trailers are likely to have been in other lakes and therefore may be vehicles to spread AIS.

For the last several years Doug and Sheila Punke have allowed the Association to store their pontoon trailer at the public landing and use it for this purpose (thank you!). It has therefore received a lot of use, and it can only handle tradition 2-pontoon pontoons. By working with Morehouse we free up the Punke trailer.

Morehouse Watersports also has agreed to:

- Give CLHA members special pricing on winterizing, storage and maintenance work of watercraft
- Store our AIS decontamination unit at their location in New Germany for free
- Store the infamous ski-toon at the New Germany location for free. The ski-toon is typically the last watercraft off the lake in the fall as it is used to help with dock and lift removal.

The board has decided to take Morehouse Motorsports up on its offer to provide a pontoon trailer and feels that its offer to winterize and store watercraft may be attractive to members. If you are interested in working with Morehouse Motorsports please feel free to give Ethan Morehouse a call at 507-491-6217 and mention that you are a Christmas Lake Homeowners Association member.

VII. Future “Open” Board Meetings

Our winter board meeting last year was open to members to listen in. We hoped this would create some more engagement with the Association and perhaps some members to run for a seat on the board. Those who listened in responded positively to the opportunity to listen in on the meeting, so the board decided to allow members to listen on this winter’s board meeting as well. The date is not yet set but think February 2022.

The board is open to member input at any time. Further, if a member wants to speak or present at a board meeting, please let me or any other board member know reasonably well in advance. We want to encourage member participation in the Association so I expect that if you ask for some time on the agenda you will get it.

Finally, the Board posts the minutes of all board meetings on the CLHA website promptly after it approves them, which almost always occurs at the following Board meeting.

VIII. Proposed Changes to Our By Laws

We didn’t receive a lot of feedback to the proposed changes to the bylaws, but the feedback we did receive was candid, thoughtful and helpful. The board thanks everyone who read through the proposed changes, and even more those who provided their comments.

The Board has considered all the comments and as a result has agreed to make some amendments to the proposed changes. These amendments include adding some reasonable controls over the roles of board members and Association officers, and not allowing member or board meetings to continue conducting business if during the meeting a quorum is lost. This newsletter is already long I’ll address these amendments and next steps in more detail in a separate newsletter.

IX. Chanhassen and Shorewood Projects

We have been working with both cities recently on projects that, I’m happy to report, are making progress. If you get a chance, do thank the managers and administrators of the city in which you live for their time, attention and responsiveness to these projects.

1. Chanhassen

A creek of sorts runs from the Curry Creek Farms subdivision on the west side of Power Blvd through a ravine in some woods, and directly into Christmas Lake at the south end of the lake. There is significant erosion in the ravine area, with soil washing into the creek, exposing tree roots, and is working its way down close to a sewer line that runs through this wooded area. Over the years the creek has deposited a significant amount of sediment in the lake creating a delta area that extends into the lake 40 to 50 feet. As the creek carries water from the Curry Creek Farms area and significant soil from the wooded area, we believe that this creek is likely the single largest point source of pollution (including fertilizer runoff) into Christmas Lake.

Roughly 20 years ago the Association tried to work together with the City of Chanhassen to control this flow of water and sediment into the lake, but was unsuccessful for a number of reasons, including the refusal of a key landowner to allow the City access to the ravine. The Association and some affected and interested homeowners on the south end of the lake have been continuing to press this issue with the City of Chanhassen, and it now appears that we have their attention and support, and that the landowner issue is workable. In particular the City's Mayor, Elise Ryan, and its Director of Public Works, Charlie Howley, have personally toured the ravine with Joe Shneider, me and some of the homeowners there.

I'm please to state that the City now lists this project as one of its water resources/water quality improvement projects. It calls the project the Cranes Vineyard Ravine Stabilization Project. The City's description and timeline for the project is available [here](#) on the City of Chanhassen website.

The CLHA Board has indicated that it would provide some funds, in an amount to be determined, to assist with the cost of completing this project. The Board took this step given the significant concern about sediment and pollutants entering the lake from this creek, and with the view that this is a window of opportunity to address this problem we have not seen before and may not see again many years. I'm hoping that with the significant economic stimulus and infrastructure funds being received by or soon allocated to local governments they will not need our financial support. We, however, did not want the project to be ignored or delayed for lack of our willingness to do so.

There are 3 or 4 homes on the south end of the lake that have easement rights to Christmas Lake over what used to be land alongside the creek, but which is no more as the creek as eroded the land away. If this project is successful, they may regain access over their easement and the Association will then likely gain several strong members. The main drivers for the Association, however, is stopping the sediment and other pollutants entering the lake from the creek and protecting the sewer line that goes under the creek from becoming exposed due to the continuing erosion.

2. Shorewood

A. Variance for Repositioning the AIS Decontamination Equipment

The Shorewood City Council recently approved a variance request by the City's Public Works Department to build a pad on one of the "islands" of trees in the public landing. We will put the decontamination unit, which is on a trailer, on that pad. This will position it better for decontaminating watercraft, and also free up a parking space for lake users.

