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The Virginia-Highland

VOICE

Summer 2012

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It's Festival Time! Summerfest 2012

by: Pamela Papner

www.vahi.org/summerfest

Friday, June 1, 2012:

7:30 p.m. – Community Dinner and Movie (at dusk)

Saturday, June 2, 2012:

10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. – Artist Market & Music
(Artist Market will close at 6:30pm on Saturday)

Sunday, June 3, 2012:

10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. – (Artist Market & Music)



The Virginia-Highland Civic Association and its media partner, 92.9 dave fm radio, are proud to present the 29th annual Virginia-Highland Summerfest.

Regularly recognized by local media as one of Atlanta's best neighborhood festivals, Summerfest takes place along tree-lined Virginia Avenue, between North Highland Avenue and Park Drive, in the heart of our neighborhood. It's a fantastic event for the entire family, so plan now to participate and buy some art!

Proceeds from Summerfest go to the Virginia-Highland Civic Association (VHCA), which is a volunteer-run, non-profit organization that helps maintain Virginia-Highland as one of the most livable urban communities in America.

Special Neighborhood Events:

Community Dinner and Movie: The community dinner and outdoor movie will begin at 7:30 pm and will be held at **Inman Middle School** field at Virginia and Greencove. Please bring your ID to verify your residency in Virginia-Highland. Dinner is graciously provided by Atkins Park Restaurant and dessert by Fifth Group Restaurants, La Tavola and El Taco. The movie begins at dusk and will be Hugo. Genki Noodles and Sushi will provide snacks during the movie.

Neighborhood Parade: This year, the theme is “**Wild Animal Safari**”, so go crazy and dress up like your favorite wild animal or any safari-related theme, and if you can perform while walking the parade, even better! The parade route begins at the top of Drewry (meet at Ace Hardware), proceeds down Drewry, right onto Barnett, and straight into the dinner line at Inman Field (about 0.6 miles). You can get dinner tickets at the top of the parade route, making it easier to participate or watch and go straight to the dinner.

Meet at Inman Hardware (Drewry/N. Highland) on **Friday June 1st at 6:30pm** to register. We'll get started promptly at 7:00 pm and end up at the neighborhood dinner at Inman School field, where prizes will be awarded. Register online in advance at www.vahi.org.

Summerfest Main Attractions:

The Artist Market

The juried artist market features work and exhibits, in a variety of media, from more than 220 of the best artists in the southeast and beyond and includes painting, clay, glass, jewelry, photography, printmaking, fiber, wood, metal, and mixed media.

5K Road Race

The Summerfest 5K is held at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, June 2nd, and features 1,000 runners winding through the neighborhood streets of Virginia-Highland. Following the 5K Race, children aged 5 and under will run, waddle, or crawl to the finish line of the Tot Trot, held in the Inman Middle School field at Virginia & Greencove at 9:00 a.m. Registration for the 5K must be made in advance. See www.active.com to register with a credit card, or www.running4fitness.com for details.

Food and Music

Summerfest always features a range of delicious food, including items from local restaurants. A variety of non-alcoholic and alcoholic drinks are available throughout Summerfest.

Music will be presented by radio station partner 92.9 dave fm, and the artist line-up this year is one of the best ever! The main music stage will be located on the Inman Middle School field at Virginia & Greencove and will feature a variety of renowned local musicians, along with nationally-acclaimed singer/songwriters. The Saturday headliner TBD. The Sunday headliner is Marc Broussard. For the complete line-up, see www.vahi.org/summerfest.

Nights of Summerfest: After the community dinner Friday night and after the last band Saturday, be sure to join us for an evening of drinks and acoustic music at the Virginia-Highland triangle. Tables and trees adorned with sparkling lights will provide a lovely atmosphere in which to enjoy the “Nights of Summerfest”.

Kidsfest

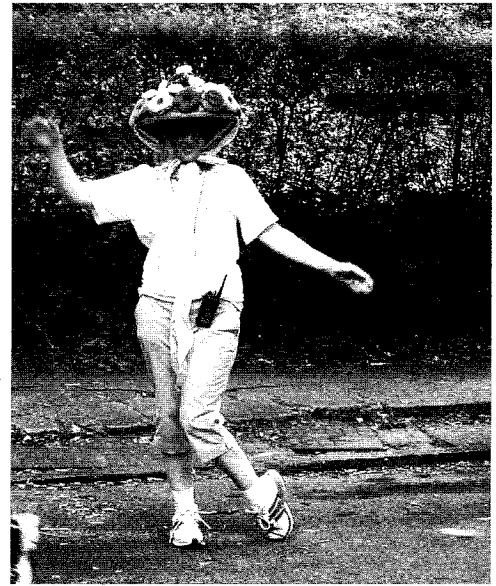
This year's Kidsfest will take place in John Howell Park (near Arcadia) on Saturday (10:00 am to 3:00 pm) and Sunday (Noon to 3:00 pm). Kidsfest features unique games, crafts, and activities for children of all ages, and most are free. Like the parade, this year's theme is “Wild Animal Safari.” We are bringing back the music stage, which was quite the hit last year.

