

NEWSLETTER

HISTORIC BOULEVARD NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Athens, Georgia, USA

Spring 2008



From the Chair

By Matt Elliott, BNA Chairperson for 2008

In the past, at least the recent past, there has always been a sort of chairperson's editorial space within Boulevard Neighborhood Association newsletters—what Melissa Link describes as “Musings of the President”—and I suppose it's good form to continue. For those of you who don't know me, I am the new Chair of our neighborhood association. I am lucky that Tony Eubanks, who did an incredible job as Chair for the past six years, has left our organization in great shape. It is easily one of the best-organized and most influential neighborhood groups in Athens—Thanks Tony!

I live at 739 Boulevard with my wife, Stacy Smith, a biologist recently turned environmental educator, and two children, Josie, 6, and Jack, 2. Josie is in kindergarten right behind us at Chase St. Elementary. I work for the Wildlife Resources Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources in the Nongame Conservation Section on rare, threatened, and endangered species and land conservation.

I've heard our neighborhood described as an “urban neighborhood,” and in many ways it is, but I don't really think of it like that. Although there are occasional rude interludes like screaming ambulances on Chase or city buses hurtling down Boulevard, as a biologist I tend to notice a lot of the natural elements. Despite the fact that our little corner of Athens has been pretty well packed with humans for over 100 years, there is still a fair amount of “nature” left, although sometimes it might be hidden by a privet thicket.

We have discovered some interesting and surprising things in the nine years we've lived in Boulevard—less than a mile from the heart of downtown. One of my all-time favorites is the Boulevard Groundhogs. I took my kids to see them just the other day, and highly recommend it. If you haven't seen the groundhogs, stop on Boulevard where

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YOUR HISTORIC BOULEVARD NEIGHBORHOOD ASS'N. STEERING COMMITTEE FOR 2008

Officers

CHAIR: Matt Elliott
VICE CHAIR: Marci White
SECRETARY: Marie Woods
TREASURER: Mary Beth Gates

Standing Committee Chairs

MEMBERSHIP/FINANCE: vacant
NEWSLETTER/PUBLICITY:
Johnny Pence
PROGRAMS: Melissa Link
NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH: Mary
Porter
PRESERVATION/
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY:
Kristen Morales

At-Large Members

Chuck Ramsey
Mark Ebell
Russ Foster
Gregg Bayard
Charles Apostolik
Carole Holmes

At Chase Street Elementary

March 22ND, 5K “Race for Chase” 8 AM

One mile Treefrog Trot 8:30 AM, BikeRodeo and Pedestrian Safety Fair 9 AM to Noon. The race is \$15 for those who register before March 14 and \$20 after. The Treefrog Trot is \$10. The family rate is \$30. Take \$5 off of each rate if you don't want a t-shirt. The bike rodeo and safety fair are free. People can get registration forms at www.runningintheusa.com/crs.

This race is a part of the Run and See Georgia Series and will raise funds for CSE's Safe Routes Program.

To volunteer to help out race day call Stacy Smith at 706-543-4903.

April 5TH at 9 AM:

Family Gardening Day

First Friday of Each Month (March 7TH, April 4TH, May 2ND):
Chase Street Elementary holds monthly “Safe Routes to School” walk and ride to school days. Join us for coffee after drop-off.

**Drivers, please watch for
pedestrians on these days
and every day!**

Teachers, Kids and Parents Embrace New Chase Street School

by *Kristen Morales*

The jewel of Chase Street is finally done. In January, children and their teachers moved back into Chase Street Elementary School after about 18 months of renovations. While the original 1921 building—the portion seen along Chase Street—remains intact, it got a complete overhaul, along with brand new wings to house pre-kindergarten through fifth grades.

The building also has a new gym, cafeteria, media center, and music and art rooms. Every room comes equipped with a "Smart Board," which allows students to use an oversized touch screen to play with words or work on computer projects with the class, along with computers with Internet access. The school also features wireless Internet access, mobile laptop labs, and laptops provided to the teachers.

Principal Bonnie Jackson said it feels good to be back in the "old" building, especially now that it's updated and freshly painted.

"It's wonderful—we have an excellent facility for teaching and learning, and really it's a wonderful landmark for the community as well," she said. "We're just delighted to be back."

Krista Dean, who teaches art, worked on the committee to design the new school. She said all aspects of the renovation were discussed, from removing the old trailers on the property to adding new wings to the decision to tear down everything but the original 1921 structure.

"We really wanted to reopen and restore the old entrance, and we wanted to have this central hallway with the area that serve the whole school, and have these intimate wings for the classrooms."

The school currently has 283 students enrolled with 29 teachers specializing in music, physical education, art, gifted education, English-Speakers of Other Languages and special education.

Jami Cashin, co-president of the school's Parent-Teacher Organization, said the classrooms are one of her favorite aspects of the new school.

