

VOLLINTINE EVERGREEN

NEWS

VECA.ORG

SUMMER 2020

ALONE



image by Hannah Joyce Photography

TOGETHER

VOLLINTINE EVERGREEN
ADAPTS TO THE NEW NORMAL

SUMMER 2020

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VOLLINTINE EVERGREEN NEWS

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 made up of volunteers and paying
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 email, 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.**

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ALONE TOGETHER

As with all the best laid plans in 2020, our theme for this edition of the V&E News did not quite go the direction we originally envisioned.

This issue was supposed to focus on the arts in Vollintine Evergreen: highlighting the 2020 Artwalk, profiles on local artists and a celebration of all things creative.

Then, of course, the pandemic hit. The city shut down. Major events (including our own art walk) were cancelled. Normal life for many came to a halt as we settled in to quarantine.

Ignoring the pandemic sized elephant in the room did not seem appropriate, so we adapted and reached out to artists and other neighbors in Vollintine Evergreen to get a glimpse of how we are all coping with what is quickly becoming the strange, new normal. In this issue, you'll find resources for dealing with Covid-19, but you will also go beyond the data and see the human side of this pandemic and how people are adjusting their lives and hopefully see a reminder that we are in this together.

We hope to continue highlighting quarantine stories, so please share yours with us and it could be featured in the next issue. If you have a story for the newsletter or if there's something else you would like to see, send us an email at vecanews901@gmail.com

-The Communications Team

REMEMBERING PASTOR TONIE



Peace Lutheran Church

VECA extends heartfelt condolences to the Peace Lutheran Church family on the recent loss of their pastor, Rev. Antoinette Robinson, 1953-2020. At Peace Lutheran Church, Pastor Tonie helped organize the outreach program, Trinity Ministries to serve the homeless. Trinity Ministries also partnered with Room in the Inn to provide overnight shelter and a hot meal once a week from November through March. Trinity Ministries at Peace Lutheran continues to minister to those in need during Covid by providing lunches to go. If you would like to volunteer or have any questions please contact: Meredee Taylor, 256-604-7781. Cash donations can be sent directly to Peace Lutheran church, 1548 Jackson Ave, 38107 in memory and will be deposited into a special account that will be used to update the church kitchen in Pastor Tonie's honor.

May loving memories bring you peace, comfort, and strength. With love and remembrance, your VECA family. ■

<https://www.elca-ses.org/blogdetail/one-pastors-story-13170360>

1548 Jackson Ave
Memphis TN 38107

ON THIS CORNER FOR A REASON *Republished from elca-ses.org*



Volunteers serving at Peace Lutheran Church.

Located at the corner of Jackson and Willett, Peace Lutheran Church in Memphis has ministered to the midtown community for over 100 years. A beautiful brick building with stained glass windows, it continues to serve its members and the community, even amidst the chaos of Covid-19 and the loss of its pastor, through online Sunday services and distance sensitive outreach.

Challenges are not new for this Congregation. Through the years, it has persevered through changes in neighborhood dynamics, reductions in attendance and an aging infrastructure. This congregation of less than 30 active members gives all it has to the community.

In response to a high demand for assistance from the homeless and working poor, Peace Lutheran's outreach called

Trinity Ministries has provided refuge and meals for over 10 years. Today with so many out of work the demand for food has greatly increased.

On April 3rd, the church faced a devastating blow, when the Rev. Antoinette (Tonie) Robinson, Pastor, Teacher, Mentor and Leader of the outreach charge, left this world after battling cancer for several months. She left behind a heart broken congregation that, due to current social restrictions, cannot properly grieve her loss nor celebrate her life. And although we must wait to congregate as a church, we are not waiting to continue the ministry of service she loved so much.

Although the pews are empty for now, the church is alive and the doors are still open for lunch every Monday and Wednesday, thanks to the member and non-member volunteers.

Rather than the hot meal normally served, volunteers now prepare sack lunches every Monday and Wednesday afternoons, standing at the doorway, with smiles (behind a mask of course), they hand them out to those in need. Each lunch consists of a cup of homemade soup, a sandwich and a heavy dose of love. Rev. Tonie taught all with whom she interacted what it was to give and sacrifice oneself. Her legacy will live on through the many members and friends of Peace that make all its outreach opportunities a success.

Peace Lutheran finds HOPE in the Lutheran and Non-Lutheran volunteers that make up our outreach ministry. We call them partners; individuals, small neighborhood churches, home bible study groups all wanting to reach out and help the Memphis community.

We find INSPIRATION in the life of Rev. Tonie Robinson who will be with us in spirit always. ■

ALONE TOGETHER

VOLLINTINE EVERGREEN NEIGHBORS ADAPT TO LIFE AMIDST A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

by Marci Hendrix

Descending on Memphis in March, the Covid-19 virus is still going strong in August with no end in sight. Shelby County Schools announced on July 27th that classes would be online for the beginning of the semester. Colleges including Rhodes are going remote for the fall semester, and the entertainment industry continues to take a beating. Living through this pandemic might be the most challenging chapter some have collectively gone through, and our hearts go out to friends and neighbors who have experienced job cuts and the loss of loved ones. The news is dire, yet we try to the silver linings to keep a balance.

