

Duck #473 Sets New Course Record --First Miss Quacker Crowned

by Tom Donnelly

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Well, the Second Annual Creekside Ducky Derby is now in the books. Whether it belongs in the history books or the funny books remains to be seen, but just about everyone had a great time and another significant chunk of money was raised to be utilized by the Friends of Hole Field in their efforts to provide new home bleachers at H.B. Hole Field. It was certainly gratifying to see so many fun-loving people join together for a good cause, especially considering that more than a few of those involved are hurting during our world's recent economic woes. As it turned out, the promoters raised nearly as much money as they did last year when the economy was still booming.

This year's winning duck is a splendid example of how clean living and proper nutrition, combined with a challenging training regimen, can triumph over the fowl play exhibited by some of today's steroid-bloated quackers. The proud owner of Winning Duck #473 is a delightful "young" lady from the the VHS Class of 1945 (Do the math, people!). Lillian Kailus may not be of the sort of physical stature that would catch the eye of VHS girls' basketball coach Jacki Stonebraker. She may be in her eighties, but Lil still takes care of herself and is quite self-sufficient, thank you very much. When the call came to her apartment that she had won \$1,000.00 in the Ducky Derby, she had to rush to get to the phone because she was outside tending to her yearly flower garden. This woman has plenty of energy, and this writer wishes his mind were as sharp as hers is.

After the initial shock had set in, Lil asked that she be given a few minutes to change out of her work clothes, and then she was whisked across town to Creekside, where a throng of race fans had hung around just to applaud her thrilling victory in what is rapidly becoming a racing event to stand alongside the Kentucky Derby and the Indy 500. Mrs. Kailus, whose son (Michael '73) and daughter (Susan '71) graduated from VHS almost 40 years ago, is also a big fan of the Friends of Hole Field. Whenever one of her offspring takes her out for dinner or something of the sort, she asks to be driven past the old football field where she had played games, though probably

not football, with her childhood friends. Remember, Hole Field also used to be a playground for the local kids long before the fences went up and it became exclusively used for high school football. Lil says she just loves seeing what the “Friends” are up to now and follows their endeavors religiously via the *Versailles Policy*.

Last year’s winner, Dave Bey (‘67) of Versailles, generously donated half of his \$1,000.00 winnings back to the Friends of Hole Field. The very first thing Lillian Kailus said once the reality of winning began to settle in was that she wanted to do the same thing as Dave had done last year. “I could only afford to buy one duck, but we really NEED new bleachers! The last marching band contest I attended, those old footboards bounced so much that I could barely keep my balance when I walked up to my seat. I got seasick just standing there as the crowd walked in and out”

One thousand dollars cash is a lot of money to just about anyone this side of Bill Gates. Certainly that sum should mean even more to an octogenarian on a fixed income. However, Lillian is from V-town and proud of it. “I have NEVER voted against any school issue since I became eligible to vote.” She accepted her \$1,000.00 check and immediately wrote out a check of her own for \$500.00 made out to the Friends of Hole Field. Also, 10% of her gross winnings went directly into an offering envelope the next morning at church. This lady certainly has her ducks in a row, so to speak. She knows what things are important in life--particularly life in a small town like Versailles.

Personal confession: Lillian’s extraordinary generosity did not surprise me in the least. She has been one of my most reliable sources of information for the articles about the history of Versailles. She possesses a wealth of memorabilia from her youth and also the sharp mind that her kids obviously inherited from her. (Classmates of the Kailus kids will recall them being at the top of their respective classes.) A visit with Lillian Kailus, as well as with most of the other folks of her generation still around these parts, can be a truly uplifting experience. Try it sometime!

Back to the race. Lil’s Duck, Old #473, was still in the paddock with all the other racers. (Actually, their paddock was a big blue trash barrel, filled to overflowing with more than 750 cute little quackers.) The Race Day activities formally began with the entrance by canoe of our very first Ducky Derby Miss Quacker, Miss Emily Eilerman, a beautiful current senior from Versailles High School. Escorting the

comely queen was this year's Honorary Parade Grand Marshal, the infamous "Gooch" a Creekside legend.

When asked how she happened to be chosen as the first Miss Quacker, Ms. Eilerman replied, "I don't know. They just called me last night and asked if I'd do it. I said, 'Sure'." Basketball fans will recall Emily as a defensive wizard on the Lady Tigers varsity basketball team the past few years. She is fearless on the court and proved her mettle on the high seas as well, braving the rolling waves of sweet Swamp Creek while cheerfully waving to her hundreds of admirers on the banks close by Creekside while Gooch paddled the canoe. Later she was asked if this honor was as thrilling as winning the State Basketball Championship had been. "This is pretty close," the clever kid said with a wink.

