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VHCA Calendar:

**Board and Community
Meetings:**

**Held the first Monday of each
month at 7pm. All held at the
Ponce de Leon Library**

**Planning and Zoning
Meetings:**

**Held the last Wednesday of
each month at 7:30pm. All
held at the Ponce de Leon
Library.**

**Locations of meetings
subject to change.**

President's Address

By Kevin Cronin

Happy New Year! I hope that everyone had a great holiday. I was able to attend the first Menorah lighting in our neighborhood. A crowd of over 200 people gathered along with our mayor, city council president and city council representative, Anne Fauver. This celebration reminded me of our neighborhood's diversity and rich heritage. I look forward to attending this event next year.

On January 5, 2004, Anne Fauver read a proclamation approved by City Council honoring Aaron Gross for his unwavering leadership for many years. Aaron Gross, who died in November, had been a long time resident in Virginia-Highland. There is no way that we could ever capture all that Aaron gave to our community. He has been actively involved in the Virginia-Highland Civic Association and most recently was the NPU Chair for the past four years. Aaron ran Summerfest for many years and helped make Summerfest what it is today! Aside from Aaron's giving to the community, he was a great, kind and caring person. He constantly gave of himself. When the new community sign was installed at the corner of Virginia and North Highland about six months ago, Aaron, though ill, was there to help! He has not only made a difference in our community, he has also touched the hearts of many of our residents through the years. We have established a committee to work on an appropriate way for our community to permanently remember Aaron. To his wife Jo, our hearts go out to you in your loss, and we thank you for sharing him with us for so many years.

I was pleased that the City Council unanimously passed the sewage and water bill so our city can move forward and we can allow Mayor Franklin to focus on more important issues at hand. With the city focusing on fixing its infrastructure, we as a neighborhood can do the same. One significant infrastructure that affects us all is our sidewalks. Whether we like it or not, sidewalks are the responsibility of the property owner. (Yes, absentee landlords, that means you.) But the good news from the Virginia-Highland Civic Association is that we have money to help you fix those sidewalks in front of your home or property that are in need of repair. We have raised our reimbursement policy to 50 percent of the cost of repair, with a maximum reimbursement of \$500 per property. Last year we spent the most ever in VAHI history, a grand total of \$5,877.

Perhaps the sidewalks are fine in front of your house, but your neighbor's sidewalks are in need of repair. We encourage you to talk to those neighbors or property owners about their responsibility. Let them know of the generous reimbursement

(continued on next page)

policy that your civic association provides to all. You can visit our website (www.vahi.org) for details.

Ok, now I hear some of you saying, "This property owner has not taken responsibility for fixing the sidewalks for years!" There is a city ordinance that requires sidewalks to be repaired and this can be enforced. You can call 404-330-6245 for more details. We will also provide a letter that you can use to remind homeowners of their responsibility and share how they can get some free money from the civic association. (See our website for this letter, in mid-February)

Imagine a day in 2004 when you take a stroll through our great neighborhood and you don't have to trip on a bad sidewalk.

I hope to see many of you at the grand opening of the Cunard Memorial Playground on March 28 at 2 pm.

Haspel is Alternate Member of the Board of Directors

Moshe Haspel, an Assistant Professor at Spelman College, was elected alternate member of the Virginia-Highland Civic Association Board of Directors during the September elections. A first-term board member, he is particularly interested in helping residents improve their houses while respecting the rights of their neighbors, the environment, and the historic character of our community. His volunteer work includes pro bono research projects for Atlanta non-profits. He can also be found working the Summerfest 5k each year. Moshe and his wife, Rebecca Baggett, first met at the Virginia-Highland Running Club and have lived in Virginia-Highland since 1998.

