



NORTH UNIVERSITY
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION



A Short Note from our NUNA President

By Laurence Miller

Holiday Greetings to all!

I know how busy everyone is, but I do hope you will come to the general membership meeting on Wednesday, December 14. We need greater attendance and it is really nice to get to see our neighbors and friends.

The trees in Hemphill Park, newly mulched, look great. Thank you Mark Feist for such good work.

When I read Melissa Miller's article in this issue about the importance of our mature trees, I had an even greater appreciation of Mark's contribution and efforts in saving our trees.

Also I want to mention it's not too late to contact Kathryn Kotrla at kjkotrla@gmail.com to contribute holiday gifts to the children at Helping Hand Home. Even small gifts will make a difference to these less fortunate children.

Again, please attend the membership meeting on December 14 and good wishes to all for happy holiday season.

Hemphill Park Trees

by Mark Feist

I would like to start by thanking those of you who participated in the mulching event we had on November 13. Our trees are in serious need of care and have been severely hurt by the successive droughts we have had and continue to have. It is my hope that by providing mulch to the trees it will stem the steady decline until the weather pattern hopefully changes.

We have finally received word from PARD's Urban Forestry Department concerning the requirements for installing irrigation. PARD wants to combine the irrigation plan with our draft tree planting plan so the irrigation would cover new trees and mature trees. However they will only include those trees which are showing the most stress.

There is another option to save our most damaged trees which is to hire a contractor to air spade around them. This is a technique that uses compressed air to loosen the soil around a tree so that water, oxygen, and nutrients can be better absorbed. Once the air spading has been done the tree will have to be roped off for several months. This is a costly procedure of roughly \$1000 per tree.

Before fall sets in and the leaves drop I would suggest everyone take time to stand back and carefully look at the tops and general condition of our trees. Within a few short minutes you will understand the seriousness of our problem. If nothing is done soon many of our mature trees will be lost. Trees are affected in every section of the park but in the Northeast section there is a real possibility

Next NUNA General Membership Meeting

Wednesday

December 14, 2011
5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

First English Lutheran Church

NEXT NUNA MEETING

First English Lutheran Church

December 14, 2011 | 5:30 - 7:00pm

AGENDA

I. Call to Order

II. Guests

III. Reports:

ANC- Bill Bednar

CANPAC- Mary Ingle

Historic Districts- Grooms, Aldridge Place

Development Review- Steven Tomlinson

Membership- Kimberly Renner

Newsletter- Judy Willcott

Parks- Mark Feist & Doug Plummer

Parking- Chris Dial & Doug Plummer

Treasurer- Laurence Miller for Jan Moyle

Quadrant leader's reports- Dick Holland, Mike Riley,

Kimberly Renner, and Rick Iverson

IV. Items Recommended for Action

V. Old Business

VI. New Business

VII. Adjourn

we could lose all of them.

Hemphill Park is the core of our neighborhood. It's where our kids play soccer and hide-and-seek, where we see our friends, walk our dogs, hold our neighborhood picnics and get together. And the trees are the most important feature of the park, shaping and defining the park. They make the park beautiful and it will never feel the same if we lose these trees.

I'm open to suggestions and willing to help in any way I can but at this juncture it is going to take the efforts and resources of the entire community. Please call or contact me (mwfeist@gmail.com / 512.419.1314) if you have any suggestions or ideas.

Minutes

The General Membership Meeting of the North University Neighborhood Association

October 12, 2011

The following people were present: Karen McGraw, Dick Holland, Bill Bednar, Valerie Bauhofer, Laurence Miller, Kimberly Renner, Michael Riley, Douglas Gibbins, Jerry Buttrey, Lauren Ames, Jim Creswell, Rick Iverson, Mary Ingle, Bill Beckner, Carol Journey, Bob Kaler, Pam Bell, Susan Pyror, and Judy Willcott.

Laurence Miller called the meeting to order and introduced the first visitor, Moses Rodriguez from the City of Austin. Mr. Rodriguez is a Senior Inspector for Code Compliance for the City. Questions were raised about the status of 400 West 33rd Street which Mr. Rodriguez said has all of the proper permits and is not in violation of any City codes.

