

Off the Lake

JUNE 12TH 2009



New life hatches at the Willow

I'd like to tell you a story that today has a happy ending. First though, I have to tell you a little background that unfortunately didn't end happily.

Last spring a Mallard duck hen built a nest in a quiet, seemingly hidden spot just under part of the deck at The Willow. She lined it with down and laid six smooth, speckled eggs. Then she lay down to roost on her nest. The staff noticed her nest and she became a bit of a mascot for everyone, although we were very careful to not intrude on her quiet vigil. The weeks went by and we waited anxiously for the eggs to hatch. Other ducklings were seen all throughout the park, and yet from her nest no ducklings appeared. It became increasingly obvious that something was wrong but she stayed on her nest for weeks still.

No eggs did hatch for her last year and she finally, sadly waddled away.

This spring Peter Siapno, a longtime friend and off & on employee, passed away suddenly. Naturally the Willow family has taken the news hard, and lately the mood has been as subdued as the weather. Pepe's warm humour is missed by all.

This spring also, a mallard hen has nested in the same spot. I don't know why, (after all, don't all ducks look alike?), but we are sure that this is the same girl as last year, back to try again. She has laid another nest of nine eggs. The laying season was delayed due to colder weather and she got a late start it seemed. And we waited, and watched, and waited. And once again it appeared that no eggs would hatch. Some staff researched mallard nesting and incubation and found

that she *was* late, but not as much as we had thought. But days passed and still no ducklings. Our hearts were breaking for her.

This morning six of the nine eggs finally hatched. Their little heads peek out curiously from under their proud mom before she stuffs them away to keep warm. The staff are relieved and overjoyed for her, and us. It's springtime, and life is renewed.

Greg Hanwell



The Mallard Hen roosting on her nest.

Did You Know?

Mallards typically lay a nest of 8-13 eggs. Incubation is usually 27-28 to hatching. The ducklings are able to swim and eat insects right from hatching.