



VECA VOICE

Summer 2021

The Greenline at 25

VECA at 50

Reimagining the Future: Landmarks

The Vollintine Evergreen Community Association Magazine

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photo by Noah L. Morrell, Jr.

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VECA VOICE

Summer 2021

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Welcome to Summer!



Greetings Neighbors,

I hope you are all getting out and about and enjoying our beautiful neighborhoods. Spring has sprung as a sure sign of new beginnings. Our beautiful Greenline is bursting forth with greens, yellows, reds and all other colors imaginable. We are all ready to shed our winter garments and dress to enjoy our new normal.

If you haven't already signed up for our newsletter, please do so. We are continuing to do some awesome things! Some things you can look forward to hearing more about is VECA's 50 Year Anniversary, Landmarks Designation, Sidewalk Repairs, TIF, Kresge, SCIF (Jackson Ave) grants, and VECA wide neighborhood cleanups, just to name a few.

How can you help? Well I'm glad you asked? You can email us at veca901@gmail.com and vecanews901@gmail.com. Let us know if you see something you like or dislike for that matter. We would like to hear from you.

In the meantime, keep an eye out for our new 50th Anniversary banners that will be going up around the neighborhood soon. A special thanks to the Communications Team for designing them and to Fast Signs on Union-Midtown for installation.

Thank you for your continued support. I'll see you around the neighborhood.

I AM VECA, YOU ARE VECA, WE ARE VECA TOGETHER

Lily Faulkner Gilkey
VECA President



Traffic Islands

Swaths of color in the middle of a street



The roses, daylilies, and other plantings in the two traffic triangles at Hallwood-University and Jackson fill the beds with colors and textures in a VECA project done only five years ago. The two islands, reclaimed from the concrete and compacted clay they were once made of, have taken hold horticulturally speaking. They are filled with donated and purchased plants creating a pleasing blend of colors and textures.

The bed on Jackson is “under construction” as new street lights are installed. The islands are small gardens basically in the middle of a street, without a water source, and subject to whatever the weather and humanity can throw at it. Still, the beds prevail. The project was started long before 2016 by local neighbors who negotiated with the city, raised money to remove and replace asphalt and concrete, and filled them with soil and plants. Since then, they have been maintained by a steadfast group of local residents (though help is always appreciated).

Where once only concrete and asphalt existed, these swaths of color in the middle of the street now enliven and benefit everyone travelling by them and our entire community. ■

Staff

SPOTLIGHT

VECA House Plaques

After many delays over the past year, the VECA Historic District **House Plaques** will be available soon. They have not been available for some time and we are only able to have them again through the big efforts of the Membership committee including Mary Wilder and Karen Edwards. The plaques are actual tiles that have been engraved locally. They measure 7 ¾ by 3 ¾ inches. These distinctive plaques show your appreciation of and participation in our community with pride of place near your front door. Find full details and how to order soon on the veca.org website.



Family Friendly Saturdays on the Greenline

Second Saturday family friendly volunteer activities are back on the V&E Greenline. These are fun, kid-friendly activities that help maintain and beautify the trail. Weeding, planting flowers, trash pickup days, and more. Joshua First, the V&E Volunteer coordinator, suggests that volunteers be prepared for whatever the weather might be and to sign up online at vegreenline.org/volunteer. Drinks, gloves, and tools are provided.

VECA Homes

VECA recently closed on the sale of a home that the CDC originally built in 2003 on a vacant lot in the 2200 block of Hunter Avenue. The 1,497 square foot home with an open floor plan, 3 bedrooms, 2 baths, and energy efficient upgrades was built in partnership with the City of Memphis HCD to develop homes for low income, first-time homeowners. VECA worked with **United Housing** for homeownership classes and financing for the buyers. The sale continues VECA's work to increase homeownership, affordable housing, and neighborhood improvement.

Reporting Area Issues

Gunfire, loud cars, curbside trash, vandalism, and un-maintained yards are all problems in our community. VECA President Lily Gilkey reminds everyone in our community to report crimes such as gunfire to MPD at **901-545-COPS**. Use the city's 311 web portal to report on curbside trash, un-maintained yards, and other problems including street light outages at memphistn.gov.

Sidewalks

Work is underway to continue the very successful **Sidewalk Repair Program** funded by the Memphis City Council. More details will be available soon on the veca.org website about the grant program and how to apply.

