# VOLLINTINE & EVERGREEN

----- NEWS-----

A NEIGHBORHOOD PUBLICATION SPONSORED BY VECA, THE VOLLINTINE EVERGREEN COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION / VECA.ORG / VECA@VECA.ORG

**OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2013** 









# Hyde Family Foundations Awards Grant to V&E Greenline

Through their Green Initiatives program, the Hyde Family Foundations announced the funding of grant money to the V&E Greenline Committee for structural improvements.

"The Hyde Family Foundations are proud to support VECA's efforts to improve the V&E Greenline for the citizens of VECA and surrounding areas. The trail positively impacts user health, offers much-needed green space in the urban core, and contributes greatly to VECA's sense of community. The V+E Greenline is a unique, sustainable model of neighborhood trail development and maintenance that can be shared as a proof point with other citizens who seek to build trails in their own communities." Lauren Taylor, Program Director for Livable Communities, Hyde Family Foundations.

This proposal to the Hyde Family Foundations grew from needs identified by VECA's Strategic Master Plan for the V&E Greenline.

Projects will address repair and refurbishment needs of the 17-year-old trail and its infrastructure.

- 1. The Keeler Bridge and the Lick Creek Bridge will be painted. The decking on the Lick Creek Bridge will be replaced.
- 2. Two bridges will be built to address access issues to the grounds near the Stationhouse.
- 3. The cement pad foundation of the Stationhouse will be repaired.
- 4. Drainage improvements will be made to the trail entrance at McLean.
- 5. Steps and a handrail will be installed at Barksdale.

VECA thanks the Hyde Family Foundations and looks forward to seeing the work in progress over the next few months.





### **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### Sculpture Unveiling Party: Are there Fish in Lick Creek? Saturday, November 9, 3 - 6 pm

### **V&E Greenline at Evergreen Street - FREE**

Crosstown Arts invites the entire neighborhood to celebrate the winner of this year's MemFeast event, "Are there Fish in Lick Creek?" by VECA artist Jeannie Tomlinson Saltmarsh. The sculpture will be installed near the banks of Lick Creek at the V&E Greenline and Evergreen St. Join us for live music, food, drinks and family fun.



### **Vollintine Evergreen Youth Group** Every Wednesday from 2:30-6:30pm **Peace Lutheran Church** 1548 Jackson Avenue

The newly established Vollentine Evergreen Youth Group (ages 11-18) will meet for arts and crafts, basketball, and homework help on Wednesdays, from 2:30pm to 6:30pm

### Call for donated items and volunteers!

The newly established Vollintine Evergreen Youth Group will meet for arts and crafts, basketball, and homework help for the first time on Wednesday, October 2, from 2:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.. Show our neighborhood youth, ages 11-18, that we care by helping provide a safe, fun, and encouraging environment for them after school. Get to know the many awesome young people we have in our area by volunteering for two-hour shifts in the space Peace Lutheran Church has kindly offered for our use. We need adults to participate in all of the activities. If you can't come in person, help us with our new project by donating basketballs, first aid kits, games, or arts and craft items. We can use colored rubber bands and thread for friendship bracelets and paper, glue, markers, scissors or really anything that teens and tweens can use to make art.

Please contact Sara First at first.sara@gmail.com or 901-500-2876 if you'd like to volunteer or donate.

#### **NEXTDOOR.COM**

Do you ever have information you would like to share with your neighbors but not the whole world? There's an app for that. Nextdoor.com is the free and private community forum for you to share with your neighbors, and VECA residents have already been using it.

VECA resident Sam Powers got rid of some junk that had been filling up his shed and he found a recommendation for roof repair. VECA has over 200 residents signed up so far. It is accessible via iPhone app or the internet.

Nextdoor.com worked with VECA to set up a network on the website where access is limited to area residents.

The Commercial Appeal recently featured an article about the East Buntyn neighborhood using Nextdoor.com, noting that the site "verifies users by address and uses real names." Privacy is key, unlike other

Check it out: https://nextdoor.com

### **VOLLINTINE EVERGREEN NEWS**

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2013

#### **VOLUNTEER STAFF**

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#### **CONTRIBUTORS**

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#### **DEADLINES FOR THE NOV / DEC VOLLINTINE EVERGREEN NEWS ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS** OCT 15

**ADS OCTOBER 15** Please send all articles and submissions to NEWS@VECA.ORG For advertising rate sheet, or to submit ads electronically, please email NEWS@VECA.ORG

#### **VECA BOARD OFFICERS**

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VECA is a neighborhood organization made up of volunteers and paying members. The newsletter, VECA mail, annual meeting, and committee activities are ways in which VECA communicates with its residents, businesses, and other stakeholders.