For more information or to volunteer, please visit www.vahi.org/summerfest.

Summerfest Committee and Volunteers:

The Virginia-Highland Civic Association sincerely thanks all its Summerfest volunteers and sponsors. Committee members who have invested many hours of their time to bring you this event include:

Co-Directors: Ann Guy and Pamela Papner
Operations: Aly Higgins and Paige Hewell
dave-fm: Bryan Bazarte, Marketing Director
Logistics: Rob Frazer, Premier Events
Artist Market: Julie Tepp and Nancy Musser
Friday Dinner: David Wolfson
Volunteers: John Becker
KidsFest: Arturo Cruz-Tucker
Parade: Kris Smith
PR: Laura Joines and JD Kellum
Sponsorships: Victoria Talley and Lauren Fralick
Store: Suzanne Scully
Road Race: Ed Williams



Summerfest 2012

Calendar

Friday, June 1, 2012

What	Where	When
Community Parade	Meet at Ace Hardware Theme: Wild Animal Safari	6:30pm (Starts 7:00pm)
Free Community Dinner*	Inman Middle School Field	7:30pm (Bring ID)
Outdoor Movie "Hugo"	Inman Middle School Field	Dusk
Acoustic Music	Virginia and Highland	8:00pm

* Graciously provided by Atkins Park with dessert from El Taco & LaTavola.
Genki Noodles and Sushi will provide snacks during movie.

Saturday, June 2, 2012

What	Where	When
5K Road Race	Register at active.com	8:00am
Tot Trot	Register at active.com	9:00am
KidsFest	Arcadia at Virginia Ave	10:00am - 3:00pm
Artist Market	Virginia Avenue	10:00am - 6:30pm
Acoustic Music	Virginia and Higland	8:00pm

Sunday, June 3, 2012

What	Where	When
KidsFest	Arcadia at Virginia Ave	noon - 3:00pm

New Highland Park Construction to Begin Soon

For more details about the plans,
visit www.vahi.org/parks

After months of working to obtain the building permit to construct New Highland Park was just issued. Plans are to begin construction in June 2012, with sod/plantings to be added this fall.

History/Overview:

On December 4, 2008, the Virginia-Highland Civic Association, Inc. ("VHCA") purchased 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 will be developed as an environmentally-friendly passive park and rain garden to support recreation, walking, community gathering, and educational programs for neighborhood residents and visitors to Virginia-Highland.

These lots are literally the only potential green space still available in our neighborhood. The future park will provide not only a respite from asphalt and noise, but it will serve as a city-wide "bio-retention demonstration" project for storm water management: storm water will be captured on-site, preventing it from reaching storm drains, and native Georgia plants and soil, which naturally remove pollutants from storm water, will be installed.

In the long-term, it is hoped this investment will help revitalize the Atkins Park business area, and the VHCA also plans to use the land for community events, including fundraising. Financing for the acquisition came through the Georgia Land Conservation Program. The VHCA was the first non-profit in the state to be approved for funding under this program. 100% of the \$855,000 acquisition cost was financed, and to-date, \$162,000 of the loan principle for the purchase of this land has been paid (as of June 2012), all funded from Summer-fest proceeds.

More than \$140,000 has been raised to enable the construction of the new green space. Most of those funds came from a "buy a brick" program, donations, and various fundraisers. In 2011, \$50,000 was awarded to the Virginia-Highland Conservation League from Park Pride's Community Grant Program. The Virginia-Highland Conservation League is the 501(c)(3) non-profit subsidiary of the Virginia Highland Civic Association, which has been doing fundraising to support Orme and New Highland Parks since early 2009.

Although park construction is beginning soon, we still have a long way to go to pay off the land. Keep your eye on the thermometer sign (generously donated by resident Mario Tantillo), and please continue to give generously and participate in future fundraising activities, as we work to pay off the remaining debt.

The Virginia-Highland *Voice*

Editor: Brent Schnee

Design: Preeti Ayyangar

Business Manager: Brian Gross

We welcome your feedback on *The Virginia-Highland Voice*. Please send your comments to editor@vahi.org.

The Voice is going electronic!

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VHCA *Calendar*

Monthly Board Meetings

When: Second Monday of each month, 7 pm.