The next visitor was Captain Dave Hiebert and three firemen from our Fire Station #3. He discussed how we can be alert about fire prevention in our neighborhood. Urban guidelines cover things like not cooking on a wooden deck, cleaning gutters, maintaining property, no oily rags stored in the garage, smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. Notify Austin Energy about any trees which are near powerlines and they will come and trim the tree.

The minutes from the last meeting were approved.

Bill Bednar reported from the Austin Neighborhood Council that there are at least two groups working to promote single member districts. Also that we should expect Austin Energy rate increases.

The ANC is concerned about the new Comprehensive Plan proposed by the City which designates 38th Street between IH 35 and Mopac as "Mixed Use Corridor."

At this point he introduced another guest, Paul DiGiuseppe, a Principal Planner from the City of Austin. Mr. DiGiuseppe assured the membership that "mixed use corridor" in the case of 38th Street does not mean vertical use, but only for future transit corridors for bus or rail. He said that the recommendation of 38th Street is in response to the public demand for better east/west transit. The demand has been expressed in ImagineAustin.

Karen McGraw from the Hyde Park neighborhood and Mary Ingle from our own neighborhood both expressed dismay that this proposal is being put forth again. Hancock, Hyde Park, NUNA and all the adjacent neighborhoods oppose development in the middle of our neighborhoods.

Laurence Miller said that NUNA is not interested in encouraging any development on 38th Street. Mr. DiGiuseppe responded that ImagineAustin wants to support the neighborhood plan and that the City views this proposal of “mixed use corridor” as consistent with the neighborhood plan. Karen McGraw stated that it is important to change the wording of the proposal now before it is too late.

Upon motion by Pam Bell and seconded by Bill Bednar the following resolution was passed unanimously by the general membership.

1. NUNA is opposed to the use of roadway terminology in the comprehensive plan that is the same as, or similar enough to be confused with, land use terminology used in the zoning regulations.

2. NUNA is opposed to the designation of 38th Street between I-35 and Guadalupe Street as a “mixed use corridor,” “transportation corridor,” or any similar designation.

Bill Bednar also reported that the Historical Society has a design standards template which the Landmark Commission will endorse by November 24 and which will be helpful with guidelines for design standards.

Michael Riley mentioned that there has been a break-in in his neighborhood and we all need to be alert and report any suspicious activity to 911.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted, Judy Willcott

Suonare, Cantare, Insegnare

by Kathryn Kotrla

Why string three Italian verbs together to introduce a NUNA neighbor? “To play, to sing, to teach” somehow hints at the talent and depth of Jenifer Jackson, who lives

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on a quiet corner of NUNA. Jenifer is about to release her 9th CD of original music. On the day we chatted, she was heading off to arrange her painting and drawings for the CD cover. She's planning an album debut at one of her favorite venues, the Cactus Café on the UT campus. Her performances in New York are for a regular following that appreciates her poetry in her music. In Scandinavia and Japan, and in venues like the Parisian Olympic Theatre, she enjoyed entertaining audiences in the thousands; but she admits to "a crush on Austin," and a confluence of personal and musical relationships that brought her here.



Jenifer Jackson

When asked how she describes her music, Jenifer pauses: "I'm never able to do that. It's melodic. I love melody. It's about personal observations, reflections, working through my own psychology, but so others can tap into it." She returns to images, being a visual artist also, particularly images of nature, since nature is a common thread between us, a "metaphor" for everyone. What is striking in her performances is her capacity to capture archetypes in her melodic, seemingly simple, musical creations. In reflecting on this ability, Jenifer notes her awareness of "death, time, impermanence, love," and how her gift of knowing "colors everything." She is generous in examining the speculation that she instinctively taps the multiple layers of time and existence. But reaching clarity, she explains that making her music for others is a means of meditation for her, and provides a healing effect for those engaged in the process of performing and listening together. You can visit www.jeniferjackson.com, and link to Jenifer's MySpace page where you can down-load songs via MP3, or spend a delightful evening at NeWorldDeli where she performs on

the third Wednesday of every month starting at 7 pm .

