

A Promise and a Challenge

By Brian Woodward, FOJB Board Member



Fred Titman

On a cool, windy day this spring, a day of celebration for the Friends of Jug Bay, an amazing thing happened. In the midst of our annual meeting, in front of the entire crowd assembled for that day, Anne Arundel County Executive Janet Owens publicly signed a **Confirmatory Deed And Declaration of Covenant**. This document signifies the County Government's promise to forever preserve and protect the environment of the Sanctuary and to prevent activities that might damage, compromise, or interfere with the Sanctuary's ecological diversity and natural landscape.

This is a time in history when elected officials in other parts of Maryland and the nation want to sell undeveloped park lands, or convert them to non-conservation uses such as housing, commercial centers, profit centers, or develop them into recreational meccas. The citizens of Anne Arundel County are fortunate to

Anne Arundel County Executive Janet Owens (right) with former FOJB co-president Peggy Brosnan after announcing the county covenant to preserve and protect the Sanctuary.

have as their executive Janet Owens, who cares about the land, about the future of her county, and about the promises made to the citizens by previous administrations when this beautiful sanctuary land was initially protected. The Friends of Jug Bay realize how fortunate we are to count Mrs. Owens as a trusted friend, and we thank her sincerely. Our deepest appreciation also goes to Betty Dixon, Anne Arundel County's Land Use and Environment Coordinator, who brought the concerns of the FOJB to Mrs. Owen's attention and spoke so eloquently about them to her. Betty also worked with us to craft the language of the document and demonstrated her love for the Sanctuary all along. We are also grateful to County Attorney Pat Logan for her legal expertise.

This covenant is an unprecedented designation for a county park. It shows the importance of the Sanctuary and the level of commitment to the preservation of natural resources by the county executive. So, what is this thing called a covenant? What does it mean to those who love the Sanctuary? A covenant is an agreement or a social compact between two parties. This covenant is intended to be perpetual, and because it is recorded in

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Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary is operated by the Anne Arundel County Department of Recreation and Parks. It was established in 1985 with the goals of wetlands research and environmental education. The Sanctuary is a limited-use park. Visitors are requested to make a reservation by calling the office before planning a visit.

Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary is a member of the Chesapeake Bay - National Estuarine Research Reserve system, which promotes scientific research, public education, resource management and stewardship in estuarine reserves across the nation.

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"We must always remind our elected officials that we are forever partners with them in protecting the Sanctuary."

the land records of Anne Arundel County as a deed, it has significant legal standing.

A covenant is also a relationship. Just as Mrs. Owens and Anne Arundel County have made a promise, we, the Friends of Jug Bay, must also make a promise. In a few short months, a new county executive will be elected. In time, there will be new county council members, new governors and new federal officials. The paper on which the covenant is printed will grow old and could become forgotten. Our Sanctuary land grows more economically valuable every day, and the incentive to put it to other uses grows along with the value. We can be certain that one day, some well-intentioned public official will be faced with a crisis and need land for a public purpose. We can be sure that one day that official's eyes will look to this land to solve that problem. The need for the land may be rationalized, maybe even justified. What then?

Our promise to Mrs. Owens, and to the citizens of Anne Arundel County and the State of Maryland, must be to remain attentive to the existence and the intent of this covenant. The Friends of Jug Bay must maintain the covenant's promise in our activities and in our memories. We must become the keepers of the covenant in order to educate, to preserve, and to protect our Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary. The FOJB must also ensure that our own actions and activities do not violate the terms laid out in the covenant. We must always remind our elected officials that we are forever partners with them in protecting the Sanctuary. Subsequent elected and appointed officials will not know about the covenant if we do not tell them about it. They cannot be expected to honor the covenant if we do not honor it.

Janet Owens, the FOJB, and Anne Arundel County have done all that we can to ensure the protection of the Sanctuary. We celebrate that accomplishment and thank Janet Owens deeply. The FOJB must now arrange its organizational priorities and activities to ensure that the intent and the promise of the covenant last forever.



Maintenance staff John Evans and Frank Speaks put a new coat of stain on the Observation Deck.