

VECA VOICE

Winter 2022



2021
The Year
In Review



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2021 Year In Review



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Winter 2022

Publisher

Vollintine Evergreen
Community Association

Managing Editor

K. A. Petersen

Design

Melissa Petersen

Contributors

Joshua First
Kristen Davis
Angie Powell

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VECA Welcome Center

1680 Jackson Ave
Memphis, TN 38107
(901) 276-1782
vecanews901@gmail.com
veca.org

VECA Board Officers – 2021

Lilly Faulkner Gilkey, President
Caroline Bauman, Vice President
Chuck Fox, Treasurer
Karen Edwards, Secretary

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Greetings neighbors,

HAPPY 50 Year ANNIVERSARY VECA!

As we bring to close another year, and reflect upon what has been accomplished, I would like to share with you some notable progress your VECA Board has made this past year. And in this season of gratitude and giving, I wish to recognize the many ways in which your 100% volunteer Board has invested significant time and energy to improve the lives of residents in our wonderful community.

We have put forth an effort to maintain and enhance our neighborhoods and respond to your concerns. As we continue to seek and make progress, we acknowledge your support as wonderful and caring neighbors. We could not be a successful board without you.

The list of accomplishments includes but is not limited to the following:

- Major enhancement in our communications. (Email, Newsletter, Facebook, etc.)
- Reviewing and recommendations to our By-laws and Charter
- Reviewing our vision and mission statements
- Receiving our Local Historic Landmark Designation
- Continued to provide Zoom capabilities to Board members and residents to attend monthly meetings
- Training for Board Members
- Maintaining and improving our rental properties
- Jackson Corridor improvements
- Improved Financial and Audit documents
- Crump Station Neighborhood Watch Involvement
- Greenline Improvements
- Holiday Party
- Holiday Decorating Contest
- District 7 Roundtable Involvement
- Sidewalk Improvements
- MLGW Advisory Council
- TIFF Involvement
- Neighborhood Cleanups, Blight and Abandoned Properties

We continue to work diligently to comply with certifications, State and Federal Laws, grants, etc. It is our desire to offer a community association that can operate more effectively and efficiently. It has not been easy. The pandemic has limited how and what we do. But because you have put your trust in us, your board, we continue to push forward to provide the best service possible.

I will roll off Board as your president in January, but I won't be far away as I will continue to serve as a board member and on various committees. Best wishes to our incoming president, as I know they will have the same pride, compassion and desire to serve with some amazing people.

I wish you all a happy and prosperous New Year.

Regards,

Lilly Gilkey, President





Student volunteers from the Collegiate School of Memphis



Alexandra Howard,
Director of Operations



Sarah Petschonek, Founder and CEO

VECA's 2021 Mary Wilder Award Goes to Volunteer Odyssey

BY JOSHUA FIRST

Beginning in the Summer of 2021, the V&E Greenline entered a productive partnership with the Memphis-based non-profit, Volunteer Odyssey, to manage its many volunteer needs. Since then, the trail has hosted hundreds of additional volunteer hours that would not have been possible without this relationship. The V&E Greenline has recruited not only new maintenance volunteers through Volunteer Odyssey's web platform, but also large groups from the University of Memphis, Cub Scouts, students from White Station High School, and elsewhere around the city and region. For these reasons, VECA is proud to confer on the organization the Mary Wilder Service Award for their hard work and organizational support.

Volunteer Odyssey started in 2013 by Sarah Petschonek, who has a Ph.D. in Industrial Organizational Psychology, when she realized how difficult it was for potential volunteers in Memphis to find and sign up for opportunities to help their community. As Volunteer Odyssey's Director of Community Engagement,

Dannon Eubanks, said, the role of the organization is to "match individuals with their ideal volunteer opportunities based on their passions, skills, and schedules." Moreover, their web platform allows volunteers to track their volunteer hours for work, school, or personal use. This feature of the platform also allows the V&E Greenline to more carefully calculate our own volunteer hours, and provides a simple communication forum for all of our volunteers. As Eubanks puts it, "We support our nonprofit partners so they can better support the communities they serve."

