

VOLLINTINE EVERGREEN

N E W S

A Neighborhood Publication Sponsored by VECA, the Vollintine-Evergreen Community Association

Volume XXIX, Number 4

JULY 2003

POTLUCK SUPPER AND POOL PARTY

Mark your calendars, and join many of your neighbors for great food and water fun on Saturday, July 12, at the Rhodes College pool. The potluck supper will start at 6:00 p.m. and the pool will open to us at 7:00 p.m. The event is free. Those under age 16 must be accompanied by an adult.

Just bring swimsuits and a dish to share (the more people you bring, the larger the dish!). VECA will provide eating utensils and soft drinks. If the weather doesn't cooperate, the event will go on, indoors.



MONTHLY HOME REPAIR CLASSES TO CONTINUE IN SEPTEMBER



VECA and VECA CDC have begun a new program in 2003. Home repair classes on a variety of topics were held on the third Saturday of each month from January through June. After our summer vacation, our next class will be on September 20. Look for all the fall dates and topics in the September newsletter.

Suggestions for future topics are welcome. We would also love to have experienced neighborhood residents help conduct a class or two.

JobLINC Bus

The Library's JobLINC bus will be at the VECA office August 19 & October 21 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

JobLINC bus travels the city offering job search assistance, including help with resumes and job interview tips to adults and teenagers.

MCLEAN BAPTIST CHURCH CALLS PASTOR

McLean Baptist Church has called Rev. Joe Doran as its new pastor. His first Sunday in the pulpit was May 25. A native of west Tennessee, Rev. Doran is a graduate of the University of Louisville and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. He served churches in Kentucky and Ohio before moving to Memphis in 1993. For the past several years he has served as a chaplain with the Baptist Memorial Health Care Corporation and he now serves as a part-time chaplain with Hospice South. Rev. Doran is also an adjunct professor at the Memphis Theological Seminary. He and his wife Kaye reside in Bartlett.

Do Not Place In Or On Mailboxes

UPCOMING MEETINGS & COMMITTEES

Unless otherwise marked, all of these meetings are at the VECA office at 1680 Jackson. To be certain, you can call first at 276-1782. Committee meetings and Board meetings are open to everyone.



Potluck Supper & Pool Party	July 12 (Rhodes College)
National Night Out	August 5
Open House	fall, T.B.A.
VECA Block Club Reception & General Membership Meeting	January 26, 2004
Historic Committee's "Bungalow Tour"	April 25, 2004
Historic Committee	second Monday monthly, 7:00 p.m. (various locations; call office)
Code Enforcement Committee	third Saturday monthly, 10:30 a.m.
Block Club Committee	first Monday monthly, 6:00 p.m.
Cypress Creek Committee	call office for update
Youth Committee	call office to help
V&E Greenline Committee	third Tuesday monthly, 7:00 p.m.
Housing Committee	second Tuesday monthly, 5:30 p.m.
Commercial Revitalization Committee	second Tuesday monthly, 6:00 p.m.
Managing Committee	last Monday monthly, 5:30 p.m.
VENews deadlines, 2003:	August 5, October 3, December 2
VECA CDC & VECA Boards	first Monday monthly, 6:30 p.m. & 7:00 p.m.
VECA CDC & VECA Boards	August 4, 6:30 p.m. & 7:00 p.m.
VECA CDC & VECA Boards	September 8, 6:30 p.m. & 7:00 p.m.

VISIT VECA'S WEBSITE



www.neighborhoodlink.com/veca

VECA & VECA CDC STAFF

Sean Fegette,
Construction Coordinator
(sean@vecacdc.org)

Steve Gadbois, Executive Director
(gadbois@vecacdc.org)

Ruth Gibson, Homeowner Counselor
and Office Manager
(wruth@vecacdc.org)

Daryl Lewis,
Neighborhood Preservationist
(dlewis@vecacdc.org)

Wilma Vandermeer,
Financial Manager

Andrew Wilkins,
Property Code Coordinator
(wilkinsandrew@vecacdc.org)



FOR SALE BY VECA CDC

All six are new brick, 3-bedroom,
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two are complete):

2113 Brown
2218 Hunter
2348 Hunter
2136 Howell
2345 Shasta
2375 Shasta



2113 Brown



2348 Hunter

For more information, contact Randy
Wilder of Sowell & Company at 278-4380.