We asked neighbors to tell us how they were coping during these strange times. A common theme was the quiet during the Phase One lockdown. Memphis shut down in a state of emergency on March 17, and only the essentials were open keeping the streets relatively quiet, especially at night.

Another theme was that neighbors are thankful to be able to be outdoors. Neighbors are grateful for access to our V&E Greenline and are grateful to visit with old neighbors and meet new neighbors. Especially during the coolness of spring, neighbors enjoyed times outside talking to neighbors and doing yard and garden work. Keshia Williams notes that "everyone's yard sure looks great."

Longtime neighbor, Cynthia Stovall, bought a beginners Singer machine and is making masks for her neighbors. VECA president, Lilly Gilkey, is making masks as well and enjoying her walks on the Greenline.

There have been some unexpected musical moments. Beverly Dixon enjoyed listening to a Memphis Opera performance in front of her condo on North Parkway. With

more time on her hand, she has been honing her embroidery skills. Beverly is also one of the neighbors who had a quarantine photo taken by photographer Jamie Harmon.

Caleb Fowler has lived in VECA for a little over a year. He and wife, Olivia, also enjoyed a musical serenade during lockdown. "One Sunday evening a neighbor pulled his bass guitar and amp onto his front porch and practiced playing. To the delight of his neighbors, including my wife and me, he was very good! That was a tranquil and pleasant moment during quarantine." Caleb has also rekindled old pastimes. "I've taken up painting anew and have started regularly writing poetry and prose and playing guitar as well."

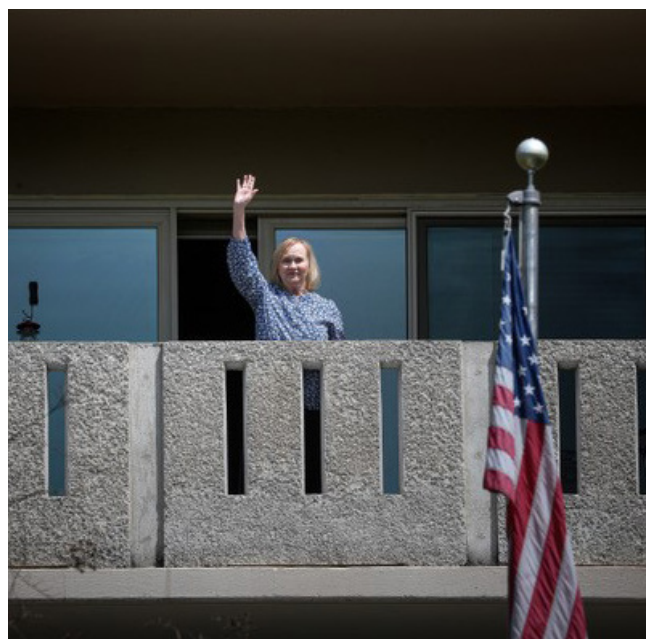
Bill Burtch has lived in the V&E for over 24 years and has been delighted to see neighbors out and about. He's been spending some free time working on projects around the house as well as digitizing family photos.

We started a purge challenge at our house. Before the heat zapped my desire to work outdoors, Jeff and I tackled a long overdue project of replacing our rickety old tool shed. We dismantled the shed, piled the debris into a rented dumpster, and with the leftover space, we piled in even more junk sitting around. The great purge was completely satisfying and the new red shed makes our backyard cheerful, as far as sheds go, that is. It's the little things, right! ■

We will run a similar article in the next issue and we would love to know how you are coping with the pandemic. Send us your story via the link below. <https://forms.gle/rqo22ZqcEEPZNUkt9>



A fox living the high life at Rhodes as the campus remains unusually quiet in late July. Courtesy of Rhodes staff member Cody Dillion.



Beverly Dixon waves from her porch. Image by Jamie Harmon.

KATIE DUNLAP SHARES HER QUARANTINE EXPERIENCE



What a year this has been! The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of our lives, and the past few months have been challenging for each and every one of us. Our family has experienced schooling at home, our church gatherings being online rather than in person, job changes, limited interactions with friends when we're accustomed to spending time with them often, and cancelled trips to visit our extended family due to the need to quarantine. We've had good days and bad days. We've had days when we've taken it all in stride and days when we all fell apart a bit.

