



December 2021 Newsletter

Falls of the James Group



This male Red-bellied Woodpecker adds a splash of color to our forest landscape December 2021.

Raise Funds for Sierra Club Falls of the James Group's Grants Program

By purchasing a reusable item, you can help fund community projects that protect the environment and advance environmental justice

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER
All Proceeds Go Towards Community-Led Environmental Conservation Projects in Central VA

ONLINE STORE **SIERRA CLUB FALLS OF THE JAMES GROUP**

We are selling t-shirts and tote in honor of our Skip the Plastics campaign to impose a 5% tax on plastic bags in Virginia. All products are 100% certified. In an effort to prevent waste, we are working with the Richmond-native company Bonfire to print and distribute all products on demand. Graphic courtesy of Sara Davenport

The Sierra Club Falls of the James Group offers a grants program to community groups participating in efforts to protect the environment in Central VA, with priority given to projects that advance equity, inclusion, and environmental justice. This program was supported in the past by an in-person fundraiser which has not been held due to the pandemic for two years in a row. As a result, the grants program has been suspended.

Now more than ever we need to fund locally-led environmental conservation projects! To restart this impactful grants program, we will be selling reusable products through this online store November-December 2021. We will be sharing the impact of past projects throughout the campaign so make sure you follow us on social media.

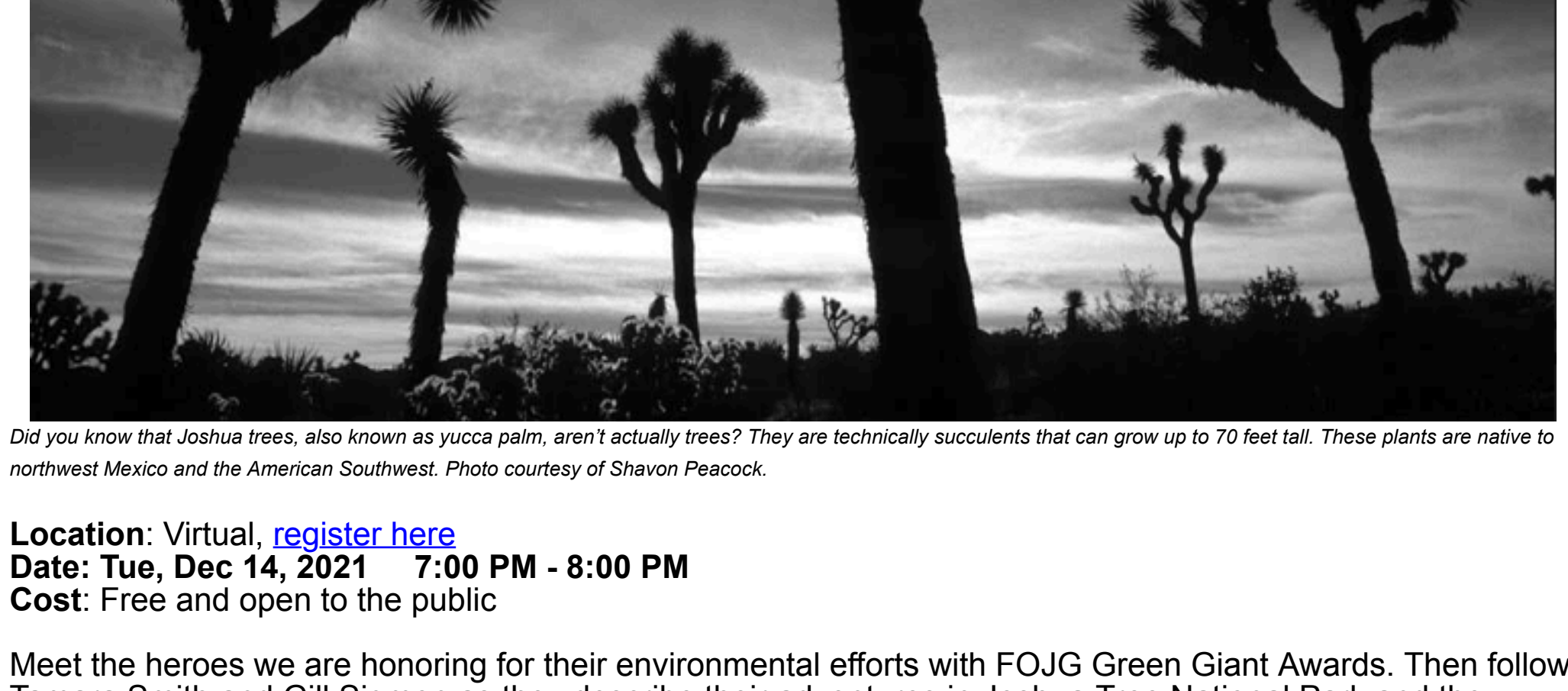
We hope this campaign will not only raise funds, but also raise awareness for important climate and environmental policies. The designs advocate for these very policies and were created by VCUart students for use by the Falls of the James Group. Barry O'Keefe, a professor in VCU's Department of Communication Arts, led students through this project. You can learn more about the artist who created each design on the product pages.

