

West Towson Elementary Boundaries Considered

West Towson Elementary School is likely to be finished and opened in time for the 2010-2011 school year. And children in Southland Hills will be attending it.

That is about all that is clear in what has become a contentious redistricting process. Many of you have been following the dust-up in the Towson Times or on the Towson Families United blog, so the Insider need not repeat everything here. But suffice it to say that Rodgers Forge residents are not happy because the options on the table will, in one way or another, split their community.

Initially, all of the four options for the redistricting included some kind of split in Rodgers Forge. But then, the board voted for another option, known as G, which kept the historic district of The Forge together but not the adjacent Gaywood or Pinehurst community, or the Rodgers Forge apartments. That opened the school board up to legal challenges based on when the option was on the table. And, several community members accused Rodgers Forge leaders of encouraging gerrymandering. The school board has yet to send its recommendation to the superintendent, so it's likely this process will get more contentious before it's over.

A Garden Grows in Southland Hills?

The Towson Presbyterian Church is planning to put in a community garden just north of the labyrinth near the corner of Chesapeake and Highland Avenues this spring. This garden, which will be on the Old Manse property, will serve two missions of the church: to be more responsible toward the earth and to help feed the hungry. All produce grown in the garden will go to help feed the hungry.

An Eagle Scout who is a member of the church has volunteered to build the beds and other infrastructure for the project. The church still needs to work out some details, including a schedule of who will tend the garden. But they welcome community involvement, and the SHIA board voted to support the project.

A thank you...

A couple of months ago, one of neighbors, Sue Proctor, put out a call in this newsletter asking people for donations to the Ronald McDonald House. Marianne Rowan-Braun, President and CEO of the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Baltimore, Inc., wrote Ms. Proctor recently to thank her for the neighborhood's generosity.

The letter reads, in part: On behalf of the children and families at the Ronald McDonald House, I would like to thank you and the members of the Southland Hills Community for the generous donation of food and cleaning supplies. With four large kitchens to stock and the need for cleaning supplies for the residents of a 37-bedroom house, you can imagine how much your contribution means to the house."



POOL PUSH TO CONTINUE

Nearly four years ago, some neighbors in Southland Hills and West Towson began talking formally about putting a swimming pool in the crumbling old jail site on Bosley Road.

The Towson Swim Club has come a long way since then. As of February, 200 families have committed – and paid – to join the pool. That number is enough to proceed with plans to build, although it is short of the original target of 300 families.

"We plan to move forward still, even though we're a little short," said pool board member Bob Corona. "We're confident that once we do break ground, everyone else will come forward."

If you signed up for the pool, the second installment payment is due this month; Greg Rowland at 412 Alabama is collecting the payments.

The pool board hasn't been actively trying to recruit members this winter; with both the economy and the weather in the doldrums, it hasn't exactly been the right time. But it will resume those efforts in March; with a payment deadline to the bank in May, they'll need to bump up the membership ranks. And early joiners get a significant benefit – they can sell their pool bond with their home.

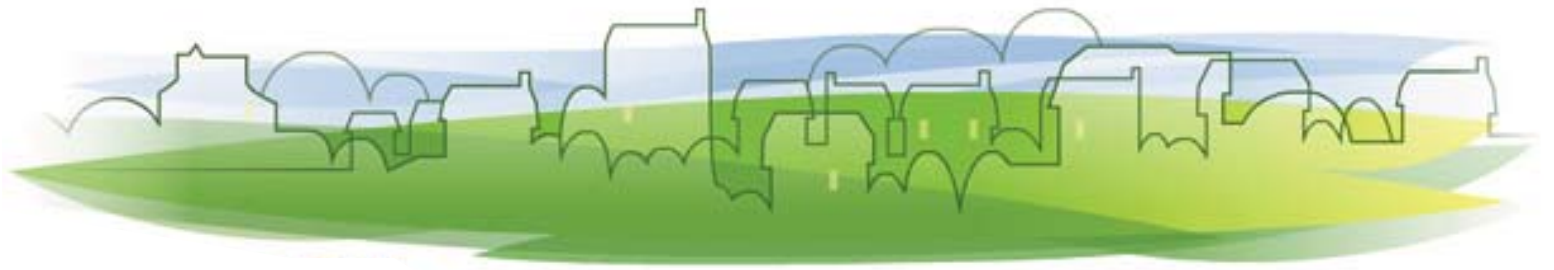
The board has hired two West Towson architects: Shellie Curry and Chris Parts.