The VECA area is bounded by Watkins on the West, Cypress Creek on the North, Springdale on the East, and North Parkway on the South.

**VECA** 1680 Jackson Avenue 901.276.1782 Website / Calendar: veca.org Email: veca@veca.org

# National Night Out, August 7th























Thank you to everyone who attended the festive National Night Out held on August 7th at the VECA Welcome Center. Thank you, volunteers for helping at the event and for your planning and coordination. Members of the VECA Neighborhood Networks committee took the lead in planning: Lilly Gilkey, Gloria Singleton, Janis Cannon, Rick Maxwell, Andree Glenn, Elise Hastings, Karen Hess, and Travis Lux. Many thanks to the folks at Mercy Hill Church who helped prepare and serve hot dogs. They also provided a sound system and music and games for the children. Thanks also to the band, Standby for Mars for their performance. Tony Steinberg coordinated the visit from the Green Machine and Marissa Harris helped with aerobics sesssions. A special thanks to Rachel Wilkin from the MPD for helping with the planning. VIP visitors included Memphis Police Director, Tony Armstrong, Colonel Russell Houston of Crump Station, Ed Stanton, Henri Brooks, Joe Brown, Myron Lowery, and Eldra White of Memphis City Beautiful.



## Neighbor Highlight: Catherine Stevens

By Karen Hess



VECA neighbor Catherine Stevens met with me recently at the VECA Welcome Center to talk about her recent move into the neighborhood and her artwork, ranging from mosaics to greeting cards.

Catherine advocates for "cherishing what we have on this planet" by conserving resources and refashioning what we view as trash into exquisite treasure. She was steered toward this philosophy while growing up in Houston. She saw the city change – fields were torn up and giant buildings were razed all around. Her family home was torn down and turned into a parking lot. Even as a young person, Catherine viewed these developments as having serious consequences in the future.

After receiving a degree in biology, Catherine began to incorporate her knowledge of science into her life and art. In the late '80s, she formed close relationships with a group of Native Americans. From them, she formed an interest in sacred ecology, which encompasses old traditions and different religions to create a strong respect for Earth.

Catherine has had the opportunity to live in many areas of the country, including Houston, Baton Route, Denver and other areas of Memphis. In Denver, to make ends meet, she took a job as a bookkeeper. "One of the biggest mistakes of my life!" she said, laughing. "At least it helped with keeping track of my art business later." She also worked for the park department of Aurora, CO. They needed someone to fill a candle- and soap-making teaching position, so Catherine offered to take it on: "They asked me to learn how to teach it, and I did." Later, she persuaded them to let her teach a mosaic course. The Denver Botanic Gardens' gift shop placed a standing order for mosaic stepping-stones. "I didn't make much money, but it was steady work that I loved and I had a lot of friends to support me."

She recently moved back to Memphis for the second time and now lives in the Vollintine Evergreen neighborhood. Catherine can be seen

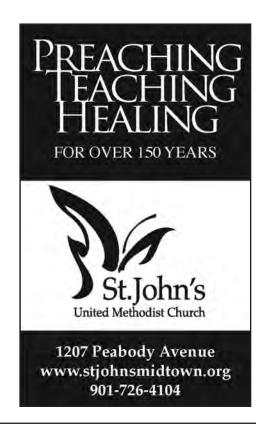
walking the V&E Greenline to get inspiration for mosaics and other art pieces. When I asked what she liked most about the neighborhood, she responded, "The cohesiveness and the friendliness. I like riding the buses here because the drivers are so much nicer than the ones in Colorado."

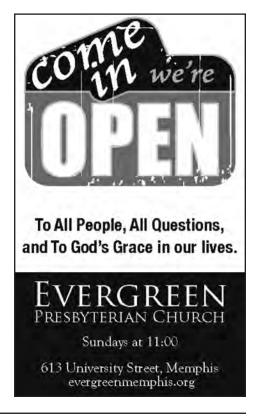
Catherine recently made her 200th stepping stone after 17 years of making them, and she is working with the Brooks Museum to supply them with the stones. Clocks, wood carvings, and greeting cards (with 100% recycled paper) are some of the other items she creates.