We are also supporting a related effort by the City to only allow watercraft to launch from the public landing if there is a parking spot then available to them to park their vehicle and trailer, or just vehicle for those that are not pulling trailers. To put this in place the City will need to pass a new ordinance. The City managers and the City Attorney are looking at this ordinance now. The present City Attorney supports the ordinance, but the City is taking on a new City Attorney on January 1, 2022. We hope that new City Attorney views it the same way.

The Association supports this move by the City as there is a real concern that on high use days in the summer the lake is so crowded that it is unsafe. Many of those launching on high use days end up parking at the nearby churches or on the north side of highway 7 and walking back to the lake, which means that the number of watercraft on our lake far exceeds the parking capacity of the landing.

We had a bad accident in 2020 on a high use day, which easily could have been much worse. Given the clarity of the water in the lake we also get a large diversity of users, including swimmers and paddlers. Christmas Lake has only about 200 acres of true recreational water (excluding the area of bays where boating and swimming is difficult) and cannot safely handle unlimited traffic.

Note that this limitation on the ability to launch would apply to lake residents, even if they would be immediately taking their trailer to their home. Note as well that the reason we would be able to enforce this limitation on the ability to launch watercraft is that we already have inspectors at the landing during most of the hours that the public landing is open. As planned, these inspectors will have the ability to lower the arm on the existing gate at the landing when all parking spots are full, and only open it when a space become available. Without this presence this would be just another ordinance that is essentially unenforceable. I mention this because the cost of the inspectors is by far and away the single largest item in the CLHA budget. Now, if this ordinance passes, not only will this spend protect against the introduction of new AIS, but it will also help us maintain a safer lake for all users.

B. Boat Ramp Maintenance

I'm sure you noticed that compared to the last several years the water level of Christmas Lake was several inches lower for most of this summer. You therefore also may have noticed that there is a significant depression just off the deep end of the concrete pads

which drive our trailers down to launch boats at the public landing. This is typical of boat launch sites at lakes throughout the state. It is caused by boaters using their motors to push and pull boats on and off trailers.

At least one trailer was significantly damaged this fall when its tires dropped off the deep end of the ramp into the depression. The Association asked the City if additional rock can be deposited into the depression. The City responded quickly and requested a permit from the DNR (which it must do) to fill in the depression. Unfortunately the DNR normally takes about 3 months to consider these permits, so no work could be done this fall. The City, however, has told us that if the DNR approves its permit application it will be filling in the depression in the spring, and with rock that is less susceptible to prop wash.

X. Snow Groomer

Few lake amenities get as much use as the groomed track around the lake in the winter. The existing roller groomer performed well for years but was falling apart. Steve Midthun therefore took the lead to find and order a new roller groomer. The new groomer will also be pulled behind a snowmobile – likely again Steve’s machine – but will leave both a multipurpose track and two grooves for classic cross-country skiing. When you use the track please minimize your impact, and if you are out with your dogs please pick up after them as much as you can. We all know where the animal waste goes when the ice melts.

XI. Other Potential Initiatives

A. Social Media Presence.

The CLHA has a Facebook page. It is not often used, and my guess is that many members don’t know it exists. We are not present on Instagram. Maybe that’s a good thing. In any event, the Board would like to look at improving our social media presence with the goal of creating a space where members can share photos and memories of the time on or around the lake. We do not want to create another “Next Door” type app. The idea, if we can make it work, is to have social media serve as a way for members develop a lake-based community of which they feel a part. It would probably require some promotion and some moderation.

If you have the experience of skills to help us look into this, or to help moderate what gets created (if anything), let me or any of the Board members know. We’d love to see if it makes sense for us to try to create a positive social media presence focused on our members as the users.

B. CLHA Mission Statement.

The CLHA doesn’t have one. The Association has done fine without one for many years now, but the lack of a mission statement does make it difficult to tell people, including lake residents who are not members, who we are and what we do. A mission statement can also help explain who we are to potential funding sources and guide us in deciding how we employ our financial and human resources.

We want to explore the creation of a mission statement. It should be relatively short, and we think it should focus on lake stewardship and the broader Christmas Lake Community, but that's our thoughts after about 10 minutes of discussion. **If you would like to help the Board think about a mission statement for the CLHA, let me or any Board member know.** Here's another opportunity to get on a CLHA committee.

Thanks for your attention, and for your membership in the Christmas Lake Homeowners Association. Remember, there are at least 5 opportunities to get more involved. You can help us:

1. choose a charity to receive all or part of our 2021 Memorial Day Fun Run/Walk proceeds,
2. create more professional (or better said more interesting) newsletters,
3. decide what actions to take in response to the lake residents survey,
4. investigate and potentially set up a social media presence, and
5. develop a mission statement for the CLHA.

All the best to you and your families this Holiday Season, and into the New Year.

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