Despite all of the uncertainty and changes in the normal rhythms of life, we've been able to do some fun things during this time of social distancing and being safer at home. We planted a vegetable garden and are enjoying lots of tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, zucchinis and fresh herbs. I learned to make garlic dill pickles and homemade tomato sauce, and we especially enjoy those! A neighbor shared some sourdough starter with me in April, and I've been working on perfecting my sourdough bread. We purchased six baby chicks in May and built an adorable backyard coop for them. They're eight weeks old now, and it's been so fun to watch them grow! We're anticipating fresh eggs later in the fall and have grown to love our hens. We've had an abundance of family time, which is both precious and can also be challenging. We're so thankful for the amazing V&E Greenline and have used it more than ever to stay healthy both physically and emotionally. We've seen our neighbors more and have enjoyed continuing to grow friendships with them. Life is challenging these days, but we believe that there is always, always something to be thankful for. We are thankful for our community and the unexpected time to try some new things and have some new "safer at home" adventures! ■



images by Jamie Harmon via Katie Dunlap

THE NEW



A piece from Melissa's "Black Lives Matter" collection.

CREATIVE NORMAL

by KA Petersen

Potter Melissa Bridgman is among many artists living and working in VECA. She has always worked at her home studio outfitted with everything needed (including troublesome kilns) to create the collections of mugs, bowls, pots, and other ceramics she produces.

The impact of COVID-19 on society and creatives hasn't all been bad for Melissa. Her work hasn't been without its challenges, not the least of which has been raising awareness among the public of the circumstances creative artists find themselves in during the pandemic.

Almost instantly after the pandemic shuttered retailers across the city and events like the V&E Artwalk were at first postponed and then cancelled, creatives like Bridgman lost all of their marketplace outlets except for online sales. And while creatives don't necessarily have brick and mortar shops of their own with employees to furlough and rents to worry about, the home-based artist is perhaps in a tougher situation for a number of reasons.

The nuances of shape, size, color, and variation in art and especially pottery makes seeing the piece crucial; something that a website can never truly reflect. Shows like the Artwalk are the way this group of artists can best reach their customers. Raw material supplies have been disrupted and deliveries scrambled. Work-at-home creatives are facing how to pay the rent or mortgage on the space where they work and live.

But there has been an upside. Creating space to work and space to do other things at home has produced efficiency; no easy task with both her husband and teenage son at home as well. "Having a teenager at home all the time has been very hard," said Melissa. "We bought a used car so he could learn how to repair it and to give him something to do outside." The success of at-home classes for the highschooler earlier this spring remains to be seen.

For Melissa, gardening has always been a passion and the pandemic has prompted more work in her abundant front garden. "Usually in the spring I have a big event every other week. With them all being cancelled it has allowed for more time in the garden."

Work has always been a priority. Melissa has shifted her focus to collections that are sold online and typically announced via channels like Instagram. A recent "Black Lives Matter" collection sold out

almost instantly. She has also increased her wholesale business that doesn't rely on shows and fairs. Without an assistant to help since the crisis started (her workspace just won't allow for adequate distancing unless she and her assistant are doing two entirely different processes which is not always possible), Melissa has had to balance production with her own life. "It has required simplification and more direct, A to B type answers," she said.

Staying connected and involved, especially with social justice issues, has always been important to Melissa and her fellow creatives. They've found ways to stay connected, share ideas, and promote the causes important to each of them including women's and racism issues. The variety of creative voices brings different ideas and audiences together that are shared and learned from. "The more we exchange ideas, as a creative community, the better off we will all be," she said.

75 percent of the proceeds from Melissa's "Black Lives Matter" collection was donated to the local social justice initiatives MLK50 and Just City. But to her and many other creatives it is about more than giving money. It is about the larger and wider conversations that have to go on about race, poverty, and other social issues. "We have an imperative to talk about social justice issues as a community," Melissa said. "It would feel flippant to create and push out art that is blind to today's social issues and unrest."

Melissa believes, as many creatives do, that centralized art shows and fairs are a thing of the past until a vaccine or other remedy for COVID-19 can be found. Smaller, more localized, simpler efforts could offer hope for creatives and those that enjoy seeing their work in person. "Something like an actual "art walk" where patrons and supporters make their way around the neighborhood instead of congregating in one location could work," added Melissa.

Like everything else in the new creative normal, balance and compassion are more important than ever. "Everything will require simplification," she repeated.

Bridgman Pottery is available online and at select retailers around the city. www.bridgmanpottery.com ■

COVID BLUES

**VOLLINTINE EVERGREEN MUSICIANS
ARE KEEPING THE MUSIC PLAYING IN
THE FACE OF A GLOBAL SHUTDOWN.**

by Mark Jordan



The economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been swift and brutal. The outbreak has sparked a global recession. At one point more than one-third of the world's population was under quarantine lockdown, bringing global trade to a near halt. In the weeks following the virus' arrival in America, markets crashed as much as 30 percent and unemployment skyrocketed to more than 14 percent. Restaurants, hotels, airlines, sports, tourism, movie theaters, any enterprises depending on large numbers of people congregating — and potentially spreading the virus — have been shut down.

One of the worst hit was the music industry, where every major 2020 festival and tour has been cancelled. And that doesn't even take into account the millions who earn all or part of their living playing music off of the big stages — the coffeehouse troubadours and Beale Street backing bands as well as the voiceless many who support their efforts. Working class musicians, of which Vollintine Evergreen has long had more than its share, are used to having to hustle to make a living. But even in that context, surviving the pandemic has become a strange new world of Zoom concerts, freelance gigs, and days spent navigating a diffuse world of public and private financial aid.