Have questions or want to get involved? Please contact the fundraising organizer, Sara Davenport, at davenport.sera@gmail.com. Sera has a background in technology and media, and has produced 300+ talk shows with global luminaries in climate mitigation, adaptation, academia, and innovation fields. She is volunteering her time to raise funds for this program because she believes that truly transformational change comes from the bottom-up, not the top-down.

Learn more about the [grants program](#) and [see past grantees here](#).

Register for our Upcoming Programs

Green Giant Awards and Two Travel Programs

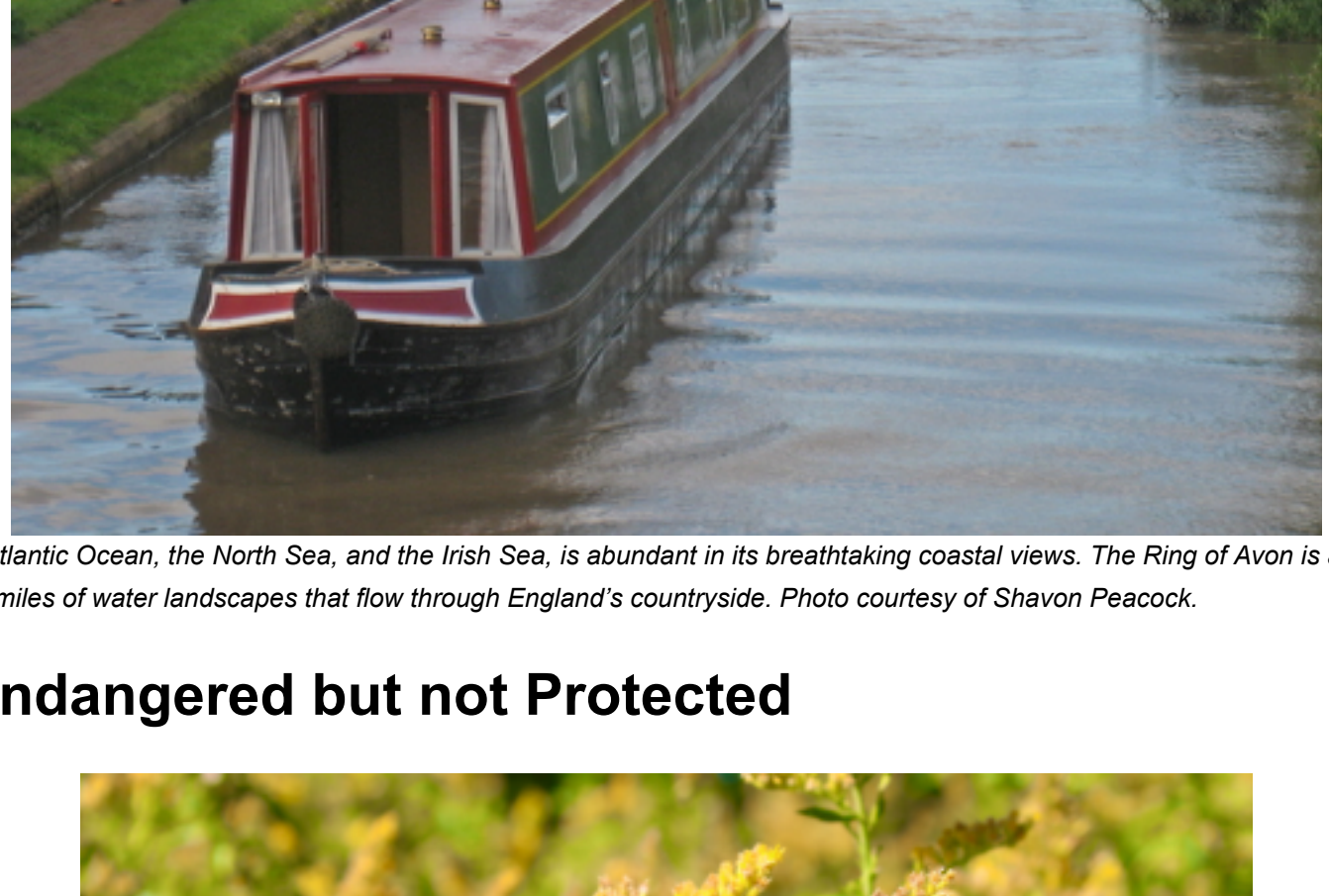


