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Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association Grows Up

BY STEVE COHN

The Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association, with deep roots in the Watts Hospital-Hillandale neighborhood, is sprouting considerable new growth this year. We'd love to have more neighborhood residents participating, both through membership in the association and by volunteering to help out with ECWA's many activities.

The deep roots go back to the origins of ECWA, which began as an idea in the mind of founding father Steve Hiltner—for many years an active WHHNA board member, chair of the Parks Committee, and general neighborhood do-gooder. While Steve is still very much involved with ECWA and even comes back to Durham every few months to continue his ECWA activities and spur others into action, his move to New Jersey has meant that he had to pass on the leadership to others. Diana Tetens now serves as the half-time Executive Director, Watts-Hillandale resident Larry Brockman is President of the board, recent Watts-Hillandale émigré Jane Finch serves as Vice President, and there are two other Watts-Hillandale residents on the current seven-member board.

Ellerbe Creek flows right through our neighborhood, of course, from the place where it runs under I-85 into the Hillandale Golf Course, through Indian Trail Park and along Westover Park, to the place where it runs back under I-85 just to the east of Guess Road. The West Ellerbe Creek Trail is much-used and much-loved by neighborhood residents, but many people are unaware that most of the land on both sides of the trail (and both sides of the creek) is owned and maintained by ECWA as its 17-Acre Preserve, with hiking trails being built on both sides, native plants being nurtured and tended (and invasive exotic species being cut back or removed), the Mutt-Mitt dispenser being refilled, and a footbridge across the creek being actively planned for (all that's missing is a funding source that would allow ECWA to apply for a Durham matching grant).

Ellerbe Creek also has a branch (the west branch of South Ellerbe Creek) that runs through Old West Durham and Walltown, from the old Erwin Mill up through Walltown Park and then under Northgate Mall. And the east branch of South Ellerbe Creek runs right out of downtown and then along another greenway trail west of Washington Street, where ECWA now owns the 3-acre Pearl Mill Preserve thanks to a recent donation from Duke Energy (much thanks to Watts-Hillandale resident Will Anderson, who provided legal advice on the transfer process).

Eventually these three branches come together north of I-85 and flow east into Falls Lake, and along this stretch ECWA has its largest preserve of all—the 82-acre Glennstone Preserve that was donated by local land developer Craig Morrison and is just now starting to take shape. ECWA also hopes to help preserve the amazing beaver marsh that lies along the creek just behind the old K-Mart off Roxboro Road (if you haven't yet seen this place it's well worth a trip).

These are big projects and big ambitions for such a small organization. And there's lots more—you can check it out on the web at www.ellerbecreek.org (though we'll readily admit that the pace of activity has been too much for us to keep up with: while some of the entries there are up-to-date, others have not been updated for many months). So ECWA sure could use your participation and your help.

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