Just four months ago, Vollintine Evergreen resident Mark Edgar Stuart was a successful, full-time Memphis musician. Since arriving here in the mid-90s from his hometown, Pine Bluff, Arkansas, Stuart has been one of the most in-demand bass players in town. And then almost a decade ago he embarked on a solo career, winning all new acclaim and fans with his own laconic, folksy songs full of wit and wisdom.

In a normal month Stuart, who left his day job years ago to focus on music full time, made a solid

living playing a mix of bass and solo gigs around town, while also working part time as a tour guide at Sun Studio. In busier months, he would hit the road playing festivals and house concerts around the country. But that was all before COVID-19.

As unprecedented and sudden as COVID-19's attack, it was also accompanied by a creeping sense of dread, like watching a tsunami head for shore. Unlike an earthquake or tornado, the slow roll of COVID-19 across the country and into every facet of Americans' lives allowed time to contemplate the tremendous changes that were ahead.

"It was the second weekend of March, and I was in a recording session that I was also producing," Stuart recalls of the weekend President Donald Trump declared a national emergency, a turning point in both the federal response and in most people's perception of the pandemic. "You could feel the dark cloud looming. Musicians who were scheduled to fly in were stuck in airports freaking out. Folks glued to their phones. Stock markets crashing. ... It was a helpless feeling for sure."

A few days later, on March 16, the federal government advised against all gatherings of more than 10 people. A week after that, the mayors of Memphis and Shelby County issued stay-at-home orders.

Since then, most musicians, like the rest of us, have been stuck at home, wondering how to pay the bills. In addition to the stimulus check that most Americans received, musicians and other members of the gig economy benefited by Congress' move to open up unemployment insurance to many for the first time and padded the weekly benefit by an extra \$600. However, implementation on the state

level has been slow and many people have yet to receive the benefit or have discovered they are ineligible.

Meanwhile, other public and private loans, grants, and other aid programs — both locally and nationally — have surfaced to help artists, though finding and navigating them has turned into something of a job in itself. In late March, musicians Rhiannon Giddens and Amanda Palmer and author Neil Gaiman launched a web site, ArtLivesOn.com, cataloguing many such resources available to artists nationwide.

"For working artists, this time is absolutely terrifying, as the freelance nature of our work means we are closer to the bone than other industries; and for all those who need art to get through the day, it's that much harder to come by," the trio say on the site. "While millions of people stay at home listening to music and watching movies, the same artists who create the stories and myths and dance-music we all love are the very same people who may be wondering how they are going to feed their kids next month."

Stuart, who estimates he lost 40 gigs just in the first months of the pandemic and was laid off from Sun Studio when it closed to tourists, has received some relief from the local nonprofit Export Memphis and through the Recording Academy's Musicares program, aid which he describes as a lifeline during these times.

"Luckily my wife is still working," Stuart says of his wife of 12 years, Emily, whose job as a social worker in retirement homes and hospitals — both nexuses of COVID infections — is itself a source of worry. "But things have been tight. Reducing overhead is the key. Didn't realize how much we used to spend on luxury things like eating out and drinking."

Of course, Memphis musicians are still playing music. Vollintine Evergreen musicians have actually been at the forefront locally of a worldwide trend of musicians hosting streaming concerts. Using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Zoom, they broadcast from home or an otherwise empty venue, accepting tips through services like PayPal and Venmo. The practice has become so common, The Memphis Flyer has begun publishing "the Flow," a handy weekly online guide to shows.

Vollintine Evergreen resident Graham Winchester has been among the busiest Memphis concert streamers, even memorably hosting one show from his bathtub. Acclaimed Americana singer Amy LaVere and her husband Will Sexton, residents of Speedway Terrace just across Watkins in the shadow of Crosstown, have hosted weekly concerts from their home, sometimes setting up in the driveway for the entertainment of passersby.

Stuart has hosted four virtual shows of his own and is planning a fifth to promote his new "quarantine rock-n-roll" EP, recorded mostly at home. He has also appeared on others' streaming shows, most notably an Italian

tribute to his musical hero John Prine, who died April 7 of COVID-19.

Stuart was aware of live streaming before the pandemic, but was hesitant about crossing the digital threshold. His first virtual shows, however, were among the best paying of his career, drawing two or three times the number of people he could pull into a bar venue.

"It was insane. The wife and I were in tears. It saved our asses for sure," remembers Stuart. "It's definitely weird playing a gig for your phone with no audience interaction, but you get used to it. I think after a while, though, the newness wore off. Less people watching and less people tipping. I totally get it, but I do think it's the weird future of gigging. We have to find creative ways to keep it fresh and engaging for people to keep tuning in."

Stuart, who often performs solo, is also one of the lucky few to have gotten to play something approaching a real concert during the pandemic. He has played a few socially distant backyard parties, and even one lakeside gig.