Why "Suonare, Cantare, Insegnare"? Jenifer's "day-job" is teaching Italian lessons to folks ranging from their teens to their late 60's, including a few NUNA neighbors. Jenifer has a life-long fascination with Italy, and says, "The second I got there, I felt like I was home....I love their way of life; how they celebrate each day and celebrate each other." As a teacher, a "professoressa," Jenifer is intuitive, challenging, inventive, practical, and fun. Her knowledge of Italian is deep, having lived there for a number of years.

One of the pleasures of living in NUNA is discovering the fascinating, talented folks who live here quietly, tapping into and replenishing the positive energy here. They're often not apparent immediately, since their busy lives and multiple interests may not include a focus on neighborhood issues, but they are true gems, able to teach us all through their work, music and philosophy, however expressed. Check out Jenifer. Have her teach you Italian. Come listen to her at NeWorldDeli or during her performances elsewhere. Buy her CDs and be transported. Experience the truths that unite us all.

Austin Historical Survey Wiki

By Jenni Minner

A team of graduate students from Dr. Michael Holleran's Preservation Planning course at the UT-Austin School of Architecture met with North University neighbors in Buddington and Aldridge Place to test the Austin Historical Survey Wiki on mobile devices. Special thanks are due to

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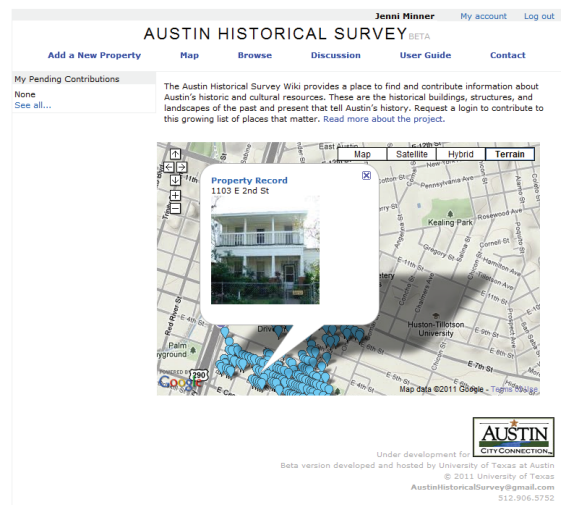
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Rick and Nancy Iverson and Joan Burnham who opened their historic homes to the effort. The project team benefited from the in-depth feedback of all who participated. This Wiki is being developed for the City of Austin and will provide everyone with the opportunity to participate in identifying and documenting historic places in Austin.

More information is being added to the Wiki on a regular basis. The map below shows a recent photo added for a home in the East César Chávez neighborhood, another neighborhood that is piloting the Wiki. Despite the generous gift of volunteers' time in North University (and even a nearly complete survey in Grooms Addition), there are only a few photographs that appear on the map for North University. We would like to encourage those who are interested to contact us and to try uploading a scanned photo or two (either recent or historical) to share on the Wiki.



Here's how to try out the beta:

1. Send an e-mail to me: Jenni Minner, project manager for the Austin Historical Survey Wiki. My e-mail address is jminner@utexas.edu. I will send you a link to the beta and login instructions.

(Note: We're not really publicizing the beta site yet, because we're trying things out and making daily improvements. However, we do want anyone interested and who lives in a pilot neighborhood to try out the Wiki.)

2. Navigate to a historic property using the map or the Browse page.

3. Go to the page for that property and select the Add a

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Photo link.

4. The photo will go to a moderator, who will publish it in just a short amount of time.

If you have any questions along the way, there is a User Guide that has tips and resources. You can also contact me at any point.

We have also been adding more ways to add detailed information. These are some new additions that Austin Historical Survey Wiki users will notice:

Overview

"The Finch-Krueger House is one of the most notable and intact early 20th century houses in Austin. Built in 1913 for Howell and Mary Stanley Finch, the house was later home of prominent jurist, Judge Charles Krueger of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. The Finch House retains its park-like setting, and has remarkably few alterations over the past 80 years. Stylistically, the Finch - Krueger House is a noteworthy Prairie School variant, and was doubtlessly considered a very modern house when completed."

updated 11/05/2011 - 14:52
by **Joshua Conrad**
source Written by Peter Flagg Maxson, Architectural Historian and included in backup for City of Austin Ordinance 931215-R.
notes [view revisions...](#) [add date...](#)

History
What is the history of the property?

