



Virginia-Highland VOICE

A Publication of the Virginia-Highland Civic Association Spring, 2001

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VHCA Calendar

General Monthly Meetings :

The VHCA community meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month except January & July at 7:30 p.m. at the Ponce de Leon Branch Library.

Annual Meetings are in September and usually held at Inman Middle School.

Meetings for the remainder of this year will be held May 2, June 6, August 1, September 5, October 3, November 7, and December 5.

Board Meetings are usually held the Monday prior to the first Wednesday of the month at the YWCA or occasionally at the Ponce de Leon Library.

Planning Committee: the last Wednesday of the month, as needed, at 7:30 p.m. at the Ponce de Leon Library.

Summerfest is June 2-3, 2001

Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU-F) meets the third Monday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at Morningside Presbyterian Church.

Summerfest 2001

by Debbie Skopczynski

There is no better way to kick-off the summer than the VHCA'S annual Virginia-Highland Summerfest! And, there is no better way to celebrate the Virginia-Highland neighborhood as Best Intown Living, than to share it with the rest of Atlanta.

Always scheduled for the first weekend in June (June 2-3), Summerfest attracts over 40,000 visitors to John Howell Park to sample menus from our local restaurants, hear local bands, road race through our shaded streets, and stroll through one of the best Artist Markets in the Southeast. Thanks to the efforts of last year's Summerfest Committee and Volunteers, Summerfest was voted by Atlanta CitySearch as the Editor and Audience Choice for "Best Arts Festival".

The festival begins on Saturday morning with a 5K race beginning and ending at John Howell Park. The little ones have their own "Tot Trot" at the conclusion of the race.

Nearly 200 artists, including many favorites from last year will offer for sale both funky and fine art on Virginia Avenue. Artists were selected by a panel of experts from over 400 applications.

Music from local bands will play on the Music Stage from noon to 8 pm on Saturday and noon to 6 pm on Sunday.

A special section of the park will be dedicated to Va-Hi's younger residents and include updated Kids Fest activities and artists who specialize in kid's art.

For the first time this year donation boxes will be stationed throughout the festival. Other revenues are generated through corporate sponsorships, the 5K race, and the sale of beer, food, and T-shirt, and, of course, the artist market participation. Profits from Summerfest support the development and maintenance of John Howell and Orme Parks, Inman Middle School, Morningside Elementary School, and Grady High School, the Ponce de Leon Library, and Project Open Hand. Donations and profits also pay for tree and flower plantings in the neighborhood public areas, the Highland Police Patrol, and pedestrian safety projects. Profits have and continue to preserve our neighborhood. We have successfully prevented tree removal at 830 Ponce de Leon and averted the Cotton Club from locating in the old Highland Theater. Your donations make a difference, so please look for the colorful boxes at the Festival entrance and give what you can.

Volunteers are needed to staff the 5K race, the Kids Fest, pour beverages, sell t-shirts, and other merchandise. To volunteer, go to www.vahi.org, email MelindaCullen@aol.com or call 404-222-VAHI.

Watch for specific events and times in a Special Section of Atlanta Intown. Virginia-Highland residents, especially those in the "festival zone", may share their concerns to the Summerfest Oversight Committee at summerfest@vahi.org or debskop@bellsouth.net.

Lawsuit Against VHCA Board Member Settled by VHCA Board of Directors

VHCA Board Member and Planning Committee co-Chair Winnie Currie was sued in December 1999, in Fulton County Superior Court, by various owners of The Dark Horse Tavern, Neighbor's Pub and the Urban Market, including Douglas F. Landau. The lawsuit claimed that Ms. Currie made "false and disparaging statements about Mr. Landau and/or Mr. Landau's Companies" that constituted libel and slander when she sent letters to the City of Atlanta police and zoning officials questioning compliance with the city's alcoholic beverage and zoning ordinances. The lawsuit sought an unspecified amount of compensatory and punitive damages, costs and attorneys fees. The VHCA has fully supported Winnie and has paid a portion of her legal fees to help defend her against these unfounded claims. Winnie convinced her homeowners insurer to absorb the balance of the costs. A copy of the complaint is on the VHCA website: <http://www.vahi.org/about.htm>.