"That was crazy," says Stuart who returns to the lake in August. "I got a call from a fan asking if I would play a gig on a dock for an audience of pontoon boats. I set my guitar case right by the water with all my PayPal/Venmo info, and they tipped me virtually while shouting out requests. It was awesome!"

As strange as it was, such events may be the future of music — remote collaboration, virtual concerts and festivals. The growing consensus is that while COVID-19 will eventually go away, many of the changes it wrought will not. Stuart envisions the music industry, for him and the music-making world in general, being very different in a year.

"Oh, it's gonna be different," Stuart says of music post-pandemic. "Until they find a cure for this thing, folks will be nervous about going out. Even when they do find a cure, folks' mindset will have already changed. You can't be stuck at your house for a year or so and it not affect your brain and psyche. ... I think tourism will come back fairly quickly — Beale Street, etc. Those musicians will have those gigs again because there will always be tourists who want to travel for Elvis, BBQ, and blues, and all that BS. But it was getting hard enough to scrape up gigs locally before COVID. We might not get back to normal, but we will eventually accept a 'new' normal." ■

Mark Jordan is a Memphis-based writer and musician who has covered the city's music scene for more than 25 years and has been a VECA resident for the past 15. His journalism has appeared locally in The Memphis Flyer and The Commercial Appeal. He has also written for such national outlets as Billboard, Maxim, and the Associated Press.

MASK UP MANE!



COVID-19 RESOURCES IN MEMPHIS

FOR GENERAL INFORMATION:
<https://covid19.memphistn.gov/>

COVID TESTING SITES:
<https://covid19.memphistn.gov/resources/covid-19-testing-sites-in-shelby-county/>

PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF COVID-19:
<https://maskupmemphis.org/project/preventing-the-spread-of-the-coronavirus/>

MASK ORDINANCE:
<https://maskupmemphis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Substitute-Mask-Ordinance-Business-Centric.pdf>

FREE MASK PICKUP AND DONATION LOCATIONS:
<https://maskupmemphis.org/locations/>

THE INTERSECTION OF PAST AND PRESENT

by Sarah Beth Larson



"Black Lives Matter" signage was temporarily installed at various intersections.

While walking my dog, I passed a neighbor on Jackson Avenue who had come to help her elderly neighbor get her trash can out for pickup. She was talking about "Black Lives Matter Avenue" and went on to share the news with everyone else she saw, from the sanitation workers to a passing cyclist: her street had been renamed overnight. I looked up to see the Jackson Ave. sign replaced with Black Lives Matter Ave., and thought about the symbolism of this renaming.

To me and thousands of others, the movement for Black lives is far more important to Memphis than the dead president. Andrew Jackson was not only a slaveowner himself, but a supporter of slavery and its extension through the new territories, and was responsible for the forced march known as the Trail of Tears, which killed countless thousands of indigenous people. I personally was glad to see the street signs changed by this protest art, as I drove down the tree-lined avenue later that day, appearing at major intersections from Hollywood to Ayers.

Memphis is a city of almost 70% Black residents, and VECA is almost 55% Black. Our communities deserve to have infrastructure, education, transportation, programs and policies that support us all to be our best and achieve the most we can, so that each of us can contribute and invest back into the community where we

live. We should all be able to live in safe places where we can get to know our neighbors, enjoy summer walks through the historic neighborhoods that make up VECA, and not look up to see legacies of slave traders, slave holders, and dead Confederates.

Our city has many problematic street names, and just last year Forest Avenue in Evergreen Historic was corrected from the misspelling "Forrest" (after Nathan Bedford Forrest, himself a slave owner, traitor to the United States, and leader of the Fort Pillow Massacre). Neighbors in our sister historic neighborhood took on the renaming of their street, which leads to Overton Park and the Old Forest, so there would be no question about who and what we honor. This protest art project shows us ways to imagine our future differently, with children growing up on a street that tells them they matter, and our elders able to live safely away from the shadows of past injustice.

At the corner of BLM Avenue and Stonewall, we can see the juxtaposition of past and present, who we used to honor compared with what we must acknowledge in this moment. Black lives must matter in order for all lives to matter. When we can say this we can begin to come together as a community to work toward healing and helping one another. ■

YOUR VOICE YOUR VOTE

Ordinary people with extraordinary vision can redeem the soul of America by getting in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble. Voting and participating in the democratic process are key. The vote is the most powerful nonviolent change agent you have in a democratic society. You must use it because it is not guaranteed. You can lose it.

*-John Lewis
February 21, 1940 - July 17, 2020*

Election season is upon us and during these unprecedented times, it is more important than ever to know how to exercise your fundamental right and have your voice heard.

Follow these steps to vote by mail for the General & Municipal Election 11.3.20 (Presidential Election). Mail your application here:

**SHELBY COUNTY ELECTION
COMMISSION
980 Nixon Dr.
Memphis, TN 38134**

At the time of publication, all information reflected here is accurate. Keep an eye on the news for any changes or updates.

