



The

CHAMPION

Newspaper

FREE PRESS

WWW.CHAMPIONNEWSPAPER.COM • FRIDAY, SEPT. 14, 2012 • VOL. 15, NO. 25 • PAGES

Serving East Atlanta, Avondale Estates, Brookhaven, Chamblee, Clarkston, Decatur, Doraville, Dunwoody, Lithonia, Pine Lake, Tucker and Stone Mountain.

# Urban samctuary

## South Dekalb boasts beautiful wetlands preserve in unlikely place

by Daniel Beaugard  
daniel@dekabchamp.com

Just off Moreland Avenue in south Dekalb County sits a 200-acre nature preserve that East Atlanta resident Joy Carter calls a "hidden gem."

Constitution Lakes Nature Preserve, located off South River Industrial Boulevard, is nestled among truck yards and old factories; it was purchased by Dekalb County in 2003.

"My understanding is that the county had money through a bond referendum to buy green space," Carter said.

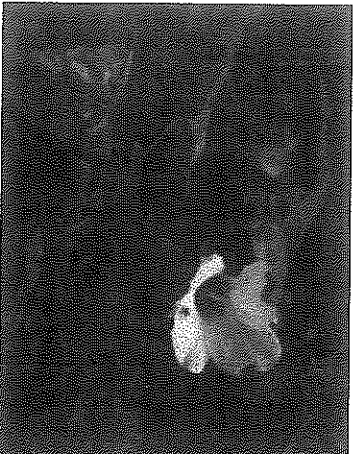
Carter, who is on the board of the Atlanta Audubon Society, found out about the preserve in 2006 while attending a bird-watching class taught by one of her neighbors. Carter lives in the Orme-wood Park area of East Atlanta and said she was amazed to find such a beautiful place with so much wildlife right down the street from her.

Over the years, the county has built a boardwalk, nature trail and parking lot, but most of the maintenance is done by a small group who frequent the park, including Carter and carpenter Joel Slaton. Slaton, whom Carter calls the honorary historian of Constitution Lakes, said the area was once owned by a brick company, which used the soft red clay to make bricks. In 1908, the South River Brick Company moved away and the area sat vacant for years. Slaton said the lake and its surrounding marshlands were most likely made when the company was digging for clay.

"It's just natural mud pits," Slaton said. Carter also thinks that the company may have struck some underground streams in the process as well.



Constitution Lakes, a 200-acre wetlands and nature preserve in south Dekalb County, is a popular place for bird watching and hiking. Photos by Daniel Beaugard



See Wetlands on Page 15A



www.facebook.com/championnewspaper  
www.twitter.com/championnews

The CHAMPION newspaper  
www.championnewspaper.com

# Metamorphosis

Continued From Page 1A

Walking down the trail and the scenic boardwalk next to the lake reveals a rich wildlife not usually seen in the city—a variety of turtles live in the area as well as cranes, herings, woodpeckers, foxes and an assortment of other creatures.

In addition to the paved trail and boardwalk, there are several miles of dirt trails surrounding the preserve. Behind the lake on Cottonmouth Trail—where Slaton and his cousin Rusty have seen plenty of snakes basking on a sunny day—sits the remains of an old watering trough and a well. As one goes further into the woods, the ground is littered with old red bricks, some of which have grown into trees because they have been on the ground for so long.

Recently, the Atlanta Audubon Society received a grant from Together Green, a conservation program led by Toyota and the Audubon Society. Friends of Constitution Lakes, the small group consisting of Carter, Slaton and several others, also participated in a Corporate Green Day Challenge with companies Accenture and Turner Broadcasting.

*“They joined together and it’s just great. You can’t do it on your own, but they’ve done what and they won—that’s how much of a difference they made,”* Carter said.

Carter said volunteers from the program, residents of nearby neighborhoods and Audubon Society members spent an entire day cleaning up the preserve—picking up trash and removing old tires from the marshes.

*“It was a really great combination of different groups, which is how things get done,”* Carter said.

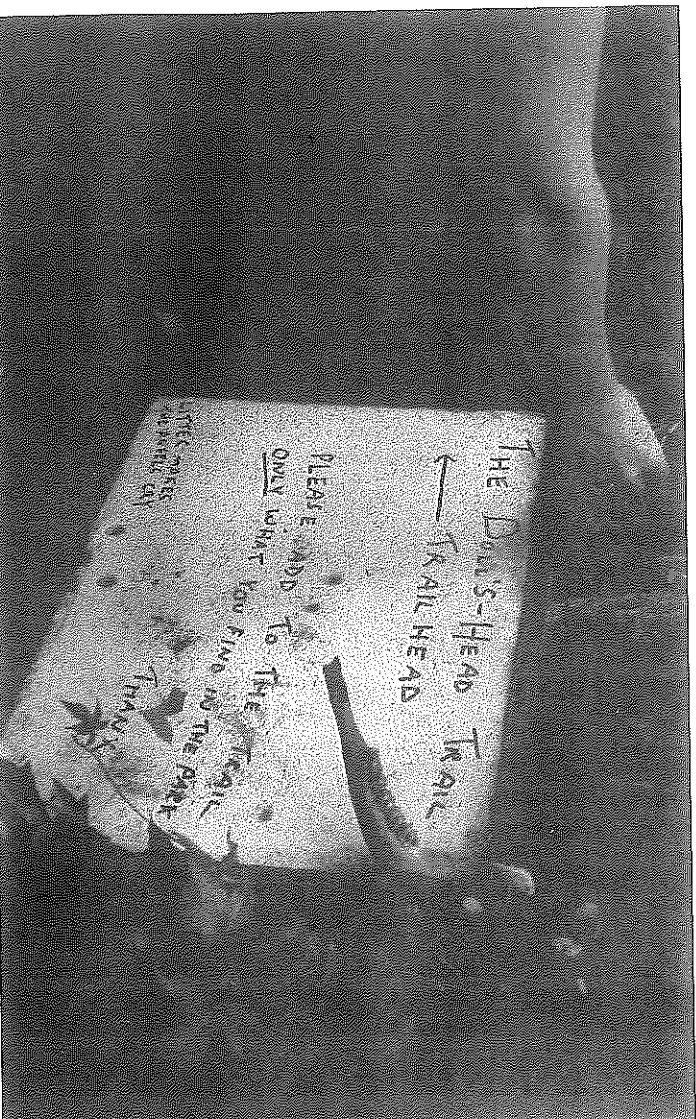
Over the years Carter and Slaton have seen the area revitalized and nature flourish. However, now the preserve’s biggest problem is all-terrain vehicle riders who have been mucking up the scenic trails. Although they’ve never been caught, Slaton believes it is probably residents that have been coming to the area for years who don’t care that the area is now a nature preserve.

*“We’ve tried everything, even laying big logs across the trail but they just use a chain saw to cut right through them,”* Slaton said.

Carter said the next big event to take place at the preserve will be led by Dave Butler, an Atlanta Audubon Society board mem-

ber and green space manager for DeKalb County. Butler will be talking a group of DeKalb County employees on a bird walk Sept. 23.

The preserve, located at 1305 South River Industrial Blvd., is open each day from 7 a.m. to sunset.



The Davis-Head trail, a quarter-mile trail leading around one of the marshes at the Constitution Lakes preserve offers glimpses of wildlife like the two herons pictured below. The trail is also decorated with materials found throughout the woods and next to the trail. Photos by Daniel Beauregard