These are two of six new “free form” text fields. These free form fields allow users to add more description and detail when describing historic resources.

Below is an image of information about architectural styles that has been added to the User Guide. The style guide was put together by the Heritage Society of Austin. We’ve put it up on the Wiki and we’re planning to add to it on a regular basis.

User Guide
Guide to Stylistic Influences/Architectural Styles
[View](#) [Edit](#) [Outline](#)

The following architectural style reference is presently under construction. Most of the styles below are most closely associated with houses, although were applied to commercial and institutional buildings. Additional styles to be added. Note that date ranges are approximate.

Much of the information in this guide was added from draft local historic district design guidelines that were created by the Heritage Society of Austin and are presently under review. Additional detail and more styles will be added to this guide over time. See more resources for identifying architectural styles.

Victorian Styles

A. Queen Anne (1880-1910)

- Building Form: L-plan, modified-L, or irregular.
- Exterior Walls: Usually wood siding or wood shingle, but sometimes brick or stone. Often with a variation of materials and textures.
- Foundation: Often screened with skirting of wood, pressed metal, brick, or stone.
- Porch: Feature decorative woodwork, such as turned balusters and spindle finials. Wraparound porches common. Porch floors often wood and porch ceilings often bead board.
- Roof: Cross-gabled, gable-on-hip, hipped, or pyramidal, often with dormers.
- Windows: Typically double-hung wood sash. Bay windows common character-defining features.
- Doors: Typically wood, often with glazing, transoms, and/or sideights.
- Chimneys: Commonly brick or stone, often with decorative tapered brick or corbeling. Sometimes metal stovepipe substitutes for chimney.

B. Folk Victorian (1870-1910)

We’re only just getting to some of the more exciting aspects of the Wiki. We hope you’ll try it out and give us your feedback. The more information that is added to the Wiki, the more interesting and useful it will be for everyone in the long run.



Ellen Peters Estate 4007 Speedway

This Hyde Park Bungalow is filled with echos of the love and care given by Miss Ellen Peters over the 70+ years it was her home. Miss Peters, who was one of nine sisters, never married, nor did four of her sisters. As they aged, she brought them into her home and managed their care. She lived to be 95, and her nieces describe her as the most generous and joyful person they have ever known. When asked if she ever tired of caring for her elderly sisters, she answered “Oh no, never! It is my privilege and my joy to be able to have them here.”

Now that Miss Ellen is gone, her nieces are selling her house. It needs updating from the ground up, but it has good bones and spacious rooms. The original character is largely intact. There are three bedrooms and one bath, a generous living room with a fireplace and built-in bookshelves, a formal dining room and a breakfast room with build-in table and china cabinet. It is pre-inspected so buyers can see what it needs to bring it into tip-top shape again.

According to the tax records, the house has 1256 sf of living space. The 50 x 130 foot lot has convenient alley access.

The price is \$289,000. For an appointment to see the house call Lin Team.



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Greek Revival:
**Celebrity Chef Gordon Ramsay Revamps
Neighborhood Restaurant, El Greco**
by Clayton Maxwell

I am intrigued by a neighbor of ours—her name is Athena, and, like the fashionable Greek grandmother-type that she is, she sports crimson nails and Versace glasses--plus she makes the best moussaka I've ever tasted. (Truth be told, the only moussaka I've ever tasted was in Guatemala, so to be eating the real thing prepared by a feisty Greek woman named for the goddess of wisdom feels like a trip to Santorini). To top it off, she just filmed a reality TV program in which English celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay throws a microwave off of her roof. Intrigued as well? Read on.

Athena's family recipes from her hometown of Serres, Greece are the inspiration for El Greco, the little bistro tucked behind what was once Mangia Pizza at Guadalupe and 31st street, just across the street from NUNA's Western perimeter. Three and a half years ago, Athena and her son, Chef Jake Konstantinidis, opened El Greco to bring Austinites dishes that are so authentically Greek that, like a good wine, you can taste the Greek terroir.

