

The Virginia-Highland

VOICE

Spring 2009

Civic Association Acquires Land for Neighborhood Green Space

New Passive Park To Feature Eco-Friendly Rain Garden by: John Becker

On December 4, 2008, the Virginia-Highland Civic Association (VHCA) closed on the purchase of two lots at 1076 and 1082 St. Charles Place, across from Belly on N. Highland Avenue. Formerly the site of a public library, the two lots are presently vacant and the association intends to turn the property into green space to benefit the entire community.

The VHCA will develop the space as an environmentally-friendly passive park and rain garden to support recreation, walking, community gathering and educational programs for neighborhood residents. Located in the heart of the Atkins Park neighborhood, the park will also add value to the many nearby homes and businesses.

Financing for the acquisition came through the Georgia Land Conservation Program (GLCP) Revolving Loan Fund. Thanks to a change in the loan program passed last year by the Georgia Legislature, non-governmental (non-profit) entities are now eligible for this low-cost financing. The VHCA is the first non-profit in the state to be approved for funding under this program. The interest rate is 3%, and the loan term is 15 years.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the purchase of the land was held at the site on Saturday January 10.



In attendance were (left to right in picture above): Curt Soper, GLCP director; Pamela Papner, VHCA board president; Shawna Mahony, resident; Paul Burks, VHCA board member and chair of the purchase initiative; Doris Betz, VHCA communications chair; Anne Fauver, Atlanta City Council member for District 6; Peter Hughes, resident; and Sharon Allen, representative for Fulton County Commissioner Nancy Boxill. Also in attendance, although not pictured, was Marilyn Morton, president of the Atkins Park Neighborhood Association.

"These lots are literally the only potential green space still available in our neighborhood," said Burks. "The future park will provide not only a respite from asphalt and noise, but it will serve as an important citywide demonstration project for storm water management. We are all thrilled that the VHCA was able to acquire this land."

"These residentially-zoned lots on St. Charles Place at N. Highland – now subject to a conservation easement – have been vacant for years, yet the land is in the heart of our community," said Papner. "The VHCA will fund the loan, for which we are very grateful to the GLCP. We look forward to significant community support to pay off the debt, and I'm confident Virginia-Highland residents will rise to the task."

"Our community has always been an involved one," Papner continued, "and I'm confident that, through a series of community fundraising events, we will become the 'success story' contemplated by the GLCP, which recently extended loan funds to local communities to achieve the type of project we envision."

Specifically, the rain garden will be known as a *bioretention demonstration project*. Storm water will be captured on-site, preventing it from reaching storm drains, and native Georgia plants will be installed. Soil and plants will naturally remove pollutants from the storm water. Similar successful green infrastructure projects have been completed in Chicago, Milwaukee, Seattle, Portland, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia.

As a passive park, interactive features such as playground equipment or a basketball court will not be installed, but the area will be re-landscaped to make it more accessible to visitors. Although final plans are yet to be drawn up, features such as pathways, trash cans and seating for visitors will likely be included. No significant installation of hardscape is envisioned and the commemorative bricks (see later in story) will be placed in the park in such a way as to not adversely impact the land's ability to absorb storm water.

Eight-year Va-Hi resident Peter Hughes, an independent civil engineering consultant with experience designing storm water

control solutions, has graciously volunteered his expertise to design the technical aspects of the new park.

"I'm excited and honored to be part of a project that will not only beautify our neighborhood, but also provide a natural gathering spot on this historic library property," Hughes said.

Hughes is looking for a landscape architect who will be equally enthusiastic about the untapped potential of the new park space.

"I encourage anyone interested and qualified to contact the planning committee and not let this rare opportunity to pass you by," he said.

The next step is to develop a comprehensive fundraising plan, which will include making numerous applications for grants, as well as a two-year series of community events to raise capital needed to build the park and pay off the loan. The VHCA will make monthly loan payments until incremental funds can be raised to retire the debt.

According to the loan terms, a final design for the new park must be completed and approved by January 2010, and construction must be completed by January 2011. Papner said that by late summer there should be some proposed designs that can be shared with the community for comment and feedback.

Fundraising is off to a fast start with over \$10,000 having been raised in the first two months since closing on the property through the "Buy a Brick" campaign and other activities. Two events – a holiday party and book sale – were organized by Shawna Mahony and the Atkins Park Neighborhood Association and brought in \$820. A generous \$1,000 donation was received from the Atkins Park Neighborhood Association treasury, another \$2,375 from board member Rob Glancy, and \$2,000 was donated by John and Julie Peak. The civic association greatly appreciates these generous donations. A list of all donors will be published in the next issue of Voice.

Anyone interested in donating to support the new park can "Buy a Brick" or otherwise contribute. Please see page 15 or visit www.vahi.org/newpark.html for more information and for notice of future fund raising activities.

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From the Editor

You can't see it, but the streamers are falling and the bubbly pouring at the virtual offices of your neighborhood newsletter! This issue of Voice is the tenth published since I began serving as editor; the same goes for Preeti Ayyangar, whose design and layout skills give the newsletter its outstanding look and feel.

From our first issue in 2006, we've sought to provide an informative and enjoyable look at the goings-on in our wonderful community. As much as is practical with a quarterly publication, we try to take a timely look at the issues and events impacting life in Virginia-Highland. We couldn't do it without the many folks who contribute content to Voice. We work hard to produce a publication we think everyone in the neighborhood can be proud of and we hope you enjoy the fruits of our labors.