Winnie Currie has raised a family of five and lived in Virginia-Highland since 1969, and has been a board member of the VHCA since 1993. For years, Winnie has served as the VHCA's watchdog for parking and zoning issues, and has served the neighborhood very well to help balance the interests of the commercial establishments we enjoy against the quality of life we demand in our neighborhood. Winnie was instrumental in protecting the neighborhood against the Cotton Club, the Colgate Mattress Company Warehouse mega entertainment complex on Ponce Place, and in pressuring the City to enforce City ordinances applicable to the building formerly known as "the Alley" on North Highland. She has also represented the neighborhood's interests in countless other zoning, parking and alcohol license issues that don't make the headlines but have a direct impact on our quality of life. As a result of her efforts, she is not always popular with commercial establishments in the neighborhood. Restaurant and bar owners have occasionally sought to quiet her to avoid questions about their compliance with parking and zoning requirements that cost them money but protect our quality of life.

In November 2000, Winnie's homeowner insurance carrier, which has footed a significant portion of Winnie's legal expenses, informed Winnie that it had agreed to settle the lawsuit by paying \$20,000 to the plaintiffs. Although Winnie and the VHCA feel that Winnie would have been fully vindicated in a trial, the legal costs of continuing the case were too burdensome to our limited budget and to her insurance carrier's willingness to proceed. In the settlement, Winnie admitted no guilt and did not release the plaintiff's from her claims that the suit violates the Georgia anti-SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) laws. Over the past year, the VHCA paid \$18,496 to Winnie's lawyers to defend her case. The plaintiff's are believed to have spent almost \$100,000 pursuing their claims against Winnie.

The VHCA continues to maintain that the lawsuit against Winnie Currie was frivolous and unfounded and is proud to have supported a tireless neighborhood watchdog against a well-funded bar owner. We encourage you to share your thoughts on this case with us at any neighborhood meeting (7:30pm, first Wednesday of every month at the Ponce Library) or by email to feedback@vahi.org. We will also continue to accept donations to the VHCA to help recover the funds spent to defend against this case.



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830 Ponce de Leon Update
by Stephanie Coffin

On May 1, 2000, Paces Property came to the neighborhood Planning Committee with their plans for the last piece of highway land that is in our neighborhood. They presented a plan for 51 condos, including a huge parking lot and a swimming pool. What was missing from the plan was any room for the beautiful mature trees on the property. In later negotiations, Paces refused to modify their plans. If built, the development would bring suburbia to Virginia Highland - a giant building emerging from a clear-cut.

Fortunately, our neighborhood was party to an agreement signed in 1992 between the City of Atlanta, the State Department of Transportation, and other neighborhood groups that had fought against the building of the Stone Mountain freeway. The agreement outlined plans for what is now Freedom Park and the disposition of other property, including 830 Ponce de Leon. This agreement gave our neighborhood the right to have a say about how the 1.2 acres would be used.

The Civic Association sued Paces Property in Superior Court to stop their plans from proceeding and to save the trees along the edge of the property. We lost in Superior Court, but won a stay from the Court of Appeals. This stay stopped the cutting of the trees until the case would be heard.

Although the City of Atlanta was a party to the 1992 agreement, on March 1, Bureau of Buildings Director Norman Koplon issued a building permit for the project. In response we are challenging the tree protection and tree replacement plan at a Tree Conservation Commission hearing on Wednesday, April 18, at 6 p.m in the City Council Chambers. In addition we have filed an appeal with the Board of Zoning Adjustment. Both of these hearings will be posted on the web site. We are asking for neighbors to come to the hearings.

This lawsuit has been very costly for the neighborhood. Many people ask, Are the trees worth the cost? Besides such benefits to the city as scrubbing the air of particulate matter, replenishing oxygen, preventing erosion and reducing heat, the trees soften street noise and beautify Ponce de Leon. The site faces what will become the John Lewis Plaza as the gateway to Atlanta's newest and largest public area, Freedom Park. The loss of the large edge trees would create a visual blight for people exiting the park. We feel that there is plenty of room for both condos and trees.

Help us save these trees. You can send a donation to help defray legal costs* to the Virginia -Highland Civic Association at PO Box 8401, Station F, Atlanta, GA 31106. For more information, call Stephanie Coffin, (404) 874-0523.

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for editing the
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for many years!**



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beverages, help with kids fest,
help with the the 5k race,
or sell merchandise.**

**call 404-222-VAHI or visit
www.vahi.org**

**Visit us Online!
www.vahi.org**

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