Do you know that Joshua trees, also known as yucca palm, aren't actually trees? They are botanically succulents that can grow up to 70 feet tall. These plants are native to northwest Mexico and the American Southwest. Photo courtesy of Sharon Peacock

Location: Virtual, [register here](#)
Date: Tue, Dec 14, 2021 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Cost: Free and open to the public

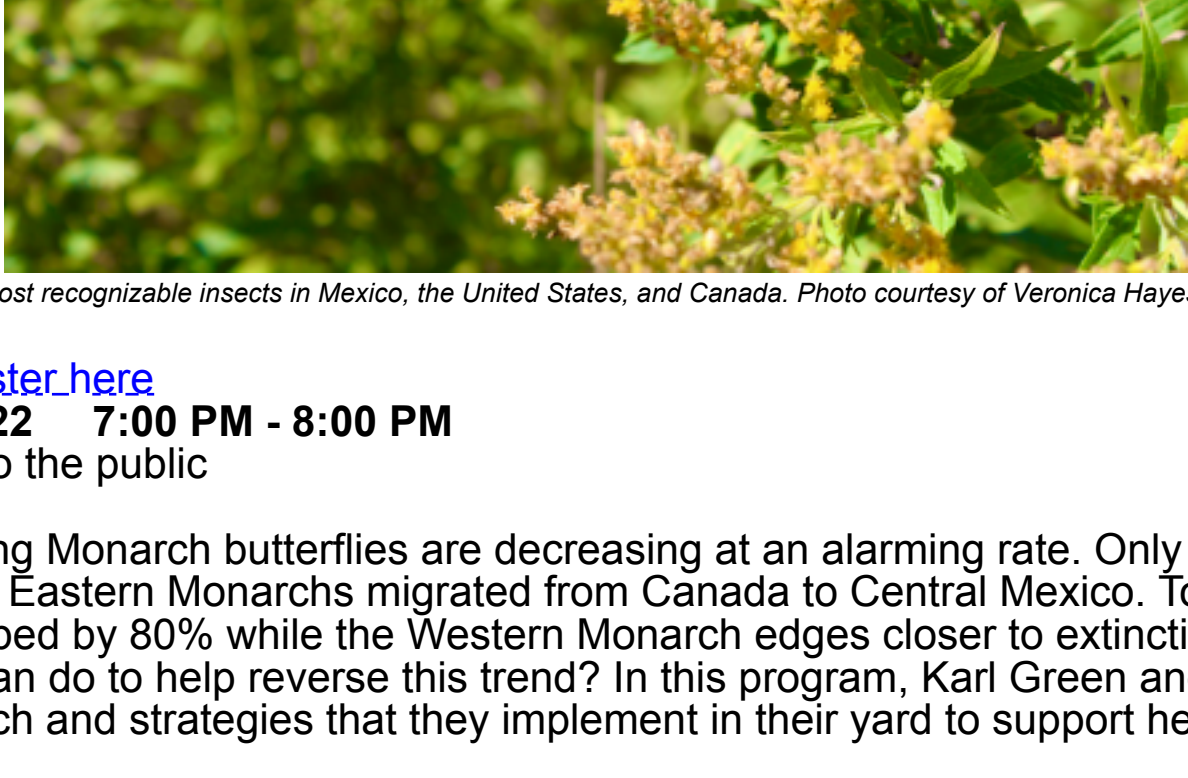
Meet the heroes we are honoring for their environmental efforts with FOJG Green Giant Awards. Then follow Tamara Smith and Gill Sigmon as they describe their adventures in Joshua Tree National Park and the inspiration for traveling there. Learn about the location and landscape of the park, the dark sky designation, and Joshua Trees.