Parking and Transportation Are Major Issues For the Business Community

By Tinka Green

The New Year finds us still facing the prospect of permit parking for St. Louis Place and St. Charles Place. The residents on those two streets have legitimate concerns when they try to find parking spaces on the street on the busy evenings of Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The businesses in that same area have legitimate concerns when they are faced with the lack of parking for their customers if those two streets enact permit parking for residents only. We all recognize the shortage of parking spaces for our popular area and we all recognize that viable businesses have increased the desirability of living in this area. The city must assume some of the responsibility for granting variances providing parking without proper counting of the spaces available. Some spaces have been counted more than once and this has been going on for so long that trying to maneuver through the paper work, grandfathering, customs, requirements, emotions, wants and needs has so far defeated a complete resolution. But the Virginia-Highland Business Association is trying. We have identified approximately fifty unused parking spaces and the Atlanta Department of Transportation has agreed that they are suitable and will be stripping any day.

The Atkins Park businesses have banded together and will provide periodic patrols during the busy nights and will pick up trash on those mornings, relieving noise and messes for those residents.

Requests for two taxi stands for our neighborhood are going through the proper channels and are expected to be granted within sixty to ninety days. Discussions



with MARTA are on-going with the hope of having zone rates in place and shuttle buses traveling from downtown hotels and convention centers through our area on a timely and affordable basis and encouraging our residents to ride MARTA also.

Anything we can think of to get visitors and residents of our neighborhood, out of their cars and onto their feet, into buses or taxis and still patronizing our businesses will be positive.

The VHBA has legitimate concerns, too. Atkins Park residents, with the exception of one house in all ninety residences, have driveways and/or garages for their private parking. This is not true for all of Virginia-Highland, with its many apartment dwellers, but if all streets became permit-parking areas, our businesses couldn't survive. We must have thoughtful balance. We have become part of a greater city with the dilemmas of sophisticated and cosmopolitan intown living. Solutions for the greater good can be identified by our working together with some smiling and laughter thrown in. I know you want that, too.

Our neighborhood is a fun place to live. Having a variety of shopping, eating and drinking establishments and also being able to buy groceries, legal drugs, have our clothes cleaned, see doctors, lawyers, dentists, movies, and friends makes this place fun. It is important for us all to be involved, stay informed and contribute our time and efforts to keep it all fun.

Tinka Green is President of the Virginia-Highland Business Association. She can be contacted at 404-817-8102.



Artist's rendering of the renovation at Inman Middle School on Virginia Ave.

What's Happening at Inman Middle School?

By Liz Coyle

If you've driven along Virginia Avenue in the past six months, you've noticed major construction activity at Inman Middle School. Inman's \$13 million expansion and renovation, scheduled for completion in July 2004, includes the addition of more than 30,000 square feet and renovation of the existing 90,000 plus square feet of building space. The construction and renovation are part of Atlanta Public Schools' long-term Build Smart strategy to upgrade and expand school facilities to create ideal learning environments. This investment in Virginia-Highland's neighborhood middle school will result in:

Smaller class-sizes. The school population is expected to increase to 780 students (up slightly from the current 750), but twelve new classrooms are being added.

New music and art suites. Expanded class space and improved facilities for band, chorus, orchestra and visual arts are included in the addition.

New, expanded media center. Three times the size of the old one.

Technology learning center. Combined with the new media production facilities.

Enlarged kitchen and cafeteria. For the students plus a new staff dining room.

A full-sized stage. Added to the gymnasium to allow

for whole school assemblies and seating capacity up to 800.

Refurbished athletic fields. Football/soccer and baseball fields will be restored at the end of construction. Yes, the portables and tent are coming down!

Renovated auditorium (site of VHCA's annual meeting). Equipped with a working sound system, new HVAC mechanical systems and will still be available for community meetings.

Since the start of the school year, two grade levels and the administration have been housed in the 1922 portion of the building, with one grade in the portable classrooms and the P.E. classes under the tent. In April over Spring Break, everyone in the 1922 building will move into the new building space so that renovation of the old building can begin and be complete before the start of the 2004-05 school year in August. The school parking lot, drop-off lane and new lobby entrance (currently the major construction zone) will be in use beginning in mid-April. At that point, the field of dreams at the corner of Virginia and Park Drive will become the main staging area for construction equipment as renovation of the old building begins, continuing through August.

Liz Coyle, a Virginia-Highland resident, is Renovation Liaison for Inman Middle School.