This is the first issue for our new business manager, Nita Luce. When Nita heard we were desperately seeking someone to manage our ad sales, billing and collection duties she graciously volunteered. If your business serves the Virginia-Highland community we encourage you to advertise with us. Voice is mailed to over 2,000 homes and businesses in the Va-Hi area so it would be hard to get a better spend for your advertising dollar. You can reach Nita at businessmanager@vahi.org.

Remember, this is *your* community newsletter. We encourage anyone interested in submitting a story or photo to contact us. Stories should be 5-600 words (about two pages double-spaced) or shorter. We reserve the right not to publish stories that are too long or inappropriate for publication. Photograph submissions should include the date and place the photo was taken, a list of those in the photo, and the photographer's name. A suggested caption would also be helpful. Stories and photos are included as space permits and any stories or photos not used may be held for later publication. For Summer issue stories, please submit a brief synopsis for approval no later than March 27. The copy deadline for our Summer issue is April 20. Please send all stories/photos to editor@vahi.org.

Drop us a line and let us know how we're doing. We hope you enjoy the Spring 2009 issue of Voice. - John Becker

President's Corner

by: Pamela Papner

President, Virginia-Highland Civic Association Board

In the last issue of Voice, I talked about "what a way to end the year!"...and it's true. The VHCA and generous neighborhood volunteers completed some amazing initiatives during 2008:

- **Neighborhood Commercial Zoning** was overwhelmingly approved by NPU-F, passed City Council in December, and is now part of our city's zoning code. This was a two-year effort, achieved because residents and commercial property owners came together to think long-term about preserving all our property values – and the unique brand that is Virginia-Highland. There are arguably no other neighborhoods in Atlanta more worthy of preserving as a pedestrian-friendly village. We thank everyone involved in this initiative, and I hope our community appreciates all the effort this took to achieve.

- **Our New Park:** In our last newsletter, we advised we were "likely" to close on the purchase of the two vacant lots at the corner of N. Highland and St. Charles Place. Well.... we closed! This was another achievement realized as the result of community-minded volunteers working many hours. The VHCA is the first non-profit in the state to receive low-cost loan funds from the Georgia Land Conservation Program for the purchase of green space. But our work has just begun. The civic association will fund the monthly loan payments through proceeds from Summerfest and Home Tour, but we want to pay it down through incremental fundraising efforts as soon as possible. Read John Becker's cover story for more information.

- **We Need Your Involvement:** With all the work that's been done over the past two years, along with the fundraising we have ahead of us for the new park, we need more help. Frankly, many of your Board members and other volunteers are getting a bit burned out. We all have jobs; we all have family. So, for those of you who have reached a point in your life where you can devote some time to "giving back," I hope you will contact me to ask how you can get involved. We need you. Please e-mail me if you want to get involved: ppapner@earthlink.net.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Hats off to Drew Baughman for his piece, Street Smarts (Voice, Winter 2009). I could have written the same piece though I wouldn't have been so nice about it. I have lived in VaHi since 1974 and the problem with joggers, walkers, and strollers in the roadway has become progressively more serious. I do not comprehend the mindset of people who jog four abreast down Amsterdam on Wednesday evenings during rush hour. I do not understand the person who wears dark clothes while running at night in the roadway with ear phones on so he can't even hear the car approaching him in the dark. And I am still flummoxed at the

intelligent people who push their baby strollers into the path of oncoming cars whose drivers are often distracted and speeding. I have honked at them, I have stopped to talk politely to them. No matter – they have yelled at me, cursed me, and told me to mind my own business. Once I was riding my bicycle down University Drive (a very narrow street) and had to swerve to avoid an oncoming car while two women walked abreast in the roadway blocking me. As a result, I hit a parked car. And this is after the sidewalks were put in on University Drive. I regard this behavior as arrogant, self-centered, and uncivil. I would love to see more letters to the editor on this problem. -E. Ellis, Amsterdam Avenue

• **Thank You:** We indeed have many community-minded volunteers who have contributed much this past year, and there are so many others who support these leaders. Please take time to thank these contributors and their teams:

Atkins Park Neighborhood Association: The Atkins Park Neighborhood Association is a group formed by residents of three streets just off N. Highland Ave. (St. Charles, St. Augustine, St. Louis). This group, led by President Marilyn Morton, has always been an active part of our community. The association recently donated \$1,000 from its limited community chest to our new park. In addition, neighbors have been 110% involved in other park fundraising initiatives, raising \$630 at their neighborhood holiday party and \$190 at a book sale last month.

Sandy d'Aprile: Sandy not only represented the civic association without compensation as our real estate agent for the purchase of the new park, she has been instrumental in getting infill zoning regulations passed by the city, and she is a key contributor to the current neighborhood preservation effort.

Peter Bade: Peter is an unsung hero who over many years, along with his "Friends of Orme Park" group, has held workdays to clean up Orme Park and has led many "fun" park-related activities for the community.

Warren Bruno: In addition to his fundraising activities for Inman Middle School, Warren has contributed the Summerfest community dinner for years. Warren attended the ribbon cutting of our new park, and all he could talk about was ways he could help us raise funds for it. Look for Warren to offer up his hot-air balloon for tethered rides to raise more funds!