Sharon Peacock will follow up with a trip report on Andrew's and her two weeks traveling on the Avon Ring in England on a 60 foot long, 6-foot-wide barge. The 108-mile Avon Ring takes boaters along parts of the Stratford Canal, River Avon, River Severn, and Worcester & Birmingham Canal. Learn about the trials and tribulations of dining the barge, negotiating bridges, tunnels, aqueducts, and 130 locks, including flight locks. You will also hear about many of the interesting sights they saw in the bucolic Warwickshire and Worcestershire countryside, including the towns of Stratford-Upon-Avon, Tewkesbury, and Worcester.



England, surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, the North Sea, and the Irish Sea, is abundant in its breathtaking coastal views. The Ring of Avon is a canal located in the center of England that provides 100 miles of water landscapes that flow through England's countryside. Photo courtesy of Sharon Peacock

Monarchs: Endangered but not Protected

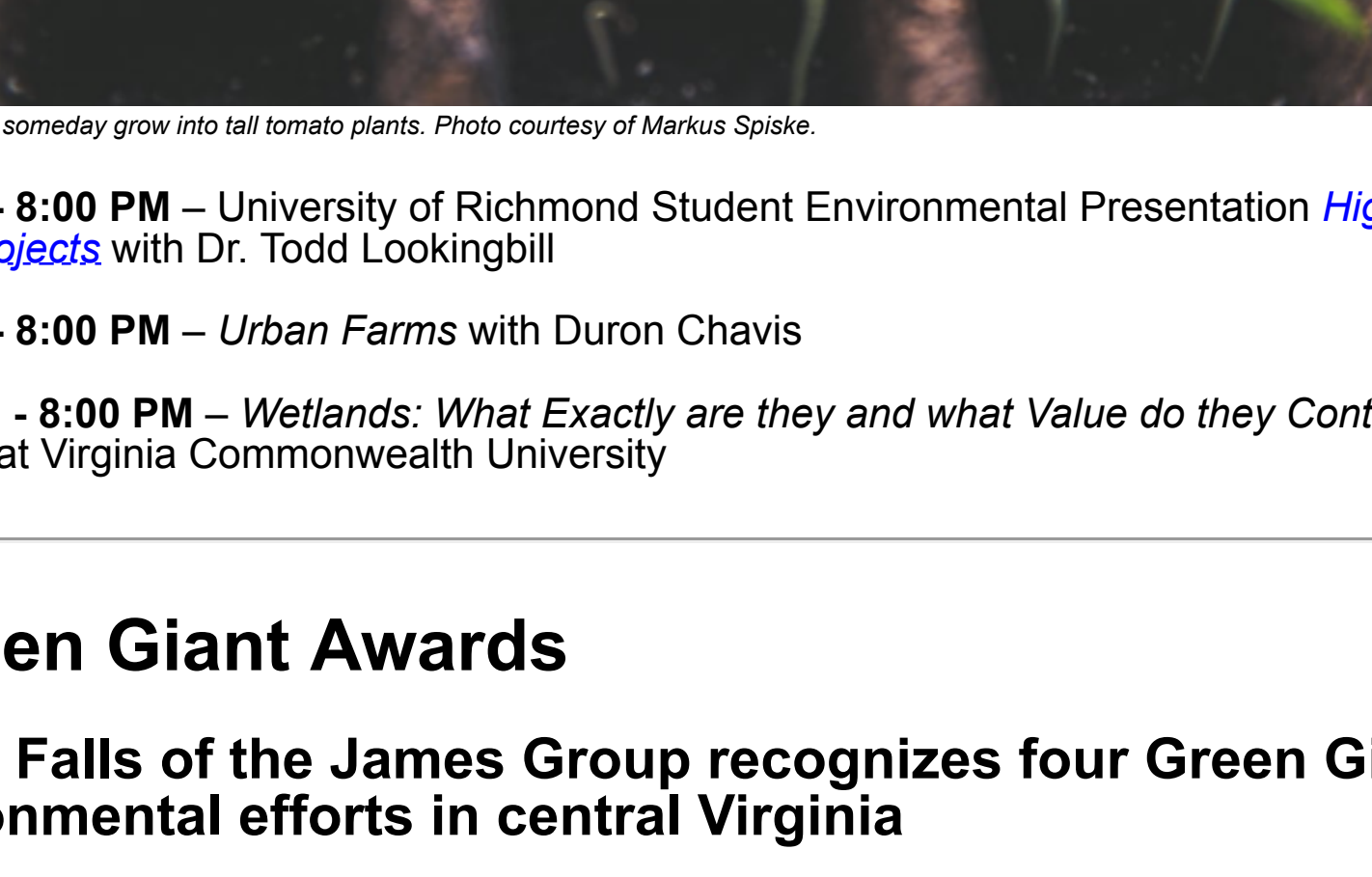


Monarch butterflies are one of the most recognizable insects in Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Photo courtesy of Veronica Hayes

Location: Virtual, [register here](#)
Date: Tue, Jan 11, 2022 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Cost: Free and open to the public

The number of migrating monarch butterflies are decreasing at an alarming rate. Only two decades ago, hundreds of millions of Eastern Monarchs migrated from Canada to Central Mexico. Today, Eastern Monarch populations have dropped by 80% while the Western Monarch edges closer to extinction. Is there anything the everyday person can do to help reverse this trend? In this program, Karl Green and Chris Burnside will discuss current research and strategies that they implement in their yard to support healthy monarch populations.