VOLLINTINE NEWS EVERGREEN

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on disk, or by email to VECA_news@yahoo.com

276-1782 phone • 276-1784 fax

email: veca@vecacdc.org and
vecacdc@vecacdc.org

www.neighborhoodlink.com/veca



DESIGNER NEEDED FOR NEW VECA WEBSITE

If any resident is interested in designing a new website at vecacdc.org, please call the VECA office at 276-1782.

VOLLINTINE-EVERGREEN HISTORY TO BE UPDATED



Long-time Vollintine-Evergreen residents may be familiar with the only comprehensive written history of our neighborhood, "Vollintine/Evergreen: A Diverse Community", written in 1980 by Peggy Boyce Jemison under the auspices of MIFA. (If you have not seen it, a few carefully-preserved copies are at the VECA office.) A lot of time has passed and a lot of change has occurred.

Accordingly, Memphis Heritage is willing to prepare an update; it has already completed one for the Evergreen Historic District, our neighbors to the south.

- Do you wish to loan photos or information?
- Do you wish to be interviewed?
- Do you wish for Memphis Heritage to consider you for the paid position of writer?
- Do you wish to reserve a copy for purchase later (probably at \$20-25)?

If any of your answers are "yes", contact the VECA office for more information.



V&E GREENLINE WALK & TALKS

Don't miss out on these educational and fun walks on the Greenline. This will be an opportunity for people in the community to hear about the V&E Greenline, meet volunteers and ask questions.

SATURDAY MORNING, JULY 12 FROM 9:00A.M. TO 10:00 A.M. - AT THE SPRINGS

Native Plants on the V&E Greenline: Railroad beds are sometimes the oldest undisturbed green areas left in the urban environment. Our secluded Greenline yields plant life surprises. Come and learn about the biodiversity in our backyard.

SATURDAY EVENING, AUGUST 9 FROM 6:00 P.M. TO 7:00 P.M. - AT THE AUBURNDALE BRIDGE

History of Our V&E Greenline: Come and learn the story behind our Greenline including Civil war encampments, lumber mills, early settlers, the second oldest railbed in Memphis c. 1856.

SATURDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 13 FROM 6:00 P.M. TO 7:00 P.M. - AT MLGW PARK

Ice Cream Sundays and a Little Music: Come and meet your neighbors on the V&E Greenline and close out the summer.

Call 272-2620 if you have questions or want to join the V&E Greenline committee.

NEEDED AT YOUR VECA OFFICE

- shelving
- projector screen

We'll be glad to pick up!



- Rhonda and Joseph Solomito for the donation of an electric oven, which completes the VECA office's new kitchenette;
- to International Paper for the donation of a full year's supply of office paper (the primary office supply used at the VECA office);
- to Regions Bank for a framed copy of the VECA article in the May 2003 issue of *Southern Living* magazine — it now hangs in the VECA office

THE PIPES ARE CALLING ... AGAIN!

by Beverly Cruthirds

Evergreen Presbyterian Church is delighted to announce the return of "Clanjamfry: A Scottish Festival", this year being celebrated for the fifth time. The festival will be on the weekend of September 19-21 and once again there will be entertainment and activities for the whole family, plus, of course, the stirring sounds of the Wolf River Pipes and Drums, Clanjamfry's official bagpipe band.