The Chase Street PTO already has about 40 members and has been keeping busy with a school garden and planning the inaugural Race for Chase on March 22, a 5K run and fun walk.

"Besides the playgrounds, the things I like best are the small class sizes—and the teachers are just fantastic," she said. "I like the feeling you get when you walk in the building—you can hear things happening, but it's not loud."

Chase Street teachers said they were also happy to get into their new classrooms.

"I'm just so glad to be here," said pre-kindergarten teacher Beth Aland. "I couldn't stand it, the first day of school I was so excited."

Jackson said parents who are interested in enrolling their child in the school can get more information from the Parent Information Center, located in the School Board office on Mitchell Bridge Road. Registration runs from Feb. 18-March 1, with notification of school assignments going out in late April.

"We'd be delighted to have children from the neighborhood," she said, adding that parents are always welcome to come and see the facility.

"But whatever works for the family—that's the pivotal point," she said.

Potential Pocket Park on Barber

by *Marci White*

If you go east on Boulevard until it ends at Barber St. and look directly across Barber, you'll see an undeveloped lot with two magnolias near the street. The Benson family, (owners of Benson's Bakery) donated 298 Barber St. to the city of Athens more than 40 years ago, with the intention that it be turned into a park. There is a movement afoot to do with the land what the Bensons specified decades ago.

The lot is 1.8 acres of trees and thick brush, sloping down in broad terraces to a creek seventy feet below street level. ACC officials have indicated that, although the steep topography poses challenges, creating a "pocket park" is a possibility.

The property is centrally located, so that a future

park would be accessible to people in the Boulevard, Pulaski Heights, New Town, and Cobbham neighborhoods. All of these areas are experiencing a resurgence of young families, for whom a neighborhood park would likely be a special draw.

Representatives from the BNA Board went to look at the lot to make an initial recommendation, trying to envision a good fit for the site and the neighborhood. The Board members suggested that a small park could be created using the street level, along with the first terrace. The park could include a picnic area, playscape and dog run. The larger trees would be left, and the area landscaped with attractive, native, drought-resistant plants. Neighborhood

volunteers could help to design and build the park, in cooperation with ACC Leisure Services.

Some neighbors of the park site, seeing that Barber has had recurrent problems with activities like break-ins, prostitution, and drug dealing, have voiced concerns that a park would be a magnet for crime. The BNA Board agrees that crime is a serious consideration and any park needs to be designed with that in mind. All parts of the park should be as visible as possible; it should have adequate lighting, a secure fence, and a regular police patrol. Ideally, the park would attract a consistent flow of upright citizens, which would actually serve to discourage illegal activity.

Within the last two years, Commissioners David Lynn and Kelly Girtz have asked for more information to explore the possibility of building a park at the site. As a result, the ACC Manager's Office has asked Leisure Services to do a preliminary evaluation. The evaluation will include how the park fits into the broader plan for Athens' parks, what park design would be suitable, and how much it would cost. The Mayor and Commissioners will then decide if they want to fund the park. If they decide to support it, Leisure Services begins the detailed process of designing and building the park.

If you're interested in helping to make this park a reality, please contact Marci White at (706) 354-0374 or mendelwhite@yahoo.com.

Neighborhood Watch

by Mary Porter

The Boulevard Neighborhood Watch currently relies on the Reverse 911 System to notify residents of recent crimes in our area. When a crime is reported, a recorded message detailing the incident is phoned to nearby residents.

If you would like to receive Reverse 911 calls, please contact Katie Jones, the Neighborhood Service Officer of the Crime Prevention Unit of the Athens-Clarke County Police Dept. Her number is 706-613-3358 ext. 230, and email is katiejones@co.clarke.ga.us.

According to a recent report from the ACPD, the Boulevard area has had only four incidents, all thefts, reported since September of 2007. If you have signed up to be on the Reverse 911 Call List and have not received any calls lately, the lack of reported activity may be the reason. You may contact Katie to check to see if your number is still on the list.

I asked Katie to notify me by email when a crime is committed so that I may post that information on the Boulevard listserve as well.



Gardening Club Gets Busy

by Melissa Link

Spring is in the air and signs of the Boulevard Gardening Club's efforts are popping up everywhere. Many of the sunny yellow daffodils seen throughout the neighborhood are a result of the club's fall bulb sales, and club members recently joined Boy Scouts and other community groups in planting fresh young dogwood saplings along Prince Avenue.

Unfortunately, due to premature pruning from ACC maintenance crews, the daffodils in the Boulevard/Nantahala traffic circle didn't bloom this year. The Gardening Club has submitted paperwork to officially adopt the traffic circle with plans to add other plants and keep them properly tended.

The Boulevard Gardening Club is also excited to return to the grounds of Chase Street Elementary to replant the butterfly garden with plants rescued nearly two years ago. The club hopes to work closely with Chase Street students in helping them develop an appreciation for nature and the growing process as the landscape of the new school comes together.

