



Volume 17, number 4

September 2014

The September meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be held on Saturday, September 20, 2014 at the Education Building of the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, Old Route 17, in Livingston Manor, NY.

Nicole Seymour will be tying a classic palmered wet-fly pattern, The Catskill. In *Streamcraft: An Angling Manual* (1919), George Parker Holden declared: “We believe that it was Lou Darling who affirmed that wood duck wing and orange body will take fish anywhere,” and Harold Hinsdill Smedley attributes a version of this pattern to Darling in *Fly Patterns and Their Origins* (1944). Louis S. Darling belonged to the Angler’s Club of New York at the start of the twentieth century and was National Dry Fly Casting Champion in 1916. Darling’s original pattern was tied with a tail of mallard breast dyed orange or golden pheasant tippet, an orange body with a gold rib, a wing of lemon wood duck or mallard breast dyed orange, and a brown or light brown hackle, palmered.

Like many early patterns, this one evolved. In *Trout*, Ray Bergman gives the dressing as Darling conceived it, including dyed feathers as a option, but without mentioning golden pheasant tippet as an option for the tail. The dressing that A. J. McClane lists in *McClane’s New Standard Fishing Encyclopedia* has lemon wood duck for the tail and wing, but brown silk floss for the body and “medium red-brown” palmered hackle.

We’ll be tying a version with Darling’s original orange body:

Hook: Size 10

Thread: Cream

Tail: Wood duck

Body: Burnt orange dubbing

Hackle: Light or dark ginger

Wing: Wood duck



If you’d like to tie along, bring your tools and vise. Nicole will supply any materials you lack.

The Guild Picnic

The annual Catskill Fly Tyers Guild picnic was held on August 16, 2014, at the Elsie and Harry Darbee and Matthew Vinciguerra Memorial Pavilion at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum.

After sampling the abundance of good food brought by attendees and going back for seconds and thirds, everyone participated in the casting “contest,” a competition

without actual prizes that combines fly-fishing skills with stand-up comedy.

The accuracy event was won by Dick Smith, with Dave Brandt and Gary Romanic placing second and third, respectively. Dave Brandt placed first in the shoot-line-through-a-vertical-hoop event, also known as the “You’ve got to be kiddin’ me” event, followed by Judie DV Smith, Casting Commissioner Gary Sweet, and Bob Osburn—the only participants who



actually got casts through the hoop.



Dick and Judie Smith.



Bob Osburn shows how it's done.



Dave Brandt, going long.

We actually do keep score

The Guild Is on Facebook and Instagram

To supplement the *Gazette*, to give members of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild another way to interact with each other, and to give the guild a presence on social networks, we've set up a Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Catskillflytyersguild>, curated by Nicole Seymour. If you have a Facebook account, you can post pictures and texts related to guild activities, from tying flies, to discussing angling books and traditions, to just plain good times with Catskill flies. If you don't have an account, you can still view the page. Most organization and businesses have a Facebook presence, and establishing one gives members who can't make it to meetings a way to participate in the guild and to keep up with its doings. We'll be posting meeting notices, excerpts from the *Gazette* archives, pictures of fly-swap flies, and much more. In addition to serving existing members better, a presence on Facebook will also show others what the guild does and why membership in it is worthwhile.

We also have recently set up an Instagram photo account for the guild, and anyone who uses the Instagram app on his or her phone has only to type in “catskillflytyersguild” with no spaces to locate us and follow us. Please feel free to contact us (or tag on the app, if you are up to speed with the way it works) with any photos you wish to share, and we will gladly repost them with credit to you.

Bucktails: A Catskill Tradition

In *Streamer Fly Tying and Fishing*, Joseph D. Bates, Jr., perhaps the definitive authority on streamers and bucktails, defined the bucktail as “a fly possessing a predominately haired wing, whose shape and intended action are to represent a baitfish.” Bates went on to write: “A hair wing fly of this type is called a bucktail regardless of the kind of hair used.” This definition was given the stamp of approval by A. J. McClane in both *McClane’s Standard Fishing Encyclopedia*, his angling Bible, and *The Practical Fly Fisherman*. However, McClane did suggest that the name is derived from the use of hair from the tail of a deer for the wing. Regardless of the hair used to tie a bucktail, who can argue with this? Not me!