The weekend starts on Friday evening with the Ceilidh, a traditional Scottish talent show, in the McCallum Ballroom at Rhodes College. On Saturday, the Scottish Faire fills the lawn of Evergreen with music, vendors, games, displays, clan tents, a children's area and much more. Saturday night, in cooperation with the Mid-South Celtic Arts Alliance, Clanjamfry presents Dochas, one of Scotland's premier up-and-coming Celtic music groups, performing in Evergreen's sanctuary. The grand finale is the Kirkin' o' the Tartans on Sunday morning, a moving church service with many elements of Scottish traditional worship, including the bagpipes in grand procession.

For more information, call the Clanjamfry information line at 458-2043. Leave your name and address to receive a brochure.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AT CYPRESS MIDDLE SCHOOL

SWEEP II will commence at Cypress Middle School at the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year. During its first year, SWEEP (Storm Water Environmental Education Project) ran at Cypress and two other schools. Carol Ekstrom (Rhodes) and Gwendolyn Shorter (Cypress) co-authored the successful grant proposal to the Associated Colleges of the South that will allow the program to continue.

Collaborators include Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, Omicron Chi chapter at Rhodes, Phi Lambda Omega chapter in Memphis, Kappa Delta, Jarvis Winfrey of Buckman Laboratories, Mark Smith of Rhodes, Billy Newton, Tom Lawrence of the City of Memphis, and Alfred Hall of Memphis City Schools.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT NEEDED

VECA CDC seeks to hire an environmental consultant to advise the community concerning current and upcoming environmental and health assessments taking place along Cypress Creek, as well as possible remediation following those assessments.

The project will be funded by an Environmental Justice grant from the U.S. EPA, pending final approval of that grant. Applicants must have technical expertise and appropriate professional credentials. Strong candidates will also have good writing skills and organizational abilities. The environmental consultant will be under contract for one year, starting on or about September 1.

Cypress Creek, which forms the northern border of the Vollintine-Evergreen neighborhood, drains a heavily industrialized area and has carried a variety of pesticide wastes, automotive fluids, and other noxious compounds. For more information, please contact Steve Gadbois, VECA CDC Executive Director.



Donations to VECA CDC (but NOT to VECA) may be tax deductible, and may be directed to a particular CDC program. For more information, call the VECA office at (901) 276-1782.

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ASK THE BANKER: Home Equity Conversion Mortgages

Question: What is a Home Equity Conversion Mortgage (HECM)?

Answer: A HECM is sometimes called a "reverse mortgage" because a homeowner draws down the equity in their home by receiving monthly payments or receiving a lump sum payment.

Question: Who is eligible to obtain a HECM?

Answer: You are eligible to obtain a HECM if you are at least 62 years of age and you own your home, but you still may be eligible for a reverse mortgage even if you still owe on a first or second mortgage. There are no income or medical requirements to qualify.

Question: What is the cost of a HECM?

Answer: There are fees and closing costs associated with a reverse mortgage just as there are with a forward (ordinary) mortgage. It is best to talk to a housing counselor or reverse mortgage specialist to ascertain more specific information on costs.

Question: What options are available besides HECMs?

Answer: Other options may include lifestyle changes, public benefit programs, or less costly ways to meet your needs. Seniors should see a HUD-certified housing counselor to learn about, and be able to consider, all their options before deciding to participate in a reverse mortgage program.

Question: What are the tax benefit implications of HECMs?

Answer: The funds from a reverse mortgage are tax-free — it is your money, and not considered additional income. It does not affect regular Social Security or Medicare benefits. However, the money received from a reverse mortgage may affect your eligibility for certain kinds of government assistance, such as Medicaid or state assistance programs. This is one of the reasons the government requires you to meet with a reverse mortgage counselor.

Question: When is a HECM paid back?

Answer: The HECM loan comes due when the last surviving borrower dies or sells the home. In addition, the loan may become due if you allow the property to deteriorate beyond reasonable wear and tear, or if all borrowers permanently move to a new principal residence, or if you fail to pay property taxes and keep hazard insurance.

VECA CDC's Ruth Gibson has considerable experience and success with HECMs.

Most of this month's answers were contributed by BancorpSouth.