Remember to Recycle

By Nan Hunter

I'm back...to asking my Virginia-Highland neighbors to recycle more now than ever. The main landfill for the city is about to shut down. Recycling must become a way of life in order for us to do our part in sustaining our planet. Just as our individual vote counts during an election, so does our individual effort at reducing trash.

Here are the three R's of recycling:

Reduce: Carry your own bags into stores. No need to take a new bag when you have tons which are perfectly usable already. Better yet, refuse a bag when you have an easy item to carry that is already secure. Don't buy overly packaged items such as Lunchables. They are too full of fat and calories anyway.

Reuse: Start with bags and then progress to manila folders and cartons and wrapping paper.

Recycle: As I walk my dog around the neighborhood on Monday morning, I notice so many overflowing Herbies. Our household pays a minimum amount each month to have all of our paper, cardboard and other plastics picked up every Saturday. We break down every bit of paper and place it into huge blue bags supplied by this company. Please call me at 404-875-1630 and I will give you their name. They would be happy to pick up your stuff, too.

Remember, buy recycled, too. The toilet paper and paper towels are really just fine.

Virginia-Highland Tour of Homes Planned

A Virginia-Highland Civic Association Board committee is making plans to host a home tour later this year. If you are interested in featuring your home on the tour, please send your name, address, telephone number, email, brief description of your home, and why your home should be included on the tour to: tour@vahi.org. Deadline for submissions is February 28, 2004.

Check out the Virginia-Highland Civic Association's web site for community events, to add your name to our mailing list or to become a member:

www.vahi.org

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Why Cities Don't Matter and Why Virginia-Highland Does

By Chip Gallagher

I had a senior member of the U.S. House of Representatives come and talk to my undergraduate sociology of race and ethnic relations class at Georgia State University about the civil rights movement. The congressman gave a thoughtful, fire and brimstone account of what it was like to march, protest and engage in acts of civil disobedience in order to change the racial status quo. As I walked the congressman across campus I asked him if he had considered a run for the U.S. Senate. He looked at me and smiled, a smile I am now convinced was a polite response to the naivete of my question, and explained that he could never carry the state. As a black politician and a hero to many he would likely carry the city of Atlanta but it would be unlikely that he could carry the state. Race and politics are intertwined throughout the nation. As of 2004 there are no blacks in the U.S. Senate.

Virginia-Highland, like many in-town (not to be confused with inner-city) neighborhoods will weather the fiscal storm that is now covering the state. The reason is the level and intensity of social organization in our community. When sociologists speak of social organization they refer to the ability to control all aspects of a neighborhood and to achieve specific outcomes in the face of opposition. The fight over the Cotton Club's attempt to move into North Highland near St. Charles is one such example of drawing on informal and formal networks to protect the neighborhood's interests. Increased traffic, parking and noise issues, public drunkenness: all these concerns galvanized the existing board and dozens of concerned neighbors to mobilize. Social organization works when a dense web of community networks exist that can effectively be tapped to jumpstart a project or squash a situation that is detrimental to the community.

“While our community has little control over the future of our sewer system or trash pick-up, we are able to control large chunks of our own destiny.”

My larger point, however, is what race and politics means for communities like Virginia-Highland in cities like Atlanta. You see cities, in a political sense, increasingly do not matter (the exception being global cities like New York, London and Hong Kong). Cities no longer matter because it is now the suburbs that deliver governors, senators and the president (absent a Supreme Court intervention) to their respective offices. President Clinton was the first president to be elected from the suburbs. The suburbs, on average, have more money, a larger and more reliable voting base and tend to be more homogenous a population in terms of race and class. The bottom line is you hunt where the ducks are. It is also the American way that you reward the constituents who voted for you by bringing state and federal pork (prosciutto for some) to those communities, typically at the expense of those from the “other” side of town or the state. Cities around the country are hurting as they lose their tax base, are crippled financially by an ailing infrastructure and an inability to fund a host of social services.