Lola Carlisle: Lola has worked for many years to improve city zoning regulations for residential infill and is leading the neighborhood grassroots initiative for residential preservation. This initiative will be a major focus for our community in 2009. She has put together a team of volunteers that have contributed significant time to this task, and we thank them all.

Lynn DeWitt: Lynn is a local commercial property owner who has been involved for years not only in our civic association,

but also in the business association. She is always ready to lend a hand and "roll up her sleeves" to contribute.

Peter Hughes: Peter is a civil engineer who lives in the neighborhood and he's donating his expertise (at no cost to the community) to develop the engineering plans we need for our new park.

Judy McCabe-Smith: Judy represented our community for years on the Piedmont Park Conservancy and has been instrumental in achieving the many improvements we will see this year, starting with the Piedmont Park pool and bathhouse renovation. See story on p.14 for details.

Kim Nickels: Kim is a local merchant (Knitch) and former board member who has contributed many hours to Summerfest. This year (her fourth as co-chair), she and Charlie Lefort are leading the charge. This event is our community's primary fundraiser, and she and Charlie plan to take it to the next level this year.


John Peak: John is a former board member who received the community's highest honor last year: the 2008 Aaron Gross Community Service Award. John led the Neighborhood Commercial initiative, and also served as our VHCA Planning Chair. He generously donated his \$1,000 award to our new park. In addition, John and his wife Julie have donated a matching \$1,000 to the park!

Tom Spach: Tom is the leader of the part of our neighborhood impacted by the new development at Callanwolde. He and Jack White are working to minimize the impact to local residents. This is an issue that will require more focus in early 2009.

Jack White: Jack led negotiations with Georgia Power to achieve the comprehensive landscaping for the new substation on Ponce de Leon Place. We had no legal "legs" to stand on in this matter, but Jack and local residents achieved amazing contributions from Georgia Power to improve that area - the best substation "screening" to-date in the city.

Voice: I'm sure readers have recognized over the past two years how fantastic our community newsletter is. Putting the newsletter together takes a tremendous amount of time and effort on the part of our volunteer staff: John Becker, Editor; Preeti Ayyangar, Designer; and Nita Luce, Advertising and Business Manager. Thanks to these volunteers who "get the word out" and help keep us informed.

As the sign at our new park (donated by Sandy d'Aprile) states, "It takes a village to make a village." We need your personal and financial contributions now more than ever. Please consider volunteering and contributing more in 2009! We are especially looking for funds for the park. If you have any ideas for fundraising, getting involved personally, or otherwise, please email: ppapner@earthlink.net. Thank you!



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Forces Combine to Clean-Up Beltline

On-Going Effort Needed to Keep Area Clean

by: John Wolfinger

In lieu of my regular safety update, I want to shift my focus this issue to the Beltline.

On Saturday morning November 8th, a real urban phenomenon occurred with the gathering of about 400 folks working towards a shared goal of reclaiming a one and a half mile river of trash in our midst. The river I'm referring to is the portion of the future Beltline transit route (with accompanying trail and green space) that runs through our neighborhood. The view that day was hardly green – instead we saw a sea of dying brown kudzu that had been sprayed earlier for eradication.

This remarkable clean-up event was carefully coordinated by Trees Atlanta, Park Pride, all Beltline organizations, Keep Atlanta Beautiful, neighborhood civic associations, the Morseberger Group at Ponce Park, Park Area Coalition, area merchants, Midtown Ponce Security Alliance, APD Hope Team, City of Atlanta Public Works and the ToolBank – all working and contributing together. The sixteen tons of urban trash collected that morning filled nine huge dumpsters.

Those who participated in the clean-up are aware that many of the items collected were discarded items from shoplifting sprees, smash-and-grab auto break-ins, and home burglaries. This area with its protective kudzu canopy had become a gathering place for those plundering our neighborhood.

With the initial clean-up complete, all residents need to take ownership and make sure the area stays free of litter. If your residence or work place backs up to Beltline property, take time for a healthy walk taking along a trash bag to clean up whatever items you find. A few minutes of time from many folks can make a big difference here. For those walking the Beltline, I would not recommend walking across Ponce de Leon Avenue on the bridge with missing floor panels. A misstep here could deposit you quickly onto the busy street below.

Georgia Power did a wonderful job cleaning out the Beltline right-of-way behind their new substation north to Monroe Drive. The Virginia-Highland Apartments erected a high wooden fence effectively blocking access to parking lot thieves entering from



A group with signs in front of Park Tavern on Monroe Dr. greeted attendees of a January 31 rally in support of the Beltline. Over 200 people attended the rally and heard city officials speak in opposition to a move by Amtrak and the Georgia Department of Transportation to preserve a nearby segment of the Beltline for heavy or high-speed rail use.

the Beltline, and they have promised to keep the trackside of their fence cleaned out. Ponce Park also continues to monitor the stretch of track alongside their building. If you work at Bark-ing Hound Village or Two Urban Licks – consider monitoring and cleaning your section of the track. This is important for the public safety of all of us.

As of late January, plans call for a second spraying – kudzu's a tough plant and needs more than just one spraying to completely kill it. A second clean-up session is also planned as part of the Great American Cleanup in the spring. Watch for details.