Where: Public Library on Ponce de Leon Ave.

Planning Committee Meetings

When: Last Wednesday of each month

Where: Public Library on Ponce de Leon Ave.

Meeting locations subject to change

Keep up with community news and events on
www.vahi.org.



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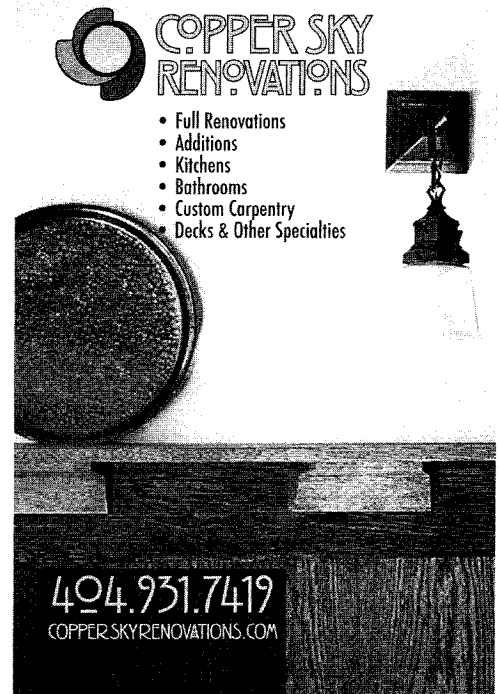
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PHOTOGRAPHY: Lauren Rubinsten

Reflections on Redistricting

by: Nicole Foerschler-Horn

In early April, the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) Board of Education took its last vote of the school year on Atlanta's redistricting plan. This action came after months of preliminary plans, community input, dozens of meetings, and several changes to the proposed maps. It also came on the heels of a widespread (and widely reported) cheating scandal, the system's high schools being put on probation for 'board dysfunction' (with a possible loss of accreditation) unrelated to the cheating, the eventual lifting of that probation, the midterm resignation of a board chair, the expiration of former superintendent Beverly Hall's contract, and the selection of a new superintendent, Erroll Davis.

All these events occurred in less than 24 months. To say it has been an eventful and difficult period is putting it mildly.

A Brief Chronology

The redistricting process began in 2010 under Beverly Hall, but it was the events of the last five months that attracted and engaged parents in this and other communities across the city.

The proposed goals for redistricting—saving the system money, closing underutilized schools, and addressing overcrowded ones—were generally understood. What few people appreciated was how strapped the system had become for cash. It was undertaking a very difficult redistricting challenge with a \$60 million budget deficit, a reality that limited a number of options, including (it was soon argued) a slower approach.

The demographers' first proposed redistricting plan arrived in late November and was met with incredulity. The demographers suggested a split-primary model that merged Hope-Hill and Springdale Park (SPARK) Elementary schools and sent the kids to each building for three grades. Morningside—closely tied to Virginia-Highland since the neighborhoods' creations—was sent to North Atlanta High School. Parents were introduced to what the next five months would be like: petitions, emails, phone calls, school surveys, letters, and meetings began.

The SPARK community sent a letter to Superintendent Davis opposing the split-primary model and arguing against redistricting Morningside to North Atlanta; the mantra was "Keep SPARK K-5". It also requested that SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) money be invested in infrastructure for SPARK, Inman Middle, and Grady High.

A letter from the Virginia-Highland Civic Association (VHCA) echoed SPARK's request to not divide our larger neighborhood and the call to expand SPARK (and Mary Lin Elementary). The letter focused on what would become (and still is, as of this writing) a recurring theme: the need to slow down the process and involve parents and community members through the Local School Councils.

Early organized responses also included parent-backed petitions. Morningside parents posted an online petition to keep that school aligned with Inman Middle and Grady High. A similar effort at SPARK had parents online and going door-to-door in support of "Keep SPARK K-5".

The second round of proposed redistricting plans, released in late January, kept SPARK K-5, but continued to propose a split-primary model for Mary Lin. Parents from several neighborhoods created a petition to build consensus and communicate with Davis. The "Voices for a New Grady Cluster" petition called for the cluster to include Morningside, SPARK, Mary Lin, Hope-Hill, and Centennial elementary schools. It rejected the split-primary model, asked for more dollars to be spent within the Grady cluster, and called for an expansion of middle school capacity. It garnered more than 1,000 signatures. The Inman Local School Council repeated the call for these elementary schools to be within the Grady cluster and articulated concerns about overcrowding at Inman. It also repeated the call for an exploration of different middle school configurations, an expansion of Inman, or the addition of a new middle school.