Go to the Shelby County Election Commission page
<https://www.shelbyvote.com/>

Click on the button to "UPCOMING ELECTIONS
(<https://www.shelbyvote.com/upcoming-elections>)

Click on the link to General & Municipal Election 11.3.20
(<https://www.shelbyvote.com/elections/general-municipal-election-1132020>)

Click on the link to November 6th Absentee Application
(available on August 5)

Print out the application, fill it out, and mail it to the address provided on the application

You will receive a postcard that acknowledges that your absentee application has been received and that your official ballot will be forthcoming.

When you receive your official ballot, fill it out and follow the mailing instructions (1 stamp) and mail it in the envelope provided.

You can then check back to see if your ballot has been received:

Voter Registration Information Lookup And Absentee By-Mail Ballot Status Tracker : <https://tnmap.tn.gov/voterlookup/>



HISTORIC PRESERVATION MAKES WAY FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE V&E

Preserving and sustaining our historic Vollintine Evergreen (V&E) neighborhood has been and continues to be priorities for VECA. As a modest community that has been home to many generations of residents and families, we are proud to be a remarkably diverse neighborhood — economically, racially, ethnically, religiously, and educationally. Walk around or drive through the neighborhood and see for yourself.

One of the things you will also notice is our historic homes and buildings are unique, well-built, reflect distinctive character, and wonderful examples of craftsmanship. There are no gated communities, mega mansions, or McMansions and never has been. With more than 20 architectural styles in the neighborhood — including Craftsman, Bungalow, Tudor, Cape Cod, Colonial Revival, Minimal Traditional, and Traditional Ranch — these significant historic resources

and assets make Vollintine Evergreen (V&E) a prime local landmarks designation candidate.

With local landmarks designation, Vollintine Evergreen can preserve the essential features of our neighborhood, while ensuring improvements, adaptations for modern living and new projects contribute to the historic character of the area. By doing so, we are establishing historic value as a sustainable advantage for preserving our community's character and built environment, and equally, ensuring the livability and economic viability of a diverse and inclusive neighborhood.

In the late '90s through early 2000s, most of the neighborhood was ascribed to the National Register of Historic Places. It was a significant [early] step in historic preservation. The National Register is an honorary designation that recognizes places worthy of preservation. It

is important to point out, however, that inclusion on the list does not prevent the architectural value of a property from being demolished or significantly altered.

Our next step is attaining local landmarks district status as V&E Historic District. This will complement the neighborhood's place on the National Register. Local landmarks designation is one of the best tools available for preserving the overall community character of a neighborhood. This special status added to a neighborhood ensures that change and new development will enhance not detract, from a district's special qualities. It is vitally important for the neighborhood design guidelines we develop to preserve the defining elements that make up the character and quality of the entire neighborhood, so they are not diminished but sustained when accommodating restorative projects, new construction, and changing environmental conditions. In fact, the principles embodied in the proposed V&E Historic District Design Guidelines will not only make our livable neighborhood better but will also serve to enhance the concept of neighborhood compatibility of individual given projects concerned.

Whether you are a homeowner or renter, historic districts provide benefits to the community. Some of the benefits according to a new report from PlaceEconomics

includes fostering neighborhood level diversity and stability, attractive housing options for a range of household sizes and incomes, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods, jobs and economic integration, older housing stock contributing to affordable housing and lesser housing cost-burdens, a pattern of resilience and strength in up and down markets, and environmental responsibility.

As we sustain the value of our neighborhood as a distinct identity, we are anchoring a sense of place within the City of Memphis. Pride in place translates into pride in city. Homeowners and homebuyers traditionally are the first investors in a neighborhood. Cities and neighborhoods that preserve and maintain their historic character count among the most desirable places to live and visit.

Through these historic preservation and sustainability goals, we hope to preserve and responsibly conserve the array of resources currently enjoyed — durable and well-built structures; access to greenspaces, parks, and creeks; tree canopies and landscaping; pedestrian and transit-friendly streetscapes; and diverse living options for households —so that your families today and in future generations may enjoy them. ■

JOIN US AUGUST 6 FOR A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY MEETING

AN ONLINE COMMUNITY WORKSHOP ABOUT THE PROCESS AND RESIDENTS' DESIRED DESIGN CHARACTER FOR THE V&E LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS DISTRICT.

WHEN: THURSDAY AUGUST 6, 2020
6:00 PM

WHERE: ONLINE ZOOM MEETING
REGISTER HERE

[HTTPS://VECALANDMARKS2.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://vecalandmarks2.eventbrite.com)

WHY: PLEASE JOIN V&E RESIDENTS TO DISCUSS PROPOSED V&E LOCAL LANDMARKS DESIGNATION AND SHAPE FUTURE HISTORIC DISTRICT GUIDELINES

VOLLINTINE EVERGREEN SEEKS LANDMARK DESIGNATION TO PRESERVE ITS UNIQUE HISTORY AND AESTHETIC

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By Ashley Foxx Davis

Neighbors in the Vollintine Evergreen neighborhood are fighting to preserve their community's unique architectural history.

