

## A FEW OF THE VALUES OF CHESTERFIELD COUNTY OUTDOORS PROGRAMS

\* Youth participants sometimes don't even know that a butterfly won't bite them, they have so little contact with the outdoors - until they participate in an Outdoor program. These programs offer kids the chance to safely experience what the natural environment has to offer. For example, in a paddling class kids may be initially apprehensive, they are afraid to get on the water, but 3 hours later they love the James and are stewards for life. As three-fourths of the borders of Chesterfield are river, exposing the kids to water safety and appreciation helps insure the long-term health of the county.

\* Richmond is the only city in the United States that has a class 4 rapids running through the middle of it, but if Outdoors is cut there will be NO river instruction whatsoever available to the public. Often after an unfortunate incident on the river the media turns to the outdoor staff for comment on river safety.

\* A major concern in the US is obesity and poor health, in part due to the sedentary lifestyle of adults who for one reason or another stopped playing sports or had no interest in sports at all. Of the top 25 drugs sold in America, half of the conditions they are meant to address could be improved through exercise (<http://www.vaughns-1-pagers.com/medicine/prescription-drug-sales.htm>) yet the proposed budget aims to cut programs that teach people exercise doesn't have to be structured nor confined to team experiences but rather can simply be a matter of getting outside and moving. Outdoors programs teach youth and adults how to be active individuals.

\* Youth are, to some extent, exposed to a variety of activities at schools, but only through Outdoors programs do they have the opportunity to experience kayaking, the challenge course, surfing, hiking and other activities. The outdoor section works directly with the schools because the schools do not have the facilities or the skills to teach kids what the outdoors have to offer. Yet the programs that offer these unique options are the very ones proposed to be cut.

\* Each fall the challenge course is utilized by the occupational programs at the Chesterfield Technical Center. It is used as a means of uniting the students, who come as strangers from their home schools, into classes that learn and function as a team. The funding for this comes from a yearly grant that continues to be awarded. That would be an indication of a successful program.

\* A large majority of the programs at the Rockwood Nature Center and the challenge course involve Chesterfield County school students, elementary through high school. They come not only for the program's content but they are affordable. For many this is their only field trip. Eliminating these programs could be looked at as another cut to the schools.

\* Other area localities utilize Chesterfield outdoor programs as part of their summer programming.

\* People travel into the county, bringing their tourist dollars, to participate in outdoor programs because what they offer is very unique, the experiences are not replicated in other counties.

\* Chesterfield County's Police and Fire Department utilize the challenge course in their recruit training programs. The police department considers the challenge course an essential aspect of the training program. There are no other courses that offer the departments such an experience.

\* Direct program costs are covered by the fees of the program. How many departments in county government can say that about their services?

#### OPTIONS FOR BUDGET CUTS

\* As the programs cover their direct costs, the salaries could be augmented with grant money for administrative costs.

\* Salaries could be partially underwritten from business matching funds. Outdoor supply stores, such as REI, Dicks, Bass Pro Shop and others have a vested interest in developing outdoor clientele.

\* Areas outside of the county that receive county funding should be reviewed. In the past the county supported areas like The Diamond, Maymont, Richmond Symphony, and Richmond International Airport. Outside areas should only be funded after the county needs have been met.

\* Most important, all jobs that were created during the financially flush years to aid county employees should be investigated as possible areas to help with the budget shortfall. Jobs that aid county employees, not the public citizens of the county, should be considered for elimination prior to any programs that go directly to the taxpayers.