



Chestnut Hill Local

(/)
Friday, May 31, 2024

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A life of stewardship: Charlie Dilks



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Charlie Dilks sailing near his easement-protected farm in Maryland. Photo courtesy of Charlie Dilks.

Posted Friday, May 31, 2024 9:28 am

by **Chrissy Clawson**

The Chestnut Hill Conservancy's sold-out Spring Gala on Saturday, June 8, will honor Charlie Dilks, a man whose commitment to conservation has significantly impacted the community. Held on the grounds of a historic Norman-style home with conserved land in Wyndmoor, the gala will recognize his contributions to preserving the natural and historical beauty of Chestnut Hill and its surrounding areas.

A lifelong passion for nature

Dilks' conservation journey began in childhood, inspired by his mother, a naturalist who founded the Women's Committee at the Academy of Natural Sciences. Growing up near Cresheim Creek, he spent countless hours exploring the Wissahickon, collecting salamanders, minnows, and crawfish. His passion for the environment deepened when he discovered a new crab species in Maple Shade, New Jersey, with Dr. Horace R. Richards from the Academy of Natural Sciences. Richards named the new species Prehepatas Dilksi in honor of Charlie Dilks in 1962.

Recalling a recent visit to the Academy, Dilks shared, "I mentioned the story during a behind-the-scenes tour, and a staff member pulled it out of a drawer in the Academy archives."

Books like "Stalking the Wild Asparagus" and "Stalking the Blue-Eyed Scallop" by Euell Gibbons sparked an interest in natural foods and foraging. This interest extended into his professional life, where he continuously sought ways to improve environmental health and sustainability. "Being brought up in that environment put me on the path," he said. "That's where it started and has kept me going ever since."

Funding the future

Recognizing that there are many like him in the community who wish to support environmental protection, Dilks introduced the "Catalyst" program to help fund a full-time easement manager at the Conservancy. Catalyst is the highest level of Conservancy membership (\$5,000+), where half of the contribution can directly support the easement manager position.

"We needed the strength to take easements and enforce them, which requires financial and human resources," he explained. "I felt and still feel that major donors need to step up and become more involved, contributing to overall operations and specific programs that ensure our future success." This initiative established a full-time easement manager position at the Conservancy, enhancing the organization's ability to protect and manage conservation easements.



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"All our activities are important, but the easement program is particularly significant to me," he said. "It's about providing resources for people who want to preserve their properties and ensuring we have the staff and funding to support these efforts."

Enduring commitment

His long-term involvement with the Conservancy and other environmental organizations, such as Natural Lands, Friends of Fairmount Park (now called the Fairmount Park Conservancy), the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, the Schuylkill Center, and the Friends of the Wissahickon (FOW), underscores his enduring commitment. "Friends of the Wissahickon is one of the lucky organizations to have been led by Charlie Dilks as board president, and his leadership focused our work and significantly grew our organizational capacity," said Ruffian Tittmann, the executive director of FOW.

Advice for future conservationists

Dilks emphasizes the importance of financial stability to the next generation of conservationists. He believes having reserves for unforeseen contingencies and the ability to undertake new projects are essential for any organization's longevity and effectiveness. "Without financial viability, important organizations could be just surviving from one month to the next," he emphasized. "We need to ensure they have the resources to support these programs and grow."

Evolving conservation

Over the years, Dilks has witnessed significant advancements in conservation. When he first became involved, the FOW and the Conservancy shared offices and a small staff with 2.5 staff members for each organization. Today, both organizations have expanded their reach and are recognized as leaders in the community of conservation. "There's been a general movement towards greater awareness and action in environmental preservation," he said. "The Conservancy and other groups are at the forefront of educating our community about the importance of these efforts."

"Charlie's dedication and vision have been instrumental in our growth," said Lori Salganicoff, executive director of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy. "Since the Catalyst program began in 2018, we have added seven new conservation easements. Charlie saw opportunities and has always been first to participate."

Sharing institutional knowledge

Dilks plays a pivotal role in preserving institutional memory and offers extensive experience to guide current and future efforts. He stresses the importance of asking questions and seeking knowledge to navigate the complexities of conservation work. "I've been involved with more than half a dozen environmental groups, bringing experience and insights to the Conservancy and the Friends," he shared. "It's about finding the right people and asking the right questions to continue our mission effectively."