Stay tuned for these upcoming programs on the [FOJG Calendar](#).



These small seedlings will someday grow into tall tomato plants. Photo courtesy of Markus Spiske

2/8/22 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM – University of Richmond Student Environmental Presentation [Highlighting Conservation Projects](#) with Dr. Todd Lookingbill

3/8/22 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM – [Urban Farms](#) with Duron Chavis

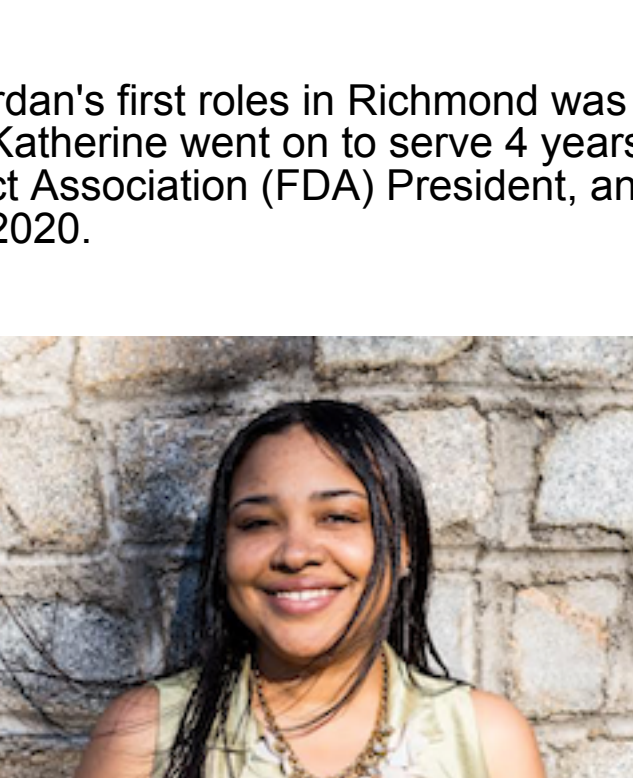
4/12/22 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM – [Wetlands: What Exactly are they and what Value do they Contain?](#) with Dr. Scott Neubauer at Virginia Commonwealth University

2021 Green Giant Awards

Sierra Club Falls of the James Group recognizes four Green Giants for their environmental efforts in central Virginia



Every year, FOJG presents notable community members with the Green Giant Award. Recipients receive \$100 and an honorary certificate. Graphic courtesy of Cathie Greenberg-Ribley



Richmond City Councilwoman Katherine Jordan (2nd District) is recognized for her support of climate initiatives on Richmond City Council. Ms. Jordan was presented with her award at the Club's Tuesday, Oct 12th, meeting where she was also our program speaker.

Katherine spearheaded the NetZero 2050 Resolution which was adopted last year by City Council, as well as helped introduce sustainability goals into city contracts and master plans.