Bates also wrote that “the origin of both the streamer and the bucktail is lost in the dim history of the past.” But then he quickly adds, “It is certain that the American Indians used similar flies in the first half of the nineteenth century.” Further, he suggests that the origin of modern long-shanked flies can be traced back to the Catskills. In *Streamer Fly Tying and Fishing*, Bates devotes a fair amount of ink to the Bumblepuppy, which he notes was originally tied as a bucktail and streamer as early as 1880 by Theodore Gordon and later by Herm Christian, perhaps Gordon’s only fly-tying understudy.

Angling historian, author, and fly fisher Paul Schullery weighs in on this matter, noting in *American Fly Fishing* that “primitive bucktails” were used for smallmouth bass in the 1870s. Schullery goes on to add that the Orvis Company sold bucktails in the early 1890s.

And speaking of Orvis, Mary Orvis Marbury, in her classic *Favorite Flies and Their Histories*, included an 1887 letter from J. H. Stewart of Jackson, Mississippi, noting that flies made by North Carolina Indians used deer hair for wings, but that the hair pointed forward, rather than backward, toward the rear of the fly. Marbury claimed that this type fly was “used by the North Carolina Indians for generations.”

Ernest Schwiebert, in *Trout Volume II*, also notes that North American Indians used a “bucktail-type lure” to catch fish before such flies were used for sport fishing. Schwiebert concludes that the bucktail was an American piscatorial concept, regardless of who receives credit for its conception. In fact, Joe Bates wrote about Alaskan Eskimos who used a fly made of hooks of bone and hair that later morphed into the Alaska Mary Ann Bucktail originated by Frank Dufresne.

Perhaps the best link connecting bucktails and the Catskill tradition was offered by Preston Jennings. In *A Book of Trout Flies*, Jennings wrote the following about streamers and bucktails: “Just when the flies were first used is difficult to say, but the Bucktail has come into prominence in the Catskills since the Esopus has been kept in an almost constant roily state, by the introduction of the clay-laden water from the Schoharie; in fact, the first one of these flies to come to the attention of the writer was called the Esopus Bucktail.”

Jennings wasn’t alone in this belief. In *Taking Larger Trout*, Larry Koller wrote: “In Eastern fishing the bucktail has now achieved a firm place in the angling field. Probably the Esopus Creek has had more to do with its establishment than any other, for

Up on the Esopus



With Ed Ostapczuk

this big stream, high and often silt-laden with water of the Schoharie pouring through the portal, is bucktail and streamer water more than anything else in the fly-fisherman's repertory." Koller went on to write that the first bucktail he ever used was also the Esopus Bucktail.

Perhaps one of the best-known Catskill bucktails is Art Flick's Black-Nosed Dace, originally tied with natural polar bear hair. I often call upon the services of this pattern, mostly in memory of Art, when I wander Flick's Schoharie Creek watershed,.

The strong association of the Esopus Creek with bucktails is expanded upon by Ed Van Put in *Trout Fishing in the Catskills*. Van Put includes three bucktails that originated on the Esopus. The first was the creation of William Mills and Son—the Esopus Bucktail mentioned above. It was favored to catch "large brown trout" in the stained flows. A second pattern was known as the Phoenicia Bucktail, which according to Van Put is an adaptation of the Black Ghost. The third fly, which Ray Bergman also credits to the Esopus, is the Brown and White Bucktail.

A cursory review of angling literature suggests a few other favorite bucktails were fished in the western Catskills. In *Catskill Flytier*, Harry Darbee wrote that the Black and White Bucktail was a "real killer on the Beaverkill and Delaware," and he included this fly as one of Darbee's deadly dozen. Eric Leiser's book *The Dettles* mentions two: the Ken Lockwood, plus a Red-and-White Bucktail, not to forget Leiser's own Llama, tied with woodchuck guard hairs.

I'm not sure how many fly fishers still toss bucktails these days, but they have their place among every serious angler's flies. I find sparsely tied bucktails in small sizes great late-season fish locators when fished along undercut banks and deadfalls. And come November, there's nothing quite as magical as the Mickey Finn, made popular by John Alden Knight.

Here is one of the bucktails associated with the Esopus Creek, the Phoenicia Bucktail. The one pictured here was tied by Ed Van Put, and a photograph of it appears in his *Trout Fishing in the Catskills*.