50th Anniversary Banners

While VECA celebrates its 50th Anniversary this year, our community will receive the "banner" treatment it richly deserves. Specially designed **anniversary banners** in gold and white are expected to be installed over the coming months along Jackson Avenue and at intersections. Thank you goes out to Lily Gilkey and Marci Hendrix for managing the project. ■



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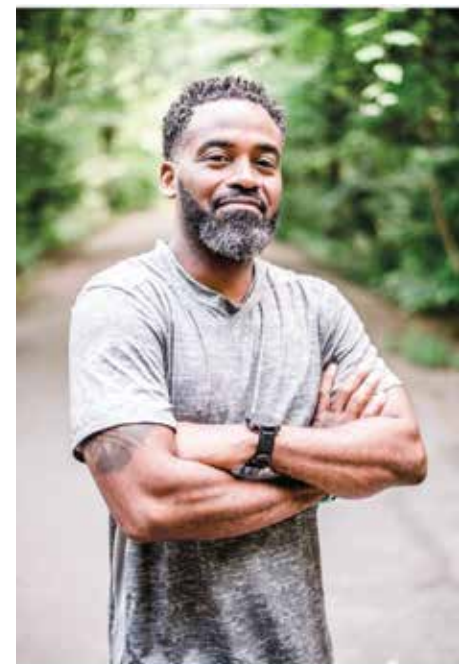
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FEATURE



VECA at 50: The CDC Years

What neighbors, a trolley, and a lot of hard work can accomplish

BY MARCI HENDRIX

From 1996 through 2008, VECA served the neighborhood as a working community development corporation (CDC) – in the business of housing revitalization. These were busy years with staff to manage construction, housing education, grants, and projects. How it began speaks to neighborhood engagement and what can be accomplished when neighbors work together.

In 1994, the Pew Charitable Trusts approached the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis to see if there

were any neighborhoods they could recommend for a Neighborhood Preservation Investment grant. Pew was looking for solid neighborhoods in need of a boost for revitalization. VECA was already receiving small grants from the Community Foundation and the timing was right to work together on a larger project.

Rhodes College hosted a meeting for VECA neighbors to brainstorm possibilities of how the grant funds could be used if selected. Attendees were enthusiastic and great ideas were generated.

VECA was chosen as a finalist and Pew representatives came to Memphis for a site visit in August, 1994. Mary Wilder was a stakeholder in the process, and she enjoys retelling the story of their visit to Memphis. VECA rented a van that looked like a trolley to show the representatives around the neighborhood. Neighbors boarded the trolley along the way to tell their stories. They met a volunteer who planted a garden of irises, another who planted trees, and one who mowed what would become the V&E Greenline. The tour ended at Helen Evans' home in Vollintine Hills where neighbors had gathered eager to talk about the diversity

and history of the neighborhood. The entire team finally ended up at Dino's for lunch and more conversation.

VECA was selected to receive a three year Pew grant of \$975,000 to be used in 1995-97. The funds were initially allocated through the Community Foundation while the VECA CDC was spun off as its own 501(c)(3). With that in place, VECA was able to manage the grant without a fiscal agent. The funds were significant to several projects including purchasing the V&E Greenline land, the Welcome Center, and VECA's start in the housing business.

Steve Gadbois and I recently talked about VECA's accomplishments during the CDC years. Steve was the last of three executive directors during the VECA CDC years along with Steve Locke who got the program rolling and Gary Gilbert who served in the middle. During the early years, the CDC did home renovations, partnering with the City on the projects. It purchased duplexes on Watkins and renovated them, converting them to single family homes to be sold to first-time homeowners with low interest rate mortgages. VECA also offered a program for homeowners to get low interest rates for home improvements.

VECA located two apartment buildings on Maury Street which, at the time, was a good block to have a presence on. VECA bought and renovated the buildings and served as the landlord until recently when they were sold to investors who live in VECA and who continue to take good care of them.

Staff provided housing counseling to people looking to buy their first home, prevent foreclosure, and reverse mortgage counseling for seniors. Ruth Gibson directed this HUD project with 1,000 families being helped as they navigated the process. VECA also bought, renovated, and sold a shopping center known as Watkins Square. For years, neighbors enjoyed dining at Melanie's which was located there until the center was lost to a fire.

Over the years, the CDC worked on more than 100 properties and purchased the Welcome Center and the V&E Greenline.

When Steve Gadbois joined the staff as director in 2000, the Pew funds were long gone and VECA was receiving funds from other sources. For years, the Memphis Community Development Partnership funded much of the general operating expenses at the VECA CDC.