While our community has little control over the future of our sewer system or trash pick-up, we are able to control large chunks of our own destiny. The fantastic fund raising efforts by the Morningside PTA, the new Cunard Memorial Playground in John Howell Park, additional police patrols from Ponce to Amsterdam, tree and plant escapes throughout the islands in Virginia-Highland, the revenues generated by Summerfest and the community updates provided by this publication collectively point to a high degree of social organization.

It doesn't hurt that over 40 percent of people in Virginia-Highland have a college degree and 32 percent hold a graduate or professional degree. Nor does it hurt that median family income is \$102,877. Having extensive aspects of expertise (political, technical, legal) in our community on which to draw on during “battles” and having (semi) deep pockets to fight those battles does allow, to quote Harvard sociologist William J. Wilson, “communities to maintain effective social control and realize their common goals.”

The common adage that “it's not what you know but who you know” is wrong when it comes to maintaining, protecting and safeguarding the interests of your community. It's both “what you know AND who you know” that allows a community to realize its common goals. Communities that lack dense social networks, a “war chest” and a hot line to politicians in the state house and city hall will find themselves severely battered during the fiscal storm we are sailing into. The social organization of Virginia-Highland will allow us to weather the storm.

Chip Gallagher is an associate professor of sociology at Georgia State and a great bread baker.

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Atkins Park Garden Club Celebrates 75th Birthday

By Tinka Green

In February, the Atkins Park Garden Club celebrates its 75th birthday, making it, arguably, the oldest garden club in Atlanta. The members come in all shapes, sizes, colors, and ages. This mixed (up) group doesn't do anything very seriously, including gardening, but we've managed to attain longevity, compatibility, and some measure of social impact.

Since 1929, scrapbooks of the club's activities have been kept and they now reside at the Atlanta Historical Society, available for students of cultural studies. We continue the scrapbook tradition and additional books are added as they are completed. They are pretty much a hoot. You can visit them but they don't leave the Society without a fee payment for an escort who also provides white cotton gloves for perusal.

That gives you some sense of our importance and, believe me, we relish it. We also relish good refreshments and lots of them. Cheese straws are the mainstay but then, anything goes. One Halloween the eats included black and orange jelly beans, those cheese puffs that stain your hands (I love them), canned shoe string pota-

toes and some wild punch, nonalcoholic, of course, although a stranger would be hard pressed to believe that (our actions can be rather bizarre, too).

There are a few rules – we don't meet in the summer because traditionally it was just too hot before air-conditioning, and no meeting in December (too much to do during the holidays). Babies are always welcome and children who are well-behaved and will eat anything without complaint can join us. Males can be members but so far none has been so daring. Membership used to be limited to residents of Atkins Park but we've branched out and even my Mom, who lives in Albuquerque, considers herself a member.

Some of our members are pretty smart about gardening and some aren't. Anyone who has seen my yard knows where I stand. But we're all enthusiastic. We've just published a cookbook. The recipes haven't been tested but have been lovingly prepared and you can pretty much depend on their being good. The book is little and has what I consider an artistic cover (the artist being me) and I have to say makes a nice gift. It costs \$17 and you can call me (at 404-817-8102) to put in an order. Your little old aunt in Peoria will love it.



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The Southeastern Flower Show Provides Great Landscaping Ideas

By John Wolfinger

Don't forget to visit our number one Atlanta gardening event of the year, The Southeastern Flower Show, which will be February 18 through 22 at the World Congress Center in the new hall "C" on the Northside Drive side of the building. The proceeds from this spectacular show benefit the Atlanta Botanical Gardens, which we are so fortunate to have as a next-door neighbor.

If you are contemplating having your garden areas professionally re-done, the flower show gives you a chance to see the work of dozens of area landscape and hardscape designers and contractors all in one place. Naturally, the biggest companies can afford to produce the biggest displays, but don't overlook the smaller firms either. Take your camera to the show to record all the ideas that you like, ask lots of questions, and take lots of notes. Ask about fees and charges, satisfaction and plant guarantees, estimates, scheduling of work sessions, and customer references (preferably work that has been done in Virginia-Highland where the lot and house sizes will be similar to yours).