Information provided in this column is offered in good faith, but individuals should carefully consider whether the advice suits their own particular circumstances and act accordingly.



HomeStyle PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER - BUNGALOWS

by Linda Nichols



Wow, it has been such a long time since we have talked about our houses - I hope you remember all your details because now we are going to try and put it all together. In our previous columns, we have talked about the different parts of our homes - the roof, the door, the windows, the porch. Now it's time to start putting those pieces together and talk about our houses as a whole. House type is based on two components - think of your house as a present. There is the box and the wrapping. The plan and shape of the house are the box and the style, made up of the decorative motifs, is the wrapping. Often plan and style are hard to distinguish and sometimes are very intertwined.

There are several different types of plans represented in Vollintine-Evergreen but in this column, we are going to focus on one particular plan - the bungalow. To identify a bungalow, look for horizontal lines, low extended eaves and a dominant porch. The bungalow originated in India and the large porch and overhanging eaves provided shade and helped to keep the inside of the house cool. You can understand why bungalows were so popular in Memphis with our long, hot summers!

The bungalow is small in size and is single story or one and a half stories. (Remember that means it isn't a house, it is a cottage. To be a house, you have to have two full floors with an attic over them.) Most half stories



will have dormers in them. The roof can be front gabled (peak in the front) or side gabled (peaks at the sides of the house), although most of our Vollintine-Evergreen bungalows are front gabled. Often, one large gable covers the house and a second, lower gable covers the porch. Bungalows have overhanging eaves and a large, dominant porch, which can be partial or full (extending across the entire front of the house). The porch can have straight or battered (remember, wider at the bottom than at the top) piers (the porch supports) and these piers can be of many different materials including wood, brick, stucco, or stone. The porch often extends out over the driveway into a porte-cochere.

In addition to the basic bungalow plan, there are three bungalow plan variations in Vollintine-Evergreen.

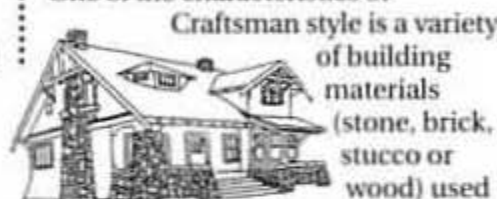
The **airplane bungalow** looks like a typical bungalow, with the addition of a raised portion of the central roof (like the tail of an airplane sticking up in the air). There are usually one or two rooms in this part of the home. Low windows are generally found along the sides of this raised portion of the house. Bungalows in our neighborhood that have 1 1/2 stories tend to be airplane bungalows.

The **Southern bungalow**, unlike most VE bungalows, is side gabled. Its low-pitched roof extends past the front of the house to form the roof of the porch, which is often supported by turned or boxed wooden columns, square brick piers, or wrought iron.

The **Spanish bungalow** has either typical, triangular gables or curvilinear gables. The gable often projects off the front of the

main part of the house. Arches can often be found on the front of the house, either as porch supports or in the shape of the windows. Spanish bungalows are almost always stucco.

Many of the bungalows in VE are in a style called **Craftsman bungalow**. One of the characteristics of



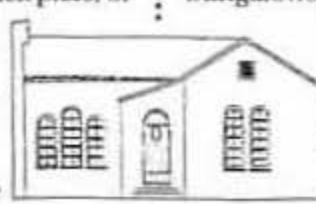
Craftsman style is a variety of building materials (stone, brick, stucco or wood) used in combination. The eaves of Craftsman bungalows have exposed rafters that extend past the edge of the house. Dormers are usually gabled or shed. Chimneys are generally found on the side of



Craftsman homes. Craftsman windows are double hung often with multi-lights over a single light. (Remember your windows? That means the

windows raise and lower and that the top window has multiple panes while the bottom window has only one pane of glass.) Doors are solid wood with panels and usually have lights (windows) in them. Doors may be framed with side lights, also.