Recently, with the slogan "reduce, reuse, recycle" in mind, Catherine began repurposing milk jugs, sanding and shaping them into beautiful lanterns. Homemade crafts are often the ones that get thrown away or thrust in a box, but maybe we could change that trend if we took Catherine's advice to heart: "The key to creating meaningful recycled crafts is taking a basic idea and kicking it up a notch." Catherine has gone through life accepting challenge after challenge. As she says, "We are at a point where we can make choices – work for fear, or work for love. I work for love."



LEFT: Catherine Stevens enjoys creating art in many mediums ABOVE: Catherine Stevens finds inspiration from nature for her mosaic stepping stones





# **AmeriCorps Team Tackling Neighborhood Projects**







VECA was honored to host another AmeriCorps NCCC team for a month. The team arrived Tuesday, August 20, and worked in the neighborhood through September 16.



The team hit the ground running, as reported by Mike Kirby, who is coordinating the team's efforts. On day one the team went through an orientation to VECA and Memphis, including a safety presentation by representatives from the Memphis Police Department. On Thursday, they cleaned up abandoned houses on Watkins and a lot on Lyndale, and they trimmed overgrowth on the west end of the V&E Greenline. Friday was spent on Henry Avenue removing graffiti and painting fences; Chris Floyd and Scott McDermott worked with the team and talked to neighbors about the work. Saturday the team worked with Chuck Fox and Mary Wilder to paint a VECA-owned house on Shasta. The team also helped with the VECA ice cream social on Sunday, Sept. 1.

Left to bottom: Cleaning abandoned properties on Watkins; working in the Lyndale Gardens; working on the Greenline

For the rest of their stay in Memphis, the team worked on trail and safety improvements on the V&E Greenline; they also cleaned up the Jackson Avenue median. On Saturday, September 7, they took photos of houses in the Vollintine North Historic District for an online history project. The team, which was housed at First Congregational Church's Retreat Center, spent two days helping improve the parking lot in the area used by the Cooper Young Farmers' Market.

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AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) is a fulltime, team-based community service program for men and women age 18-24. The program operates in partnership with non profits to do needed service projects throughout the region. The six-member team assisting VECA included: Lindsey Mancari, Derek Anderson, Marlisa Jemison, Hunter Rawls, Graciela Billingsley, and Gyrell Taylor.



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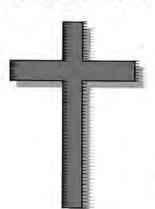
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We are still meeting in the chapel at 10:30am on Sunday mornings.



# **Crosstown Neighborhood Abuzz with Activity**

### **Cleveland Street Flea Market partners with Crosstown Arts**

### By Jeff Hulett

We've all heard about the revitalization of the historic Sears Crosstown building, but did you know about all of the cool things already happening in the Crosstown neighborhood? The Hi-Tone is back in business; local artist Yvonne Bobo has opened an art studio; Visible Music College has a storefront; Crosstown Development Founding partner the Church Health Center is working on having a presence in the neighborhood. There are so many things to talk about, not to mention all of the fun things Crosstown Development Founding Partner Crosstown Arts is bringing to the neighborhood.

One of the coolest things, I think, is the re-emergence of the Cleveland Street Flea Market. One of the longest-standing neighborhood establishments, the market is reorganizing and launching a new partnership with Crosstown Arts to include an after school program, simply called story booth.

"Along with the improvements, we are planning to add a larger arts presence to the flea market," said Cleveland Street Flea Market coordinator Mary Jo Karimnia. "We hope to add arts vendors .... and host arts-related events and shows."



This past month, they hosted the Memphis Urban Sketchers and a CD release party for story booth. For two weeks this summer, a group of middle-school boys wrote original lyrics and music for a single produced by Visible Music College's staff member Kirk Smith. Calling themselves "GameTime," they performed "I Don't Quit" on a recent Friday afternoon to the applause of market vendors, customers, and invited family and friends. The entire stock of CDs sold out ten minutes after the performance.

"We are currently in the middle of a major renovation, moving and improving vendor booths and building a permanent space for story booth," added Mary Jo.