Between March and April, Superintendent Davis issued three successive sets of redistricting plans. They defined our cluster as Morningside, Mary Lin, SPARK, Hope-Hill and Centennial. Recommendations also included the need to continue to look at expanding SPARK. The three successive plans differed in their approach to handling the expanded middle school population; the first plan proposed a 6th grade academy at Coan Middle School, and the second recommended Cook Elementary. The final plan added more trailers at Inman Middle as a temporary measure. A long-term solution for middle school is still to be determined.

During this period, a petition called "The 10-Year Plan" was also circulated. It advocated moving Mary Lin out of Inman Middle and Grady High to Coan Middle and Jackson High.

It cited cost savings (no new construction or new facilities), stability for a greater number of neighborhoods, and argued that such changes would allow Inman and Grady to stay at or under capacity for a decade. Opponents articulated several counter points, particularly the decades of involvement of Mary Lin parents in supporting and building Inman Middle and Grady High.

Throughout the process, the epicenter for all these evolving narratives was the online discussion board, Big Tent's "APS Rezoning." Its daily posts—full of questions, criticism, suggested solutions, and different perspectives—had all the benefits of online social communities. Huge volumes of data were shared and potential solutions were floated, vetted, revised, and abandoned or perfected. It also had its downside: the vitriol of some posts, often by anonymous writers, required periodic intervention by the forum's moderator, who did a deft job of finding a fair balance between encouraging free expression and preventing personal attacks. One byproduct that eventually emerged was a consensus that people posting needed to identify themselves and their neighborhood.

Reading both Big Tent and the Patch (where Jaclyn Hirsch's reporting, interviews, and videos were a consistently reliable source of information on many aspects of the process) allowed citizens to track evolving arguments and a seemingly unending number of meetings and reports.

Lessons Learned

Our area is growing; the operative population projections are uncertain at best. Even beyond the pending challenges of middle school capacity, further redistricting will be needed, perhaps soon. It is part of living in a vibrant community, but the process doesn't have to happen in the manner we just experienced. There are ways APS can improve it, and there are ways the VHCA can better support it.

Given that APS did not create a formal forum for building consensus, VHCA should have. Regular meetings moderated by a professional facilitator in which community members could have publicly proposed and advocated for solutions would have been useful. The divisions here (and elsewhere) were significant enough to make perfect consensus unlikely, but the discussion and the process itself would have provided an opportunity to build a deeper shared understanding of perspectives. Equally important, face-to-face meetings and ad-

vocacy produce more constructive tones and promote understanding of concerns and perspectives of neighbors.

The immediate pressure has eased, but a long-term plan to address middle school capacity still needs to be formulated. It's important that VHCA reach out to our community and host forums to contribute to its creation.

We should continue to work for an inclusive process in which the PTOs/PTAs, Local School Councils, and neighborhood associations work shoulder to shoulder with APS. I have tremendous respect and admiration for the (often extraordinary) analysis done by a variety of parents and activists in our community, but it shouldn't be necessary for accountants, lawyers, and parents to recreate enrollment projections and become demographic and population projection analysts. We need to know all the possibilities that have been considered by APS and their conclusions—all of their constraints and goals—and we need a real dialogue between the community and system, not a repeat of what many perceived as shouting into a black hole and hoping to be heard.

We know our schools are better when parents and community members are involved. The anxiety, uncertainty, and perceived dysfunction of the process to date incentivizes parents in every community to consider other options—moving, private, and charter schools—for educating their children. When we lose these families, our neighborhood schools are poorer. Substantive dialogues within the neighborhood, with APS, and across our cluster would build trust in the system and increase the likelihood that parents will choose their neighborhood public schools and invest in them. We need to be cognizant of this truth as we move forward.

Lastly, Superintendent Davis has repeatedly argued that parents only care about their own children, but that he has to care about them all. Parents certainly do care about their children; as we saw, parents from all over this city signed petitions, wrote letters, and rallied on behalf of their own families, but a great majority of those parents also have the ability to see beyond the walls of their local schools and consider the welfare of their neighboring communities; what they haven't had is the opportunity to do so. It's time to create it.

Dr. Leila Denmark

by: Lola Carlisle, Karri-Hobson Pape, Jack White and Judy Potter



Dr. Leila Denmark passed away on Sunday, April 1st. Born in Portal, Georgia in 1898, she was 114 years old and believed to be the world's fourth oldest person at her death. And what a person! The Atlanta Journal Constitution obituary recounted a remarkable life in medicine: the third woman to graduate from the Medical College of Georgia (1928), the first intern at Henrietta

Egleston Hospital on the Emory campus and the first to admit a sick baby there, the state's first female pediatrician, and a significant role in the research that led to the development of the pertussis vaccine and the modern day DPT vaccination.