VECA participated in the Shelby County Workforce Investment Network grant program, working with incarcerated men helping them learn construction and life skills. A number of houses were built under the program led by Vernua Harahan – as well as the V&E Greenline station house. Projects began wrapping up in 2008 as the economy slowed and the housing bubble was bursting nationwide.

Mortgages became harder to obtain, and the VECA CDC board decided to get out of the housing business.

In just 13 years, the VECA CDC worked on over 100 properties, successfully accomplishing what it had set out to do. VECA still owns 6 single family homes with long-term renters, and the organization retains its CDC designation, an important tool for future grant funding. ■

Marci is a regular contributor and a long-standing VECA board member.

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The V&E Greenline at 25

25 years ago, the V&E Greenline was little more than an idea and an abandoned railroad track

BY JOSHUA FIRST

Looking back on VECA's first 50 years, we cannot ignore one of its greatest accomplishments, the V&E Greenline, which celebrates its Silver Jubilee in 2021. From the "West End," where the iconic "Blue Kids" sit, to the "Springs" passing along the northern boundary of Rhodes College – the V&E Greenline brings our neighborhood together. It provides recreation, exercise and natural beauty to our neighborhood.

The trail now contains an arboretum, a wonderful array of fauna, including barred owls, snakes, turtles, rabbits, goldfish, and ducks, alongside a few timid cats and plenty of dogs on their daily walks. The Greenline is also closely connected to the Memphis arts scene with several installations and sculptures along the trail by top artists such as Jeannie Tomlinson-Saltmarsh, Ben Butler, and Yvonne Bobo, and hosts the V&E Artwalk, a community-organized outdoor festival for regional artists, crafters, and musicians.

In March 1995, a small group of VECA volunteers called the Greenways Committee walked the abandoned L&N Railroad easement through the neighborhood noting all of the impediments to creating the trail we now enjoy. Mosquito breeding grounds, unstable embankments, the lack of a bridge over Lick Creek, criminal activity, and several spots used for dumping garbage were found. This walk was the culmination of years of discussion (and plenty of hand-wringing) about what to

do with this property after Sears closed its Crosstown facility and the freight line that delivered goods from a nearby warehouse.

In 1982, VECA lobbied Memphis mayor Richard Hackett to purchase the abandoned line from the railroad in order to establish a trail that went downtown on the reclaimed land. The city refused, but that didn't stop VECA members Steve Gadbois, Charlotte Swailes, Mary Wilder, Renate Rosenthal, Mike Kirby and others from forming a Greenways Task Force to research ways for the community itself to purchase the land and develop it as an unpaved bike and walking trail.

A 1983 survey of adjacent homeowners revealed that over half supported the idea, and, with the help of grants from the Pew Charitable Trust and the Tennessee Greenway Initiative to VECA in 1995, the newly chartered Friends of the Vollintine Evergreen Greenway purchased the abandoned land from the L&N Railroad in November 1996. Later that year, the landscape design firm Ritchie Smith Associates completed the plan for the V&E Greenline, which has served as the blueprint for the development and maintenance of the trail.

Over the course of the next several years, hundreds of volunteers from the neighborhood and Rhodes College turned up to clean the area, build the Gardens at Idlewild, and worked on landscaping on newly-dubbed V&E Greenline. By 1998, the Greenline Committee had been named the "Best

Grassroots Organization" in the city by the Memphis Flyer, and in March 2005 the national Rails-to-Trails organization named the V&E Greenline its "Trail of the Month."

In the first few years of the new millennium, three major infrastructure projects were completed on the V&E Greenline under the leadership of committee member Bill Rehberg. Volunteers and Keeler Iron Works built both Lick Creek Bridge and Keeler Bridge, uniting the different parts of the Greenline into an uninterrupted trail. In 2006, construction was finished on Kirby Station, a replica of a 1920's railroad station house, which functions as a machine shed. It is named in honor of founding members and long-time volunteers and donors, Mike and Jan Kirby.

The 2010s saw the V&E Greenline establish deep connections with the local art community, first with the "Blue Kids" sculpture project on the West End in 2011, created by Rhodes professor Ben Butler and his students. Inspired by the "Blue Kids," committee member and artist Suzi Hendrix created a stained-glass and cast iron mosaic bike rack, located near Kirby Station, in 2013. The same year, Crosstown Arts funded Jeannie Tomlinson-Saltmarsh's sculpture "There Are Fish in Lick Creek" on the west side of the Lick Creek Bridge. The following year, Sean Murphy and Anne Froning worked with neighborhood volunteers to install a musical playspace near the Woodland Gardens area of the trail at Avalon. And just this year,

Opposite: Volunteers Margaret Leggette and Mike Hondo working on the trail in 1996.