The V&E Greenline and VECA hope to continue to benefit from their relationship with Volunteer Odyssey. Congratulations to the 2021 recipients of the Mary Wilder Award! ■



Dannon Eubanks, Director of Community Engagement

Josh First is the volunteer coordinator and secretary of the V&E Greenline Committee.

Meet Caroline Bauman, 2022 VECA President

Over three years Caroline has done a lot in VECA and is poised to accomplish even more.

BY KRISTEN DAVIS



Born and raised in Northwest Arkansas, Caroline moved to Memphis six years ago. She purchased a home in the Vollintine Evergreen historic neighborhood with her husband three years ago and has taken an active role in the neighborhood ever since. Recently, I had the opportunity to chat with Caroline to learn more about our new VECA president and her goals for the Association. As it turns out, she is asking us to offer her direction.

Caroline, tell me how you wound up settling in Memphis? Growing up in Arkansas, I came to Memphis a lot as a child. I remember going to the zoo and to performances at the Orpheum. Memphis has always been a fun and familiar place. I fell in love with the food, the culture and the people of the city.

I thought I might wind up here but didn't think it would be my first stop out of college. I am a journalist and thought I'd go live in Chicago or New York or some other really big city in my 20s. However, straight out of college, I was offered a job with Chalkbeat, a non-profit news organization dedicated to covering the news of public education. This job married my two loves; journalism and education which I couldn't pass up.

I've come to recognize that in Memphis you can experience all the joys of a big city; resources and so much to do without the deficits of an overly expensive cost of living. And, it is small enough that you can really be known and have an influence on what happens here.

Sounds like you have found a home in Memphis and that we are lucky to have you. Tell us a little more about you and your family. My husband, Jacob, works for MLK50. Before that he spent several years at the *Memphis Business Journal*. Our jobs led us both to become quickly involved in the broader Memphis community. We are lucky to have a shared vision and investment in community, people and places.

His family is in Knoxville and mine is in Northwest Arkansas so Memphis is

about as close to the middle as we can get. We love being at a driving distance to all the things we love; our families, New Orleans, and natural beauty.

Out of all the neighborhoods in Memphis, why did you and Jacob choose to invest your time and money into a home in the Vollintine Evergreen neighborhood? We knew we wanted to be close to the places we love in Memphis and that we wanted to be in a diverse neighborhood. I am half Arkansan and half Puerto Rican and it was important to me to find a racially and socioeconomically diverse place filled with residents who are passionate about improving the city and being connected to each other.

I knew a few people I admired lived in V&E and so I did some digging on the VECA website and learned about the history of the neighborhood and the community association. VECA was founded to promote a racially diverse neighborhood and a sense of hope that was not the tenor of the conversation in Memphis at the time. We were drawn to a neighborhood where residents were so involved in the health and welfare of the entire city and their community.

This neighborhood has a heartbeat and sense of community that Jacob and I wanted to be a part of. Plus, being walking distance from Crosstown, so close to downtown and part of the midtown community, this was a fun place to be.

Once you got here, how did you get involved in VECA? We came to V&E in the fall and I saw on social media that the annual meeting was coming up. I attended as an opportunity to quickly meet so many neighbors in one place. At the meeting I saw that the culture of VECA was “if you want to build it, go for it.” They were looking for as many eager ideas and hands as possible. And we still hold that culture today. There is always a need and a warm welcome for new people to come into the community and identify as willing and able to help.

Within a few months of moving in, I noticed that the streets surrounding us had speed bumps but ours did not. People used our street as a cut through and flew down it causing everyone, especially residents with young children, to worry. When I joined VECA, the board supported our efforts to get speed bumps installed. A few lessons came from this. I took a petition to every house on my street. This helped me meet all my neighbors very quickly and helped me realize there are A LOT of

houses on a single street. And, the VECA board was incredibly supportive in the effort. It was a long process filled with bureaucratic red tape but I learned that the board’s historical shared knowledge was incredible and we all rejoiced when it was complete.