In the last couple of years, there's been a surge in development in nearby areas like Overton Square, Crosstown, and the Medical District.

V&E residents said they're not opposed to change but they want a say in it.

"It makes a statement about what we love about our neighborhood. We love the design of it," said resident Suzanne Askew. "We like the various street sizes, the sidewalks, and the trees. In order to keep that same community spirit, we need [a] landmarks designation."

The Vollintine Evergreen Community Association is pursuing an official designation from the Memphis Landmarks Commission as a historic preservation district.

The designation will help residents protect current look and feel in the areas east-west from University to Watkins streets and north-south from Cypress Creek to North Parkway.

The majority of the houses in V&E were built between 1920 and 1950 in Craftsman Bungalow, English Tudor, and Colonial styles. Askew has lived in V&E for 14-plus years in a 100-year-old Tudor.

From 1997 to 2007, VECA members ensured most of the neighborhood was listed on the national register of historic places, but inclusion on the national register does not prevent demolition or put any limits on property owners unless they're seeking federal development dollars. Even then, the community has little say in final decisions.

"I really honestly thought that being designated on the historic national register would protect us," said Renate Rosenthal, who has lived in the same house in the neighborhood since 1975 and serves on the landmarks committee for VECA.

"Landmark designation gets us one step closer to being informed if changes are proposed that don't fit with the historic nature of the neighborhood," she continued.

Natasha Strong is a longtime resident and chairperson for the VECA committee working to secure the designation. She also serves on the Memphis Landmarks Commission. She said most people are attracted to V&E for its architecture.

"We look at landmark designation as a neighborhood tool in the toolbox," said Strong. "If you have landmark

designation when things happen—whether its demolition or new construction—the neighborhood is required to be informed ahead of time and not when something is done and it's too late."

Andy Kitsinger is principal of a local planning, design and community development agency, The Development Studio. He's also a consultant for VECA's landmarks designation process.

He said it's important for residents to be involved in their neighborhood's planning process, but many communities don't pursue the designation because they don't know it's an option.

"Landmark designation status is a great way to have more participation by residents in the process," said Kitsinger.

COLLECTIVE POWER

In 2017, V&E residents started looking towards a City of Memphis landmark designation when they saw an increase in residential and commercial development in and around the neighborhood but weren't always able to provide formal input before developers broke ground.

A new building's design is largely decided by its developer.

Consider the dozen new apartment complexes on and around the Highland Strip. Their boxy build, sharp lines, blocks of color, and flat facades are becoming more common across the city.

This "fast-casual architecture" can clash with existing homes and buildings and change the look and feel of established neighborhoods.

Each of the city's 16 historic preservation districts has its own set of design guidelines that its residents developed and use to govern demolition, new construction, and rehabilitation of residential properties. The guidelines apply to residential property, including apartment buildings, and sometimes include commercial properties.

The typically guidelines govern visible structures and facades like home additions, garages, fences, window styles, sidewalks, and paint colors.

If a builder or an individual homeowner wants to build, demolish, or make a big change, they have to seek approval

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	ZONING	CODE ENFORCEMENT	NATIONAL REGISTER	LOCAL LANDMARKS DESIGNATION
VECA as a formal organization was primarily founded because of redlining in the early 1970's and blockbusting efforts by private realtors.	A rezoning study using volunteers was started in 1974 but was never completed. The task was too large, and funds were not available to pay for a consultant.	The neighborhood has used code enforcement to improve housing conditions. This strategy has meant working intensely with city and county officials.	From 1997 to 2007, volunteers working through VECA successfully got most of the neighborhood designated on the National Register of Historic Places.	Fast forward to 2017, increase in residential and commercial development occurred without any formal input. One of the best tools available for preserving historic areas is local Landmark designation.

from the landmarks committee. If their plan doesn't meet the community's design standards, they have to seek an exception.

The community gets a chance to weigh in on each application. Their guidelines aren't fully binding, but the landmarks committee gives substantial weight to their recommendations.

PRESERVING HISTORY, EMBRACING CHANGE

Organizing for community improvement isn't new to V&E. In 1980, MIFA commissioned a complete neighborhood history. Entitled "Vollintine Evergreen: A Diverse Community," it notes that V&E residents were part of the city's first formally recognized civic club, the Evergreen Club. It formed in 1909.

By 1934, its residents and clubs claimed responsibility for recruiting Snowden School, the Memphis Zoo, and Vollentine School to the area. They raised funds for a playground, got the city to install sidewalks on Jackson and Vollintine avenues, and hosted an annual community picnic.

There are seven smaller neighborhoods in V&E, each with its own character and style. Steve Gadbois joined VECA in the 1980s. He said V&E became a truly unified community in the early 1970s, primarily to fight discriminatory housing practices like redlining.

"We've always been proud of the fact that the Vollintine Evergreen neighborhood matches the city of Memphis," said Gadbois, who moved into the area in 1986. "Whether its socioeconomic status, background, race or age—we've got it all."