Nat Akin, the Crosstown Arts director of story booth says, "We're really excited to finally have dedicated space in the flea market



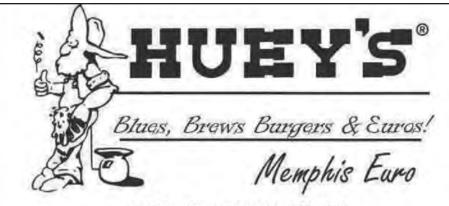
to allow collaborative art projects between community volunteers and neighborhood youth [aged ten to 18]. This flea market is already such an amazing, great space for inspiration, and we're excited to add to that vibe with creative writing, art, and music projects that turn the imaginations of young people loose in here."

Nat says all the programming is free, and each project will result in a final product and a celebration before an audience. He's now actively recruiting volunteers and kids for this fall's programming, and he looks forward to meeting neighbors from VECA who might like to be involved.

The future is bright for this burgeoning area, and that can only make our neighborhood that much stronger.

> Contact Information Nat Akin 901.573.8444

FACING PAGE and ABOVE: GameTime team



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### **Student Fellows Update**

By Travis Lux



The conclusion of summer marks the end of the Transforming Neighborhoods Rhodes-Plough grant. The grant helped fund residentdriven, community-oriented projects and provided outside-the-classroom learning opportunities for Rhodes students through fellowship positions.

Through the grant, VECA had two great Rhodes fellows this past summer, Karen Hess and Elise Hastings. Karen is a junior and environmental science major; Elise graduated in May and has held a fellowship with VECA for the last two years.

Working 37.5 hours per week, they helped plan the successful National Night Out neighborhood celebration; they wrote articles for the newsletters; and they spent many hours scanning old neighborhood newsletters (dating back to the 1970s) which are on the veca.org website. But for the bulk of the summer, the Rhodes student fellows worked on "action-research" projects - the goal of the research isn't the research itself, but to take action based on the content of the research.

The idea for the project came from the VECA Strategic Plan – a longrange plan for the neighborhood developed two years ago through a series of town halls, organized by neighborhood quadrant, at which residents could voice their concerns and offer their visions for the Vollintine Evergreen community. One of the common themes that emerged during this process was the desire to create more opportunities for neighborhood youth opportunities after school, during the summers, and within the VECA organization.

There were two primary goals for the project. The first was to understand the nature of after-school and summer youth programs around the city of Memphis generally and in Vollintine Evergreen, in order to find out what works, what doesn't work, and what are some best practices. The second was to work alongside volunteers to help create a plan for addressing the neighborhood's needs by making use of its assets.

Throughout the project, Hess and Hastings worked closely with VECA volunteers Andree Glenn, Lilly Gilkey, and Angie Powell, helping

them identify organizations within and outside the neighborhood that offer youth-related programs. On this list were churches such as Peace Lutheran and Springdale Baptist and citywide, youth-specific organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club and Bridges. By the end of the summer, almost 20



different organizations and individuals were interviewed. The team gathered information about their programs, like cost of attendance and the activities offered, and also about the barriers they face and how they envision their work in the future. There were a few common themes.

First, there are several programs within Vollintine Evergreen's boundaries which are mostly small church youth groups that typically meet once per week and that are good for focused activities. One barrier for these groups is that parents might feel uncomfortable sending their kids to religious programs. Another barrier is transportation. In most of the neighborhood programs investigated, youth arrived either by foot or their parents drove them.

Lastly, all programs desired more money for programming and daily operation. Though interested, many of the city-wide institutions (such as Boys and Girls Club, the Parks and Neighborhood's Community Centers, Memphis Athletic Ministries) that offer everyday programming are not planning to expand into other neighborhoods due to limited budgets, and none of these operate within Vollintine Evergreen.

Despite its gaps, Vollintine Evergreen has several assets. There seems to be a fairly large volunteer base (from within and outside of the neighborhood), an established community association in VECA, several small, yet active church youth groups, and a number of under utilized spaces in old churches, vacant buildings, and community parks. Any combination of these assets can be leveraged to begin addressing the neighborhood's needs.

Concerning the "action" portion of the project, on July 10 a Youth Town Hall ws held at the VECA Welcome Center. The point of the meeting was for kids to express their visions for an ideal after-school program. They developed a pretty comprehensive list of desired activities. In addition, an open community meeting on July 27 was held to gather parents and others to brainstorm how the neighborhood might work together to develop more youth services. One of the group's initial ideas involved using Peace Lutheran Church's space to focus on reading and basketball.

The group committed to continuing to meet, and a follow-up meeting was held on Saturday, August 10. Attendees developed a tentative mission statement and discussed initial needs and first steps. The group met again on August 24 at Peace Lutheran.