It sounds like VECA was a valuable resource to you from the start. What other VECA projects have you focused on in the last few years? Incoming VECA Vice President Chloe Elam and



longtime residents Natasha Strong and Andy Kitsinger had been working on a grant to analyze and make a plan about the Jackson Evergreen corridor of the neighborhood. I live north of Jackson and have thought a lot about how Jackson divides the neighborhood from a walkability standpoint. I'm passionate about connecting the neighborhood and joined the project. We have a lot of data from our research efforts with the city and other groups. In 2022 we will embark on an exciting era of community meetings to determine how we can make the area between Watkins and Evergreen on Jackson a better place for our neighbors.

Walkability is so important to ensure everyone can enjoy the assets of V&E like the Greenline and local businesses. We have some amazing restaurants in the neighborhood. What's your favorite local specialty? This is a very challenging question! Narrowing down to the restaurants closest to me for walkability, I'd say the honey gold wings at the Kitchen on Jackson and the

burger at Alex's Tavern. There are few things better than a burger, cheap Coors light and football on TV. There is a very special vibe there.

What else is special to you personally about the neighborhood? I am working on my Spanish. My neighbors down the street are from Mexico and have been so patient with my language efforts. We have really enjoyed bonding over it.

We have a lot of people here who we have chosen as family but not many actual relatives. I have been so blessed to get to know people on my street. We have neighbors down the street with young children and early in our time here, they invited us to a "Peppa the Pig" birthday party. It was so special to be included in such a familial way.

My next door neighbor and I both have flower beds that we work on religiously, we have developed a shared camaraderie over this and I really value that bond.

There is so much to be gained from developing a community with people you can depend on and have fun with. I've seen this in a microcosm on my street and hope that VECA can create more opportunities for people to be in community together on both large and small scales in 2022.

For readers who may not be familiar with VECA, tell us about the general work of the association. VECA is a connector. It's not a social service agency, but it is made up of people with a ton of institutional knowledge. If you identify a need, your own or something you observe in the community, please bring it to VECA. We will share what we can do about it and also help you navigate the systems in the city and come up with options to fill the need.

I hope to one day live in a world where the information about how to handle issues within your home or street is easily accessible but the current reality is that there is a web of bureaucracy you have to go through to know about getting speed bumps or who to call if you hear gunshots. The VECA board has spent time learning the nuances of the systems, talking with the police precinct, and applying for grants to do things like sidewalk repair.

We are a group of concerned residents who want and feel motivated to take the time to make this a great place to live for everyone in the neighborhood. The goal is to make things as easy for neighbors as possible by sharing the load. Many people have served on the board for a long time and their experience along with the power of the entire association is wildly valuable.

VECA is governed by a board and its work is conducted by several focused committees. Its membership is made up of residents of the neighborhood but it serves the entire neighborhood, members and non-members alike. If a reader wants to learn more about VECA, what would you suggest? First, I would say visit the website. Next, I would invite you to attend a board meeting. We are not an exclusive group and welcome

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attendance and participation in all of our meetings and events.

You can read about our various committees on the website and choose to get involved from there. Our Youth Committee holds a back to school drive every year. The Neighborhood Networks Committee hosts events like parties and service days to bring neighbors together.

Our Historic Committee has done a phenomenal amount of work to achieve landmark status for the community. This group has developed such a deep understanding of the changes that come with this status. As a homeowner, if you are wanting to make a change to your home but unsure how the new official historic status impacts what you can do, don't toil through it alone – contact them!

It is truly amazing to have VECA here. I hope that everyone in V&E takes full advantage of this neighborhood gem. What is your vision of how VECA will interact with residents in 2022 under your leadership? Creating a shared sense of belonging for everyone in the community is a huge focus for me. We are opening a new chapter at VECA where we can take the time to pause and ask our neighbors what they need and want from their community association. I want to engage the entire neighborhood to find out what they are passionate about and where we can continue to improve.

The energy at VECA is great and maintains the sense of hope we were founded on but we don't know what we don't know. We need more voices, more involvement and more help. We want to create a community but need people to get involved.

What are some of the ways people can get involved? Look at the list of committees for something you are passionate about. You can officially join a committee or pitch in for a single effort or event. If there is something you want to do here but don't see the right committee for it,

bring the idea to VECA and we will figure out how to support you. Maybe you want to host a block party, and we can help. Maybe you want speed bumps for your street, we can help.

