



PHOTO BY DAVE HAMP

Pat Herold Nielsen basks on the dock at Corsica Farm, where she and her husband, Ed, spent their days when they weren't in Brooklyn, N.Y. Pat lost a 10-year battle with cancer almost two years ago, but the legacy of her fight to clean up Eastern Shore rivers lives on.

Pat Nielsen: Poetry in motion

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CHESTERTOWN — The Chester River has often been described as picture-perfect. There are thousands of images that depict it sparkling in the summer sun, or iced over in the dead of winter. Tall ships glide across its currents into Chestertown for festivals, and Colonial re-enactors toss tea into it every May.

But looks, as they say, can be deceiving. And for Pat Herold Nielsen, her husband Ed, and several others, the river didn't look so hot back in the mid-1980s. They decided to do something about it.

This month, the group she helped found, the Chester River Association, is honoring Nielsen with a poetry competition, using donations made to the association in her memory after her death in February 2008. There will be two cash prizes and the first Pat Nielsen Commemorative Open Mic Poetry Night. The event is slated for March 5 at the Bookplate in Chestertown.

Poems should reflect any aspect of the Chester River and its surrounding areas.

Indeed, it was poetry that Nielsen, an award-winning television writer, editor and producer, turned to writing as she battled breast cancer over the decade preceding her death, according to her husband.

"Pat was a TV journalist who wrote and produced shows, but she always had a great narrative gift," Ed Nielsen says. "It's not easy switching hats from journalism to creative writing."

But that's what she did, keeping her new passion to herself. Then her husband saw one of her poems. "I told her, 'That's great!' and gradually she's starting showing them to me."

Soon enough, her poems began to appear in the river association's magazine, *Currents*, which Pat edited for the first 10 or 12 years of its existence. Her poems would often appear on the magazine's back cover.

"We all loved those poems," Ed says, recalling how Pat had organized a poetry

"slam" or open mic for poets, at Andy's in Chestertown, to encourage others to express themselves through verse.

Coordinating the poetry competition is CRA Treasurer Marcy Dunn Ramsey, who came up with the idea to use the memorial contributions to stage the type of event Pat Nielsen would love.

"She was very persuasive, very passionate about her views," Ramsey says of her longtime friend. "When she died, there was a huge outpouring from the community, and we had accumulated about \$4,000. We talked about a party or a scholarship, but Pat was big on outreach and educating the community."

Meredith Davies Hadaway, vice president for college relations and marketing at Washington College, got Rose O'Neill Literary House Director Mark Nowak on board to judge the poems. Entries must be postmarked no later than Jan. 30 to Ramsey at 140 Bright Meadow Lane.

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