The Phoenicia Bucktail

Hook: Standard streamer hook,
size 8

Thread: Black

Tail: Double section of dark
yellow wool

Rib: Gold tinsel

Body: Black silk, dressed heavy

Wing: White bucktail

Cheeks: Jungle cock (optional)



Tied by Ed Van Put Photo: Ed Ostapczuk

Looking Back Upstream



Remembering

Several prominent fly tyers and members of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild have passed away recently. Here, following excerpts from their published obituaries, those who knew them reminisce about those who have passed on.

Ralph S. Graves of Roscoe, NY, a retired building maintenance mechanic for AT&T in Queens, NY, died Saturday, July 5, 2014, at the Sullivan County Adult Care Center in Liberty, NY. He was 74. The son of the late Herbert Spencer and Muriel Hart Graves, he was born February 19, 1940, in Abington, PA. Ralph Graves was interred with military honors be in Riverview Cemetery, Roscoe, NY. Memorial contributions may be made to the American Cancer Society 95 Schwenk Drive, Kingston, NY 12401 or to the Catskill Fly Fishing Center 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY 12758.



The Catskill fly-tying community experienced a great loss with the passing of Ralph Graves. He had been a member of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild since 1994 and played a major role in the fly-tying programs held at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center. In addition, over many years, he tied at most of the major fly-fishing expositions held on the East Coast.

Ralph Graves lived for many years in Bronxville, NY, working for AT&T. He was a veteran of the U.S. Navy.

Ralph began tying flies in his teens. His first fly tying book was the *Noll Guide to Trout Flies and How to Tie Them*, which referred to the fly tying of Jim Deren. He first came to fish the Catskills as a “weekender,” driving up from Bronxville. He met his wife, Theresa, in the early 1970s when he was lodging at the Beaverkill Sportsman, which was run by Marge Renner. Theresa was employed there at the time.

Ralph tied commercially for much of his adult life. He tied for the Dettles, beginning in the 1980s. Joe Fox told me that Ralph would “appear” at the Dettles’ shop sporadically with flies to sell. They always purchased them. Joe thought that Ralph mainly tied wet flies and nymphs for the Dettles. Ralph “retired” to Roscoe, NY, on a full-time basis in 1989. He subsequently opened the Old Glory Fly Shop in 1992, located right next to the Rockland House.

Though Ralph was mainly a Beaverkill and Willowemoc guy, I remember him talking of fishing the Croton system, obviously a much shorter ride from Bronxville. Unfortunately, he had to stop fishing his favorite rivers in 2006 due to declining health.

Many of us knew Ralph for his work with wet flies. Over the years, he worked on development of some “fancy” patterns. He tied large wet flies that reflected the flags of various nations, including Ireland, Italy, and Canada. In 1984, Ralph presented one of these “fancy” flies, Old Glory, a representation of the U.S. flag, to President Jimmy Carter, who had come to the area to fish.



In the 1970s, Ralph became quite skilled in macro photography. He used this technique to take detailed pictures of mayflies and other aquatic insects. Eric Leiser and Larry Solomon made use of some of these photos in their book *Caddis and the Angler*.

One of the highlights of his fly-tying experience was to have gone to England. He shared with me the fond memories he had of spending time there in the company of the well-known British fly tyer Oliver Edwards.

Many of us who attended the annual Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Rendezvous remember Ralph's roosters, which he brought with him to the event. He raised these birds for a number of years, both for the feathers and for the eggs.

Ralph struggled with health issues for many years. And even though he often voiced complaints, he bore this hardship courageously. Conversations with him were often lively, sprinkled throughout with humor.

Ralph was one of those fortunate individuals who for many years was able to live in a community among many like-minded people, through his efforts making a significant contribution to the craft he loved and at the same time really enjoying it all. We will miss him.