I am so grateful for the members who sustain our efforts and I hope to increase our numbers. I can only imagine what we could accomplish with more support. But, you don't have to be an official member to get involved. You can take advantage of everything VECA has to offer, member or not. Anyone in the area can reach out to the board with ideas, needs or questions at any time. Our greatest asset is our ability to put our heads together and share our knowledge and skills to figure out how to meet a need in the community.

What are your hopes for VECA in 2022? Do you have any VECA New Year's Resolutions? I hope we are able to spend more time together next year and to see V&E become more walkable. And, I hope more residents can access the

beautiful green spaces we have, such as the V&E Greenline.

I'm most excited to have the opportunity to listen to our residents. It's a huge neighborhood and I'm excited to talk with our neighbors. I want to hear what's most impactful on your life here, what you are excited about and what you want to see change. I hope people will come and share what is going on in their part of the neighborhood. And I hope that I can serve by steering the organization to be inclusive and effective under the community's direction. ■

Kristen has lived in V&E with her husband Dominic since 2016. She works on the Give901 campaign for City Leadership in Crosstown Concourse and loves walking her dog, Faxon, on the Greenline.



Welcome Evergreen Gardens!

A Historic Area Becomes a Part of VECA

BY ANGIE POWELL

For the first time, VECA has added homes to its boundaries. Evergreen Gardens has two streets, Hunter Ave and Greenview Circle. Greenview Circle, designed for and marketed to middle class African-Americans in 1954, has a rich and storied history. I interviewed Floyd C. Rogers, a retired educator and real estate agent. His family was one of the first to purchase a home in the newly created neighborhood and 56 years later he still lives in a home here with significance in the African-American community.

Mr. Rogers has vivid memories of Greenview Circle and how it began. His family bought their house when he was in high school, and it remained in the family until recently. He recalled "Mr. Eugene Horn who was one of the founding partners for the Union Protective Insurance Company. ... he was a businessman who had grocery stores and rental properties in several neighborhoods. He was the one that went to the Boyle Investment Company to sell them on the idea of building nice homes for blacks."

The street was unique because of its brick houses with carports and three private bedrooms off a hallway, each room having its own closet. School teachers, Firestone workers, and postal

workers were among those who initially purchased the homes. Mr. Rogers recalled the Hagler and Holloway families who owned a restaurant where Northside High School now stands.

The most celebrated resident was Luke Joseph Weathers Jr., one of the famous Tuskegee Airmen from World War II and the first African-American air traffic controller. Mr. Weathers married LaVern Nailing at St. Therese-Little Flower Catholic Church in 1947. Mrs. Weathers stayed in the house until she died in 1999. Mr. Rogers believed the children kept the house for four or five years and then sold the house to an investor. That investor sold it to another investor, who lost it during the financial crisis of 2008. At the time he was living in his family home on Greenview Circle but went to the auction to see who was going to buy the house. At the auction, he bought the house with the intention of selling it, but after seeing the quality construction and the bomb shelter he decided to keep it and lives there now.

I asked Mr. Rogers about the "best of times" for Greenview Circle. He spoke fondly of the Evergreen Garden Club, which is still active. He said "about 30 years ago, a lot of the older residents were still living at that time, they would get together during the Christmas holidays and have a theme like Star

of David or an angel and most of the residents decorated in that theme... During the holidays there would be a stream of cars (coming to see the lights)."

When I asked about the worst of times he said it was about 20 years ago, and about 85 percent of the older residents had passed on. He also recalled a battle with a chemical company releasing toxic waste into Cypress Creek. He said they cemented the creek and eventually paid a settlement to all of the property owners along it.

Evergreen Gardens, like most of VECA, has a rich history. As Mr. Rogers wistfully said, he would like to see an airplane in front of the Weathers' house and to see the home placed on the national register. Since they are now a part of VECA, perhaps his dream can become a reality. ■

Angie Powell moved to VECA in 2004. Originally from Mobile, Alabama, she started her involvement with VECA delivering the newsletter.