Our bungalows in Vollintine-Evergreen have stood the test of time well. They were great homes when they were built in the 1920s and they are still great homes. They are spacious and well laid-out, they adapt to a variety of decorating styles, and their spacious porches encourage us to visit with our neighbors. The large number of bungalows and the variety of high



quality materials used in their construction have made our neighborhood one of the premier areas for these wonderful structures.

EXPLORING THE BUNGALOW — HOME TOUR — SUNDAY, APRIL 25, 2004

Because Vollintine-Evergreen Historic District has so many wonderful bungalows, next year's home tour is going to focus on these interesting and versatile homes. Interest in bungalows is at an all-time high in this country, with publications like Bungalow Magazine tapping into the public's interest. In 2002, 700 people came to admire our homes. Now, we want the Mid-South to see our great bungalows. Actually, we want the world to see our bungalows and we will be inviting Bungalow Magazine to come to our home tour. To capitalize on our great bungalow porches, the Historic Committee is planning to feature a short play on someone's spacious front porch.

Now all we need are great bungalows. Do you have one? Do you know of someone who has a knock-out bungalow? Please call 278-9838 or email us at: ve_historic@yahoo.com to nominate a great bungalow for consideration for the home tour.

If you are fascinated by bungalows and would like to be part of planning the Home Tour or even just volunteering on that day, please contact us. We would love to have you join the committee!



MAY & JUNE — YARD OF THE MONTH HONOREES!

Congratulations to these honorees! Please drive by and admire these homes. If you would like to nominate a house for Yard of the Month, please email us at: ve_historic@yahoo.com or call 278-9838.

MAY — 690 N. EVERGREEN



Nathan Crumley sits on the strategically placed large rock at 690 North Evergreen.

The serene and elegant yard at 690 North Evergreen is the result of much hard work by homeowner Frank Crumley and his son, Nathan, who have done all the work themselves. The yard work has occupied two of the five years they have lived in the home. The perfect placement of a large rock was not the work of nature. In fact, Nathan confessed that moving the rock was the hardest part of the yard's transformation.

JUNE — 972 N. WILLET



Belle Williams and her flower filled front yard at 972 North Willett

Although Belle and Lonnie Williams have lived at 972 North Willett since 1966, she only began working in her front yard flower beds about 10 years ago. In fact, Belle works in her yard almost everyday. She inherited her love of flowers from her mother, along with most of her plants. Old-fashioned flowers such as four o'clocks, night-blooming moon flowers and petunias cover her entire front yard. Some of the flowers were thoughtfully planted, while several just appeared as volunteers, transforming what used to be a grass covered front yard into a grass-free paradise garden.

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HUNTING GROUNDS, DAIRY FARMS, AND HOUSING TRACTS: THREE CENTURIES OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE IN THE VOLLINTINE-EVERGREEN NEIGHBORHOOD

by Chad Montrie (Chad_Montrie@uml.edu)

[Editor's note: This is the fourth of five installments of this article. The complete version is at the VECA office.]

(Last time: Housing Tracts)

PETROCHEMICALS AND RACE

By the 1950s, housing development in Vollintine-Evergreen was nearly complete, with the exception of some land that had once been part of a pasture belonging to T.J. Briggs, later developed as the University Cabana apartments and Cypress Junior High School in the 1960s. As dairy farms were replaced by subdivisions, the area also saw the arrival of a number of chemical plants on its borders. In the years after World War II, petrochemical manufacturing increased substantially in the United States and Memphis experienced more than its share of this particular industrial growth and development. Between 1947 and 1967, the number of chemical companies alone in Shelby County increased from 53 to 77. These companies were attracted to the area by low cost power from the TVA, sufficient river and railroad transportation options and low freight costs, proximity to raw materials, as well as abundant and relatively inexpensive land and labor. The plants that moved to North Memphis could also count on the use of Cypress Creek to carry off waste materials.