Yet, business has been slow at El Greco. The chief complaints were that the prices were too high and the food took too long. I wonder if that's just the way it goes, however, when proud Greeks are back in the kitchen making sure that each dish is ultra-fresh and made to order. ("I can't refrigerate my food, it must be freshly made," Athena told me in a thick Greek accent.) Perhaps we have to pay a little extra and wait a little longer for the real thing?

Nonetheless, this August, Athena and Jake decided to place their flailing restaurant's fate in the hands of Gordon Ramsay via his reality TV program, Kitchen Nightmares. The drama-mongering American version of this show is Fox's reinterpretation of the more reasonable British original, Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares. In late August, Ramsay and his LA crew landed in Austin, infiltrated Athena and Jake's kitchen, and were given one week to revamp and revitalize El Greco.

Hence, the throwing of a microwave off of the roof. Ramsay was making the point that good restaurants don't use microwaves, but mostly he was hamming it up for the

Fox TV crews. I don't know much about the percentage of microwave usage in good restaurants nowadays, but Jake, when I asked him about this incident, looked at me and shrugged, "I've never worked in a kitchen where there wasn't a microwave."

But of course, hamming it up is exactly what you ask for when you sign up for a reality TV program. Both Athena and Jake said repeatedly that Ramsay was "a very nice guy" and "an awesome person" outside of the shooting. But, alas, when playing the game of reality TV, Ramsay must be an arrogant jerk; he called Jake a "sack of sh**" the very first time they "met" on screen, and Jake called him a "fu*****" on camera soon thereafter. Apparently, words that must be asterisks in neighborhood newsletters are key ingredients in nightmare kitchens.

Name-calling aside, Ramsay did roll up his sleeves and completely overhaul the El Greco menu. He said it was "too authentic" and in order for the restaurant to make it, they needed to "Americanize." Hmmm, anytime the word American is used as a verb, it makes me pause. Ramsay's "Greek-American Fusion," as Jake called it, meant that the more obscure Greek dishes like Athena's family turlu bit the dust. The traditional hummus became less lemony, and Ramsay added a chipotle red pepper hummus to the menu. When I asked Athena about it, she tried to be a good sport, but couldn't help but say with a wave of her hand, "You know, chipotle is NOT Greek."

When I ate at El Greco last week, the post-Ramsay menu did seem less expensive than before, and, everything looked enticing enough that I had a hard time deciding what to order. The friendly dread-locked waitress, Stevie ("like Stevie Nicks," she said) actually recommended the chipotle red pepper hummus, and out of her favorite hot appetizers (the crispy feta, the spanakopita, and the grilled octopus were her recs) I went for the spanakopita. The hummus was fine—well made and fresh--but I did find myself wishing for a chipotle-free, plain lemony hummus. The spanakopita, however, was perfect, and an example of why made-to-order food tastes so much better; a spanakopita that's been hanging out in the fridge just can't compete with this fresh beauty. The filo dough was perfectly crispy and the spinach tasted like Athena had just plucked it from a hillside garden.

But it was Athena's moussaka that almost made me cry in

appreciation. My memories of moussaka are distant and oddly multi-cultural. During a stint in Guatemala, I worked in the restaurant of an exotic Dutch woman named Sasha who offered moussaka on her menu. I remember layering the potatoes and meat and serving it in little clay dishes to the backpacking Europeans who passed through. But what I tasted last Friday--Athena's concoction-- is a Greek goddess in contrast to that mere mortal moussaka of my past. Athena layers tender eggplant, zucchini and potatoes in a beautiful baked heap with crispy edges, topping this lasagna-like creation with béchamel and a hint of cinnamon. There is a meat version at El Greco, too, but I went veggie, and was so happy with it, so relieved that I could truly stand behind Athena's family recipe and wholeheartedly recommend it to all my friends, that I wanted to hug Athena when she came out of the kitchen to check on me. I refrained, however.