As I write this article, I'm receiving word that GDOT and Amtrak have filed motions to stay the track abandonment proceedings from Norfolk Southern. It is my hope that this impediment to the Beltline's progress is resolved by the time this is published, and our Emerald Necklace is back on track. Our whole quality of life will be immensely improved with legitimate activity along the Beltline route.



Dr. Joan Beaulieu, DVM
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Atlanta, Georgia 30306
Fax: 404.881.6220

Notice About Dogs at Inman Middle School

There has been a significant increase recently in the number of people using the Inman Middle School fields bordered by Virginia and Greencove avenues and Clemont Drive as a dog park. The number of users most afternoons and evenings rivals the dog run at Piedmont Park. The school principal has advised us that this practice must unfortunately come to an end.

Inman Middle School has always been a great neighbor. However, the recent surge in canine usage has forced Inman to ban dogs from school property. In addition to sometimes unsanitary conditions caused by a few careless pet owners, using school property as a dog park poses potential insurance and liability issues for Atlanta Public Schools. Fortunately, we have alternatives: neighbors are encouraged to walk their dogs a few blocks further to the wonderful run at Piedmont Park.

Please appreciate the fact that Inman Middle School has been and continues to be a great supporter of our community. For example, for the past two years, the school has graciously allowed us to use this same area for the music stage at Summerfest, our community's biggest fundraiser. In exchange, we provide insurance and indemnify APS. Indeed, if we had not been allowed to use that land two years ago - during the severe drought when the city would not permit us to use John Howell Park - it would have jeopardized the success of our entire festival. So, please, let's be respectful of our friends at Inman Middle School.

Thanks for your understanding and compliance.



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2008 Home Tour Raises the Bar

by: Rob Glancy

The 2008 Virginia-Highland Tour of Homes was held December 6th and 7th. This year's proceeds will benefit the new park at the corner of N. Highland and St. Charles. It was the fifth straight year of terrific, yet chilly weather. Ticket sales were the second strongest in the five years since the tour was resumed in 2004. Final net income figures will be available after trailing expenses and sponsorships are accounted for. Overall, in the five years since the tour was resumed, it has raised over \$100,000 for the community.

This year's tour featured six eclectic homes and was capped by a festive after celebration at P'Cheen in the Old Fourth Ward. Special thanks to Arnaud Michel and Jean Frederic Perfettini of Anis Bistro in Buckhead who filled in for one of our neighborhood restaurants that closed just prior to the tour.

We sincerely thank the gracious homeowners as well as our sponsors. We also appreciate the fine neighborhood restaurants - Atkins Park, La Tavola, Shorty's, Noni's, Anis Bistro, the prepared foods team at Whole Foods and MetroFresh - that provided food tastings at tour homes. Thanks also to the house captains, volunteers and committee chairs - and a huge thank you to Allie Coker, Charlie LeFort, Mandy Robertson, Ann Guy, Phil Weeks and Shannon Makaila for their perseverance and support.

The Tour Steering Committee has begun pre-planning for the 2009 tour which will be held on December 6th and 7th. If you're interested in taking a leadership role in this year's tour, have a prospective home you'd like to show, or would like to help sponsor the event, please contact Rob Glancy at 404-467-9922 or email tour@vahi.org. Additional information is available at www.vahihometour.org.

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Progress Made on New Elementary School

Doors to Open for 2009-2010 School Year

by: Karen Woodward

With a goal of relieving overcrowding at Morningside Elementary, Atlanta Public Schools (APS) will open a brand new elementary school this fall. With a planned capacity of 450 students, the new school is currently under construction at 1274 Ponce de Leon Avenue, between Briarcliff and Springdale roads. The Morningside kindergarten campus currently operates on the eastern part of this property. All current K – 3rd grade students who live in Virginia-Highland, Midtown, Poncey-Highland, and the part of Druid Hills within the Atlanta city limits will be re-zoned to the new northeast elementary school as of the 2009-2010 school year. Though the school will open without a 5th grade class (current 4th-graders will continue to attend Morningside or Mary Lin Elementary Schools next year), the school will be a full K-5 school once the inaugural 4th grade class moves up in the 2010-2011 school year.

As the first APS school designed based on principles of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System, the new school will feature natural lighting, state-of-the-art technology, and high-quality acoustics. To earn LEED certification, a building project must meet certain prerequisites and performance benchmarks in each of five categories: sustainable site development; water savings; energy efficiency; materials selection; and indoor environmental quality. The eco-friendly design includes features such as a rooftop garden, low-flow bathroom fixtures, water efficient landscaping, and use of renewable resources. Once built, the school will be cleaned with green chemicals and appointed with furniture made without dangerous chemicals that would release gasses into the air.

The existing buildings will be renovated and connected to a new building to be built behind them, with a courtyard in the center. The new building has a contemporary design and will not compete with the historic nature of the existing buildings. Additions constructed in 1952 and 1980 have been demolished. Renovation of the Hirsch Mansion (current K Annex) will not begin until students leave at the end of May. Links to architectural drawings and site plans can be found on the Morningside Elementary website, www.morningsideschool.org, under School Info, New Northeast Elementary School.

Construction is on-track and scheduled for completion in July. The new building is being framed, and renovations to the interior of the historic Rutland Building (which will house offices, two art rooms, a clinic and the media center) are underway. The contractors are in the process of drilling 56 geothermal wells which will connect to the building to provide energy-efficient climate control. The wells – six inches in diameter and 400 feet deep

– are being drilled in front of the Hirsch Mansion. Heat from the earth's core will be transferred through buried pipes to the building in cool weather, and in warm weather heat from the building will be deposited into the ground.