Floyd C. Rogers of Evergreen Gardens

2021 In Review

What VECA Did For You

While 2021 continued to be a challenge to our community and the city due to COVID-19, VECA moved forward with programs and efforts to improve the quality of life in our neighborhood. We took on issues that are important to neighbors and continued to provide the types of programs and services our community expects, needs, and deserves.



Historic District Approval

After many years of tireless work, countless meetings, discussions, letters and hearings, the **Vollintine Evergreen Historic District Landmarks Overlay** was approved in July by a unanimous vote of the Memphis City Council. The overlay established the guidelines for protecting our unique community

architecture during renovation and for new construction.

Hundreds of volunteer hours went into working on the process and seeing it through to completion and property owners from all over the community participated in a variety of discussions, roundtables, zoom meetings, and hearings during the effort.

The Vollintine Evergreen Historic District stands as the **largest in the city** with more than 3,400 properties on about 880

acres which now includes the **Evergreen Gardens** area at the very north (see Welcome Evergreen Gardens).

The Landmarks Overlay requires a **Certificate of Appropriateness (COA)** to be applied for and approved before any work is done to a property. COAs include new construction or renovation visible from the street, and demolition. There are helpful guidelines available on the VECA website.

Keeping You Informed

Our weekly email **Spotlight** newsletter reached hundreds of neighbors throughout the year and the Communications team produced four issues of the new **VECA Voice** quarterly magazine. Efforts were made to increase the number of copies produced and distribution points during the year as well as deliver it for free online via the **veca.org** website. Speaking of the website, it has been extensively updated with many new features and easier navigation. We even have a store for VECA merchandise now!



Holiday Decorating Contest

Caring and Supporting the Work of Others

VECA helped MGLW and Gethsemane Gardens COGIC hold a community fair providing social services and a **food bank** to our community during the challenging year. We took part in the Mosaic Church Halloween event, providing treats for kids and we hosted our own **Holiday Party** in December, complete with Santa and Mrs. Claus.

The Youth Committee organized a **school supply drive** again in 2021 providing each of our three elementary schools with boxes of much needed supplies, masks, sanitizers, and more.

We produced and coordinated installing eleven 50th Anniversary banners throughout the neighborhood and our first-ever **Holiday Decorating** contest was a big hit with neighbors who went all out on their decorations this year!

Supporting Property Owners and Affordable Housing

VECA sold one of its **affordable housing units** in 2021, the first home sold since 2008. The home was originally built when VECA was a CDC. Overall, the affordable homes that VECA owns and manages produced a surplus of \$20,000 in the year which funds insurance for volunteers and the Board and contributes to overall program funds.

63 properties took advantage of two grants for **sidewalk repairs** and replacements that covered 50% of the costs making our community more walkable and safer.



Making Our Streets Safer

We continued to work on the **Jackson Avenue Road Diet Project** designed to make the street safer with particular emphasis on narrowing the street in areas and improving intersections. A traffic study was completed and the committee is working with City Engineering on next steps for 2022.



2021 Holiday Party

V&E Greenline

Artwalk returned to the V&E Greenline in 2021, held on its new date in the fall. More than 40 local artists and hundreds attended on a beautiful day at Kirby Station. A new sculpture was installed on the grounds in memory of longtime VECA and Greenline leader and volunteer Jan Kirby.

The trail continued to see record levels of use and **strong volunteer participation** again in 2021, including groups from the University of Memphis, Church Health, and others.



Second Saturday volunteer group



Seed swap and sale at Idlewild Gardens

Our Sources of Funding

VECA is a tax-exempt 501 c(3) nonprofit. For more than 50 years, our programs and services have been paid for through fundraising. Our current funding sources include five affordable home rentals, leasing the Welcome Center to BLDG Memphis, grants, advertising, sponsorships, donations, and our most important – **association memberships**.

Your membership supports so many important and beneficial programs and services in our neighborhood – including this magazine! You can **renew your membership or join online** anytime. Every membership supports our work – which is done by volunteers throughout the year

2021 was certainly full of challenges and 2022 will inevitably bring more. Our neighborhood, and VECA, are positioned to take-on these challenges better than ever before. **#WeAreVECA** ■

We Love **VOLUNTEERS**



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