



Wine, Song, Food - and Niantic River Memories

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by Suzanne Thompson

STR-STH whips up special cookbook

Many non-profit organizations publish cookbooks, full of members' favorite recipes, to raise funds. When Save the River-Save the Hills, a local environmental group, set out to create a cookbook, the group's organizers decided to include a collection of keepsakes about the unique history, culture, and family memories of the area.

"Past, Present, Future!" will be unveiled at STR-STH's annual wine, cheese, song, and pasta dinner on Thursday, Dec. 9, 6 to 9 p.m., at

Flanders Fish Market and Restaurant in East Lyme. This is the fifth food and entertainment event to fund the education and outreach group, which protects and preserves the Niantic River Watershed and neighboring Oswegatchie Hills from development and pollution. STR-STH has legal "intervener" status in the ongoing lawsuits filed by developer Glen Russo, who owns 238 waterfront acres of the Oswegatchie Hills, against the Town of East Lyme for its denial of his proposed high-density development of the hillside.

The cookbook has been compiled by Eileen O'Pasek, STR-STH membership chairman, and her husband, Ken, who handled much of the design and layout, including ads by supporting businesses and friends of STR-STH.

In addition to family recipes, there are 30 personal pages of vignettes, stories, poetry, remembrances, and historical and environmental information about the Niantic River, neighborhoods, and communities. There also are at least 50 photos, some dating back to the early 1900s, provided by STR-STH members and supporters.

"This whole area has such a rich and exciting cultural history, as well as a nautical history," said O'Pasek, who has enjoyed talking with long-term residents about their memories. "There was so much going on here, the wealth in the area, the tourism."

"There are old photos of the trolleys, the Golden Spur, the diving horses, and the Oswegatchie House, the casino, and colony of cottages," she added. The house, a resort for the wealthy, drew movie stars and celebrities, along with Albert Einstein and other famous individuals.

The book also features more recent photos from STR-STH's annual Niantic River Day and Kayak Regatta in August, as well as excerpts from stories of local authors and artists whose works were shaped by the river, the hills, and the communities.

"This is going to be a living book, one that we update," said O'Pasek, who is already thinking of the insert she wants to produce for the three-ring binder next year. "We want more of people's stories, photos, poems, and recipes."

"The book is gorgeous," said Deb Moshier-Dunn, STR-STH vice president, who got to see first copies from the publisher. "Eileen really pushed the publisher's limits to create a keepsake book."

STR-STH welcomes members who share its goals. Volunteers operate a marine sewage pump-out boat on the river, put on public and school information and education programs about non-point source pollution and boating safety, and monitor water quality and beaches in the watershed. The group advocates for sewers for East Lyme waterfront neighborhoods and encourages the towns of Waterford and East Lyme to fulfill their obligations under the Federal Phase II Storm Water Regulations.

"Our members are our backbone," said O'Pasek. "We can't become apathetic about the ongoing legal battles over the Oswegatchie Hills. Anyone who cares about the river and the hills, we need you and we want your input."

"Past, Present, Future!" costs \$20. Tickets to the Dec. 9 fundraiser are \$25 per person and cover three kinds of pasta, cheeses, and a glass of wine, beer, or soda; cash bar is also available. Silent auction items include three Niantic River scene paintings by local artist and author Patricia Coombs Fox, plus holiday gift baskets and gift certificates from area restaurants and businesses.

Although tickets can be bought at the door on Dec. 9, O'Pasek encourages people to call her in advance at (860) 439-1687 to RSVP.