

THE CARRBORO CITIZEN

MILL

Our monthly arts publication is in this issue.

See inside!



PHOTO BY KEN MOORE
The brilliant red of Red-berried Swamp Smilax adorns bare tree branches in swampy sites.

More red berries!

FLORA

By Ken Moore

If you are expert at using your “owl eyes” while driving, you may spot some red berries that are neither holly nor dogwood. Like holiday lights, these red berries are strung up in tangles and thickets. I’m describing the fruit of one of the species of catbrier, *Smilax* sp., that folks curse when they encounter them in the wild.

Most of the *Smilax* species bear round clusters of black fruit. One of them, the Coral Greenbrier, or Red-berried Swamp Smilax, *Smilax walteri*, sports brilliant red berries. Unlike the Common Greenbrier, *Smilax rotundifolia*, and Catbrier, *Smilax bona-nox*, this red-berried Smilax is most commonly found in the standing waters of the bogs and swamps of the Sandhills and coastal plain. Rarely will you spot it in our eastern Piedmont.

However, there is a place to view it not far from Carrboro and Chapel Hill. Drive on NC 54, just a short ways east of Interstate 40 to the limited parking space at the New Hope River Waterfowl Impoundment sign. Be certain to take your binoculars with you. Walk back, being constantly mindful of the traffic, along the north side of the road, to look out over that swampy area of standing water. Here and there you will observe clusters of brilliant red berries scrambling over the trees and shrubs. In addition to viewing birds, I frequently use my binoculars for close-up views of plants. I promise, you will be impressed with a close-up view of those red catbrier berries. You’re not otherwise likely to get very close to those vines in the water, unless, of course, you’re wearing waders.

For years, I have wanted to have a Red-berried Catbrier in my own garden. I know of no nursery that offers it – and if ever plants are available, one will have to plant several in hopes that one of them will be a female vine that will produce the red berries if pollinated by a close-by male. If I can get my hands on some berries, I sow some seed myself!

SEE FLORA, PAGE 5

Hitting new highs

RECENTLY...

By Valerie Schwartz

It was not as an interloper that I sang during the first rehearsal of the Women’s Voices Chorus on Sept. 3. Being amidst them seemed like a good way to learn how accepting the women were going to be of their new director, Allan Friedman — the first man involved with the 15-year-old institution founded by Mary Lycan, the only director the chorus had ever had.

Silly me.

In order to sit among them and sing the music, I had to audition for Friedman, which proved a good introduction to his easy and easing style.

Of course the women welcomed him — they had put him through his own audition and chosen him over others last summer.

Still, my question remained: Would they respond to him as he led them through the difficult phrases of the challenging music he chose — a repertoire selected because he knew it would help them produce the sounds required to rise above the acoustical challenges of Duke Chapel, where they will perform their first concert under his direction?

The answer was resounding — after the first rehearsal they were thrilled. Three months later, when I returned to hear how things had developed, it sounded as though the Chapel Hill Kehillah had been filled

SEE RECENTLY, PAGE 8



PHOTO BY VALARIE SCHWARTZ
Allan Friedman has the right moves as he leads the Women’s Voice Chorus to its first concert under his direction.

Persistence brings results for a proud and historic community

Mebane group found themselves fighting for their neighborhood

By TAYLOR SISK
Staff Writer

“A visceral response,” is how Omega Wilson describes it, a sensation “that makes you so angry you can’t think. That’s what people call rage. When you get so mad you can’t count to two.”

This, he says, is how his West End Mebane community, approximately 90 percent of which is African-American, felt when they learned a highway bypass was going to be laid smack through the neighborhood, displacing families, razing a 130-year-old church and destroying the cemetery in which generations of community ancestors, including Wilson’s own, are buried.

How could the community not have been previously made aware? How could it be that this plan had apparently been in development for years (according to Wilson, for well over 10 years) without the community being informed, so that its members could speak out against it in public hearings?

“People would say, ‘I mowed the mayor’s lawn,’” Wilson, founding board member and president of the West End Revitalization Association, says. “I took care of his kids.”

Nearly half of West End lies within the Mebane city limits. And Mebane is, after all, a small town. Residents shared a post office with city officials, shopped in the same stores, attended, for the past few decades, the same schools.

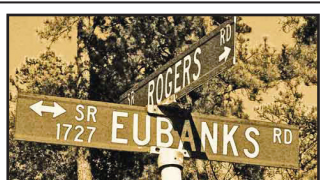
“I taught his kids and his grandkids,” Wilson recalls people saying of one official or another.

