

Beacon Dispatch April 2006

Highland Wanderer: Sweep the River Clean

Scenic Hudson's 9th Annual River Sweep Sets its Sights on Beacon and Beyond

On April 22nd, Scenic Hudson will kick off their 9th annual Great River Sweep, a nine-day event that brings thousands of people together—from Manhattan to the Hudson headwaters in the Adirondacks—in an effort to clean up the Hudson River and its tributaries. This year, the first day of cleaning will end with an event at the Beacon waterfront, featuring food, live music, and the celebration of a cleaner River.

In 1998, when the River Sweep first began, Scenic Hudson was making plans to set up a volunteer program, when they received a letter from six-year-old Josh Taubes, who wrote to Scenic Hudson, asking if the environmental group could clean it up. “At the time,” says Scenic Hudson’s director of Education and Volunteers, Andy Bicking, “we were looking for a way to mobilize volunteers to have them work with our organization and to support the environmental issues in the Hudson Valley. We wrote back to Josh and told him that we could only have a small impact by ourselves, but we could help to organize Josh and other people to clean up portions of the waterfront.” That year one thousand volunteers came together to cleanup thirty-seven sites up and down the Hudson.

“We designed the program to encourage and empower local people to do their part to adopt local natural resources and take care of them,” Says Bicking, and it’s clear that it’s a plan that’s working quite well. This year Scenic Hudson expects to see two hundred coordinators and over seven thousand volunteers adopt and work to clean up two hundred sites throughout the Hudson River Valley. To facilitate the cleanup, Scenic Hudson also provides promotional materials, trash bags, advice on how cleanups can be planned, training, and volunteer incentives. “It’s a great way for people to show some pride, to stand together in unity, and display their vision of the Hudson River as the premier River in the country,”

Last year alone the River Sweep resulted in the removal over about 93 tons of trash, and overall Bicking estimates that more than 400 tons have been removed.

A Concerted Effort

Mark Price of Hudson Valley Pack and Paddle in Beacon has been coordinating cleanups for the River Sweep for the last six years, initially in Wappingers Falls, and for the last several years at Dennings Point and Long Dock in Beacon. Price, who is an avid kayaker and who takes hundreds of people a year on kayaking tours of the Hudson, sees the cleanup as a personal tribute to the River that he loves. "I see it as a welcome to the River spring thing. I don't like garbage, I don't like seeing it, and I see the clean up as a kind of peace offering for the spring."

Mark estimates that, over the last six years, he and his business partner, Eric Eckley, have overseen the cleanup of more than 120 cubic yards of garbage. "In the beginning we only had a few people show up but last year we had over 30 people and one year, when Stop & Shop sponsored an ad for the cleanup, we had more than 70 people come to clean. With that many people we can easily fill a 30-40 yard container in a few hours." Price is also quick to point out that, without donations from companies such as Royal Carting, who donate dumpsters and have become sponsors of the annual event, the Sweep would not be nearly as effective. "Royal not only donated dumpsters, starting with our first cleanup six years ago, they've even gone so far as to pick up dozens of extra garbage bags after the cleanup was over, all for free."

More Coordinators Needed

With a month to go before the start of the cleanup, Andy Bicking stated that they were still working on getting enough coordinators to handle the seven thousand volunteers they expect to see this year. "We're basically looking at getting about eight coordinators recruited every day until about April 9th," he said. "Then we should be set with a couple of weeks to go before the cleanup starts."

Scenic Hudson is also planning a major event on the Beacon waterfront at the end of the first day. "We're going to have an open invitation to anyone in the community and the local area, to come down to the Longdock Beacon site." Bicking said. "From there we'll be splitting up into smaller groups, to clean up the State Park, Scenic Hudson land, the City park, the DOT ferry landing, essentially the entire Beacon waterfront." After

about three hours of cleanup Scenic Hudson will be throwing a volunteer appreciation party which will include donated rides on the newly opened Newburgh/Beacon Ferry, musical entertainment, food, and drinks.

“When you’ve got thousands of people coming down to the River, it is inspiring.” Bicking says. “It sends a signal to people who live in the region, and beyond, that the Hudson River is a precious natural resource. It’s the front door to our communities and it’s something that we should take a lot of pride in.”

Sidebar: Get Involved!

Scenic Hudson’s Great River Sweep isn’t limited to the Beacon waterfront; in fact there are literally hundreds of opportunities for you to get involved in cleanups up and down the Hudson River from April 22nd through the 30th. To join or coordinate a cleanup log onto www.greatriversweep.org or call Scenic Hudson at 845-473-4440.

Can’t make it to one of the River Sweep cleanup events? Resolve to cleanup your yard, street, or neighborhood to make the River Sweep an everyday event.