



Minutes CATS Communications Meeting December 4, 2019

Attending: Shelly Daus, Pam Dorland, Donna Gray, Helen Gregory, Libby Gretz, Penny Kaiserlian (Chair), Rachel Keen, Tim Maywalt, Anne Nelson, Martha Orton, Dorothy S. Smith, Mary Spear, Bill Sublette

This meeting was called to invite graduates of the Class of 2019 to meet current members of the Communications Committee and learn about their work and needs.

- 1) **Membership.** Libby Gretz, Membership Coordinator, discussed dues collection and preparation of the email blasts to members.
Dues collection occurs primarily at the end of the year and Libby could use help at the member meetings in collecting dues and issuing receipts for cash. Anne Nelson asked why we don't include a request for donations as part of our annual dues collection. We do get some donations at that time, but don't request them. Libby believes that fundraising is a separate activity and we would need to discuss in the Board if we should do more, and for what purpose.
Email blasts: Libby sends blasts to members about CATS events twice a month. Information is gathered from the CATS calendar and checked with committee chairs. She also includes events or articles of interest from other environmental organizations. Libby maintains the membership list and contact information. She restricts the information that goes on the website to name, email address, phone number, and year of graduation. The revised list including the Class of 2019 will be ready next week.
- 2) **Branding.** Donna Gray this year took on the task of researching and ordering the CATS T-shirts. In 2019 we also put in an order for more CATS hats. In future, we could order other types of branded merchandise, possibly including some shirts promoting tree awareness for the public. Tim asked about polo shirts. These need to be ordered individually, but we have not yet worked out the details. Dorothy thanked Donna for also introducing us to Square, a method of accepting charge cards that we used for the first time at the Fall Tree Sale.
- 3) **Facebook.** We have had a CATS Facebook page for about five years now. Martha Orton manages it and keeps it fresh with many new articles and photos. It is a public site so

she takes care with photo selection. Currently we have 580 followers but Martha says the reach is much broader. The Tree Sale post had about 2,500 views. Shelly suggested we take snippets from the blog on the website and use them to direct people to the full story on the website.

- 4) **Website.** Two CATS volunteers redesigned the website in 2017. Two different volunteers (Sandy and Jerry Holtz) took on the job of managing the site until June 2019. They recommended that CATS move to a website consulting firm to manage it on a paid basis. The Board approved this and selected Web Weaving as the consultant. We have been stalled by the need to prove that we own the domain name, charlottesvilleareatreestewards.org. In the meantime, several CATS volunteers keep the information updated. Tim and Bill do regular posts on educational activities or projects. Penny updates the walks/classes, member meetings and other information. We can always use extra help. Volunteers can adopt particular pages to update. Bill notes the process is fairly simple.
- 5) **Photography.** In August Tim, Bill and others organized a workshop on photography for CATS members so that our photos will be more professional and varied. Here is a link to the slides:

<https://charlottesvilleareatreestewards.org/charlottesville-area-tree-stewards-class/class-reference-material-and-links/>

- 6) **Email promotions.** The CATS “Tree Basics” classes were started in 2010, and the Tree Walks in 2017. The program has become much more active in recent years. In Fall 2016 we had 49 people on our mailing list to get information about these and other CATS events open to the public. We now have 725 names, up 82% from 2018. The mailing list has become so large that we now have to send the mailings out in two batches 24 hours apart. We are at a point where we should consider one of the professional services like Mailchimp or Constant Contact which would give us more flexibility on mailing to segments of the list as well as new design options. Shelly Daus, who has experience with this, recommends we choose Mailchimp as we can use the service free for up to 2000 names. She offered to help us set up our list and templates. We would then be able to code the list to mail to different subgroups. Several other members, including Donna Gray, also have experience in doing mailings with Mailchimp. We will proceed to investigate and see whether we can implement in early 2020.
- 7) **Table Events.** Dorothy Smith, in addition to being CATS president in 2019, has managed tables for CATS this year. She has organized tables at nine events, including the two Tree Sales, PLA, Kidvention, Eco Rodeo and some symposia. She encourages all new members to participate in helping to staff tables. There will always be at least two people staffing, usually for a couple of hours at a time. It is an enjoyable assignment and a great way to learn from the questions and the other tree stewards. Questions can be answered with the literature we have available, or by consulting reference

books, or referring people to professional arborists, VA Tech, and other resources. Dorothy reports that we usually have 10-20 people signing up to be on our mailing list at these events.

- 8) **Publicity.** We currently do publicity about our public events and our training class to other environmental groups so that they can tell their members about our talks, walks, etc. We put information in local calendars, and contact magazines and local TV. This year the Belmont planting project was covered on both local TV stations.
- 9) **Advertising.** Since ads are becoming increasingly expensive, we usually do only two or three a year. Robin Hanes prepares ads for the Spring and Fall Tree Sales for Cville Weekly and we mention our other activities there. Cville Weekly will design ads from copy and photos we submit.
- 10) **Printed materials, brochures etc.** We order many useful tree publications from ISA for use at tables and other public events. We produce a few of our own brochures, including the one about CATS. We also prepare a flyer for the Training Class and put posters on local bulletin boards.
- 11) **Library.** CATS maintains a library of reference works, trade books, and tree identification guides at the Department of Forestry. The library was moved in 2019 to a locked bookcase in a storage room in the DoF. Now that our nursery is on the grounds of DoF, we hope more people will have a chance to use the library. The Librarian is Sue McCoy. She could use some occasional assistance with cataloging, checking in books etc.