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# Exhibit, Lectures Featured

By Maggie Wolff Peterson  
*Special to The Winchester Star*

It runs along Interstate 81 and by other roadways large and small. It runs past scruffy, overgrown homesteads and through the urban center of town. It even runs under a jail.

Today, Black's Run is a trickle managed by the Harrisonburg public works department. The stream runs through concrete culverts and piping that steer its course around and through the city.

But just a couple of centuries ago, it was the water source that established the city. Its banks were the places that settlers drew fresh water and fished for food. And before the settlers, Native Americans surely knew the stream as a source of sustenance and life.



These photos are samples of the exhibit opening today at the Shenandoah Arts Council building in Winchester. (Photos Provided by Scott Jost)

And there is still life there now. "Everything from a few smallish fish" to the

enormous snapping turtle that artist Scott Jost said he saw there recently.

Jost, an art professor at Bridgewater College, is a chronicler of the stream whose black-and-white photos are displayed at the Shenandoah Arts Council in a show

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opening today.

The exhibition will kick off with a lecture that Jost will deliver at 7:30 p.m. at Shenandoah University’s Hester Hall, “Community Conversation and the Healing of Black’s Run,” describing Jost’s roles as an artist, activist, and appreciator of a tiny wild place within an urban landscape.

Preceding the lecture will be a reception from 5 to 7 p.m. at the arts council building, 811 S. Loudoun St.

Additionally, Jost will speak on “Landscape, Ecology and Land Use” Thursday in Gregory Hall, room 152, on the university campus, from 9:30 to 10:45 a.m. and again, 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. All events are free and open to the public.

Jost arrived in the Shenandoah Valley in 1996 and conceived of the exhibition in 1999. He picked up his camera to record the course of the stream and then sat down at the computer to write an accompanying narrative. The artwork became “a plea for the restoration of the stream. It looked like it had been completely neglected,” he said.

When he discovered it, Black’s Run was polluted by runoff from its own banks, where erosion was accelerated by a lack of vegetation, primarily trees. So in connection with other activists, Jost began planting trees.

And the city came behind them and mowed them down, Jost said.

It was Jost’s introduction to the fact that saving Black’s Run would require collaboration. The city didn’t want trees along the stream because its underground sewer lines follow the same course.

“There are good reasons why you can’t plant trees anywhere you want to,” Jost said. “The roots would look for any moisture, and get into the sewer lines and crack them open.”

So Jost changed his approach.

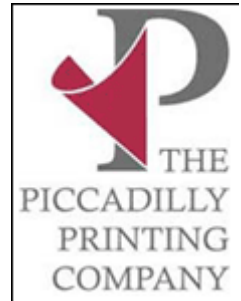
“I interviewed people instead of writing the text myself,” he said.

as chairman of the Committee on Education and Health, after running as an independent in the governor’s race in November?

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Jost spoke to city officials, activists and landowners and developed a vision of the stream as a resource with many stakeholders. It was surprising “how poetic people were when they spoke about this stream,” he said.

The result has become a 28-page book that now accompanies the 24 photographs in the show.

“If you ask me, did people at that time plan well enough for the future, I’m gonna say, heck no,” the book quotes Mike Collins, Harrisonburg’s director of public utilities. “But I think that’s judging from today’s standards. They did what they had to do.”

Jost’s photographs show a streambed cluttered with chunks of concrete and fouled with debris. In one photo, volunteers struggle to remove a broken, collapsed above-ground swimming pool that someone threw in.

But Jost counts that image as one that displays progress. Volunteers still clean the streambed and “the size of the trash gets smaller each year,” he said.

And in another shot, volunteers tend plantings in a pocket park created where the stream flows by a downtown farmers’ market. A greenway, following the stream, is now under development, Jost said. “It’s a wonderful project that’s going to take a whole generation to realize.”

“Black’s Run: An American Stream” will be exhibited at the Shenandoah Arts Council through Oct. 29. Gallery hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, and 1 to 4 p.m. Sundays.

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