Corona said that, when he talks to Realtors, they say that a pool is the one thing Southland Hills/West Towson is missing, and that gives neighborhoods like Wiltondale and Stoneleigh an edge when trying to recruit new residents. Both those community pools are full, and have been for years.

Nearly half of those who have already committed to the pool are Southland Hills residents. Corona said he's hoping to attract some more members from other neighborhoods: of the 1,800 homes in Rodgers Forge, for example, only about a dozen have joined the pool.

"Southland hills has been very supportive," Corona said. "If we can get a higher percentage out of some other neighborhoods, we'll be good."





Help for Haiti

And speaking of donations, many neighbors have reached out to help after the devastation in Haiti. Baltimore is home to many wonderful aid organizations, including Catholic Charities and Lutheran World Relief.

Many news organizations have issued two warnings to those who want to give: send checks, not stuff; and choose a reputable organization with a proven track record. Although items like toothbrushes and shampoo are sorely needed in Haiti, sorting through the tons of medicines and toiletries flown in takes up valuable time, and much of it isn't getting where it needs to be, experts have said. Relief groups learned that lesson well during the Asian tsunami, and they are trying to get the word out now as well.

February Fling is on!

For more than 20 years, neighbors have been getting together on a Saturday night during the coldest, bleakest and shortest month to chase away the winter blues. The tradition continues this year at the home of Vince and Kristin Nesline, who have graciously volunteered to host the gathering on Saturday, Feb. 20, from 7-10:30. Salmon and fillet will be served, but please bring a side dish to share. The cost of the Fling is \$12, payable at the door.

The Fling is a great way to get to know your neighbors...and some years, when it's crowded, you really get to know them! Many of our homes are not that big, and between 60 and 120 people usually turn out for the party. The theme this year is the Winter Olympics.

Single-Stream Recycling



Baltimore County finally began its much-awaited single-stream recycling program. They will be picking up both paper and plastic on Monday mornings. They will not pick up yard waste in February and March as part of the recycling program, but you can throw out yard waste with your regular trash and they will take it.

If you did not follow the recycling rules that they sent out, you likely came home to find they didn't collect yours, and that you got a "notice of violation." This notice stems from some of the rules that are in place now. Before the county took recyclables in plastic bags; they now won't take plastic bags. Also, they don't take items like Kleenex boxes that are mostly cardboard but include some plastic. For a full list of what they will and will not take, see www.bcrecycles.com.

One fun thing to do...

This column was intended to showcase activities in the Towson area that are a short drive or walk. However, many families in our community are members of the Maryland Zoo in Druid Hill Park, and they may not know about a little benefit that is going away soon: In January and February, zoo members get free admission to the Maryland Science Center and the B&O Railroad Museum. Both of these attractions are fabulous, for kids and adults alike.

The B&O in particular is looking great after an extensive renovation of its roundhouse, which lost its roof in a recent snowstorm. For the next few weeks, simply show your zoo membership card and you'll receive free admission to the permanent exhibits – some features, like train rides or special exhibits, cost a few dollars extra. Have fun!



New in town?

The Southland Hills insider would like to welcome new families to the neighborhood – reviving a tradition that began under previous editors. If you have new neighbors, let us know; send an email to rkobell2002@yahoo.com.

How to reach us

If you have neighborhood news, send an email to rkobell2002@yahoo.com.