Yet, I did see a very proud sparkle in her eye when I told her how much I liked it. Ramsay had slightly altered her dish, adding the cinnamon to it, and it was one of the changes Athena didn't seem to mind. "As you're getting older your... how you call it... um, your taste buds, change," she said. "Before, I thought that cinnamon was just for sweet, but it tastes good in moussaka. I don't mind so much."

Athena and Jake are rightly proud of the food they serve, so I think it was no easy feat to swallow Ramsay's invectives in front of TV cameras for a week (not to mention having the crew follow you to the bathroom). After day four, utterly exhausted, the walls of good manners came crumbling down: Athena and Jake fought, probably in loud Greek, and the crews were delighted to record the kind of family screaming match that keeps audiences coming back for more. Athena added, "I told Chef Ramsay to get out of my kitchen."

Yet it's clear that behind the camera, they had a different relationship, and that she likes and respects the man enough to be happy for his approval. "Chef Ramsey told me in private that I'm a great chef," she said, in a wistful tone. "And that my kitchen was spotless, that he's never seen such a nice kitchen."

The Austin food bloggers have been in a tizzy over whether or not Ramsay ruined or restored El Greco, some foodies quibbling in detail over the new blue stripes on the walls and the quality of the pre versus post-Ramsey pita bread.

I don't really care about all of that, I'm just delighted that such a good place to eat is within walking distance of my house, and that I can bite into that lovingly-made moussaka knowing that this is about as close to Mount Olympus as I am going to be in Austin, Texas.

El Greco offers \$9.99 lunch specials, which includes a main dish (gyros, moussaka, or whatever the special of the day may be) and a side and a drink.

The El Greco Kitchen Nightmare episode will air on Fox in mid-November.

Clayton Maxwell is a travel, culture, and lifestyle writer whose work can be found in publications like Dwell, Conde Nast Traveler, and BBC's Olive magazine. For the last nine years, she has been a regular contributor to the international photography magazine, Eyemazing. During a four-year stint in Madrid, she was the proud author of a monthly column on Spanish etiquette for Spain Magazine as well as co-author of the Time Out Madrid guide. She now is happy to call Hemphill Park home. She lives on Laurel Lane with her husband, Scott, and two young children, Carlisle and Harry.

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Update on Historic Preservation

by Pam Bell

The City of Austin is preparing ordinance changes for the Historic Landmarks program that will begin limiting tax abatements for landmark property owners. The biggest change is that the Austin portion of the tax abatements for residential landmark properties would be capped at \$2500 a year. The city plans to “grandfather” current owners into the changes. The city is likely to consider the ordinance changes before the end of the year. In addition, the City has settled litigation over the landmarks program. Beginning next year, landmarks owners will need to declare why they are in need of tax relief. This declaration is part of the annual historic tax exemption application.

Most of the other entities involved in the Travis County Appraisal District based their decisions regarding the Landmark tax incentives on the outcome of the City of Austin’s review of the program. In late August the AISD Board of Trustees voted to retain tax abatements for historic properties for 2011. The board issued this decision with the caveat that it would like to see more integration of the landmarks program and the benefits of historic preservation in general into AISD’s curriculum, so that students and teachers can take advantage of the community history. (NUNA residents Alegria Arce Hibbetts and Joan Burnham have ideas to address educational opportunities for AISD students.) In addition, Travis County voted to retain its tax abatements pending reforms to the program from the City of Austin. Austin Community College Board of Trustees voted in July to continue its suspension of tax abatements. ACC board will vote in January on whether it will permanently end historic landmark property tax abatement. Efforts to roll back or terminate historic landmark property tax incentives may emerge in 2012 as several taxing entities including Travis County and AISD have stated that they plan to review the City’s changes to the program. .

Currently, the Heritage Society is working with AISD to cultivate more programs and better access to the historic resources for AISD schools.

Pre-Occupied with Wheatsville

by Steven Tomlinson

If you’re a member of Wheatsville Co-op (NUNA’s local



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grocery store on Guadalupe), make sure you vote online for the 2012 Board of Directors and the non-profit organizations that will get a share of Wheatsville's profits in the coming year.