Dr. Denmark was married to John Eustace Denmark for more than 60 years, until his death in 1991. In 1931, the Denmarks had a daughter, Mary Denmark Hutcherson; Dr. Denmark then started her own practice at home so she could raise Mary. Her first home office was in the breakfast room of their home on Kentucky Avenue; the family later moved to 1051 Hudson Drive, where the living room served as a waiting room and a bedroom as the exam room. Dr. Denmark practiced medicine in Virginia-Highland until 1949. When Karri Hobson-Pape and I researched our book about the neighborhood (Images of America: Virginia-Highland), we spoke to a number of long-term residents who remembered residents and neighbors taking their kids to Dr. Denmark.

Dr. Denmark's daughter, Mary Denmark Hutcherson, had fond and vivid memories of growing up in the area. She played in the waiting room of her mother's office and recalls her mother peeking out of the exam room to call in her "next little angel." And she remembers a charming and happy childhood in Virginia-Highland.

Virginia-Highland was Mary's playground. She had a great group of friends who biked and roller-skated all over the area, often chasing – or trying to chase – the fire trucks going on calls from Station # 19. Mary and her friend Ann Tinkler (whose father was the minister of the Associate Reform Presbyterian Church, now the YWCA) frequently played at Orme

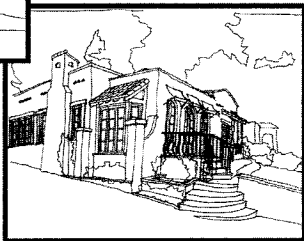
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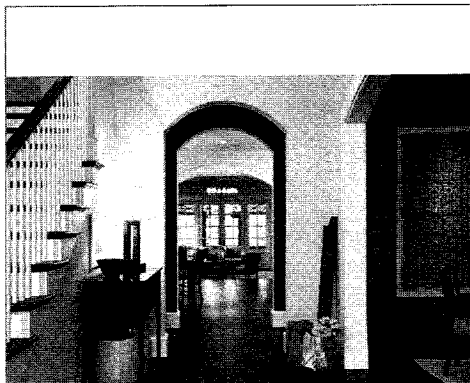
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Park, which they called "The Little Park." They recall the old Highland Bakery horse and buggy coming through and the strong sweet smell of the fresh bread. Mary thought the horse was very pretty – she remembers that he was white and had a big blocky head. (Some of the old Highland Bakery delivery routes are on display in the building behind the current Highland Bakery at 655 Highland Ave.) Mary described many stores at the corner of Highland and Virginia; Mrs. Georgia's Dairy was a favorite – who can resist a milkshake!

When it came to schooling, Mary remembers every detail and there were many. Redistricting and changes in school routes and destinations are not a new concept here. Mary can tell you every bus, trolley, and transfer she made on her path to acquiring an excellent education – an education she took seriously in spite of the constant temptation to dawdle at Rich's downtown on her route home. She attended Inman (from K–6), O'Keefe Jr. High (now part of the Georgia Tech campus), Atlanta Girls High in Grant Park (two years), and graduated from Grady as a member of that school's first co-ed class in 1948. She found herself well-prepared when she got to UGA; she recalls her freshman year there to be largely a review of material she already knew.

These great stories about the Denmark family, including these wonderful tales of the daily life of a child in Virginia-Highland in the 30's and 40's, make me feel grounded. This neighborhood has a rich and vibrant history; its citizens and its buildings are full of varied and rich stories. We Virginia-Highlanders are fortunate people.

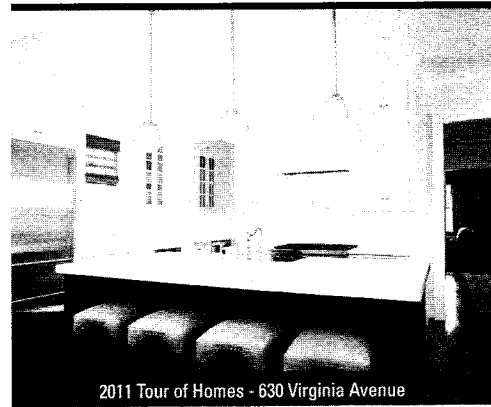
picture: Mary Denmark. c. 1940. Courtesy of Mary Denmark Hutcherson.