—*Bill Leuszler*

The unofficial "mayor" of Roscoe, NY, renowned fly tyer Ralph Graves, passed away this past July 5th. *Ralphie*, as he was universally known, had a wry sense of humor and a slow delivery of a joke . . . or a fly order, as he did indeed tie in slo-mo! He goes waaaay back and used to attend the old Sportsman Shows in Boston alongside classic rod maker and mentor Vince Cummings at the Hynes Auditorium. He owned the teeny-weeny Old Glory Fly Shop, named after his signature fly creation, the Old Glory, tied with married wings in red, white, and blue; he also did a Canadian version adorned with a maple leaf. The fly-tying gentry of Roscoe would gather in his shop to watch Ralph wind a hackle and catch the ballgame. Ralph and his tying cohort, Dave Brandt, were not above some hi-jinx out on the fly fishing show circuit, too. It has been said that sometimes the best fishing is "up the river and around the bend." So have a safe trip there, Ralph. If you see Vince, Poul, Lee, Walt, Winnie, Harry, or Elsie, say Hi! to 'em for me, will ya?

—*Howie Strathie*

Carl S. Bradley, age 79, formerly of Stoughton, Wisconsin, passed away peacefully on Thursday, July 17, 2014. Carl Bradley was born on September 23, 1934, and raised in Gallupville, NY. He moved to Schenectady as a teenager and was a graduate of Mont Pleasant High School, class of 1952.

An over-the-road truck driver, Carl relocated to Stoughton in 1975. His love of the outdoors, especially camping, hunting, and fishing became a lifelong passion. He became an avid fly fisherman, fly tyer, deer hunter, and upland bird hunter. He developed a deep fondness for German short-haired pointers, especially Pepper and Reba, who were champions in his kennel.

Carl rose to be recognized as one of the premier deer-hair fly-tying masters in the world. He was a member of both the Southern Wisconsin Chapter and the Albany Clearwater Chapter of Trout Unlimited, devoting countless hours to habitat restoration and promoting the art of fly fishing. He was recognized for his involvement with a program to introduce fly fishing to special-needs children. Carl designed a deer-hair perch fly that is on display in the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum in Livingston Manor,

NY. He built beautifully crafted landing nets and fly rods with great passion and spent many hours streamside, hoping to catch a trophy.



Carl Bradley made his mark tying the big, deer-hair flies of the bass fisher. He also tied many standard patterns for his fishing, and of course, some well-known Catskill trout patterns, such as the Rat-Faced McDougall and the Black-Nosed Dace call for deer hair, as does the Muddler Minnow, but Carl was best known for his skill in barbering bass bugs—spinning, packing, stacking deer hair for various mouse, frog, minnow, and other patterns.

Carl was a member of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild for many years, even though that may have been because I talked him into joining. I had lots of time to coax him, because he, Bob Mead, and I traveled together for many years doing many of the fly-fishing shows around the country. We were often referred to (in a friendly way, I hope) as the Three Stooges. I don't know how that got started, but I do know that we tied a lot together, and every time I watched him, I learned more about tying. I have many of Carl's creations in my own collection today, and they're still the best hair flies I have kickin' around my tying area.

In recent years, Carl slowly became unable to tie anymore, but still enjoyed reminiscing about tying sessions past: what he had learned from Chris Helm, some of the outrageous situations we'd been in, and some of the great tyers we had met and with whom we had shared a few patterns or pints.

About five years ago, he handed me a fifty-dollar bill for five years' membership in the guild, the only person who's ever done that. Carl's son Doug once said that we've all got some great "Carl stories" to tell, and those stories will now be what we remember him by. Carl Bradley was a good pal, a good pool player, and a really good fly tyer . . . he will be missed.

—*Dave Brandt*

Larry Duckwall passed away suddenly on August 27, 2014. Born in Johnstown on September 15, 1937, he spent his youth in Downsville, where he lived with his grandparents, George and Mabel Odwell. He graduated from Downsville High School in 1955, then from Hartwick College in 1963. Larry was a science teacher in Mount Upton, Andes, and South Dayton, NY. He was dearly loved by his students, many of whom remained lifelong friends. While an educator at Pine Valley Central, he was a wrestling coach and official. After retiring from teaching, he became the southern states regional director for Ducks Unlimited. He also had been a petroleum land man in North Dakota and had worked as a salesman for hunting and fishing outfitters. In 2005, Larry and his wife, Joan, retired to Oneonta, NY, where he resided until his death.

Larry was an outdoorsman in every regard. He was an avid hunter and talented fisherman. He was a national bird bander for the Audubon Society and regarded nationally as a gifted fly fisherman and fly tyer. He was asked to spend a month in China to teach local students fly tying as a means for them to earn a living. Larry was also an accomplished musician, singing and playing the trombone and piano.