The MIFA history tells a more complex story of race and community development. In the 1930s, residents actually "defeated movement to erect a Negro College" in the neighborhood.

Then in the late 1960s, a group of local faith leaders came together to discuss their dwindling congregations. After the 1964 Fair Housing Act abolished race-based housing discrimination, white V&E residents begin leaving

the neighborhood. White residents feared an all-black neighborhood and were moving out fast.

The faith leaders wanted to stabilize the exodus and intentionally grow a more diverse community. They formed VECA to calm and educate existing white neighbors while including new black neighbors in the community's continued growth.

The launched a neighborhood publication to dispel race-based myths and rumors and help white residents get to know their new neighbors who, like them, were primarily professionals with the same concerns for their families and community.

When schools were desegregated, VECA worked with white parents to accept and support the decision and remain in the neighborhood.

When real estate agents began blockbusting in the area, VECA wrote to the Attorney General, sent desist letters to the real estate companies, and warned residents in their publication. They got one agent fired and protected their members when a second threatened to sue.

The MIFA history quoted one VECA organizer to say: "We were trying to educate [whites] not to panic, not to sell unless you have to."

It should be noted that the MIFA history was part of a series that included few black authors or sources.

Gadbois says the neighborhood wants to preserve its historical aesthetic character while also keeping the diversity of its community intact.

"We're a very representative neighborhood that needs to stick together for the good of everybody," he added. ■

A BUSY SPRING ALONG THE ARBORETUM

NEW MARKERS AND PROJECTS BRING THE V&E GREENLINE ARBORETUM CLOSER TO CERTIFICATION.

by *The V&E Greenline Arboretum Team*



New markers inform Greenline users of the multitude of tree species along the trail.

From a project that began more than three years ago, the V&E Greenline Arboretum is nearing completion — and Level 2 certification — along the 1.7 mile trail. The V&E Greenline has long been a favorite place in the community, experiencing an enormous jump in use since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Project leaders Connie Shepherd, a horticulturist with the City of Memphis, and local resident David Creagh have spent countless hours identifying, cataloging, organizing, and marking more than 60 species of native and naturalized species for inclusion in the first phase of certification. The trees that make up the arboretum are scattered all along the trail found mainly between Avalon and Mclean.

Recently, markers have been placed near the bases of many trees identifying them as part of the Arboretum. The markers are produced locally by the Memphis Botanic Garden who has also played an important role in moving the Arboretum along in the process towards certification.

The Botanic Garden Tree Team was here recently helping us to correctly identify some of our more challenging varieties," said Connie. "They have been so helpful as we work through this process." The Tennessee Urban Forestry Council has also been closely involved. The TUFC has recently helped establish 6 new certified arboreta in the west Tennessee area.

While the identification and marking process continues, Connie and David also spend hours doing research and putting together all the information

that will eventually make its way into an online public resource about the Arboretum. Work on a printed map and information kiosk to be located on the trail is also underway.

Once everything is ready and our application is submitted and paid for, a representative from TUFC will physically inspect and check our trees, markers, maps, everything," said Connie. "Our trees have to be good specimens, properly shaped and well maintained."

Official certification as a Level 2 Arboretum is important as it recognizes the commitment required to start and sustain an arboretum for the betterment of the community. Arboreta can also be recognized with an Award of Excellence from TUFC and are placed on the statewide map of arboreta.

Once certified, the V&E Greenline Arboretum will join other area arboreta including well known locations such as the Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Rhodes College, and the Memphis Botanic Garden as well as smaller locations including the Cooper Young Arboretum, Sea Isle Park, and the Arboretum at Southwind.

Arboreta play a vital part in preserving nature and providing opportunities to the public to learn about trees in general. Arboreta have an economic value as well. Homes located near community features such as a greenline, walking trails, and arboreta are sought after and generally have a higher resale value.

But the real value, according to Connie, is in what can be learned and gained from an arboretum. "The V&E Greenline Arboretum will be a place parents can walk with their children and learn about trees — not just their names or if they are deciduous (lose their leaves each year) or coniferous (evergreen), but about how important and beautiful they are," she said. "And because of its location as a part of the V&E Greenline, it is open and accessible to everyone."

All of the work that has gone into getting the Arboretum to this stage has been accomplished by Connie, David, and a small group of other volunteers

and experts willing to give their time to the project. All of the needed supplies, markers, as well as the eventual resources and kiosk required, are funded by individual donations to the V&E Greenline.

As the V&E Greenline Arboretum nears the end of this phase of preparation for certification, much more is anticipated. Recertification is required every three years and the team would like to identify or add 30 trees to the total including more in the easternmost section of the trail. New efforts for on-going support and fundraising are also on the way.

"Because of its location as a part of the V&E Greenline, [the arboretum] is open and accessible to everyone."

Neighbors can help with the progress of the Arboretum toward certification by making a donation of any amount to the V&E Greenline. The V&E Greenline also has a newsletter where you can keep up with what's happening with the Arboretum as it nears certification. ■

Learn more at www.vegreenline.org/arboretum.

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