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Community REVIEW

News that matters about your community

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In Memorium

Mrs. Clara Carroll

December 26, 1999

Clara Carroll's death was as if one of the strongest branches of that special family tree suddenly snapped. But the birth of her granddaughter Clara, is a graft that will take, in time, and make the family tree grow even stronger, in her name.

Clara had a special light, an aura of grace, an enduring place in our hearts. May the family feel the love of our community.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Decatur's Future: Growth For The Common Good

I bought my home in Decatur three years ago because I liked the town's human diversity, the architecture of the older homes and the sense of community here. I considered moving to a number of metro Atlanta neighborhoods with attractive older homes, but I was drawn in particular to a unique "hometown" spirit that sets Decatur apart from other areas. I made a deliberate choice to settle here and get involved in Decatur's special community life.

And I do mean special. Visit any city event on the Square, and you will witness a diverse group of people enjoying one another's company. People not just of different races, but of different ages, incomes, sexual orientations, religions and political leanings come together in a true, vibrant community.

Part of that vibrancy is Decatur's dynamism in recent years. Our town is changing rapidly, as is all of metro Atlanta. People are buying up, developing and redeveloping intown property so fast that most urban planners and city officials are struggling to keep up. Population projections indicate that in just 25 years, Atlanta will be roughly equal to the New York City of today.

South Decatur offers a classic example of how redevelopment and gentrification are rapidly changing the look and flavor of our community. While some of this change is a natural by-product of people moving back into the city from the suburbs, driven to escape the misery of ever-longer commutes, many people are working hard to bring a more revitalized economy to the Oakhurst business district. The renewal of south Decatur is no longer questionable; it is a question of time.

Affordable Living For A Diverse Community

Decatur is changing, yes—but how do we ensure change for the common good, across the racial and economic spectrum? We have little time to contemplate what our city will be like in 25 years—or even five or ten. While we have so much to be thankful for, it is also a time to be thoughtful, lest we risk losing all that makes Decatur special. If we do not plan carefully, we will simply be swallowed up by the growth of Atlanta.

In the Decatur Roundtable discussions of 1998 and 1999, maintaining economic and racial diversity consistently emerged as a chief concern about our town's future.

Closely tied to that concern are the issues of



Guest Editorial
by Robert Soens

affordable housing, transportation, and good planning. We must ensure that a diversity of people would not only want to live here, but can afford to live here. We should be working today to make sure we have housing affordable to people of various income levels and ages.

And in order for a variety of people to live here, they need affordable and safe means of transportation to and from work. Transportation issues will be determined on a regional basis, and Decatur must be open and willing to participate in the decision-making with a strong voice.

There is much talk about "smart growth" both in the metro area and state-wide, and the issues are numerous and complex. Georgia is lucky to have in Roy Barnes a governor who takes them seriously. We are also fortunate that Michael Dobbins, Atlanta's Commissioner of the Department of Planning, Development and Neighborhood Conservation, is committed to creating a city that will be healthy and diverse in the future.

Our Labors Of Love

Decatur's current prosperity is no accident. It is the result of years of a special labor of love, of many hard-working people too numerous to name individually here. Chances are you know some of them. They sit on the city commission; volunteer on various Decatur Business Association committees, organizing such events as the Decatur Beach Party and the Concerts on the Square; they organized the Decatur Roundtables; sit on various boards like the Downtown Development Authority; volunteer in their local church, school PTO or civic organizations like Rotary; or have risked their life savings to start one of the many small businesses that give us so much of our small-town feel. We can also be thankful for past and present

members of the City staff for their wise decisions and hard work. Far too few of these people ever get recognized as Hometown Heroes.

Many of those same individuals were involved in Decatur's strategic planning initiative over a decade ago that cleared the way for the quality of life we now enjoy. A new planning endeavor is now beginning, and there are many ways everyone can be involved in maintaining and enriching the community we value. The Growth and Development Action Team and the Strategic Planning Action Team, both outgrowths of the Decatur Roundtable discussions, are seeking input from Decatur's citizenry, as will strategic planning focus groups.

Please consider getting involved (see below for contact information). We will need the continued dedication of many people to maintain our uniqueness. Just as the Decatur of today is no accident, we cannot allow the future to be one; either.

Get involved

Contact Lyn Menie, Executive Director, Decatur Downtown Development Authority, at 404-371-8386 to join either the Growth and Development Action Team or the Strategic Planning Action Team, or to be a part of a focus group leading to a new strategic plan for Decatur.

Robert Soens is a member of the Growth and Development and Strategic Planning Action Teams, president of the Community Center of South Decatur and chairman of the Scottish Rite Hospital Development Team and a resident of Decatur.

Correction: In our Dec. 16 issue, Robert Soens was misquoted in the article South Decatur Keeps on Growing. The sentence read: "While all of these new ideas and plans are spurring renewed excitement about South Decatur, Soens remains cautiously optimistic about the future of the burgeoning little area." Soens reports that he is very optimistic about the growth of businesses in south Decatur. However, he does feel that the rapidly changing economic climate of the area lends itself to gentrification, something he feels should be approached with caution and care.