Most recently, Katherine was the chief patron of Richmond's Climate and Ecological Emergency Resolution which passed City Council unanimously in September 2021. Academically, Katherine received her graduate degree in Urban & Environmental Planning from UVA, Whether it's for the environment, school funding or gender equality, Katherine has consistently stepped forward to lead and secure positive change in Richmond.

One of Councilmember Katherine Jordan's first roles in Richmond was as Chair of Fox Elementary School PTA's Parks & Grounds Committee. Katherine went on to serve 4 years as a member of Richmond's Green City Commission and was Fan District Association (FDA) President, and Parks & Trees Chair before being elected to Richmond City Council in 2020.

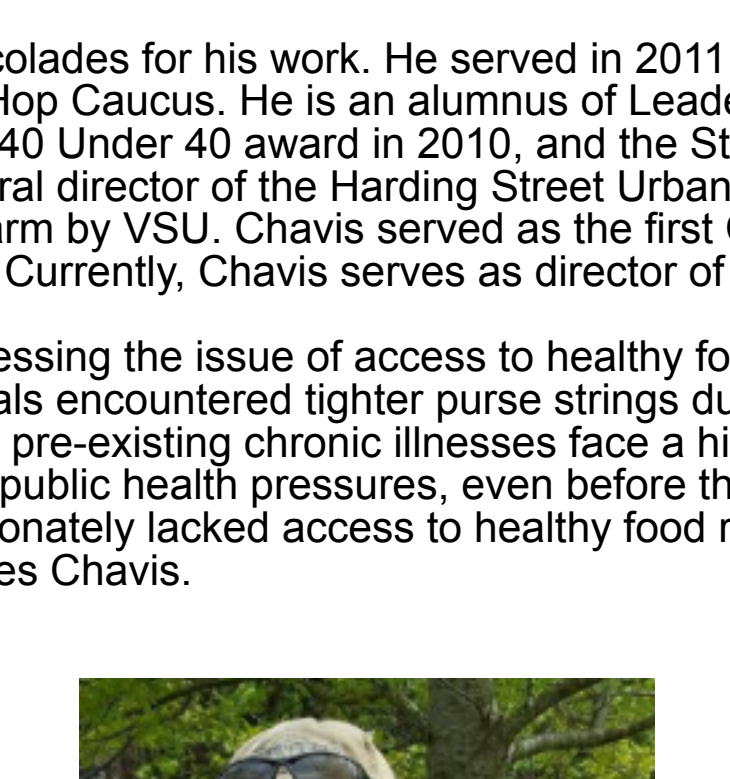


LaVeesha Allen Rollins, our second Green Giant awardee, is co-director of Concerned Citizens of Charles City County, or CC5. She has been one of the leaders in the successful fight to block the 1,100-megawatt C&T natural gas plant in their rural backyard this past summer. LaVeesha's and CC5's work continues with efforts to defeat the proposed 1,650-megawatt Chickahominy Power Plant and its accompanying 83-mile natural gas pipeline as well as a request by the local mega-landfill to enlarge its footprint.

In a recent article in Energy News Network, Ms. Allen Rollins said, ["We want to empower our residents. Nobody wants to feel helpless. Nobody should lose their home or health because somebody is developing something."](#)

In an interview for this article, LaVeesha shared "I am a pretty simple person. The reason I got involved was primarily because I was shocked that something like this would come to my small town. After some research on the effects reported by other towns currently having power plants I realized this was something that affected me. My father had to have a heart transplant, and they could not tell me exactly why his heart failed so suddenly. So to me it became personal. Were we a victim of these types of developments? Is the landfill harmful? How could people do this to others because of their social class and location? How is that just? So then I realized if I stood by and did nothing I am a part of the problem. And now here I am! This world is scary and sometimes so painful with the continual fights we face, but I feel I have so many people before me that paved the way that I must do my part in continuing to fight for justice.

My hopes are that my children's futures will be better because of something I do. So that my town will be a catalyst for green energy initiatives and a pioneer against social injustice. Also to tell the history of black Americans and show the significance blacks played in the history of Charles City. I want to make it better so my kids can catapult off the platform I give them to make society even better. I feel humanity has lost its empathy and care because of convenience and selfishness. My hope is that something I do can inspire others to do something good for their environment."