After the show, drive around the neighborhood, see where the landscaping trucks are parked, and inspect what they are doing. Ask your neighbors if they know of people who have had good experiences with gardening firms. Put all your notes together along with your clippings from the newspaper, garden and shelter magazines, and garden catalogues, decide how much you want to spend and start calling for consultations. Be sure you clearly communicate in your interviews and make sure they understand your vision of what you want to achieve. You'll soon be able to sort out the ones who understand your wants and desires, and who can work within your

budget limitations. If you can't afford all the things you want to do at once, ask how you can set up a stage-by-stage program to work toward your goal over a stated period of time. If you have time, perhaps you can do some of the labor yourself. Finally, make sure all parties sign a written agreement before any checks are written. Make sure they have a current certificate of insurance coverage and a statement in writing that they will pay all suppliers and subcontractors, protecting you from a mechanic's lien.

With the huge amount of evergreen plants that are suited to our Zone 7 growing area, no Virginia-Highland garden has to look dead and barren in the winter. Take a look at the following addresses to see how fresh and green our gardens can be in winter. Homes at 961, 965 and 971 Adair Avenue all have a fresh, green and welcoming look in their front gardens. The entry garden at 983 Rupley Drive is a welcoming collection of statuary and containers planted with greenery. The home at 957 Virginia Avenue has a beautiful sweeping border of winter annuals backed with evergreen perennials, and is interspersed with deciduous oak-leaf hydrangeas that have interesting naked branches. The front walled-in garden at 971 Rupley Drive has a wonderful collection of evergreen shrubs, trees and vines with a striking palette of foliage color even in January.

If you have never been to Hellebore Days at Piccadilly Farm at 1971 Whipoorwill Road in Bishop, Georgia, you need to treat yourself to a nice country drive out east towards Athens. The dates this year are March 5 and 6 from 10am to 4pm. They have a lot of unusual perennials for sale in addition to more hellebore than you have ever seen in one place before. They will be in full bloom, so you can see what color you are buying, and the prices are very reasonable. It's well worth the trip.



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Anatomy of a Property Tax Assessment Challenge

By Anonymous

DISCLAIMER: I am neither a tax attorney nor an accountant and do not claim to be an authority on this subject. The purpose of this article is to share the experience that I had with the Fulton County Tax Commissioner's office.

Like many other Americans, I took advantage of 40 year low interest rates in the mortgage industry and bought my first home in 2002. Having lived in Virginia-Highland for five years, I could not stomach the thought of leaving this vibrant neighborhood and living somewhere where I would be forced to frequent Atlanta's congested highways. I had spent many months jogging through the neighborhood picking up "FOR SALE" flyers, reading the "ZAC Report" and scouring the Internet for a cheap house in 30306. I had even hired a real estate agent, a 20+ year veteran of the area and a referral from a close friend. I had done significant research and my agent had been running MLS queries for weeks.

You may want to put down your coffee before I tell you what happened next. Believe it or not, I found a 2br/2ba house on Cresthill Avenue, one of two brick streets left in Virginia-Highland for under \$300,000! In fact, I actually paid \$10,000 less than that. As you can imagine, it needed significant renovation.

“I felt like a defense lawyer, gathering evidence and putting together my exhibits. I had practiced my “closing arguments” and could picture the jubilation from the gallery as I rested my case.”

After many months of inhaling paint stripper and sawdust, I began to make significant progress on restoring the house to a livable state. After about 235 trips to Highland Hardware and Home Depot, I had exhausted my renovation funds and reduced my post-work routine to mowing the lawn, loading the dishwasher and folding clothes (a sharp contrast to my previous routine of hanging drywall and stripping paint).

Since I had purchased my house in August 2002, my property tax was included in the closing statement and hence, something I did not have to deal with for 2002. Further, I was pleased that my taxes were somewhat reasonable for this area – approximately \$3,500. However, 2003 would prove to be a different story. Like most Fulton County residents, I received my property tax assessment and appraisal early in the year. I was shocked to have learned that my appraisal by the county had gone from \$329,000 to \$358,000! Not only had I paid \$39,000 less than the 2002 appraisal, but it was now \$68,000 higher than what I paid! Most people know that

the appraisal value determined by the county is almost always less than what a homeowner originally pays initially and is always less than the fair market value of the home. It's very similar to the ad valorem tax we pay on our automobiles and other personal property. Most of us have an appraised value much less than the true value of our cars.