Be a Part of VECA Voice

Volunteers are needed for writing, photography, graphics, editing, and ad sales. Indulge your creative side! Make a difference in our publication and in our community today.

VECA.ORG/VECA-VOICE

renowned Memphis sculptor Yvonne Bobo installed a beautiful metal representation of a Clematis flower, commissioned by Mike Kirby in memory of his wife Jan, who died suddenly in January 2020.

By far the most significant development in the last decade has been the establishment of the V&E Artwalk. The annual fundraiser brings 70 artists from around the Mid-South to the Greenline every April since 2012 (with the exception of 2020). The Artwalk is the largest event in the Vollintine Evergreen neighborhood, drawing visitors and awareness to the trail from all over the area. Like all of the work on the trail, the Artwalk relies exclusively on the work of volunteers and funding from individual and corporate donors.

Trail use is higher than ever and residents enjoy the natural beauty and positive value the V&E Greenline represents especially in uncertain times. The V&E Greenline has been undergoing a transition in recent years, from the period of construction in the 1990s-2000s to a new era where maintenance and sustainability is the highest priority. Caring for this natural artery of the community continues to be done entirely by volunteers supported by donations as the trail receives no money or support from municipal sources. Please visit vegreenline.org for more information about the trail, and to discover ways that you can help it thrive for 25 years more. ■

Joshua is a Greenline Committee member and a regular contributor.



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Artwalk returns this year on Saturday, October 9th to Kirby Station on the trail at Tutwiler. New things are in store for attendees this year including a selection of Memphis' best food trucks for a bite to eat. Keep up with Artwalk announcements at vegreenline.org/artwalk

Construction Dumpsters

How to handle the debris

BY DENNIS OSTROW

Regardless of the season, remodeling is a constant in our neighborhood. Drive anywhere in VECA and you can see the signs – dumpsters in driveways or on the street. Whether you are doing the work yourself or have a contractor, what to do with the debris is an important thing to be addressed. There are specific rules and guidelines for temporary dumpsters we'll review here to help you handle it properly.

The City of Memphis Code provides the requirements for dumpster placement within the city limits. In general, dumpsters are to be placed on the owner's property, most commonly the driveway. When the dumpster must be placed on the street, a location permit must be filed and approved.

Ordinances prohibit Memphis Solid Waste Services from picking up construction debris left on the curb. Contractors and homeowners are required to remove it when work is completed. Failing to do so may end up costing the homeowner if the city has to remove it.

Once you've assessed how much debris is expected, order a dumpster from a provider. Providers have their own rules about what you can put into the dumpster, how much you can fill it, and when it will be hauled away.

Typically, only construction debris is allowed in dumpsters such as lumber, drywall, and flooring. Household trash is not allowed. Combustible and hazardous waste is a no-no too. Check with the provider and have a full understanding of what is permissible.



All dumpster providers allow for the dumpster to be filled completely, meaning not above the top rim. When it comes time and it's overfilled, it may not be hauled away until the excess material is removed. Overfilled dumpsters are a hazard on the road when being hauled to the landfill.

Whether you or your contractor are performing your remodel, be sure to

follow these simple guidelines as well as those from the provider. Handling the debris properly will make your remodel as stress free as possible. ■

Dennis is a regular contributor with a lifetime of home renovation and building experience.

Dumpster Resources

Waste Connections: wasteconnectionsmemphis.com/construction

Memphis Solid Waste: memphistn.gov/government/solid-waste-management

Beauty of Ingenuity

PHOTOS BY NOAH L. MORRELL, JR.
AND STAFF

This whimsical sculpture by local artist Yvonne Bobo was inspired by Jan Kirby's lifelong love of nature and 25 years of dedication to the V&E Greenline. Her love of art was instrumental in making the V&E ArtWalk a great success for all of Memphis to enjoy.

The *Clematis* has generous blooms symbolizing the *Beauty of Ingenuity*. This wild, fuzzy seed moves aloft spreading joy – and warms the heart of those who knew and loved Jan.

The sculpture required over a year to plan, source, build and install in part because of material delays due to COVID-19. The Kirby family met and worked with the artist to create something truly unique on the Greenline and in our community as public art.

A beautiful dedication was held recently with the family, the artist, and invited guests in attendance on a beautiful spring evening – a fitting event to celebrate local art and to remember Jan and her spirit that will always remain a part of Artwalk and our community. ■

Inset photos: Artist Yvonne Bobo directs the delicate crane work required to position the upper sphere of the sculpture.