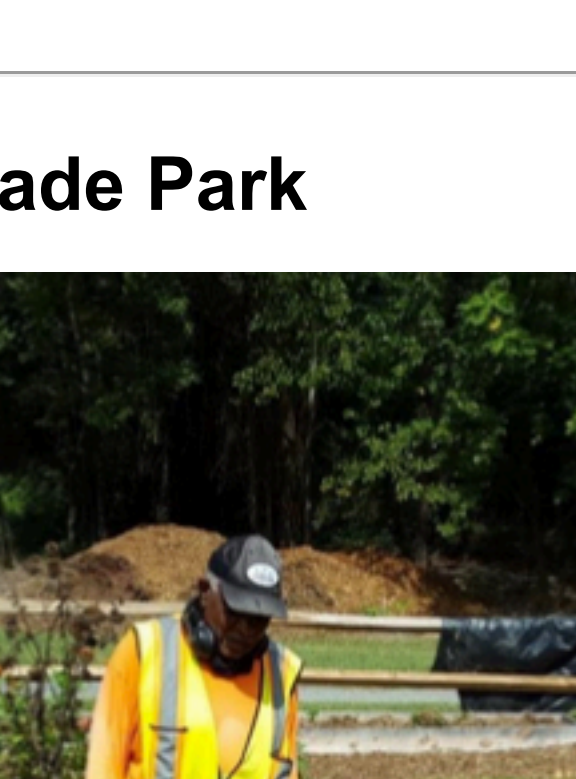
Duron Chavis is our third Green Giant awardee. Duron's bio on his [website](#) indicates why he is a Green Giant award recipient. Chavis started his career in community advocacy as a volunteer then as an employee at the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of VA. While working there, he founded the highly acclaimed Happy Natural Day festival as a grassroots effort to supplement the summer jazz concert that is held annually at the institution. The festival is a weekend-long experience that focuses on cultural awareness, health, wellness, and social change.

Chavis engages in coordinating innovative and dynamic initiatives around the topics of urban agriculture and local food systems in a culturally relevant way. In 2009 Chavis launched the Richmond Noir Market, a Saturday farmer's market targeting low-income communities located in what the USDA has designated as food deserts in Richmond, Virginia. He developed his first community garden in 2012, which subsequently led to the development of urban farms, urban orchards, urban vineyards. These projects included a focus on poverty mitigation, workforce development, and health and racial equity.

Duron's vision expanded through his organization, Happy Natural Day, by creating the [Resiliency Garden Initiative](#). The Resiliency Garden Initiative empowers the community by building raised garden beds in people's backyards at zero cost. Since their launch in April 2020, they have delivered over 300 raised beds throughout the Richmond region. For individuals without a backyard, they steward multiple green spaces across the region, including a 1-acre community orchard in Southside Richmond and a 1-acre urban farm in Northside Richmond in support of community resiliency efforts.

Chavis has received numerous accolades for his work. He served in 2011 as a Clean Air Ambassador on behalf of Earthjustice and the Hip Hop Caucus. He is an alumnus of Leadership Metro Richmond's class of 2011, received Shive Weesley's Top 40 Under 40 award in 2010, and the Shive Weesley Power List in 2014 and 2015. Chavis served as the inaugural director of the Harding Street Urban Agriculture Center, a recreation center repurposed into an indoor farm by VSU. Chavis served as the first Community Engagement Manager for Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. Currently, Chavis serves as director of The Happy Natural Day.

"COVID-19 has illuminated how pressing the issue of access to healthy food is for communities throughout the country. Not only have individuals encountered tighter purse strings due to job loss and lay-offs as a result of the pandemic, people with pre-existing chronic illnesses face a higher risk of contracting the virus in public. Apart from affordability and public health pressures, even before the COVID-19 outbreak, formerly redlined neighborhoods disproportionately lacked access to healthy food retail options such as grocery stores or farmers markets," observes Chavis.



Our Fourth Green Giant awardee is **Bob Argbright**. Argbright, also known as "Mr. Bob," has masterful organizational skills, genuine charm, and tireless energy. Over the last six years, he mobilized around 150 local organizations, including FOJG, to transform six acres of overgrown land into Bellemeade Park Outdoor Learning Campus. This Southside Richmond park was awarded \$176,000 on April 24, 2021, from the Virginia Outdoor Foundation to help build a regional outdoor area and workforce development site. The park has a rain, wildflower, and memorial garden. There is an area dedicated to exploring and playing in nature. Children can learn how to grow food and garden in the Youth Vegetable Garden, which provides a compost and worm bin, mushroom nursery logs, Purple Martin birdhouses, a beehive, and a wildlife hotel. Hiking and biking trails now encompass and pass through Bellemeade Park, and there is a bike shed where community members can rent bikes and learn how to repair their own bikes.