Needless to say, I was furious and determined to fight this appraisal. Most homeowners do not appeal their tax appraisal because in nearly every case, the tax appraisal is less than the fair market value (and we all know how much renovation this neighborhood has been experiencing). Hence, the last thing most homeowners want is a visit from a Fulton County tax property appraiser. So, you might be saying, “he's right, why should I keep reading this article”, but it may pay to appeal anyway. Here's my account of the appeal process.

Step 1 This process is quite simple. After receiving your tax assessment/appraisal, you simply indicate that you disagree and you write in the value you believe your home is worth. In addition, you are instructed to include any “supporting documentation to your claim” such as a closing statement, appraisal, etc. Sounds easy? It is. I simply photocopied my closing statement and appraiser's

report, sent in my original tax assessment and wrote in my perceived value of \$290,000. I thought my case was pretty good, as it was clearly stated on the closing statement the amount for which I had paid in an arm's length transaction.

Approximately four to six weeks later, I got a letter indicating that my appraisal was unchanged! I was shocked. Without having seen my house, the county arbitrarily assigned a value to my home of \$68,000 MORE than what I paid! They could've at least thrown me a bone and met me half way. Nope, no change.

Step 2 Regardless of the outcome of STEP 1, homeowners still have the option of appealing to the Fulton County Board of Equalization. Having a strong background in finance and accounting, I was determined to appeal the appraisal. The only step in the process is formally notifying the county that you are appealing the county's appraisal and have agreed to have it determined by an independent board of homeowners within Fulton

County. By now, it is September and the tax bills have already gone out. When your assessment is in appeal, the county will send you a bill for 85% of the appealed value. (So in my case, they assessed taxes on \$304,300). And like many of us, this was paid out of my escrow account held by my mortgage bank.

Step 3 After receiving official notice of my appeal date, I had a few weeks to put together my "defense". I felt like a defense lawyer, gathering evidence and putting together my exhibits. I had practiced my "closing arguments" and could picture the jubilation from the gallery as I rested my case.

To my disappointment, the actual process is a bit more subdued. My "trial" was actually held in a small room in the Board of Equalization's office in downtown. I was greeted by three board members (all of whom were residents of Fulton County and not employees of the tax commissioner). I was given the option of presenting my case first or having the county proceed. TIP: Let the county go first: their case is generally going to be a superficial comp analysis on the recent home sales in your neighborhood. I actually used the county's comp analysis to help my case further by pointing out that the appraised value on every house used in the county's comp analysis was actually less than the sales price. The county-appointed appraiser did not have a response to my inquiry on why my house had an appraised value of 20% higher than the sales price, when every house used in her analysis had an appraised value of 20% lower than the sales price. Now to be fair, I will admit that there are not many homes in Virginia-Highland under \$300,000, but should I be punished for finding a good deal on a fixer-upper? I think not.

After wooing the board with my well-thought out valuation analysis and submitting numerous documents, I was instructed that my time was up and I would be notified in 10 days on the decision. Before leaving I had to submit a value. I said I paid \$290,000 and at a minimum would like the value to be no higher than \$290,000.

Ten days later, I got a letter with an appraisal of \$329,000. They had basically met me half way and reappraised it at the 2002 value. If you've made it this far, here's the payoff. Since I went through the appeal process, my tax assessment is locked-in for two years. That's right, my taxes for 2004 and 2005 will be the same as they were in 2003. This loophole was pointed out to me by one of the Fulton County Tax Commissioner's customer service employees, a gem I felt worthy of sharing with my fellow neighbors

FIRST PERSON is an occasional column written by a Virginia-Highland resident. If you have an interesting story to tell, submit your article to editor@vahi.org.

In Short...

1) If you appeal your tax assessment the first time, it may go down. If you are happy with the appeal, you should consider taking appealing to the Board of Equalization anyway. Why? Because after the Board determines your final valuation, it's locked-in for two more years.