Club members are also scoping out sites for the eventual installation of a community garden in the neighborhood. The Boulevard Gardening Club meets monthly for social, educational, and community activities. For more information, email boulevardgarden@yahoo.com.



Boulevard Gardening Club members Ann Sears, Valerie Aldridge, Carole Holmes, and Eppie Boze plant a dogwood sapling on Prince Avenue.

“From the Chair,” cont’d.

“Brickyard Creek” crosses between Hiawassee and Park, in the kudzu ravine behind Dixie Painting. If it’s a warm enough day you should be able to spy several of them cavorting around in the kudzu, which just happens to be their favorite food in these parts. Until fairly recently, groundhogs didn’t even live within fifty miles of here, but they’ve followed the kudzu patches south, and we can now count them as neighbors.

Amphibians and reptiles (“herps”) are a particular interest of mine. We have more of these around than you might expect, too. After I dug a small pond in our backyard, green frogs, a relatively aquatic species, began regularly appearing here, despite the fact that we must live at least a quarter-mile from any other permanent water. One can only assume they must have hopped their way over from the aforementioned, much-abused Brickyard Creek, which pools into a marshy wetland right around where the hospital wanted to bury it with fill dirt from their parking garage. We’ve got snakes here, too. I’ve seen handsome 4-foot black rat snakes sunning themselves in the driveways of some of the finer homes on Boulevard, and our kids have captured ringneck, rough earth, and brown (“Dekay’s”) snakes right in our backyard. Lizards? We’ve got good numbers of green anoles (“chameleons” to some southerners), and there are a few broadhead skinks around. These guys get over a foot long, and the males of the species get big, fat, red heads when mature. There used to be one that hung out in the crevices of the rock outcrop on the corner of Boulevard and Beulah, but I haven’t seen him in a while. Stacy once chased one through the hedges of the University President’s house on Prince, to no avail. This was back before the whole Michael Adams/Vince Dooley firing fiasco. If someone were to try that now, especially on a game weekend, they’d risk being clubbed over the head by security.

We get all kinds of interesting birds beyond the normal backyard cardinals, robins, and the like. Two species worth mentioning are wood thrushes and barred

owls, both more often associated with deep woods. I’ve heard the flutelike song of the wood thrush described as the very epitome of the deep woods. You can hear them in the summer all over the neighborhood, especially around Grady, Virginia, and behind Lakeview. Similarly, I’ve heard the “who-cooks-for-you” call of barred owls all over, too, including a number of times in our backyard. I hope that they are picking off some of our neighborhood rats.

I couldn’t leave you without at least a few words about some of our Boulevard insects. Kids, at least our kids, seem to be fascinated by the miniature world of bugs. When we bought our house, the landscaping consisted primarily of trash piles and enormous Chinese privet bushes. We cleaned up the former, chopped down the latter, and planted some passionvine and milkweed, among other things. In late summer the passionvine draws tons of Gulf fritillary caterpillars, and the milkweed has been attracting monarch caterpillars. The kids love to watch them as they fatten themselves up, build cocoons and transform into butterflies. And, of course the lubbers... There are many legends about these massive, red and black grasshoppers, all of them false. They are really just the native eastern lubber grasshopper, found throughout much of the Southeast. Why so many of them make Boulevard home I don’t know, but the kids love them, collecting them and keeping them in plastic containers for a day or two. People who garden tend to hate them, as they will devour certain plants right down to the nubs. I used to really like them, but by the end of the summer I get kind of tired of their massive appetites, too, and have been known to relocate boxes of them, usually to Oconee County, where I figure they could use some excitement.

Well, what’s the point of all this? I’m not sure... except I encourage you to get out, enjoy the spring weather, walk around the neighborhood, chop down a privet, visit with the neighbors, etc. Don’t hesitate to track me down if you have any questions about any neighborhood issues.

Dog run off? Having a yard sale? Just wanna vent?

Post it on the Boulevard neighborhood listserv

Go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HistoricBoulevardNeighborhood> to join

JOIN THE BOULEVARD NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

The purpose of our neighborhood association is to provide a social and informational network for those who wish to participate. We welcome all to engage in festivities and/or dialogue to the degree they feel comfortable. Dues are \$10 a year per household or \$25 for a three-year membership, or \$5 per year for a student household.

Name:

Address:

Phone

Email addresses of each member:

Please indicate:

New member

renewing member

Would you be interested in participating in Neighborhood Crime Watch, Block Captain, Membership committee, organizing social events, or other volunteer duties?

Note: Your contact information is for the exclusive use of communicating BNA news and events. It will not be shared or sold to other parties. Mail or drop off membership form and dues to BNA treasurer:

Mary Beth Gates: 155 Grady Ave, Athens 30601.