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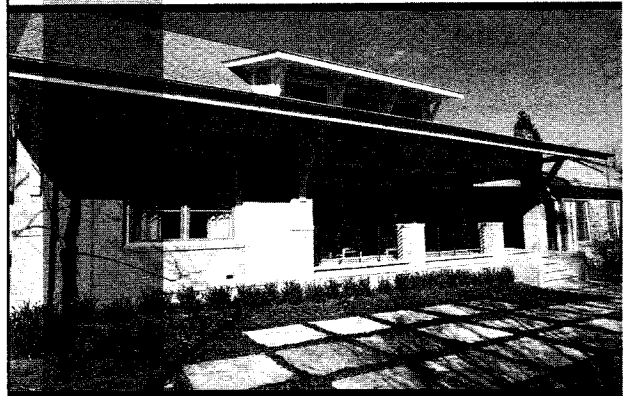
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Graffiti in Virginia-Highland

For more specific details, visit www.vahi.org (under the Safety tab) and www.keepatlantabeautiful.org

Send reports to: graffiti@vahi.org

What is it and what is its connection to safety?

Graffiti is marking, drawing, etching, and scratching on private, public, or commercial property without owners' permission and is usually created by those seeking recognition within their peer groups. It is a serious crime of vandalism and may be a signal of possibly more serious criminal activity to come. Though not necessarily gang-related (only 10% of graffiti is associated with gangs), it is still a malicious violation of property owners' rights and is time-consuming and expensive to remove.

Graffiti Abatement as a part of Neighborhood Safety

Neighborhood safety starts with good outdoor lighting, locking our doors, knowing our neighbors, and participating in:

- the Clean Car Campaign
- the FBAC and reporting suspicious activity
- picking up litter and keeping up our yards
- removing graffiti immediately. Part of the allure of taggers is notoriety and thrill of the exposure.

Removing graffiti swiftly helps prevent a recurrence through perseverance and patience. The taggers will quickly lose interest. All of these efforts show we care and that our neighborhood is one of the best in Atlanta!

What can we do?

Longer daylight hours and warmer temperatures in Spring tend to bring an increase in graffiti. In Virginia-Highland, stickers and tags on traffic signs, utility boxes, benches, and poles are the biggest nuisance. Though less prevalent, we also get large-scale graffiti on open surfaces, such as walls and fences, on both public and private property. Residents should photograph graffiti and report to: graffiti@vahi.org. Include location and date.

Residents can also restore surfaces to their original condition:

- Remove stickers with a utility scraper and peel off.
- Paint over paint: it is cheaper and quicker to paint over tags on already-painted walls. Keep extra paint to match in the event of a recurrence.
- Restore bare walls using a solution like Motsenbocker's Liff 4 and a power washer.
- Cover tags on fences, poles, and benches using matching-color spray paint.

- Street signs are the trickiest to restore—proceed gingerly with Safety Wipes (available from VaHi Graffiti Taskforce) or Motsenbocker's Liff 4 (tested in small spot)

Not to be left out

- Adopt a SPOT: Some areas tend to be tagged repeatedly. We welcome volunteers to adopt these spots and clean as needed. Advice and instructions available by emailing graffiti@vahi.org
- Ask local merchants and residents to remove graffiti from their property.
- Plant evergreen shrubbery, hollies, or ivy to cover large spaces that attract repeat graffiti.
- For graffiti in public parks, call the city hotline (404-546-4288) to report. This is a Department of Public Works call center, and a service request will be generated upon completion of the call to begin the removal process. This is a great city resource for handling large-scale graffiti out of our expertise.

Virginia-Highland is a vibrant in-town Atlanta neighborhood made all the more so by Graffiti Abatement. Thanks to the many dedicated volunteers who make this happen!

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Planning for the 2012 Virginia-Highland Tour of Homes is Underway.

Mark your calendars for December 8 & 9.
To volunteer, write the Tour Committee at:
tour@vahi.org

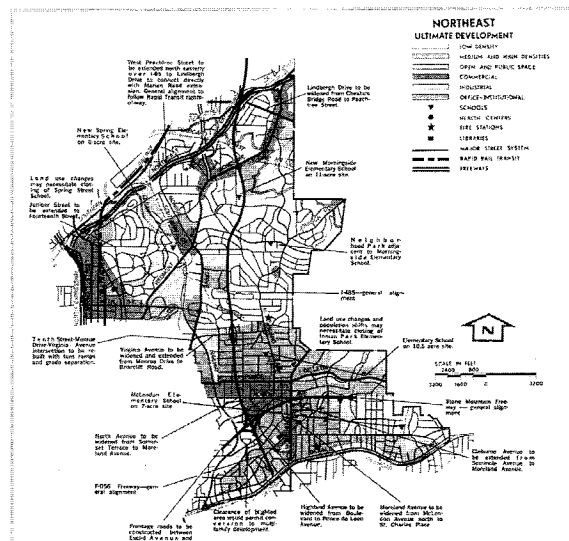
by: Jack White and Lola Carlisle

The Tour of Homes is a tradition in Virginia-Highland. It started in 1972 at a very different time in this community. The neighborhood was clearly in transition; what it would end up looking like was neither obvious nor certain. Suburban development was booming, middle-class flight was in, well, full-flight, and the Georgia Highway Department (the predecessor agency of today's GDOT) was trying to blast a full-scale limited-access highway (the infamous I-485) through the Old Fourth Ward, Virginia-Highland, and Morningside. Fortunately for all of us, a group of active and committed urban pioneers decided all these communities were worth saving, and they fought and stopped the road.