Students from Oakgrove-Bellemeade School, adjacent to Bellemeade Park, have the opportunity to learn about the flora and fauna of the Albio Creek watershed. These students learn about the watershed through immersion, collecting water samples, conducting water quality testing, and seeing for invertebrates. Mr. Bob also organizes weekly Saturday tutoring in reading at Bellemeade Park for students in the nearby Latino community. After tutoring, the learning continues in the Youth Vegetable Garden. Bob's goals are to get children outdoors, teach them about the environment, and to inspire them to contribute to their local community.

Duron Chavis, **LaVeesha Allen Rollins**, and **Bob Argbright** will be recognized and receive their Green Giant Awards at the [December 14th program](#) of the Sierra Club Falls of the James Group. The meeting will be virtual via Zoom.

Volunteer at Bellemeade Park



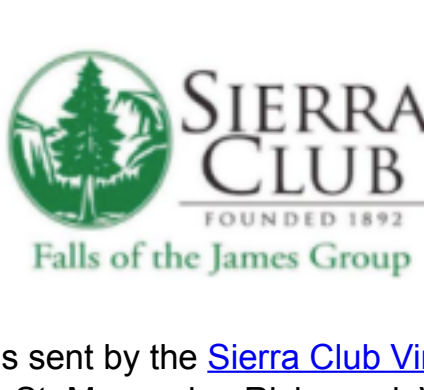
There is always work to be done at Bellemeade Park! In this picture, a volunteer mentors children as they play and learn in the Youth Garden. Photo courtesy of Sharon Peacock

This month's Bellemeade Park Conserve and Create Work Day is on **December 11, 2021, from 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM**. Volunteer opportunities include spreading wood chips in the Youth Garden, planting daffodils, removing invasive plants, weeding the pollination and rain gardens, and building a new coop for our chickens. We will provide all tools that are needed but request that you bring water and gloves. For more information and to register, [click here](#).

Updated Falls of the James Group Website

The [Falls of the James Group website](#) is revamped thanks to the Kate McClory, Anne Repp, Joe Brancoli, Sharon Peacock, and our webmaster, Eric Vrable. One of the more recent website updates consists of a Committee tab where you can view updates associated with the Advocacy Committee, Executive Committee, FOJG Grants, Membership Engagement, and Skip the Plastics RVA. We encourage you to visit these tabs and explore everything FOJG has to offer.

Updated National Sierra Club COVID-19 Response



The National Sierra Club Executive Director Mike Brune, Chief Operations Officer, Jen Trahan, and Ramón J. Cruz, President, as of August 5th, 2021, indicated that outings, meetings, and some events have resumed. All require a safety plan, written by the organizers, to be approved by the Virginia Chapter and National Sierra Club. In addition to any indoor event MUST be masked, regardless of vaccination status. These guidelines are extended through February 28th, 2022.

2021 FOJG Executive Committee

Joe Brancoli, FOJG Executive Committee Chair/Leadership Chair, & Acting Chair VA Sierra Club Chapter Executive Committee: joesierra@gmail.com

Glen Besa, FOJG Political Chair and Outings Leader: glenbesa@gmail.com

Steve Carter-Lovejoy, FOJG "Skip The Plastics" Committee Chair: scarterlovejoy53@msn.com

Carille Greenberg-Ribley, FOJG Executive Committee Member: carillegr@gmail.com

Sharon Peacock, FOJG Secretary, Membership Engagement Chair, & Outings Leader: sharonandrew@verizon.net

Lee Williams, FOJG Advocacy Chair: lee.sierraclub@greennewdealva@gmail.com

Aileen Rivera, FOJG Executive Committee Member: ajrclouds@aol.com

Bruce Tarr, FOJG Executive Committee Member: bruce.tarr@comcast.net

Steve Yarus, FOJG Executive Committee Member: hsyarus@gmail.com

Thanks for all you do for the environment.
Veronica Hayes
Newsletter Editor
Sierra Club Falls of the James Group