If you're not a member, consider joining. These days, as more Americans reconsider our institutions of business and government, we've got an encouraging model right here in NUNA. A co-operative is a business owned by (and run for the benefit of) the people who shop there. Co-ops have a long history in Europe and the U.S. They've experienced growth spurts during periods of economic upheaval and social change, when other institutions couldn't keep up with what consumers needed. Co-ops grew rapidly around the time of the Depression when people were looking for more affordable ways of buying basic provisions. They boomed again in the 60s and 70s (when Wheatsville formed) to provide natural foods that corporate grocery chains didn't offer. Nowadays, co-ops are again flourishing as people seek healthy, local and organic food they can trust and ways of doing business that keep wealth in the communities where they live.

For a typical investor-owned business, profits are the end goal. For a co-op, profits are one means to bigger ends. The shoppers who own Wheatsville have invested capital (by buying memberships) in a business whose stated goal is to promote healthy food, hospitality and generosity as a way of doing business, and the growth of the co-operative economy. In addition, owners get 10% off all groceries purchased during quarterly owner-appreciation days, regular members-only discounts on featured items, an annual rebate (as a percentage of money spent at Wheatsville) and the opportunity to purchase investor shares (savings securities currently paying an extraordinary 4% annual return) when Wheatsville finances store expansion projects.

I've served on Wheatsville's Board for three years, and it's been a rich and rewarding opportunity to learn with some smart, committed people. In addition to the basic stewardship of Wheatsville's finances and governance, we explore ways that the business we're directing can make Austin a healthier and more hospitable community and an attractive alternative to impersonal corporations. Mainly, we keep exploring creative and humane ways to combine democracy and business to make a difference.

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Your Neighborhood Forest

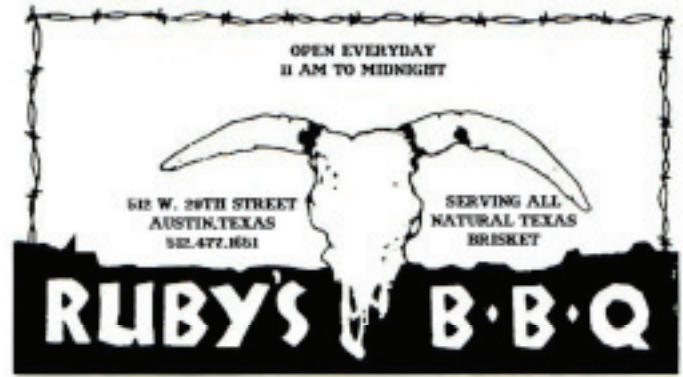
by Melissa Miller

One thing I like about my neighborhood is the presence of tall trees. It adds to the quality of our lives. You are probably familiar with some of the benefits of trees, besides beauty and shade. They add oxygen to the air. Their transpiration cools us. Their presence calms us and improves children's learning, reduces crime, increases neighborliness. See Richard Louv's Last Child in the Woods for more about this (or his Wikipedia entry). Also, houses with trees sell for an average \$6500 more than the equivalent without.

And there's a lot of drama going on in my back yard because of the 80 year-old pecan tree and various small understory trees I've planted. Several species of birds fly in and out. And the squirrels complain a lot. Last spring, I had 7 nesting pairs of native birds using the yard to raise families: cardinals, goldfinches, house finches, inca doves, white-winged doves, mockingbirds, Bewicks' wrens. Then there were the non-native English sparrows, grackles, and starlings. Unfortunately, the starlings and grackles ganged up on the golden-fronted woodpecker trying to nest in the pecan, and it had to abandon the nest. See? Drama you wouldn't have without trees.

American Forests recommends that the citywide goal for urban tree canopies should be 40% of it's land mass. Austin's is 32%. They recommend 35% for urban residential, which NUNA exceeds at 39%, according to a 2007 study by ArborPro Inc. for the Parks and Recreation Department. But the neighborhood is surrounded by others in the low 20%. These studies are aerial views, which sometimes confuse vegetation for canopy. An actual on-the-ground tree survey can be useful to any neighborhood in ascertaining the health of their urban forest and the extent of canopy. An Austin Parks & Rec survey showed that only 27% of city trees are in good condition, a worrisome trend. Half were in fair condition. See <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/parks/forestryinventory.htm>.