The school plans to use the gymnasium and parking area of the Druid Hills United Methodist Church. The parties are currently negotiating a long-term agreement for renovation and use of the church facilities by the APS.

APS posted the new school's principal position on October 7, 2008. Members of the community have participated in the selection process, which is underway. APS planned to present its recommendation for principal of the new school for approval at the February 9th meeting of the Atlanta Board of Education.

The Atlanta Board of Education will follow APS policy guidelines for the naming of the school. Once a principal is selected and named in early February, the Board of Education and a Task Force will embark on the exciting task of creating a new school in our community.

Parents of children who will be enrolled at the new school have formed a parent teacher organization. On January 22, the following were elected to serve on the organization's Board of Directors: Clare Ritchie (president), Jenn Ballentine, Jason Brewster, Aaron Danzig, Steve Fazenbaker, Lynne Kushner, Elizabeth Ross Lieberman and Guido Sacchi. These eight members will serve through the start of the school year, when the entire parent and teacher body will elect a new Board. Parents within the rezoned neighborhoods are encouraged to become a member of the parent group for the new school; dues are \$5.00.


Communication with interested parties is coordinated through Yahoo Groups. If you're interested in joining the group, follow these instructions:

Go to www.yahogroups.com, sign up and/or sign in and join the group.

Group name:
new_ne_school

Group home page:
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/new_ne_school

Group e-mail:
new_ne_school@yahoogroups.com

Editor's Note: Voice apologizes for including an incorrect group e-mail address in our last issue. 

New Business Profiles

by: John Becker

HERE ARE SNAPSHOTS OF SOME BUSINESSES THAT HAVE OPENED RECENTLY IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD. IN THIS CHALLENGING ECONOMIC TIME, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO SAVE SOME GAS AND PATRONIZE THE BUSINESSES OF VIRGINIA-HIGHLAND.

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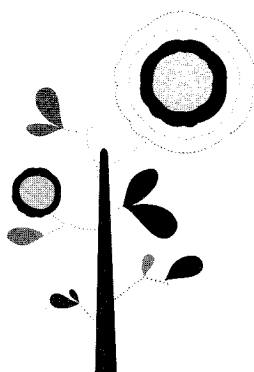
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Le Tux Shop is a new men's formal wear store located next to Ten Thousand Villages on St. Charles Ave. Owner/manager Rik Ducar says the shop will feature tuxedos for purchase from better men's brands like Oxxford, Dunhill, Jack Victor, BCBG Men, CK-Calvin Klein and Haspel Clothing. Hand-selected rental options that represent the best of the rental tux market will also be offered. An outstanding selection of unique offerings adorns Le Tux's formal shirt wall as well — including Eton of Sweden, Robert Talbott Protocol, Ike Behar Formal and Bordello. Twenty different styles are features at the store, and custom formal shirts can also be created through the Le Tux Private Label program. Ducar plans to showcase the best of Atlanta's wedding-industry talent on a weekly basis, putting the finest caterers, cake makers, photographers, and musicians in the spotlight. He hopes to make Le Tux "wedding central" in Atlanta.

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by: Linda Merrill

History of Virginia-Highland

{Part II}

The Cheshires

Another Atlanta pioneer with links to Virginia-Highland was Captain Hezekiah Cheshire (1786–1870). He and his wife, Sarah, came from South Carolina and settled in what was then DeKalb County; around 1850, Cheshire purchased eight acres for eighteen dollars in the Virginia-Highland district and planted fields of wheat, cotton, and corn. He built a house for his growing family at present-day 1186 North Highland Avenue, between Highland Terrace and Amsterdam.

Although Hezekiah himself was too old to fight in the Civil War, four of his sons served in the Confederate Army. Atlanta's outer defenses extended along Highland Avenue in what is now the Morningside neighborhood, and engagements were fought along Highland and Briarcliff, not far from the Cheshire homestead. The family did not stay to witness the battles: as the Union Army approached, the Cheshires abandoned their home, which would be used in their absence as a military hospital. By the time they returned, only the chimney remained, and on the property they found the graves of soldiers from both sides of the conflict. In 1866, Hezekiah built a new house on the site and acquired forty more acres, extending his property west from North Highland to what is now Monroe and south beyond Virginia Avenue. His eldest sons, Jerome and Napoleon, also became successful farmers and traders, eventually accumulating "handsome fortunes," according to a family history, "their estates being among the most desirable and valuable in the country." To this day, that property remains a vital part of the city as the land surrounding Cheshire Bridge Road.

As late as the 1940s, the Cheshire homestead on Highland was occupied by two of Hezekiah's daughters, Sallie (1864–1944) and Mattie Cheshire (1865–1935), who lived much as they had in childhood, reluctantly admitting electricity and forever insisting on drinking their water from the old well in the front yard.

