

Spring cleaning

'If you can walk, you can participate' in Saturday's Patuxent cleanup

By Shanise Winters

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For many years, the Chesapeake Bay has been recognized by Marylanders as a historical and national symbol providing endless resources and economic stability.

However, in recent years, the Patuxent River, one of the bay's tributaries and the longest river entirely within Maryland, has become less resourceful as a result of neglect, pollutants and land practices in surrounding regions.

Each year, volunteers and various organizations join in the Patuxent River Spring Clean-Up, a statewide response to these environmental issues, in an attempt to give back to the bay and show appreciation for its resources.

This weekend, the fifth annual cleanup takes place at sites throughout Maryland. The Patuxent River Spring Clean-Up was organized by the statewide organizing group EarthReports from 2002 to the end of 2004, when the group became a member of the WaterKeeper Alliance and was licensed as the official Patuxent RiverKeeper, a private, nonprofit public interest group created with one goal in mind -- protect and restore the Patuxent River.

Judging by the success of last year's event, in which 392 participants retrieved more than 42 tons of waste and 3,000 bottles and cans, it's safe to say that the Patuxent RiverKeeper, which is headed by Patuxent River Commission member Fred Tutman, is well on its way to achieving that goal.

"We have cleanup sites in seven counties, and it creates a harmonic convergence -- people sing together, run together, jog together, so why not clean up the river together?" says Tutman, the first official "keeper" of the Patuxent River. "We help the various organizations get supplies and release forms, and we provide them with a tallying feature so they can assess the overall success of the event. Participants like to know that their eight or nine trash bags contributed to the bigger picture and the overall success of the cleanup."

Lauren Webster, the Patuxent RiverKeeper Restoration and Spring Clean-Up project coordinator, recognizes the importance and benefits of a clean river.

"We live in this watershed, and we have a responsibility to ourselves and future generations to keep the river clean," said Webster.