2) If you do appeal, be sure to ask the Tax Commission for your final bill. Remember, you only pay 85% of the assessed value when you are under appeal. It is your responsibility to pay your final bill, not your mortgage company's. I had to personally call the county to have them send me an additional tax bill for the amount I owed. I don't get the sense they would have proactively sent this to me.

3) One of the reasons the county claimed they did not reappraise my home under the first appeal was because they believed my sale was considered a "bad sale". A bad sale is defined as "not representative of a property transaction for a specific area". Confused? So was I. Apparently, since I had purchased the home from a developer as opposed to a homeowner, the county did not believe the sale had been completed at arm's length.

Cunard Memorial Playground:

Park Cleanup on Saturday, March 27th; Grand Opening on Sunday, March 28th

By Cynthia Gentry

The new Cunard Memorial Playground in John Howell Park has been bustling with activity since it opened for play on Thanksgiving Day. The community joined together to build the playground in honor of our neighbors, Lisa, Max and Owen Cunard, who died last summer when a tree fell on their car. On November 15, over 400 dedicated volunteers built the playground, installed the memorial garden and gave the park the best facelift it has had in years! Watching so many people work wholeheartedly to help their community was a beautiful sight to behold.

If you missed that wonderful day...don't worry... you have another chance to get involved by helping us get ready for the big opening ceremonies event! Here's what's coming up:

In the old playground: New slides, tops and panels will be installed; the city will fix the drainage problems; and the playground will be covered with the same rubber safety ground cover that is in the new playground. The walkway from the playground to DeLeon Street will be replaced with the rubber material as well. The water fountain will be repaired and a doggie water fountain installed. We do not need volunteers for these projects.

Saturday, March 27: Spring cleaning in the park! We'll work all day to get the playground and park in picture perfect shape for the Opening Ceremonies the next day. In the morning we'll form the VaHi Kids' Brigade... KIDS! WE NEED YOU!! You'll polish the playground equipment, rake the leaves, pick up sticks, plant flowers, spread mulch, sweep the walkways. It will be fun...and when you're done, if it's OK with your folks, there might be a little ice cream treat for you. In the afternoon, grownups are needed to wrap things up - pull weeds, edge planting beds, plant shrubs and trees, etc. If you're good we may have ice cream for you, too!

Sunday, March 28: Opening Ceremonies at 2pm in John Howell Park. Join us for this special event as we mark the official opening of the Cunard Memorial

Playground, remember the family we lost and celebrate the community that we have. There will be plenty of food, music, fun and surprises. Mayor Franklin will also be on hand to celebrate. You won't want to miss it.

Watch the Virginia-Highland Civic Association's web site (www.vahi.org) for more detailed information.

Thank you to everyone who has participated in making this playground a reality. In under five months your neighbors have worked together to raise over \$160,000 to create a fun-filled place where families can come together to enjoy each other and this great community of ours. If you would like to participate in the Opening Ceremonies, Kids' Brigade and/or Spring Cleaning events, please email us at playground@vahi.org (or call Cynthia Gentry at 404-853-4878).

Cynthia Gentry is chairperson of the Cunard Memorial Playground Committee.

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Mark your calendars and punch this date in your palm pilot. Virginia-Highland Summerfest will be held on June 5 and 6 this year and we will need volunteers. Visit our website, www.yahi.org in mid February to find out how you can help out.

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Q:

There is some graffiti on the wall and on some signs near my house. How can I remove it?

A:

According to Seth Lynn, who is on the Board of Directors of the Virginia-Highland Civic Association and head of its Graffiti Abatement Committee, nail polish remover is often a good remover of light to medium amounts of graffiti on non-porous surfaces (e.g. glass, most metals). As with any chemical, it should be tested first as it may sometimes also disfigure the original object/design itself. For larger or more resilient graffiti problems, Seth has a supply of more aggressive graffiti removal chemicals at his house that were donated to the Civic Association. According to Seth, these are available for anyone in the neighborhood who would like to use them. Anyone who borrows these chemicals should carefully read and follow the instructions printed on the labels. Seth can be contacted at 404-748-4030.

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