The Nine-Mile Circle

With the advent of the streetcar, the agrarian landscape three miles outside the city rapidly began to change. As the Atlanta Constitution observed, the trolley lines, "like a veritable cobweb from center to circumference," connected Atlanta's central business district with the outlying areas, "from the heart of the city to the most distant suburban hilltop." In December 1889, the Fulton County Street Railroad Co. started service as the second electric street railway in Georgia, traversing the largely unten-

anted land northeast of town. Its route, known as the "Nine Mile Circle," began downtown, ran out Broad to Peachtree and Houston, then along Highland Avenue to Virginia and the broad, sweeping intersection that would become the heart of Virginia-Highland. From there, the track went downhill to Boulevard (now Monroe), where it made another wide turn and then continued to complete the circuit where it started in the city.

At first, the Nine-Mile Circle was used as much for recreation as for transportation. On hot summer evenings, thousands of city-dwellers would board "picnic cars" equipped with multi-colored lights and brass bands to take advantage of the breeze. In fact, with its five-cent fare, the Circle ride was often recommended as an antidote to the oppressive heat of a summer's day: "The trip carries one through the woods and meadows east of the city and the country breezes are delightfully exhilarating." These pleasure trips made the outlying county familiar to many urban residents, some of whom would eventually become suburbanites themselves; for eventually the trolley's success made it practical to extend residential development beyond the city limits—and inexpedient to reserve such valuable land solely for agriculture. As one writer for the Constitution remarked in a summary of the railway's progress in 1894, "Rapid transit encourages the extension of the residence districts and brings far away suburban points comparatively within a few minutes of the heart of the city. On that account many of Atlanta's business and professional men who formerly found it necessary to live in the center of the city have in the last few years built homes away out in what a short time ago would have been called an isolated country spot, but that is now a well populated district and growing section of the city."

Next issue: Green B. Adair and Highland Park

Sources:

Elijah Dekalb Cheshire's family history, 1896, typescript by his daughter-in-law Anne Cheshire, c. 1954, kindly provided by Harrilee Cheshire, 2008; Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events* (Athens, GA, 1954); The Morningside Nature Preserve Master Plan, historical overview by Fred Crudder, 2004, http://www.atlantaga.gov/client_resources/park%20design/mnp/masterplan%20text.pdf; Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution, 1924–32; Sarah Toton, "Nine Mile Circle", jpg image, Southern Spaces, January 2008, <http://www.southernspaces.org/contents/2008/toton/1e-018-ss-06-stoton.htm>.

Neighborhood Preservation Committee Holds Community Meeting

by: Lola Carlisle

On January 14 at Inman Middle School, nearly one hundred people attended a community outreach meeting held by the VHCA's Neighborhood Preservation Committee. The committee, formed in response to neighborhood concerns over inappropriate infill, has been exploring methods of preserving the existing character of the Virginia-Highland residential areas. As you may have seen in previous articles and e-mails, the committee has held open meetings on neighborhood preservation since February 2007.

Those who attended the January 14 meeting heard a presentation on the committee's activities to date and viewed visual displays of photos and information on the history of Virginia-Highland. One of the highlights of the presentation was a fascinating oral history of our neighborhood, given by Linda Merrill and Karri Hobson-Pape. We even found out that one couple attending had lived in Va-Hi since the 1930s!

During the Q&A session attendees reinforced what most of us assumed about the residents of this neighborhood; that we are deeply engaged, interested and passionately involved, wanting what is best for our community and wanting to avoid over-regulation. With this awareness, the committee has focused on researching the type of historic designation that regulates without being overly restrictive – Historic District Overlay Zoning. Of course, a community this engaged wants to know as much as possible about the committee's work, how they can participate and how their voices can be heard. This understanding has and will guide the committee as we go forward with our community outreach.

In the next few months, Regulations team members will break down and present the draft regulations for community insight and opinion. Consider these draft regulations as a jumping off point. Revisions will be made based on community input. The process will be involved and the language is not necessarily what most of us are used to, so we will take this in sections. We will record all comments, review and do our best to discover where we find consensus and where we find concern – modifying the draft regulations accordingly as we proceed.

We encourage you to attend future meetings and voice your opinion and concerns. It's only by hearing from as many residents as possible that we can all determine whether or not historic designation is right for Virginia-Highland.

For more information on the committee, meeting schedules, Virginia-Highland's history, the Urban Design Commission, what Historic Designation is, other neighborhoods that have it and so much more, please visit lovevh.org.

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City Ramps Up for Phase II of Va-Hi Streetscape Improvements

Construction Scheduled for Completion Prior to Summerfest

by: John Becker

The city of Atlanta was scheduled to begin work on the second phase of streetscape improvements to the intersection of Virginia and N. Highland Avenues in late February.

This phase of the project will reconstruct and enhance sidewalks along Virginia Ave. from Todd Rd. to approximately 170 feet east of N. Highland, and along N. Highland from Virginia Ave. south approximately 300 feet.

Improvements include:

- installation of new concrete and brick paver sidewalks
- new curbing
- wheelchair-accessible ramps and driveways
- new street furniture
- enhanced pedestrian lighting
- new landscaping and street trees (existing Bradford Pear trees to be replaced with Chinese Elms by Trees Atlanta in October)

Intersection improvements are also planned for N. Highland Ave. to the south of Virginia and for Virginia Ave. to the west of N. Highland.

According to a February 5 project update from Atlanta's Department of Public Works, the city executed an agreement with the chosen vendor on January 27. Public notification was scheduled for early to mid February and contractor mobilization set for February 20. The city expects the project to be finished prior to this year's Summerfest.

The first phase of the project – which brought similar improvements to the north side of the intersection – was completed in early 2007.