“Well, I’ve been knowing her for 20 years.”

There it was though — a story in the local newspaper that a spur off NC Hwy. 119 was going to divert traffic from downtown and dissect the West End



PHOTO BY ISAAC SANDLIN
Omega Wilson, president of Mebane’s West End Revitalization Association, stands in front of the historic church and cemetery that he and his neighbors have fought to save.



Editor’s note: This story is the sixth in a series that examines issues related to environmental justice and to the fight of the Rogers and Eubanks roads community to be relieved of what they allege to be an undue burden. To read the stories in this series and for other resources, go to www.carrborocitizen.com/main/rogers-road

community.

Wilson sits today in his insurance office in the West End, calmly recreating the sequence of events that on a bitterly cold

day in December 1994 launched his community into action, when news of the bypass first surfaced — a sequence of events that continues to unfurl.

A moratorium on the highway still holds today. Meanwhile, Wilson travels North America speaking to grassroots organizations about community development, and the West End Revitalization Association continues to work to preserve, stabilize and develop an historic neighborhood and to construct a stronger sense of community.

More 'pro-action'

As a program director for Chapel Hill-based MDC, a nonprofit specializing in community development, John Cooper has worked on a number of environmental justice projects. He’s a friend and associate of Omega Wilson’s, and he says he’s learned a great deal from the man.

“When I was active in the en-

vironmental justice movement,” Cooper says, “I felt like a lot of what was going on was reactive.” Rather than NIMBYism, what disadvantaged groups most often experience, says Cooper, is WIMBY: “Why in My Backyard?” — with the question being raised after it’s all a done deal — after the permits have been signed, the momentum mounted. By then, Cooper says, you’re fighting a losing battle.

“So I was of the mindset that what was needed was more pro-action,” he continues. “What was needed was a better working knowledge by disadvantaged groups of land-use planning and of the decision-making that was going on in their communities.”

“I met Omega Wilson around the time I started to feel that way, and he was doing exactly that. He had a group of folks who organized before the ground was broken for a highway, to stop that highway. Essentially, all

environmental justice issues are land-use issues — they’re decisions about what’s placed on the land, how the land is used, how the land is treated, how it’s protected. Those are land-use decisions, and land-use decisions are finalized well before ground is broken.”

The West End Revitalization Association (WERA) was formed in 1994 after community members learned of the decision to run a Hwy. 119 bypass through West End.

“We saw something about some of this in the newspaper,” Wilson says, “and we started asking the city manager about what was happening, and got no information.” A public hearing was then called for Dec. 23.

“And of course people were kind of alarmed,” Wilson recalls. “People were shopping and cooking Christmas dinners

SEE JUSTICE, PAGE 4

Proposal put forth to expand dual-language classes

By SUSAN DICKSON
Staff Writer

Students at three Chapel Hill-Carrboro elementary schools could have the opportunity to enter the Spanish-English dual-language program next year, under a proposal recently considered by the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Board of Education.

Under the proposal, the program — in which a class comprised equally of native English-speaking students and native Spanish-speaking students is taught both in English and Spanish — would be expanded to Frank Porter Graham, McDougale and Scroggs elementary schools for the 2008-09 school year.

The program is now offered only at Carrboro Elementary School. A Chinese-English dual-language program is offered at Glenwood Elementary School.

Although the board took no action on the proposal because it was a work-session item, board members said they supported expanding

the program.

“I do think that it makes sense to go forward [with the program]. This is a popular program — there’s a waiting list,” board member Mike Kelley said. “As long as there are qualified teachers, interested native English speakers and enough native Spanish speakers it makes sense to me to expand this into as many schools as possible.”

Board member Jean Hamilton agreed. “I’ve seen the benefits [of the program],” Hamilton said, adding that the demand for the program proves the need to expand it.

In addition, Hamilton said expanding the program would benefit the program’s teachers by creating a critical mass of teachers who can work together.

Superintendent Neil Pedersen said that although the program was too new to have substantial achievement data, students seemed to benefit from the program.

“I know we’re still in our infancy,” he said. “But I think that every indication is that achievement is at least as good as ... a traditional pro-

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— Mike Kelley, Chapel Hill-Carrboro school board member

gram and that students are developing fluency in two languages.”

Pedersen said that considering transportation costs, it would be more cost-effective for the district to expand the program to other schools rather than to make it a magnet program at one school.

“We haven’t really developed a system where we have the capacity to transport students all over this district,” he said.

The board will revisit the proposed expansion at a meeting on January 17.

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