According to Hess and Hastings, "With the end of summer, we have passed along everything we learned to this dedicated group of volunteers. We are more than thankful for the opportunity to have been involved in this project and in various projects over the past three years. Thanks, neighbors!"

ABOVE LEFT: Andree Glenn, Adam Alsamadisi, Travis Lux, Taylor Sieben, Jazlyn Phelps planting trees. ABOVE RIGHT: Karen Hess and Elise Hastings

### **Velsicol**

#### Steve Gadbois

Cypress Creek forms the entire northern border of the Vollintine Evergreen neighborhood, from Springdale Street on the east to Watkins Street on the west. The entire creek is about seven miles long, flowing from southeast to northwest through many Memphis neighborhoods, before it becomes a large storm basin north of Chelsea Avenue whose water is eventually lifted into the Wolf River on its way to the Mississippi.

There are two distinct portions of Cypress Creek adjacent to Vollintine Evergreen. "Sub-area III" is the portion east of Evergreen Street, where the creek is now totally channelized, while "sub-area IV" is the portion west of Evergreen Street, where the creek is unchannelized and relatively natural. Flooding in sub-area IV occurs nearly every spring, and because of the vast flood plain, it does not endanger homes or personal property. In contrast, in sub-area III, any flood can mean only that the creek rises above and out of its concrete channel, often into backyards, but that is quite rare.

(Actually, sub-area III east of Evergreen Street does not include the soil underneath the creek bed itself. That concrete-covered soil is technically designated as "sub-area II," but it is not and never has been of great concern because it is fairly stable and the technicians who occasionally need to work in the creek bed know what precautions to take.)

Upstream, to the east of Vollintine Evergreen, there are or were various heavy industries that dumped many of their wastes directly into Cypress Creek in the mid-20th century, before environmental awareness developed and before regulations were enacted. One of those industries is Velsicol Chemical Corporation, located at 1199 Warford, just north of Jackson Avenue and just east of the bridge over the railroad. Velsicol manufactured various chemicals that were used in pest control (agriculture, termite treatment, etc.), including dieldrin, aldrin, endrin, heptachlor, and chlordane. Because of regulations and changing markets, Velsicol phased out most production by the 1990s. The manufacturing plant will be demolished to make way for a distribution center, as reported by Tom Charlier in the Commercial Appeal on July 13, 2013.

While all water in Cypress Creek carries various man made and natural contaminants, because of its continuous flow the water itself is now essentially free of the chemicals that contaminated the creek many years ago. But the current concern is the soil near the creek that had long exposure to that



contaminated water. Most notably, when sub-area III was channelized in the 1960s, it was first straightened; much soil from the creek bed and banks was pushed back, ending up outside the new concrete walls, often in the backyards of houses and perhaps even in backyard vegetable gardens. Although records from that time are notoriously sketchy, old aerial photographs have been useful in reconstructing the original natural course (pre-channelization) of Cypress Creek, and the soil testing results to be described below tend to indicate higher contamination where the most soil was moved.

The concern about contaminated soil outside Cypress Creek's concrete walls in sub-area III resulted in careful scientific work within the last decade. VECA was an important party in facilitating that work. The main purpose of this historical article is to summarize five separate initiatives that stand out.

First, late in 2003, remediation took place in the playground just west of Cypress Middle School, including University Park along University Street. That remediation was mandated by and supervised by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), and it took the form of a cap of clean soil on top of the existing soil, which was fenced off for several months as grass regrew.

Second, in 2003, in what officials call a "risk assessment," 84 properties on both sides of Cypress Creek in sub-area III had soil samples taken and tested for various chemicals. Scientific sampling and testing were done carefully by a qualified outside firm, directed and supervised by officials from TDEC. Each property's results were reported to the owner, and compilations of all results were given to VECA. For various scientific reasons, the "benchmark chemical" was the pesticide dieldrin (formerly used in growing cotton and corn), and the threshold level for dieldrin was set at 0.7 part per (cont. on page 11)



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# **VECA Ice Cream Social** September 1, 2013

The annual ice cream social was held on September 1st with ice cream and wading pools in abundance. Many thanks to everyone who helped make the event a success. Living Hope Church provided the ice cream and volunteers to help scoop. Angela Lamb, Mary Wilder and Marci Hendrix coordinated the event. Syd Lerner, executive director of the Greater Memphis Greenline set-up a bike rodeo for the kids for fun and to teach safety. Musical entertainment included John McDowell with the Fabulous Malchow Brothers, Rick and Glenn and Michael Graber. Many thanks to all the volunteers for helping to make this signature event another fun time of gathering for our neighbors.





































million ("ppm"), equivalent to 700 parts per billion. About one-third of sampled properties had dieldrin residue exceeding that threshold.