The project's second phase will cost approximately \$450,000. Funding comes from the city's \$150 million Quality of Life bond program.



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Colonel Mustard in the Kitchen With a Knife

Colonel Mustard – referring to the character from the board game Clue – is a pseudonym for a Virginia-Highland resident who enjoys dining at the many wonderful restaurants in our neighborhood and sharing thoughts on the dining experience with others. In this issue the Colonel takes a look at a neighborhood newcomer: The Original El Taco

This new eatery bills itself as ‘a spirited neighborhood Mexican joint’ and it’s exactly that. It was favorably reviewed by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and, after eating there once and ordering take-out twice, I wholeheartedly agree: this place is good!

The name leads one to believe there are more locations to come. I’m patiently awaiting them so it won’t be so hard to get a seat at this location. One night while I was waiting for my take-out, customers were told the wait was an hour and a half. But the night we dined in, we were seated right away. It was a Monday night around 7:00 and the place was pleasantly full; a little loud with music but that didn’t interfere with our table talk. We saw neighbors at several tables, all drinking margaritas. There’s a great selection of drinks of all kinds, including a frozen mojito.

We began our meal with lime-salted chips and salsa with guacamole on the side. My husband had pork green chili soup and green chili chicken enchiladas. Our guest had wood grilled fajitas, served with salsa and pickled cabbage. He chose marinated steak, though you can have the dish prepared with chicken, chorizo, shrimp or a combination. One of my take-outs had been El Short Stack and I couldn’t resist having it again. I’m from New Mexico and this dish made me think of home with flat open-faced corn tortillas, red and green chiles, cheese and a sunny-side-up egg on top. Scatter a little lettuce and tomato around it - really close to home! We shared an unusual side dish: wood-grilled scallions with lime juice and sea salt. They were so good I may have two orders next time. There were just a couple left for my to-go box, but the waitress had an accident and dropped them on the floor. No thirty second rule here. She added a whole order for me and I tell you, you’re going to die for these tasty treats.

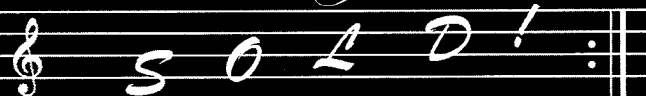
Since it was our friend’s birthday, I had fried apple pie with cinnamon ice cream for dessert. Another option is a Mexican Coke float with vanilla ice cream. I don’t know if Mexican Coke is different than ours but I intend to find out. For my next visit I’m considering guacamole, grilled scallions, maybe a Mexican pizza, shrimp ceviche, crispy pork belly taco (or maybe not), fajita salad, el burger, spicy Mexican fries, the Coke float – and a big to-go box. If you can’t tell, I plan to be a regular at El Taco.

Colonel Mustard gives The Original El Taco 5 hot dogs out of five - and throws in a few more!

The Original El Taco: 1186 N. Highland Avenue
404 873-4656 www.eltaco-atlanta.com

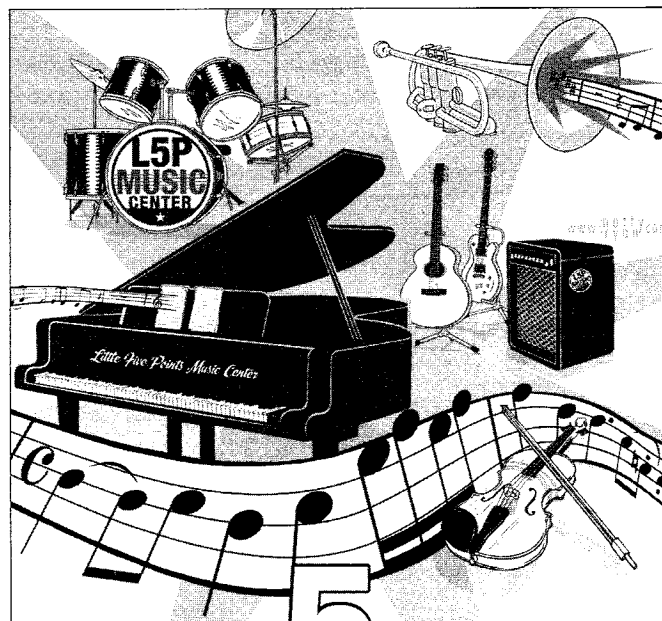


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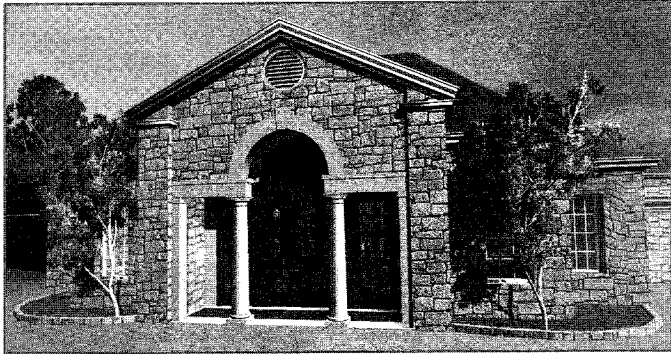
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Summer camp information available in February 2009.

New Piedmont Park Aquatics Center to Open This Spring

by: Judy McCabe Smith



The entrance facade of Greystone.