The first chemical company to open near the Vollintine-Evergreen neighborhood was Buckman Laboratories, founded in 1945 by Stanley Buckman. The company established its headquarters and manufacturing facilities on McLean, on the north side of Cypress Creek, at a site that had alternately been part of a 50-acre horse farm, a lumber company office, and a residential rental property. Soon after its opening, however, the plant was heavily damaged by

an explosion of benzene gas and subsequent fire. The workers managed to escape after smelling the gas and none were seriously injured or killed, but the explosion was felt 18 miles away and the building was left a shell of twisted steel girders and pipes. The company was able to build another plant rather quickly and little time was lost marketing its first main product, BSM-11, a slime control agent used by the pulp and paper industry. In the next couple of decades, Buckman expanded its facilities and also began producing and selling a whole host of other chemical compounds designed primarily for a number of different parts of the paper manufacturing process. In 1974 there was another explosion, resulting from a chemical reaction involving methylene bromide, which blew off a part of the roof but, probably because it occurred in the pre-dawn hours, fortunately caused no injuries. This second major accident did not seem to slow the company's growth, however, and it continued to develop new products and expand its operations around the world.

Less than a decade after Buckman's founding, in 1952, the Velsicol Corporation purchased a plant built for the war effort, adjacent to Cypress Creek but several miles northeast of Vollintine-Evergreen, and transformed it into a pesticide-manufacturing facility. In the 1940s Velsicol had developed heptachlor, a chlorinated hydrocarbon that the company manufactured along with endrin and other pesticides at its new facilities in Memphis. By 1974, Velsicol was producing 6 million pounds of heptachlor a year and, even after it was banned for use in the United States in the 1980s, production continued for shipments mainly to tropical countries. But Velsicol was not the only other pesticide manufacturer in North Memphis. Just down the road, and also adjacent to Cypress Creek, was Creotox,

a pesticide blending company founded in 1946. After it closed in 1991, the Creotox land was declared a Superfund site by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The environmental impact Buckman, Velsicol, and Creotox eventually had on the Vollintine-Evergreen neighborhood was largely a matter of their chosen waste disposal methods. Prior to 1963, when the Wolf River Interceptor was finished along the south side of Cypress Creek, the chemical companies dumped nearly all of their production wastes into the waterway (after 1963, they supposedly dumped only "non-contact" waste there). Velsicol was perhaps the worst polluter, the main source of the aldrin, dieldrin, and heptachlor epoxide found in sediment and soil samples taken from along creek banks. The company also poured thousands of pounds of toxic emissions into the air. Still, the other companies also disposed of manufacturing wastes seemingly without regard for the social costs. Buckman Laboratories used the Wolf River Interceptor to dispose of chemical wastes once it was available, but throughout the 1970s these discharge products frequently plugged the sewer and overflowed into the creek. This material, according to Dr. Buckman, contained large quantities of hydrogen sulfides and that explained the bad odors that sometimes permeated the neighborhood.

The petrochemical industry as a whole also affected the Vollintine-Evergreen neighborhood in another way, by developing products that transformed the health department's vector control program. In addition to ditching, filling, oiling, and dusting water surfaces with paris green, starting in 1945 the city-county agency began using Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) to kill adult anophelene mosqui-

PETROCHEMICALS *cont'd on page 10*

PETROCHEMICALS from page 9

toes. Personnel sprayed this insecticide inside and around rural and river-zone homes, in city and county school cafeterias, as well as on streams and other bodies of water. By 1950 the program's chemical arsenal also included chlordane and methoxychlor and, in the last year of that decade, health department personnel sprayed more than 40,000 gallons of DDT-fuel-oil emulsion alone. The 1966 health report declared that malaria had "ceased to exist as a disease of importance in the community," but spraying, along with other vector control efforts, continued into the 1970s. In Vollintine-Evergreen, this decades-long effort to control mosquitoes with chemicals introduced a variety of new ways for residents to be exposed to pesticides, from taking a walk near Lick Creek to eating in the Snowden School cafeteria.

