

South Fork Conservancy Chairperson Sally Sears Talks to the Parkwood Garden Club at our June 13, 2011 Neighborhood-wide meeting. Here's Sally's transcript:

It was wet, it was raining, and you have a beautiful Park! You have a gorgeous slice of real estate there, and the creek going through the middle of it, which you had to see without the ivy and see with eyes aglow is transformed. You guys have just done it! It's so impressive!

One of the things I've discovered from the Olmsted Linear Park is that you can have the prettiest creek in the world, but if you can't SEE it, if the ivy's invaded it, or the terrain's too steep, you forget it. It's neglected. We have sort of de facto...creeks in Atlanta, by neglect, by letting ivy grow over it or other things that we have lost a really valuable piece of our history as well as our present, because what we found when we started looking at the path of the South Fork which meets the North Fork and forms Peachtree Creek, is that these are substantial waterways that have been turned into little more than sewers because that's what you have to run along them, but they've gone away in our memory and in our lives simply because it's easier to get in the car and drive than it is to get into somebody else's backyard and walk. The premise was it's somebody's back yard. In your case, it's your front yard! And for many of us this is public land. The DOT owns a lot of it, the Georgia Department of Transportation: they own a significant piece of Deepdene right across the street. But also the City of Atlanta owns a lot of it: their watershed division. And now that everybody's going to pay more in water rates, now that DeKalb has raised its rates and City of Atlanta has raised its rates, we have a taxpayer interest or ratepayer interest in making sure our investment in cleaning these creeks and better water for us pays off. And one way that we've all figured out to do that, that you're figuring out beautifully, is put a hiking trail by the creek or a walking trail by the creek, and if you're enjoying it walking with your dogs you'll notice if something goes awry with the sewer system. That's what we've been doing in creeks along the South Fork and down toward Lindbergh which is where the two creeks meet. We've worked on a big project up to Zonolite.

Some of you may remember when W. R. Grace company shipped vermiculite laced with asbestos out of there. Well after a year and half, we've been talking to them about using that DeKalb county land for a community garden, and the EPA got very nervous, seeing lawsuits cropping up, and finally this week they've gotten permission from the bankruptcy judge of W. R. Grace, to go forward with a plan to get the last of the dirt out of there that's even slightly contaminated so we can begin planning for a community garden and trails beside the creek at Zonolite. I feel like I'm talking to one of the few clusters in the city that remembers Zonolite! This is great!

Anyway, Emory has been a wonderful partner with us, and I know that your history with Emory goes way back a way, and is thick and full and rich. Emory has given us a wonderful intern, Phillip Chang, who has graduated with one of the very first degrees in Sustainability at Emory. He and I are working this deal! Not that -- I'm so glad to be here first, because you guys have got this wonderful accomplishment that you've done. You've looked at your front yard, you've returned it to the public realm, and you've done

it without bulldozers much, without electronic equipment much, maybe the weed eater or two, with a couple of chainsaws, but you're respecting the native plants, which were there before we were, and you're returning it to the use of everybody that wants to come through there, and it's truly public service at its finest, and I don't see any taxpayer money being used for this, so hooray! Congratulations, and I'd love to come back. We're headed to Morningside/Lenox Park Association tonight, so that they can get up to date on what the EPA wants to tell them could happen there and we can begin planning more actively for both banks of the South Fork as it goes through Zonolite. So, hooray! You're following some great leaders and every one of you is doing the right thing every time you walk in that Park.

Thank you for letting me come by!