

## Opinion

### Notes on the River: Becoming stewards of a legacy

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On Oct. 9, I participated in a river cleanup with Emily Cranwell's second grade class from the Country School. We met at the Choptank River Fishing Pier Park adjacent to the bridge to Cambridge.

The wind was blustery that day, out of the south, and the river teemed with whitecaps wildly rushing over themselves and hurtling towards us like, as James Joyce might have written, the flying manes of so many frothing horses. I was worried these 8-year-olds might be deterred by such a gusty breeze. I was wrong. Skipping among the bulkhead stones they delighted in the smacking waves and over the course of a morning managed to remove enough trash from the shoreline to fill nine 50-pound bags.

Drew Koslow, our Choptank Riverkeeper, accompanied this expedition, but it was arranged and led by Clarence "Doc" Kuntz, who serves as CREB Conservancy's volunteer director of river cleanup. This past summer, Doc was recognized by the Town of Easton for his efforts in cleaning trash from the headwaters of the Tred Avon.

As part of "Doc Kuntz Day," he also was inducted into Boy Scout Troop 532, as he had worked with the Scouts on several occasions. Later Doc, 86, confided to me proudly that not only is he now Troop 532's oldest member, but he found in his closet an old Scout shirt with a patch on it reflecting his attendance at the 1937 Boy Scout National Jamboree in Washington.

On Oct. 26, Doc led another cleanup effort, this time with eighth grade students from the Country School, removing debris from the North Fork of the Tred Avon near the junction of St. Michaels Road and the Easton Parkway. The students discovered a large tractor tire embedded in the stream ditch. Doc and Drew both shook their heads and told them to leave it, that they'd never get it out. A half hour later, Doc looked up and three kids were rolling the 150-pound tire to the trash heap.

When 10 days later Doc and I addressed Easton High School's Ecology Club, Doc had prepared a PowerPoint presentation including a photograph of these kids rolling this tire up the bank with the caption: "Never Underestimate the Power of Young People." He also showed an overhead photo of the Town of Easton and showed the students how the headwaters of the Tred Avon, the North Fork and the South Fork, seemed to encircle and hold the town in an embrace. Doc asked the ecology class to help find ways to return the river's embrace by helping to keep it clean and free of pollution.

Lately, as I have been talking with various constituents around our river community, trying to understand the issues that threaten our waterways and how we can best approach them, I have been taken aback a bit by a tendency to blame others for the decline of the rivers.

The scientific evidence seems overwhelming, for example, that agricultural practices throughout the Delmarva Peninsula over the past 50 years have led to devastating nutrient loading in our streams. Yet, several farmers seemed only interested in blaming others. "It's the goose waste," one farmer vehemently argued at the town hall meeting with Maryland Attorney General Doug Gansler.

Other farmers argue that wastewater treatment plants or lawn fertilizers are the real problem. Developers seeking to obtain approvals for new projects similarly are equally quick to point out that agriculture is the problem, not development. And riparian landowners who want the right to cut down trees in the critical area, or fill in wetlands to improve their property, or heavily fertilize their lawns right down to the water's edge argue that airborne deposition is the problem.

At CREB Conservancy ([www.crebconservancy.org](http://www.crebconservancy.org)) we are trying to build an organization that will give the rivers in our community a strong voice. If our rivers could speak, how would they answer all of these claims claims that somebody else is always the culprit?

There is, in fact, little to gain by pointing fingers at others. We are all part of the problem. Each of us needs to recognize this fact and find ways to change our own behavior to give our waterways the opportunity to heal themselves.

When those kids, with Doc Kuntz cheering them on, rolled that tractor tire out of the wetland, they weren't thinking about who to blame for putting it there; they were simply finding joy in rising to the challenge of cleaning the river. If an octogenarian and a bunch of second graders can clean a riverbank on a blustery morning, the rest of us ought to find the will to do our part.

Those of us fortunate enough to live here have the opportunity to become familiar, even intimate, with this natural landscape of rivers, forests, and farms, to know it in spring and winter, in storms and sunshine, in the light of the pre-dawn over a waving field of wheat, and in the red flush of a falling moon.

As a community, we must protect this gift that we all share. This requires us to act, to each make changes, to each make sacrifices. So be it. We must all become stewards of this legacy.



Standing: Volunteer Sam Brinton, Jesse Jordan, Doc Kuntz, Choptank River Keeper Drew Koslow, Elizabeth Clemens, Katie Larrimore, Tyler Urquhart, and Chris Blizzard. Inside the tire: Alex Strauel and Kristin Morgan.8

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