You did not simply know Larry, you experienced him. He was an amazing character whose sense of humor had no bounds.

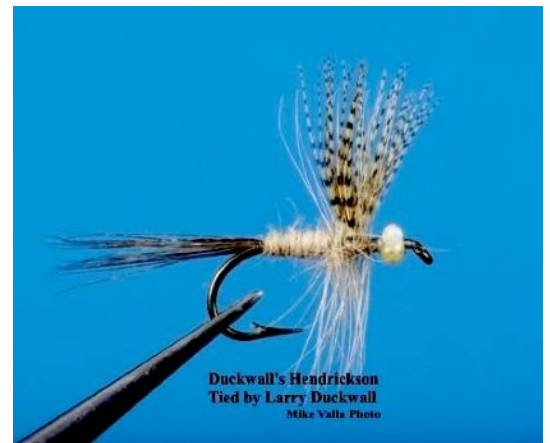
Donations may be made to Healing Waters North Texas in care of Lewis Duckwall, 509 Briar Oaks Drive, Lake Dallas, TX 75065.



We've lost yet another Catskill fly-fishing personality—Larry Duckwall. Those who knew Larry will remember him for his wry sense of humor, his story telling, and his dedication to all things fly fishing. Larry was one of the core group of Catskill personalities. Back in my formative fly-fishing years, guys like Larry kept our youthful, growing enthusiasm for fly fishing alive. Larry gravitated to the Darbee Shop—Elsie (aka “Elsie Belle”) and Harry were close friends. If Larry was present in the shop and you poked your nose inside, he’d give you a quick glance and then continue on with recounting an intriguing experience or tale.

The last time I spoke with Larry was a couple of years ago, when he filled my ears concerning the history of Darbee’s famous Rat-Faced McDougall pattern. Larry was so insistent that the story be told about the Rat-Faced MacDougall/Irresistible tangle that he wanted to be quoted. So his words are right there in *The Founding Flies*. Here’s an excerpt:

Catskill region fly-fishing aficionado Duckwall knew Darbee well and visited him often. They discussed the two flies—the Irresistible and the Rat-Faced McDougall—and how Messinger’s fly influenced Harry’s clipped deer hair body creations. In a recent chat I had with Duckwall, he said, “I knew Harry well, and we talked about his Beaverkill Bastard and the Rat-Faced McDougall. Harry told me that he took the clipped deer hair body idea from Messinger. There was definitely a Messinger influence.”



Larry loved fly tying, and often his sense of humor compelled him to add anatomical parts to classic Catskill patterns. The one above features eyeballs, but use your imagination: other “parts” were sometimes found on his flies, such as the male Red Quill.

—Mike Valla



Summertime Small

We have been fortunate this year in the Catskills with frequent rainfall, cooler-than-normal nighttime temperatures, and streams that have been flowing nicely since April. I cannot

remember summertime conditions this good any time in the last ten or eleven years that I have been fishing there.

The last time I was out, I fished a very public pool near my place. It’s popular with locals, and judging by the red-and-white bobbers dangling above the stream edges, I am sure it gets its share of traffic. The stream this time of year is usually too warm to fish, because the lake above it is shallow, and the water moves slowly through it, but this year, the afternoon water temperature was just 64 degrees, a miracle for late July.

Another saving grace is a tiny tributary that flows cold and clear into the south end of the pool, mixing with the water and likely bringing the temperature down a few degrees downstream. This feeder stream has a flow of maybe 20 cubic feet per second,

but the trout know it well and are always staged around it, both to stay comfortable and to ambush small insects caught in the drift.

I stood above the pool, geared up, rod in hand and tippet pinched between my index finger and the cork grip, looking down. Watching the water below the feeder stream, I saw the first brown appear and quickly take something from just under the surface. Three feet to the left, a slightly bigger trout did the same, again just under the surface.

“Man, this is going to be easy,” I thought and walked the long way around and below them to make an approach from behind. Standing in the water about forty feet closer than my vantage point before, I tried to see some sign of bugs in the drift. I could see nothing, but the fish were still working on something. Feeling bold, I dug out a size 14 Parachute Adams, knotted it to the 5X tippet, and dropped it in the wash.

