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Rick Russell Photo

Too ghoulish for school

Woodstock Elementary School (WES) students showed off a wide variety of Halloween costumes Tuesday afternoon during their annual Halloween Parade through Woodstock, where they made their way around The Green before returning to the classroom. Above, Colt Worrell, as a soldier, and Brantley Ricard, as Spider Man, lead the way for the kindergarten class. See page 8A for more photos.

After flood ravages, East End Park and River Trail restoration efforts continue

By Lauren Dorsey
Staff Writer

Woodstock's East End Park and the start of the Ottawaquechee River Trail (ORT) are well down the road toward a full recovery following July's flood events. The river, however, wreaked havoc on the ORT's lower trails, where repairs have yet to begin.

East End Park emerged after the flooding relatively unscathed, according to

Jack Rossi, one of the lead volunteers of the Friends of East End Park. "We were quite amazed [at] how well the park held out," said Rossi. "Whereas with Irene, we lost so much land, the area was down to virgin ground without any trees."

Rossi attributes the park's outcome at least partially to its densely vegetated riparian buffer, which the group has filled with willows, maples, and birch trees over the

past decade. "Had we not done that, [the river] really would have devastated the park again. The roots were so effective," said Rossi.

The flood did wash out the lower part of an access road that runs down to the river. "There was some major damage there," said Rossi. "It became a little bit of a cliff." The waters also deposited a layer of silt onto the park's flat areas and downed a few of the trees

that lined the river.

As of today, the park stands nearly as it did before. Peter Butler, the park manager and a private contractor, recommended that the park use a professional to remove the silt. "He felt that we should not get volunteers involved because of the potential toxins that might have been present. We just didn't know, and we decided to be

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Tourism rebounded nicely during foliage season

By Tom Ayres
Senior Staff Writer

Tallies of tourists visiting the Woodstock region dropped in the aftermath of July's widespread flooding, then spiked to reportedly unprecedented numbers from Sept. 15 through the end of October as the annual parade of fall leaf-peepers made their yearly junkets to the scenic Upper Valley.

"It started out as a tough spring and summer because of all the wet weather and flooding," Woodstock Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Beth Finlayson said on Tuesday. "But the end of September and October have just been incredibly robust and busy," she continued. "We've seen numbers at the Woodstock Welcome Center

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Parcel in front of library belongs to the Village

By Lauren Dorsey
Staff Writer

Last week, the Norman Williams Public Library (NWPL) board decided to transfer the responsibility for a roughly 7,000-square-foot parcel in front of the building to the Woodstock Village. The change will occur after the library completes the plot's fall maintenance. The decision follows a recent discovery by Seton McIlroy, the Chair of the Village Trustees, that the Village officially owns the property. "The assumption that [people] were working under was that the land in front of the library belonged to the library," said McIlroy. "I was looking at a zoning map and just happened to see that the property owner was listed as the Village of Woodstock."

The parcel stretches between the library and M&T Bank, and it includes the NWPL sign. Specifically, it runs from the sidewalk leading up to the library's entrance from South Park Street to the sidewalk in front of Splendid Bakes and the M&T Bank building.

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The flat, lower section of East End Park was submerged under the flood waters from the summer's first flood event, which deposited a layer of silt when they receded. Some of the trees that line the park's riparian buffer are still visible above the rising waters.

Jack Rossi Photo

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cautious," said Rossi. Once Butler finished removing the silt, volunteers got to work cleaning up debris, restoring the pollinator garden, and planting new vegetation.

In light of the potential danger the silt and washed-out road posed to the children who often frequent Music by the River, Pentangle Arts decided to move the event to the Woodstock Green this past summer. "It was a safety issue," said Rossi. "We didn't know what the timeframe would be on repairing the access areas." Given the speed of the park's recovery, Pentangle's board has already decided to bring Music by the River back to the park next year.

East End Park has not just been focused on recovery this summer; it has also made significant strides towards increasing the park's accessibility. The park has added an accessible area under its pergola, an accessible walk that leads to a parking space for disabled persons, and worked to ensure the access drive down to the river is graded smoothly to increase the number of people who can use it. "We're



Volunteers at the Ottauquechee River Trail working to pile and burn debris.

Tom Weschler Photo

trying to accommodate as much public access as possible," said Rossi.

According to Tom Weschler, the lead ORT volunteer, the ORT trailhead, which has been the subject of controversy this summer after ORT volunteers cleared dead trees, invasive knotweed, and other vegetation from the area's riparian buffer, fared similarly to the park, incurring relatively minimal damage. In addition, the water the trail did see came from overflowing culverts, not from the river.

The ORT trails that loop around the lower field were

less fortunate. The floods devastated the area. "The field became a part of the river," said Weschler. "The water must have been six, maybe ten feet deep." Randy Richardson, the development director at the Upper Valley Trails Alliance and a volunteer with ORT, agreed. "This massive wall of water shot across the field. It's just hard to even imagine the power of it," said Richardson. "The river created a beach where there was no beach and fired huge trees and stones everywhere."

Weschler partially credits the rip rap, stones placed along the river by the Army Corps of Engineers to protect the wastewater treatment facility, for the trailhead's survival. "The rip rap protected the trailhead; [but] after the wastewater treatment facility, it goes away," he said.

The trees that lined the far side of the field further demonstrated the importance of a dense riparian buffer. "The trees acted kind of like a filter. So much garbage was caught by those trees. It's mind-boggling," said Richardson.

Following the devastation,

Weschler wants to significantly increase the amount of vegetation along the river in hopes it will make the trails more resilient to flooding. "One of the things we can do to mitigate this in the future is to strengthen the riparian buffer by doing plantings, which we will probably start in the spring. Especially on the lower field, where the river cut through, the buffer needs to be strengthened," said Weschler.

The ORT has yet to be able to start working on the lower field because the Woodstock Resort Corporation, which owns the field and allows its Billings Farm to use it for haying, has yet to give the group the green light. When they do begin, the work is going to be extensive.

In the meantime, the group has not been sitting idle. In addition to repairing the trailhead, the ORT has completed its Universal Accessibility Project. "The beginning of the trail is now usable to everyone, regardless of physical capabilities," said Weschler. The ORT added a wheelchair ramp, hardened the first third of a mile of the trail, and installed a secure railing alongside the stairs.

Weschler estimates that the repairs to the lower field trail will cost somewhere around \$30,000, which includes the trail work, reconstruction of the bog bridges, bench replacements, new picnic tables, and signage. As a result, the group is applying for a series of grants to help them fund the recovery. "[The ORT] was clearly adopted by the community, embraced, and loved," said Weschler. "And we just want to get the trail back to the way it was."



Children playing in the East End Park labyrinth after the park's restoration. According to Jack Rossi, the trees that line the Ottauquechee River helped mitigate some of the flood damage.

Lauran Corson Photo