On May 25, the highly anticipated new Piedmont Park Aquatics Center becomes reality.

At long last, Virginia-Highland residents will have access to a beautiful, nearby, state-of-the-art outdoor swimming facility, including a marvelous restoration of the beloved old bathhouse, re-named "Greystone". The \$7.8 million project is a product of over five years of input from Virginia-Highland as well as other city neighborhoods and organizations, and will include amenities that should delight everyone.

In place of the old pools that were demolished, two new pools have been built, each for a different use. In the center will be a 25-meter, four-lane lap pool. On the south end will be a recreational pool featuring a zero (beach) entry with bubblers, a current channel for floating, a whirling-water vortex and underwater benches. To its side will be a 15' diameter children's "sprayground." Pools will also have a Poseidon drowning-detection system.

On the north end will be an open lawn for gatherings and relaxation and the new, pool-level entry plaza with concession stand. The deck area will be surrounded with trees planted into tree wells, planters, plant beds, trellises and other shade structures. All areas, including pools, will be ADA accessible. Separating the pool areas from Lake Clara Meer will be a new curved retaining wall arching away from the pool, designed so that a boardwalk can be added later.

The old bathhouse, now Greystone, has been gutted and re-designed to separate the pools' wet functions from the dry functions of the original structure. The showers, changing rooms and lockers will now be located in a new attached structure on pool level. Greystone (so named because of the grey Georgia granite used in construction) will be LEED (Leadership in Energy and

Environmental Design)-compliant and ADA-accessible, but its historical features and character will be preserved.

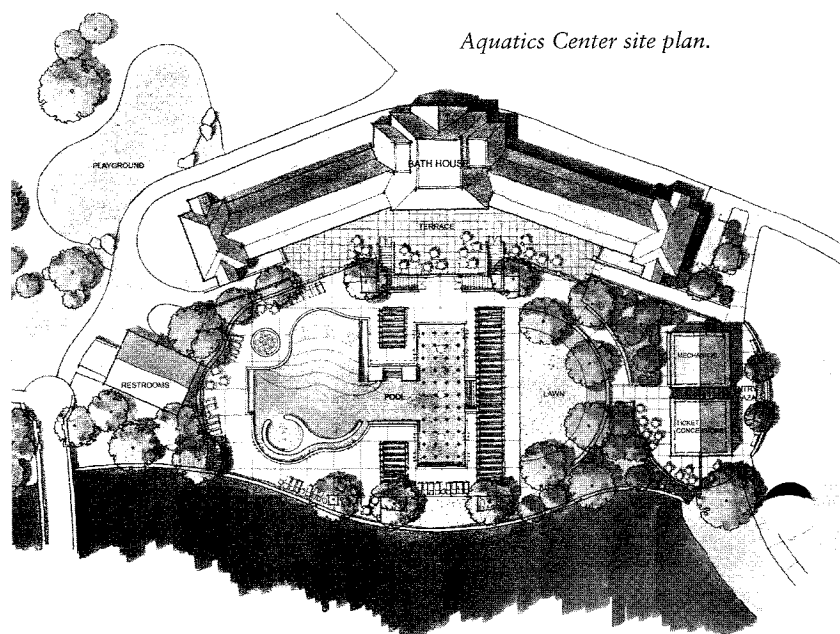
Programming for Greystone is yet to be determined, but the goal is to be inclusive as opposed to exclusive. There was overwhelming interest in having a public space with wi-fi-enabled café, yoga/exercise classes, a neighborhood meeting and event space, and bicycle and skate rentals. To that end, Greystone has been designed to be flexible and multi-use and includes an open south wing and center area, and in the north wing a meeting room, two small rooms, a warming kitchen, AV storage and restrooms. Enhancing the view from Greystone and overlooking the pools and lake will be a new outdoor deck, running nearly the entire length of the building. There will be double French doors on each side, opening onto terraces.

Additionally, the Picnic Pavilion and Bandstand across from the Aquatics Center have also been renovated.

All of this is the initial project of the \$43 million Phase One of the 53-acre Piedmont Park expansion. This phase, "Breaking New Ground," will lay the infrastructure and foundation upon which future amenities will be built by "greening" the entire area, including removing the asphalt parking lot, constructing paths and trails, lighting, land preparation, woodland and creek restoration and landscaping. The first renovation area includes 41 acres of land north of Park Drive Bridge and extending to Piedmont Avenue near the Ansley Mall area. This land is broken into two parcels – North Piedmont Park and Piedmont Commons. Renovations to a third 12-acre parcel, named Piedmont Gardens will likely occur in subsequent phases because of the ongoing sewer rehabilitation project at the site.

The park still needs to raise \$682,000 for the first phase of the Capital Campaign and your support is needed. To learn how you can help, go to:

<http://www.piedmontpark.org/support/membership.html>



Buy a Brick in the New Va-Hi Park!

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The Virginia-Highland Civic Association recently closed on the purchase of the former library lots at the corner of St. Charles Place and N. Highland Ave., which in turn enables us to create additional green space in the heart of Virginia-Highland. We immediately began fundraising to pay for the construction of the new environmentally friendly, passive park and to pay off the purchase debt. We need your help! Here's the offer:

- Contribute \$100 and receive an engraved brick.
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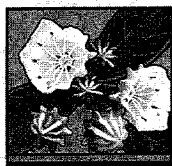


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