Third, in 2004, the risk assessment was expanded to 50 additional properties, all of which were immediately adjacent to properties that had exceeded the dieldrin threshold the year before. Velsicol vice-president Chuck Hanson wrote in our July 2004 Vollintine-Evergreen News that risk assessment "uses conservative assumptions about potential exposure to contamination and the toxicity of contaminants to provide regulators with a worst-case estimate of the potential health risks posed by a site." Hanson also noted that a risk assessment "is not designed to determine whether health problems in a community are related to particular environmental contaminants."

Fourth, complete soil remediation was offered to the owners of 18 already tested properties where concentrations of dieldrin were highest (above 3 ppm). This drastic but apparently effective method typically involved removing all out-buildings, trees, bushes, and other plants, removing the top two feet of soil, installing a barrier to prevent upward migration of any remaining contaminants from below, bringing in new clean soil, and finally replacing out-buildings, trees, grass, and all landscaping. The trucks – even their tires - were cleaned before they were allowed on the streets, and all soil was taken to a specially prepared long-term holding area at Velsicol's plant. Despite the obvious expense that this remediation entailed, Velsicol officials seemed to do all they could to make sure it was done properly and thoroughly. Naturally, owners and residents were skeptical, and some were difficult to find, but by 2007 all 18 properties had been completely remediated at Velsicol's expense.

Fifth, a human health study was conducted by the Memphis and [according to its website] Shelby County Health Department, using data from the Tennessee "cancer registry" from 1991 to 2000. Specifically, the Health Department compared the rates of six different cancers in various demographic groups of long-time residents of census tracts along Cypress Creek, using Shelby County residents as the comparison group. It turned out that rates were statistically significantly higher in only two categories: pancreatic cancer among black females and breast cancer among white females. The study noted that by its very nature, it could not identify any cause for any difference in cancer rates between residents near Cypress Creek and residents of Shelby County as a whole.

Meanwhile, and not surprisingly, there were developments on the legal front. In 2004, a class-action lawsuit was filed by four citizens against Velsicol for \$1.75 billion. Understandably, Velsicol and its officials were unable to publicly comment or act on the lawsuit, even as they were cooperating with and supporting the concurrent risk assessments and health study described above. By 2008 that lawsuit evolved and ended with a settlement for \$2.1 million, for "diminution of property values." The thinking seemed to be that soil sampling and health studies might be scientifically and legally inconclusive, but there was no question that some property owners had suffered, or would suffer, rightly or wrongly, due to others' perception that their property was damaged. Accordingly, a total of 195 owners of properties with elevated levels of dieldrin (VECA included) received payments, with amounts tied to the appraised value of the affected properties. The VECA office functioned for several days as a sort of "satellite law office" for Horne & Wells PLLC as that firm processed payments from the lawsuit.

While the Cypress Creek issues related to Velsicol's past activities were a very serious matter, there were some less-serious moments along the way. Early on, when it was proposed (perhaps even mandated) that signs be posted near the creek warning of possible contamination, the first signs that appeared in sub-area IV at the northern dead-end of streets like Avalon simply warned against swimming with the message "Danger of Drowning." Later, in the spring of 2005, a section of the concrete wall suddenly broke free and shifted into the creek channel, though it did not topple over. This failure of the concrete wall was probably simple due to its age, unrelated to past contamination by Velsicol

and other industries, and unrelated to soil remediation efforts nearby. It was certainly alarming at the time to residents in that block of Edward Avenue. It seemed to take City officials quite some time to figure out how to repair the wall, but they did.

Dr. Steve Gadbois was executive director of VECA CDC from 2000-2007. He moved to Memphis and the Vollintine Evergreen neighborhood in 1986 to teach at Rhodes where he was a tenured associate professor of mathematics. He currently teaches math at Memphis University School and continues to be an active VECA volunteer.

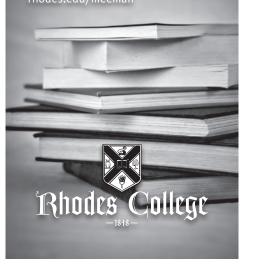
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