Overlay photo: *Beauty of Ingenuity*, Artist Yvonne Bobo 2021

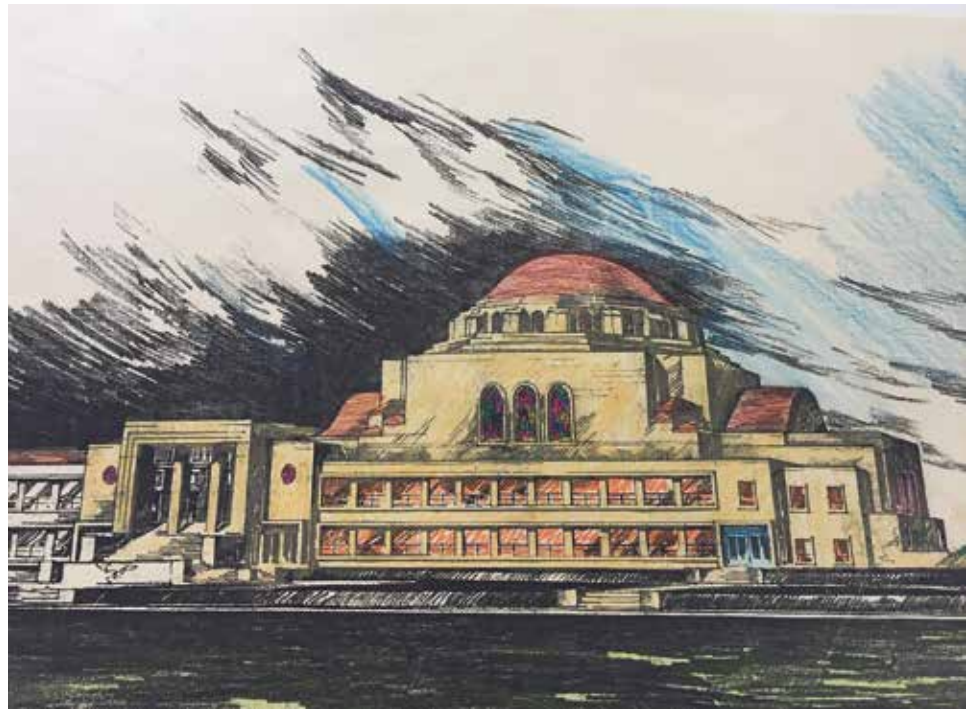




Imagining the Future

Local Landmarks

BY SUZY ASKEW



Rendering by architect George Awsumb, of the expansion of Baron Hirsch Synagogue circa 1950's.

In the last issue of *VECA Voice*, there was an excellent article about the history of the Baron Hirsch Synagogue. If I could have added one thing I would have said “A National Register listing does not protect this building or our neighborhood, only Local Landmarks can.”

The architect, George Awsumb, left behind a drawing of the next phase of Baron Hirsch that few people ever saw. Thinking ahead, he imagined just how a new addition would fit with his original design.

VECA's Historic Committee also imagines what might take place in the future with or without Local Landmarks District status, the only tool in the neighborhood preservation toolbox.

One example is Glenview Local Historic District. While it took years for Glenview to be appreciated for its architecture, early Landmark protection saved this historic area. Glenview was spared demolition and haphazard infill. This set the stage for its popularity and rebirth as a charming historic neighborhood.

Other neighborhoods haven't been so fortunate. Orange Mound is listed on the National Historic Register but only for being the oldest historic African-American subdivision, not for its architecture. Orange Mound cannot seek local landmarks protection because most of its original 982 shotgun houses

are permanently altered, have been demolished, or replaced with incongruous structures.

Williamsburg Village on the southeast corner of Goodlett and Poplar inquired about Local Landmarks status years ago but there was a moratorium. Today, the real village is surrounded on two sides by walled and gated, zero lot line developments.

How does this impact the future of our neighborhood? Without Local Landmarks status, VECA's future is unprotected. With it, we would be Memphis' 18th and largest Local Landmarks district, with guidelines that define improvements and development to all property owners. It also alerts us to what is being planned within our neighborhood.

George Awsumb planned ahead for the future. Should he be asked, he was ready. VECA has planned ahead too and we are ready with our guidelines. ■

Suzy Askew is a regular contributor and a member of the VECA Historic Committee.

Stay up to date on the progress of Local Landmarks and how you can participate by signing up for the weekly *VECA Spotlight e-Newsletter* at veca.org.

Thank You!

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