As polluting chemical plants became a fixture in the areas adjacent to the neighborhood and chemical vector control introduced additional routes for toxic exposure, the racial composition of Vollintine-Evergreen began to change, though these developments do not appear to be directly linked. In 1970, the area south of Vollintine, which included about 75 percent of the neighborhood's entire population, was still overwhelmingly white. This was also an affluent section of town, with a median annual income per household of \$10,000, as compared to \$8646 in the city as a whole, and 547 families had incomes that exceeded \$15,000 a year. In the census tract north of Vollintine, however, which extended across Cypress Creek to Chelsea, there was a black majority and median annual income in the area was \$7369, though both the white and black residents who lived within the Vollintine-Evergreen neighborhood boundaries tended to be more affluent. Modeane Thompson,

for example, a black woman born and raised in North Memphis, moved to 1936 Edward in 1964. She was a social worker and worked part time for Family Services while her husband was an insurance executive. Four of their five children went to Catholic grade schools while the other attended Fontbonne College in St. Louis.

By 1980, Vollintine-Evergreen had 14,352 residents, more than half of whom were black and nearly all of the rest white. Annual median income, even in parts of the area south of Vollintine, had dropped below the city median, and an increasing number of households lived near or below the poverty line. There were significant variations in patterns of residence, although more in terms of race than in income. Looking at the census block level, most of the movement of blacks into the neighborhood was still north of Vollintine, with a lesser number moving to the section between Jackson and Vollintine, and only a minuscule percentage of African Americans buying or renting homes in the subdivisions south of Jackson and east of Evergreen. Integration was taking place but not evenly, and the wave of African Americans who did move to Vollintine-Evergreen in the 1970s tended to be significantly poorer (as well as younger) than previous residents.

That there was any integration at all in Vollintine-Evergreen is due in part to the Vollintine-Evergreen Community Action Association (VECAA), established in May 1970 by residents who sought to prevent whites from fleeing in response to a black influx. The steering committee of this new organization included both white and black professionals, including Modeane Thompson. They worked toward their main objective by establishing a 12-member real

estate committee which set up a consulting service for residents to discuss property values, kept abreast of block-busting efforts by real estate agents and put pressure on real estate companies to end the practice, and started a welcoming program for new residents. In addition to these activities, VECAA also functioned as a more traditional community improvement group, blocking the removal of the tree-lined median on Jackson Avenue for left turning lanes as well as setting and enforcing aesthetic standards for homes and yards. In 1976, the organization's name was shortened to Vollintine-Evergreen Community Association (VECA) and, under the leadership of Southwestern professor Mike Kirby, it directed more attention toward rezoning (to preserve the single-family character of the neighborhood) and housing deterioration. Toward the end of the decade it began a long, drawn-out effort to rehabilitate an apartment complex on Vollintine and Watkins, which had become a haven for prostitution and drug-dealing.

VECA took the initiative on a number of issues affecting the neighborhood during the 1970s, including racial integration of housing and schools, but some residents wanted to take a more combative approach, including N.T. Greene. Born on Davis Street in North Memphis in 1925, Greene, who is an African-American, left for New York City during the start of World War II. There he worked on the docks and in an electronics factory but, wishing to escape the worst of workplace racism, he eventually took a job as a window washer. When he married and decided not to raise his children in New York, the family returned to Memphis in 1972. They bought a home on Terry Circle, near Vollintine and Evergreen and, shortly thereafter, Brother Greene

PETROCHEMICALS cont'd on page 11

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276-1782



PETROCHEMICALS *from page 10*

established the Shelby County Democratic Club 40-2 (SCDC), the numbers a reference to the home precinct of Greene and other members. Membership usually hovered around 40, with only about half that number regularly active, but it included both black and white residents.

(Editor's note: N.T. Greene died on December 24, 2002.)