Since then, some trees have been planted and others lost;



Schedule of NUNA Meetings

All Wednesdays

Development Review Committee

First English Lutheran Church

6:00 – 7:30 p.m.

January 11

February 1

Executive Committee

502 West 33rd Street

5:30 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

January 18

General Membership Meeting

First English Lutheran Church

5:30 – 7:00 p.m.

December 14

February 8

the question is whether there was a net gain or loss. Most recently, we lost two huge trees on my street due to the work of putting in new sidewalks. That's sad, but they were short-lived ash trees and were reaching the end. Nevertheless it was an important loss to the street, as they shaded the asphalt. Studies have found temperatures to be as much as 30 degrees cooler under a street-tree's canopy. Recovering that "ecosystem service" will take decades. At the city scale, the urban heat island effect can increase local downtown temperatures from 14 to 21 degree Fahrenheit. Reaching the citywide canopy goal will greatly ameliorate that effect. New trees will take a decade or more to contribute to the urban canopy, so saving healthy mature trees, and improving the lot of those in fair condition, should be a priority.

It's the pecans that are really taking the hit here. Last year a pecan died across the street from me, and now I can see 5 dead or dying pecans by just standing on my upstairs front porch. Pecans are native to river bottoms and are the state tree. So our extended drought may take more of them unless they are irrigated. The San Antonio city arborist and forester recommend about once every week or two deep watering under the canopy, starting a few feet from the trunk, which will apply to Austin as well. (Listen to their advice given on The Source: <http://tpr.org/programs/thesource.html>)

This brings up the issue of range of ages. A healthy natural forest can be a model for our urban one in that it has everything from saplings to young adults and the fully mature so that a dying old tree has already got a replacement growing close to its full size. That can take decades, at least 20 years for a pecan—one generation. Our many tall pecans are perhaps up to 100 years old, maybe more. I figure they were planted when the neighborhood was built around the turn of the last century. However, I haven't seen young pecans in my neighborhood. Mind you, I haven't taken an inventory. They have a life expectancy of over 300 years--live oaks, 100 years, although some live oaks have lived well over 300. But a bottomland tree, such as a pecan, living on a hill needs help to do so, especially watering. That and several inches of compost and mulch should keep any tree healthy. But there are other ways of losing a tree besides drought or old age: a resident decides to take it down because it drops too many leaves, is leaning and dangerous, makes her sneeze, or makes him mad. So

the more we plant, the better. Especially since the survival rate is fairly low for young trees.

Many neighborhoods can't accommodate large trees because their yards are small, so those who can would be doing us all a favor if they would. Why should we? Well, the nuts, shade, beauty. And they provide roosting spots for owls, hawks, and other big birds. Besides the thrill of seeing the birds up close, they help keep the rodent population down. I don't believe I would have ever heard the piercing hoot of the great horned owl without my 60-foot pecan. Their great dark forms come to roost in the tree in the winter. What a thrill to see their huge wingspan as they glide silently over me. The live oaks next door provide forage for the raucous bluejays, not to mention the squirrels and many other birds. Occasionally, I'll hear a chorus of annoying screams from them when a hawk comes to roost in the branches. Needless to say, it's a short visit.

So plant a tree if you can, a big one if you have room. And cut your trees some slack. Don't expect them to put their leaves in the trash can. Sweep the leaves into the flowerbeds and let them mulch and feed your shrubs as they break down. Or use a mulching mower on your lawn, if you still have one, and let it fertilize the grass. For those sneezes, one teaspoon of local honey in your coffee every day will cure what ails you. And hug a tree at least once a week. It'll make you a better person.

Melissa Miller is a writer and nonprofit professional and has been a leader in the Native Plant Society for ten years, including state president. A native of Hawaii, she lives now in her great-grandmother's house in San Antonio and has worked hard to understand the cultural and natural milieu in which her ancestors lived. This article originally appeared in her neighborhood newsletter (the Tobin Hill Community Association) and has been re-written for NUNA.

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