A few minutes after Miss Quacker had passed in review, an air horn blared a shrill note announcing that the ducks were in the water! Nearly 800 little plastic ducks hit the chilly waves together and spread out in all directions. Race referee Louie Kremer, with a big assist from sidekick Bunzy Barga, (OK, Marilyn, you can call him Steve if you want to, but nobody else would know to whom I am referring.) ushered them in the general direction of Creekside, and the race was on.

Of course, what everyone wanted to know was how the lone Red Duck was doing. Big Red, as you will recall, would mean a \$10,000 bonus for the winner should he cross the finish line in front of all the other ducks. At first, Red was lost in a sea of yellow as the entire mass just kind of swirled around in place. The current is very slow in this secure and undisclosed launch location, and there was another very strong headwind, reminiscent of last year's debacle. However, the creek itself was fairly high this year, and Red seemed to sense that his time to shine had come. Inch by inch, the solitary red speck moved through the pack until he was right up in the first wave of racers.

Todd Phelan of Phelan Insurance has generously donated an insurance policy each year guaranteeing that the promoters were covered just in case the Red Duck actually won. At that time, Todd was located on the Center Street bridge with a video camera in his hand so as to provide concrete proof to the underwriters should the unthinkable happen. I do not know if Todd's zoom lens was strong enough to see that little red duck's head pop up at the front of all those yellow bodies. If he had known, we would probably be

searching the creek bottom for the camera right now.

Sadly, Red's fortunes were soon to change. A pack of yellow ducks, perhaps the very ones who have recently been spotted training near a certain insurance agent's place of business, began shepherding the wildly protesting Big Red Machine ever closer to the north bank of Swamp Creek. Soon, the struggle was over. Red and his new-found "friends" were tangled among some tree branches that had recently fallen into the creek. There he would remain for nearly ten minutes, and his big moment in the sun would have to wait for some other year. All that extra training and all those drug tests had been in vain. Such is the life a bigtime racing duck.

Almost simultaneously with Red's misfortune, another group of racers broke away from the mess and began picking up speed downstream. What had started out as an amoeba-shaped conglomeration gradually became an almost-straight line of ducks all heading in the same direction. The lead duck was tough to identify, but Kremer and fellow race promoter Tony Streib knew just where to wait so as to find out. They had supervised a trial run with a few volunteer ducks earlier in the day just to make sure everything would go according to plan this year. There was a certain spot where the ducks always seemed to slow down. The water was deeper there and the stream was at its widest. It also just happened to be the place where any headwind would be at its strongest.

Sure enough, the pack quickly caught up to the lead duck as the wind really picked up, just as it had last year. As the now-dozen-or-so lead ducks bobbed around in the still waters, Tony and Louie were fairly certain that they had seen a "3" as the first number of the one that had first broken away. This information was quickly relayed back to race headquarters and a yell went up from all those spectators whose ducks were in the "300" category. Of course, these other ducks were hardly rookies in racing knowledge. Just as that mystery duck began to pull away again, the others formed a draft-line and stayed right with him. It must have been the extreme effort that it had taken to battle both the headwind and the lack of a strong following current, but our lead duck was eventually overtaken--first by one, then another, then by an entire flock. Discouraged, he headed toward the comfort of the north bank and nestled in among the grasses.

The chase was on. Drafting was working perfectly. First one bird would take the lead, and then another would splash right on by.

The North Center Street bridge was now only a few yards away. Just what actually happened under that bridge may never be known, but Duck #473 came out of the shadows several feet in the lead and gaining speed at a terrific rate. The banks were narrowing there, and the deep water from our recent heavy rains practically picked him up and sent him flying toward the finish line.

Fortunately, Louie had run ahead while the ducks were briefly stalled right before the bridge, and he was already in place at the finish line. He and Captain Frank Treon stood in their waders, poised to snatch the ducks before they crashed headlong into the wire fence that served to ascertain that no ducks would escape. They will be needed again next year. The 2009 race was just twenty-one minutes old compared to nearly four hours last year. A new record was being established!

