

“Expert explains Tick bite-ology”

By Dotti Farrington

A tick expert has initiated a Tick Awareness Day for Rhode Island on June 3, and at Monday's Town Council meeting, he offered to bring some of his assistants to Jamestown that day for an educational program outlining how to help fight ticks here on the island.

Dr. Thomas Mather, an authority on tick-borne diseases at the University of Rhode Island, extended the invitation during his presentation on “tick bite-ology” to the Town Council and about 40 residents at the meeting.

The invitation was extended specifically to homeowners willing to hire Bartlett Tree Services, at a fee not discussed, to spray their yards with a tick fungicide repellent. The role of Mather and his staff would be to provide before-and-after analysis free of charge as part of one of the research programs he operates at URI. “There are no promises. We know it does chase the (adult) ticks away, but we do not know yet if it affects the larvae,” Mather said. “It is a way to help do research that might benefit areas affected by ticks,” he added.

Mather said he uses some pamphlets in his programs to try to educate the public, but he has become convinced that few people use the printed information. “People don't take action even if they read the pamphlet. They are not a useful public health strategy,” he said. He has found that people are more likely to act after a demonstration, best viewed within their own neighborhoods, where they share information and encouragement with neighbors, Mather noted. That is the approach of the program he is offering to Jamestown residents.

Property owners interested in hosting a program on June 3 for at

least a dozen neighbors are asked to contact Town Administrator Bruce Keiser by Monday, May 15, to make arrangements. He said the number of demonstrations that can be scheduled will be limited by staff availability.

Precautions needed

The information Mather shared this week focused on how to avoid ticks and the Lyme disease they spread on the island and elsewhere. He suggested that individuals and property owners are not doing as much as they can to avoid the disease. His talk Monday night evolved out of efforts by town officials to find ways to reduce the island's deer population. Mather emphasized that people must protect themselves against Lyme disease by

protecting themselves and children, their yards and their pets. He reported statistics that showed that use of existing protection methods are not used effectively. The very effective technique of tucking pants' legs into socks before walks in woods or even around homes is not followed, he said. “It's just not in style,” Mather said. People also do not use the daily routine of looking for and removing ticks that do attach themselves to people, children, and pets, he added.

He described the procedure for removing the ticks, with sharp tweezers, explaining that ticks removed within 24 hours cause no harm, but those attached more than 48 hours transmit disease. “That's the importance of the daily check,” he noted. People in tick-infested areas must do the daily exam, but they do not need to go to a doctor whenever they find the imbedded insects, Mather said.

The scientist detailed the overlapping life cycles of ticks, which

are active now through the summer. He pointed out that the use of tick repellents on clothing is very cost effective, but it is used by less than a quarter of people wanting to protect themselves. “Spraying at least shoes and socks is a good start” at self-protection, he said.

New resource

Mather also told his audience about the development of a new Web site intended to help property owners, identified by exact neighborhoods, get detailed information about spraying and fighting ticks by other means as well. The Web site is in development and is expected to be operating later this month. The Web address is: www.TickEncounter.org.

Mather explained that deer carry deer ticks that are infected with the Lyme disease bacteria by rodents, especially white-footed and deer mice. A cotton ball treatment for the rodents is being tested under a \$950,000 grant to URI, and a treatment to kill ticks on deer at feeding stations is in its second year of study, Mather said. “It's too soon to know if it is helpful,” he noted.

The URI professor said that incorrect use of spray repellents for yards by homeowners is a waste of effort. He urged using professionals to do the work. He said that efforts to teach people how to properly apply repellents have so far not been effective.

Mather is a professor of medical and veterinary entomology at URI, where he has developed several projects on tick population suppression and transmission dynamics of tick-borne diseases. He has been specializing in Lyme disease and strategies to control ticks for more than 10 years, working with health officials, industrial partners, and homeowners. His newest programs center on landscape techniques using geographic information systems or GIS.

As director of URI's Center for Vector-Borne Diseases, Mather co-ordinates a multi-disciplinary approach that is being used worldwide in studying and con-

trolling diseases. His research is also contributing to efforts to find a vaccine to prevent Lyme disease. Mather is working with a team that has led URI to becoming a leader in training engineers

for the global marketplace and a national model for creating a multi-disciplinary doctoral program.

Scholarships available from RI Foundation

The Association of Former Legislators Scholarship Fund at the Rhode Island Foundation is seeking applications from students with a history of substantial voluntary involvement in community service for one of five \$1,500 scholarships it will award this year.

Created by the 28-year-old Rhode Island Association of Former Legislators, the fund requires applicants to be Rhode Island residents and high school seniors who intend to attend col-

lege or other post-secondary educational institution. Selection also will be based on financial need and academic excellence. Scholarships will be awarded in memory of the Honorable Florence K. Murray, who represented Newport from 1948 to 1956 in the Rhode Island State Senate and was the first woman elected to the General Assembly.

For detailed information and an application, visit the Rhode Island Foundation Web site at www.rifoundation.org or send a self-addressed envelope to: Libby Monahan, The Rhode Island Foundation, One Union Station, Providence, RI 02903, indicating the name of the scholarship. Application deadline is June 1.

Scholarships for jewelry education offered

The MJSA Education Foundation Jewelry Scholarship Fund at the Rhode Island Foundation is accepting scholarship applications from students enrolled in tool making, design, metals fabrication, or other jewelry-related courses of study at accredited colleges, universities, or nonprofit technical schools in the United States.

Criteria for the awards, which range from \$500 to \$2,000, include course of study, career objectives, samples of work where appropriate, financial need, jewelry industry experience, academic achievement, and recommendations.

For detailed information and an application, visit the scholarships section of the Rhode Island Foundation Web site at www.rifoundation.org or send a self-addressed envelope to: Libby Monahan, The Rhode Island Foundation, One Union Station, Providence, RI 02903, indicating the name of the scholarship. The application deadline is June 1.

Volunteer drivers for cancer patients sought

One of the biggest challenges facing cancer patients can be getting to and from their medical treatment facilities.

Lack of transportation is a major problem for thousands of cancer patients, many of whom require daily or weekly treatments, often over a period of months. Many often lack any transportation or simply do not feel well enough to drive.

The American Cancer Society's Road to Recovery program offers free transportation for cancer patients. With the high demand for rides in Rhode Island, the Society has a critical need for local volunteers who can donate both their time and the use of their personal vehicle to drive patients to and from treatment. As American Cancer Society Road to Recovery volunteers, drivers tell us what times are best for them. Their availability is matched with the needs of patients who call requesting transportation.

“Volunteer drivers can make a difference in the lives of cancer patients, whether it's once or twice a month or twice a week,” said Deborah Smith, Rhode Island vice president for Cancer Control for the American Cancer Society. “These volunteer drivers can become an important part in a cancer patient's road to recovery,” she noted.

For more information or to volunteer as a Road to Recovery driver, contact the American Cancer Society's 24-hour information line at 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit the Web site www.cancer.org.

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