Greene's social consciousness had been shaped in the 1960s by wide-ranging reading, including Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, as well as by following news of civil rights and antiwar protests. This reading and the swirl of events during the decade of upheaval also inspired a spirit of militance. What made Greene unique was his readiness and ability to blend the fight against racism with concerns about the environment, as this was well before any discussion of "environmental racism" or an "environmental justice movement." One of the first issues the Shelby County Democratic Club addressed, and the one that consumed most of the members' time during the rest of the decade, was the problem of sewage overflow in Cypress Creek. Their campaign began in the early part of December 1972, when the SCDC and VECAA arranged a dialogue meeting with the city engineer and Dr. John Buckman. The engineer explained that the sanitary and storm sewers were technically separate systems, but when excess rainwater got into the sanitary sewers the raw sewage overflowed into the storm sewer system, including Cypress Creek. He suggested that the existing main sewer line was inadequate and proposed the construction of a larger line to the Wolf River Interceptor, at an estimated cost of

\$200,000. Buckman explained the efforts his company had made to reduce the waste it dumped into Cypress Creek and promised they would correct their role in the sewage overflow problem.

During the summer of 1973, the Memphis public works department cleaned trash and trees out of Cypress Creek from Springdale to Evergreen, and Buckman Labs made improvements to its part of the sewer system, though chemical waste continued to pour into the creek during frequent overflows at the plant. The next summer, the city held an environmental impact hearing on the proposed sewer line, which would follow the old one down the creek from Hollywood to the Wolf River. Bids were taken on the work the following year, by which point the cost had risen to at least \$1.7 million. As the city made preparations for the project, Brother Greene changed the name of SCDC to the Cypress Citizens' Committee (CCC) and, in the early part of 1976, he changed the name again to the Cypress Health and Safety Committee (CHSC). Like the SCDC, both the CCC and CHSC focused primarily on sewage overflow problems, but the name changes reflected Greene's interest in improving the drainage conditions at Cypress Junior High School. The school was built in 1967, at the point where the Overton Bayou drained into Cypress Creek. It was oriented to face east toward a less affluent, predominantly black area, and away from Vollintine-Evergreen, because the intention was that it would serve mostly black students in North Memphis, which it did. Greene had taken a tour of the school in 1974 and became aware that overflow raw

sewage was seeping up through the basement. The Cypress Citizens' Committee later filed a lawsuit, seeking \$340,000 in damages from the city, but Judge Bailey Brown dismissed the case and this was upheld on appeal. In any case, the solution to the problem, the larger sewer line first proposed by the city engineer, was already in the works. It was finally finished in 1977.

On the issue of sewage overflow, SCDC and VECAA were able to work together. At other times, however, there were differences of opinion about both means and ends. Greene later claimed that the major point of division between the two groups was SCDC's commitment to action, pointing out the irony of VECAA dropping this word from their name in 1976. But both before and after this date the Vollintine-Evergreen association was much more than a social club. In fact, VECAA outlasted the SCDC, CCC, and CHSC, and went on to win some important victories. The group joined with other Midtown organizations, for example, to successfully fight new proposals to extend Interstate 40 down North Parkway or, alternatively, by way of the old L&N railroad line. Rather than put an interstate on the L&N property, in the 1990s VECAA acquired the land for a "greenway," a 1.7-mile long stretch of park-like area through the middle of the Vollintine-Evergreen community. Before the Greenline was made, the old bed was "like a jungle," only periodically mowed and sprayed with herbicides, sometimes catching on fire, and littered with trash. Now it is one of the more pleasant places to walk in the neighborhood.

(Next time: Conclusion and any readers' reactions)

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VOLLINTINE-EVERGREEN COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

VECA is a neighborhood organization made up of volunteers and paying members. The Vollintine-Evergreen News is the way in which VECA communicates with its residents. The Vollintine-Evergreen News contains information about VECA, neighborhood residents, and business and government policies. VECA is bounded by Watkins on the West, Cypress Creek on the North, Springdale on the East and North Parkway on the South. Contact VECA by writing to 1680 Jackson Avenue, Memphis, TN 38107 or call (901) 276-1782.