

Elizabeth River Project



PRESTON GANNAWAY | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

Cleanup effort comes home

THE RIVER ADVOCACY GROUP tackles an ambitious project: persuading homeowners to change behavior that pollutes the water.

By Scott Harper
The Virginian-Pilot

In trying to save the Elizabeth River, environmentalists first asked businesses to aid the polluted waterway. Then they signed up schools. Now they are expanding their efforts to a larger and tougher crowd – homeowners.

The Elizabeth River Project, a local environmental group, is preparing to roll out its newest voluntary program, to be called River Star Homes, that

will encourage residents to go green and tread lightly on their own properties.

Participants must take several actions to benefit the long-abused river, which runs through the industrial core of South Hampton Roads, touching Norfolk, Portsmouth, Chesapeake and pieces of Virginia Beach.

Those who enroll might agree to use less fertilizer, scoop their pet wastes, reduce

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the actions

Participants are asked to use less fertilizer, scoop their pet wastes, reduce lawn chemicals, stop dumping grease down their kitchen drain, or build a rain barrel or compost pile.

To sign up Call (757) 399-7487 or go to www.elizabethriver.org.

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VICKI CRONIS-NOHE | VIRGINIAN-PILOT FILE PHOTO

The Elizabeth River Project has enlisted businesses and schools to help the polluted waterway. Next it's targeting a broad group responsible for fertilizer, chemicals and animal wastes that end up in the river: homeowners.

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AGENCY'S GRANT GIVES A PUSH

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lawn chemicals, stop dumping grease down their kitchen drain, or build a rain barrel or compost pile.

In exchange, they will receive a colorful lawn flag and become part of a movement that, block by block, seeks to shift everyday mindsets and practices toward the environment — shifts that continue to be elusive.

“Citizens are the biggest bite of the apple, what with so many people living in the watershed,” said Marjorie Mayfield Jackson, executive director of the Elizabeth River Project, based in Portsmouth. “We’ve waited all this time but think we’re ready.”

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homes by 2020. A manager will be hired soon to coordinate the new program, Jackson said.

River Star Homes will officially begin on April 30 at an event called Riverfest, but Jackson said her group already is taking names of interested residents to get them ready with information and suggestions. (Call (757) 399-7487 or see the group’s website at www.elizabethriver.org.)

To get the program rolling, the Hampton Roads Sanitation District is providing more than \$120,000 for the first two years.

Ted Henifin, general man-

ager of HRSD, said his agency hopes to better spread information about how residents should handle wastes that otherwise can clog sewer pipes and cause sewage overflows.

For example, Henifin said, residents should minimize their use of garbage disposals in kitchen sinks, should not pour grease down the drain, and should not flush medicines down toilets.

“Getting people to change their behavior is always tough,” he said. “We think this program can really help.”

Without money last summer, the Elizabeth River

Project started a pilot program for homes along the Lafayette River, a branch of the Elizabeth in Norfolk. About 25 residents took part.

Robert Berg, who lives near the river in Colonial Place, was one of the participants.

A retired teacher, Berg has tried for years to be environmentally sensitive at home, refraining from fertilizers and lawn chemicals. In the program, he built a rain barrel and went so far as to recover the excess water dripping from his air conditioner.

“The key is to get more and more folks on board,” Berg said. “A lot of this stuff is so obvious, but it makes a difference when others are doing it, too.”

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