Ironies abound; all these trends—particularly the threatened highway—depressed land values and helped make many of the homes especially affordable, even to those with very limited resources. Because the state was tearing down the structures on properties it acquired (in an effort to make the highway seem like a done deal), celebrating newly-renovated homes had particular political significance. The first Tour was a fundraiser to fight the highway and a statement that these homes and this community were worth saving and here to stay.

Another irony was that the land the Highway Department condemned, bought, and cleared along Virginia Avenue wound up as today's much-used and much-loved John Howell Park: the site of Summerfest, which has grown into a major fundraiser of the Civic Association and funded a huge range of projects throughout the neighborhood. We probably don't say it often enough: "Thanks, Highway Department— this community wouldn't have been the same without these unsuccessful road-building schemes."

The GHD plans shown here feature a diamond interchange at the site of John Howell Park where many homes were razed. (VHCA has placed plaques in the park identifying the addresses and sites of homes demolished there; look for them along Virginia Avenue the next time you walk there.) Had the state built this road, we wouldn't have been talking during the redistricting process about having more capacity at



1970 City of Atlanta map showing I-485 plans.
Courtesy of Joseph Drolet and Department of Planning, Atlanta.

Inman Middle School this coming school year, because there wouldn't have been a field there to accommodate it. While you're looking, don't miss the recommended new road from 14th Street to Park Drive, smack across the active oval in the middle of Piedmont Park. It's easy to underestimate how radically different intown Atlantawould have been had the Highway Department been able to push these schemes through.

The Tour of Homes—which has been held off and on for several decades and became an annual event in 2004—celebrates thoughtful renovations and represents an ongoing salute to the vitality and preservation of older intown communities. It's now a city-wide attraction, and in the last two years, it's been a very successful fundraiser. Visitors tell us they appreciate the area's unassuming personality, walkability, and small-town feel. A lot of VaHi residents clearly enjoy preserving and reclaiming the beauty of the neighborhood's several charming home styles.

This year's Tour promises to be a great one. The Tour Committee (chaired by Angelika Taylor) is new and eager and has been well informed by their predecessors, who remain valuable resources. Money raised by the Tour goes directly into the neighborhood in the form of grants for neighborhood organizations, parks, schools, safety efforts and much more.

The Tour is currently in the process of home selection; contact them if you have suggestions. This is a great effort for volunteers; please get involved. Many business owners show their support each year by sponsoring or providing needed services for the event. Restaurant participation makes visiting the homes even more special; sampling from our amazing surrounding restaurants is always a treat.

A Walking Community

by Peggy Berg

vahi.org/sidewalks email: traffic@vahi.org.

Our Virginia-Highland sidewalks get a lot of use and are an integral part of our community's character. I am reminded of the value of our sidewalks on these Spring evenings when all my neighbors seem to be out and about, walking dogs, playing with children, or enjoying a frozen yogurt.

As much as they seem permanent, like any aspect of our homes, sidewalks require maintenance and periodic renovation. As with home renovations in Virginia-Highland, our sidewalks reflect many tastes, budgets, and architectural fashions. We have hexagonal pavers from early in the neighborhood's history; many of these now resemble crushed concrete, having succumbed to the forces of tree roots, water line replacements, weather, and weight of cars. We have both poured concrete and aggregate sidewalks that are more modern, as well as stamped concrete that was fashionable a few years ago. We also have brick, stone, and other special surfaces installed by homeowners. We also have several blocks that have never had sidewalks, although concerted efforts by the VHCA, City, and our Council representatives have added sidewalks to most blocks.

The City of Atlanta has a standard that a crack or break in a sidewalk that rises more than an inch is dangerous and should be repaired. An inch isn't much visually, but it can trip the unwary or distracted and makes passage uncomfortable for wheelchairs, strollers, and people who may not be strong walkers. Many of our sidewalks have cracks of more than an inch, at least in some spots. This is particularly an issue for sidewalks with pavers in which a few pavers may need to be re-set.