Louie niftily nabbed the winner and yelled out its number to the sexy scribe sitting on the south bank with a notebook listing all the ducks and their respective owners. "Number 473 is Lillian Kailus," came the official call. "Who?" was the unofficial response from the approximately 100 spectators within hearing distance. It appeared that none of Lil's classmates from the Class of 1945 were in attendance. (Even though formerly handsome bartender Bruce Streib later got even with a certain newspaper writer by pointing to one guy who actually knew Lillian Kailus and saying that he must be that old, too.)

In quick succession, the next eleven ducks were identified, as they had also won prizes. Frequent long-distance runner Mark Shimp's elegant #86 swam gracefully into the Captain's waiting hand, and Mark was quickly \$100.00 richer. Versailles residents are certain to see Mark and his duck training just that much harder over the next fifty-two weeks so they can be the big winners next year. Jon Keihl's fantastic #482, a former nest mate of Lil's duck, was third and paid a cool \$50.00. In quick succession, #249 (Jeremy Mescher), #328 (Denny Mestemaker), #724 (Bob Marshall/Jenny "Kremer" Treon), #409 (Randy Condon), #397 (Fred Wells), #387 (Jada Barlage), #727 (Thursday Night Crew), #182 (Chuck "Narth Star" Hemmelgarn), and #300 (Matt and Danielle Francis) earned well-deserved prizes for their owners.

Those non-monetary prizes had been donated by some very generous "Friends." Here is a partial listing: Greenville National Bank (4 Reds tickets), Dick Lavy (Dragons Tickets), Beau Townsend

Ford (Dragons Tickets), Dave and Eric Huelskamp (Kid's Barn and a Complete Car Detailing), Groff's Mowing and Lawn Care (4 BBQ Chicken Dinners at Poultry Days), and Creekside (18-inch pizza).

Of course, Creekside was responsible for much more than just that pizza. Manager Tony Streib worked tirelessly side by side with Louie Kremer to make this year's Ducky Derby another sparkling success. Not to be forgotten is Paula Schmitz, who was the winner of the 50/50 drawing and plopped a cool \$100.00 back into the Friends of Hole Field kitty (or more accurately a ducky). Thanks, Paula!

What about the last duck in? Last year, Bob "Rap" Drees's horrible hatchling brought up the rear, and he has been hearing about it ever since. This year, that honor goes to Gary Condon's dumb duck, who reportedly got into some marble and granite dust at Nickol Monument, and sank like a stone not far from the starting line. Better luck next year, Gary.

And what about Next Year? Well, there is sure to be a Next Year. Too many people have too good a time to let this classic go away. As a matter of fact, shortly after Miss Quacker Emily Eilerman paddled downstream, a pair of somewhat older yet just as attractive ladies in attendance wanted to know how they could be entered into next year's pageant. Several gentlemen nearby quickly volunteered to be judges/trainers for any such contest. Ideas then burst forth in a blur. "How about bikinis?" "Mud wrestling would be even better!" Who knows what will happen at the 2010 Creekside Ducky Derby? Maybe Todd's Red Duck is due.

The day was a huge success. Not just because we made a bunch of money to put another dent in the massive bill that is a necessary cost if we are going to have a first-class stadium. We also had a ton of fun! Whether it is the Ducky Derby or the Ball Drop or the Breakfast with the Tigers or a Fish Fry or constructing another new building, the Friends ALWAYS have fun.

We are certain to be at it again soon. We will be pouring concrete, setting blocks, and erecting new light poles this summer. Poultry Days is just around the corner, and we will be heavily involved there once again. Perhaps you are not in good enough financial shape to make a big donation of cash right now. Maybe you do not have the skills needed to help with construction or field maintenance. No problem. You can always donate a few hours of your time to the cause. If you worked in the Social Tent taking tickets last year, better plan on doing it again this year. Louie is expecting your call. Plus,

Mike “Brute” Poling is looking for pairs of workers (friends, family members, etc.) to sell the newest delicacy, Friends of Hole Field Pit Potatoes. Ten separate two-hour shifts with the spuds are available during the weekend’s activities. If you have any questions, contact one of the above men or Tom Donnelly at 526-4421.

As Lillian Kailus said shortly after receiving her rousing ovation upon her triumphal entrance into Creekside, “I was just overwhelmed when I looked out at all those young people who have done so much hard work at the football field. I am so very grateful for them. I was there when the Tigers were the best team around back in the Forties, and those former players and cheerleaders and marching band members would be so proud of these guys.” If you can’t have fun with “these guys” then you are really missing something. Why not join us?