Immediately, I saw one of them move toward it, then turn away with a splash, obviously not at all fooled. This occurred two more times, and then not one fish came up again.

Humbled, but not whipped yet, I went smaller. Lengthening the tippet with two feet of 6X, I plucked a size 20 something, nothing more than a tiny puff of CDC for a wing around four fibers of tightly twisted rabbit fur for a body and two short Microfibbet tails, split spinner style. Three or four minutes having elapsed, time enough, I hoped, to give the trout a fresh start, I cast to the same general area, and the instant that little puff of fuzz hit the water, I was fast onto a little wild brown a whopping nine inches long. All right!

I caught one more on top, then, when they seemed to ignore the dry, I switched to a size 22 gray nymph with a 1/16-inch brass bead and caught two more right under the surface. Just for experimentation purposes, I tried the Adams again and didn't even get a look. I switched back to the little dry and hooked a fish, then quickly lost it and the last of those flies I had.

I am the first to admit, sometimes even loudly, that I dislike tiny flies. I don't mind tying them, as long as it's fewer than half a dozen, but I dislike fishing them. Gossamer tippets, minuscule hooks — it doesn't



seem right! However, I am sold on them, because there are times when you are flat-out going to get skunked without them. Realizing that, I have started to do some things that have made the transition to summertime small flies simpler and less stressful.

The most important thing when tying these tiny flies is to make them as simple as possible. Thread bodies, tiny (or no) tails, and just the hint of an upright wing are all that's really needed. If ever there is a time when impressionism is important, it's with tiny flies. The dry patterns I tie are so simple that I almost am embarrassed to admit it. The same thing goes for nymphs: nothing more than a lightly dubbed body, a very fine wire rib, and a hint of hare's ear at the thorax. I am not even sure that color matters, because I tie them only in gray, and they work just fine.

For hooks, I feel barbless is a must. These hooks are so tiny that most humans cannot even pick one up, and removing a barbed hook that's size 20 or smaller is almost impossible. I do not like wrestling hooks out of a trout's mouth and would rather leave the fly there to fall out itself than fight it out. A barbless hook makes any fly better, but it really shines with the tiny ones.

The Partridge K1A Vince Marinaro Midge hooks are great for tiny dry flies, but unfortunately, they don't make them anymore. I have tried a few brands, and I favor anything that has a slightly bigger gape. Scud-style hooks work well.

Unless you are a midge-fishing nut, I wouldn't suggest carrying a lot of tiny flies. I simply have them for the odd situation when nothing else will produce—three or four in a few sizes from 18 to 22 in the dries and the same for the nymphs. If you really want to get crazy, I suppose an emerger could work, but again, with flies this small, I don't think an exact or even close representation is needed. If it leaves a tiny footprint on the surface and it's not dragging all over, most likely, the trout will approve.

I use 6X tippets with these flies, too, although someone told me I should go to 7X. I tried 7X once, caught a blade of grass on a back cast, and didn't even feel the tippet break. Had I caught a cobweb, I am sure the spider would have been puzzled at the "fly" that stuck in there. How folks fish 8X I will never know.

There is something about fishing very small flies to small fish in an intimate setting. I picked up a classic graphite rod, one of Sage's LL series, and it's just a dream matched with a long, fine leader and small flies. If you have not tried little flies, don't discount them, as I did all these years. In certain conditions, they work when nothing else will.

For Sale: Ernest G. Schwiebert, *Salmon of the World* (Winchester Press, 1970), belonging to Elsie and Harry Darbee. Number 106 of 750, signed and numbered by the author, with slipcase with a few minor shelf marks. The slipcase contains the 63-page book and 30 color prints of salmon by Ernie ready for framing. \$400. Contact Judie DV Smith at darbee1@juno.com or call (607) 498-6024.



This newsletter depends on all guild members for its content. Items from nonmembers are welcome at the editor's discretion. Without the articles, information, for-sale or want ads, cartoons, newsworthy information, and whatever else is interesting and fun that members submit, this newsletter simply becomes a meeting announcement. Send submissions to Bud Bynack, budbynack@verizon.net or 69 Bronxville Road, Apt. 4G, Bronxville, NY 10708, (914) 961-3521.