The Virginia Highland Civic Association has two sidewalk initiatives. We are working to get a few segments along North Highland replaced. Because they are so highly-trafficked, these are significant liability issues and detrimental to the curb appeal of our neighborhood. We are also working on a sidewalk bundle along St. Charles. The bundle will enable the City to work efficiently on sidewalk repairs. It also gives property owners an opportunity to upgrade their sidewalks with the Association handling the process through the City and for a great price.

VHCA hopes to work on another bundle next year. If your block would like to be considered, please let me know: Peggy Berg, VHCA Streets and Sidewalks Chair traffic@vahi.org.



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RENOVATING ATLANTA - ONE HOME AT A TIME

Goin' Coastal: a Great Catch

by Brent Schnee

I don't know if I would call myself an epicure, but I, like most people, know good food when I find it.

Goin' Coastal takes a responsible approach to good cuisine—it proves that sustainability does not necessarily mean a sacrifice in quality or quantity. Located on Virginia Ave., next to Paolo's, Goin' Coastal offers a variety of seafood in the tradition of low-country preparation: the flavors are clean, distinct, and successfully run the line between a traditional boil and comfort food.

The menu is familiar, but with a few twists on some classic flavors. The restaurant offers such staples as crab legs, crab cakes, shrimp, and She-Crab Soup (which is really good, by the way). The more adventurous might consider trying the bacon-fried oysters or the Jalapeño Corn Bread Pudding (think super-creamy Mac & Cheese), and imbibing a Bacon, Blue & Dirty martini, which wonderfully compliments many of the restaurant's flavors.

Daily specials offer an even greater enticement, and those lucky enough to sample the 20-oz Cowboy rib-eye will relish the cut's preparation and flavor, which is best described as "buttery" (which in this foodie's mind equates to delicious).

Any issue with the restaurant essentially comes down to size: even in the middle of the week (I went on a Wednesday), the house was nearly full, and without a dedicated parking area, patrons are better off walking, but this is nothing new to Virginia-Highlanders. Reservations are recommended for the weekends.

With a very respectable wine selection, attentive service, a relaxed ambience, a sound culinary philosophy, and (most importantly) an excellent menu, Goin' Coastal stands out from your typical fare and is a welcome addition to Virginia-Highlands.

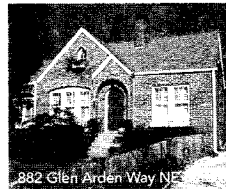
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How to Choose a Contractor

by Phillip Pettis

Virginia-Highland residents spend thousands of dollars a year on home improvements. Choosing the right contractor is an important first step.

Find the Right Contractor: Ask friends for referrals: they often give the greatest insight. Another good source of referrals is your real-estate agent. They tend to follow the market and hear everything (good or bad) about local contractors. Find at least three contractors to talk to.

Set up Meetings with all Candidate Contractors: Explain the scope of your project and your budget. Ask the contractor if the budget is realistic for the project. An experienced contractor should be able to give approximate numbers just by walking around and looking at the project. Working with a contractor is an important relationship; be sure you communicate well and feel good about working together.

Get Bids and Compare: Be sure you understand the contractor's bid and that you carefully compare all the proposals. If all bids are similar, pick the contractor you feel best about. If one is much lower, something could be wrong. Remember the proverbial saying: you get what you pay for!

Look at Credentials: Contractors in Georgia must be licensed. Fortunately, it is no easy task to become licensed in Georgia. Verify they have a license by going to: <https://secure.sos.state.ga.us/myverification/>. The license process requires either extensive proven experience or rigorous coursework and testing. Another benefit for consumers is that if your contractor is unethical, you can file a complaint against his/her license, and the state board may investigate.

Check References: An experienced contractor will have numerous projects to show you. Check references and ask this question: "What went wrong and how did the contractor handle it?" Construction is not an exact science; things do go wrong. The test of a great contractor, however, is how he/she handles it and whether or not the client was pleased with the end result.

The Construction Agreement: 1) Be sure you read and understand it, or consult an attorney. 2) Get a firm completion date; experienced contractors should be able to guarantee their

completion dates within 14 days. 3) Check the warranty, what it covers, and how long it lasts.

Up-front Money: For small projects under \$4,000, my advice is not to pay money up-front! If the contractor has an issue with that, find someone else. *Warning: there are numerous people who collect 40% for "materials", cash your check, and never come back. If a contractor must have money for materials to start, agree to meet him/her at the local supply store, pay for the materials so they become your property, and deduct that from the contractor's bill. For larger projects, I suggest no more than 10% upfront. The balance owed should be paid in draws as work is completed. Do not pay the final amount until the punch list is complete and you are fully satisfied!

Phillip Pettis is a licensed contractor who has renovated and built new homes in Virginia Highland and Morningside for over 15 years. He can be reached at phillip@designcreativelive.com

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