Looking forward

As the Conservancy celebrates his contributions at the Spring Gala, it also looks to the future. His vision of a stable, growing organization continues to energize the Conservancy's mission to preserve the natural and historical character of Chestnut Hill and surrounding communities in the Wissahickon watershed. "We have viable organizations able to undertake more activities and produce positive change," he said. "It's about looking ahead and ensuring we have the resources and leadership to keep moving forward."

Charlie Dilks's legacy is a testament to the power of dedication, vision, and community support in conservation.

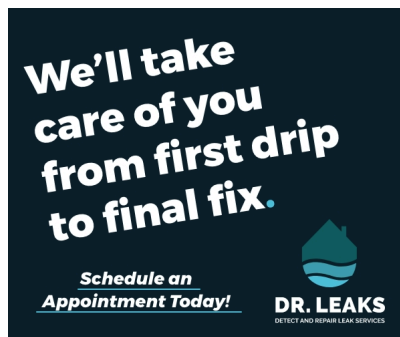
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LOCAL CALENDAR

<p>Sat, Jun 01 @3:00pm Sponsored</p> <p>Christ Vibe Summer Jam</p> <p>City Life Church Fri, May 31</p> <p>Fataday Korngor Growing Pains Album Release</p> <p>The Royal, Where Music Lives Fri, May 31 @9:00am</p> <p>Future Without Guns</p> <p>Quorum at University City Science Center Fri, May 31 @9:00am</p> <p>Color Fields</p> <p>The National Apartments</p> <p>See All Events (https://chestnuthilllocal.com/events/)</p>	<p>Mon, Jun 03 Sponsored</p> <p>Giant Presents: "A Lens for the Lighthouse"</p> <p>Northeast Regional Library</p>	<p>Thu, Jun 06 @12:00pm Sponsored</p> <p>New Online Content Posted -- COTH Website</p> <p>Center on the Hill</p>
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THE LATEST



A life of stewardship: Charlie Dilks (/stories/a-life-of-stewardship-charlie-dilks,32396)

The Chestnut Hill Conservancy's sold-out Spring Gala on Saturday, June 8, will honor Charlie Dilks, a man whose commitment to conservation has significantly impacted the community.

(/stories/a-life-of-stewardship-charlie-dilks,32396)



Love is Love: NW Philly prepares for Pride (/stories/love-is-love-nw-philly-prepares-for-pride,32394)

Northwest Philadelphia is gearing up for Pride Month, which starts on Saturday, with a calendar full of activities recognizing that love is love.

(/stories/love-is-love-nw-philly-prepares-for-pride,32394)



PRA chief testifies against appointing G-town Y conservator (/stories/prachief-testifies-against-appointing-conservator-for-g-town-y-building,32393)

About 30 some odd neighbors of the now-defunct Germantown YWCA trekked to Courtroom 453 at City Hall last Thursday to support local developer Ken Weinstein in his quest to be named conservator of the long vacant building at 5820-24 Germantown Ave.

(/stories/prachief-testifies-against-appointing-

conservator-for-g-town-y-building,32393)

CHCA approves Airbnb (/stories/chca-approves-airbnb,32392)

The CHCA board voted to recommend approval of a variance for 7929 Roanoke Street, with provisos, for a short-term rental property.



Billions over budget: Questions swirl over city's "green" fix for sewers (/stories/billions-over-budget-questions-swirl-over-citys-green-fix-for-sewers,32391)

More than a decade after the Philadelphia Water Department introduced its 'Green City, Clean Waters' program, costs have quietly ballooned to at least \$4.5 billion at its halfway mark, at least \$2 billion over original estimates, according to public records and department employees.

(/stories/billions-over-budget-questions-swirl-over-citys-green-fix-for-sewers,32391)

St. Luke's Germantown Church



REQUIEM - RENAISSANCE
a choral collaboration
Saturday, June 15th at 1:30pm

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With rain predicted to deluge Chestnut Hill this weekend, the Home & Garden Festival has been rescheduled for May 19. "In light of the worsening weather outlook for Sunday, May 5, we are going to postpone the festival until the advertised rain date of Sunday, May 19," said Courtney O'Neill, executive director of the Chestnut Hill Business District. "We appreciate your understanding and hope for a gorgeous, sunny day on May 19."


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A Summer of Fun!



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