

# Green with Pride

Park Pride encourages Atlantans to keep community spaces green

by Ashley M. Wilborn

With more people buying condos in the city and homes being built with smaller yards, parks and greenspaces are becoming more coveted than ever before. As Atlanta experiences these changes, taking care of your own backyard is no longer enough. Often, trying to organize the community to help out and raise money can be difficult, so it never hurts to get a little help from some Friends.

Park Pride, a nonprofit group that's been around for almost 20 years, acts as a liaison between citizens and the community government, helping make the effort to preserve parks a little easier.

nutrition programs and planning, adult fitness stations and more.

Now, Harris says the park area is more intergenerational and taps into the urban need for more greenspace. "The new mixed-use communities don't have yards, like when we grew up," she says. "A lot of them have designated space, but the parks are only about five acres. Collier Heights Park has fifteen. The park really gives people an outlet to come together in a common place."

The success of Collier Heights Park, which continues to grow, is based on the momentum of the citizens having

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"We help communities who want to improve their parks form 'Friends of the Park' groups," says Abigail Paine, director of development and communications for Park Pride. "And we have a visioning program that helps the community rally and be very active in what they want their park to be."

This visioning program has helped many Atlanta communities, most recently Collier Heights Park in Adamsville. "I'm a resident and my children went there," says volunteer R.R. Harris. "We knew it wasn't as it had been and we wanted to make it as nice as it was when my children were there." They've already raised \$120,000 for major renovations that include a new cybercenter, seminar and

a vision and being organized in their plan, which Park Pride helped to lay out. The non profit is very focused in their efforts—they don't do capital improvements, like actually laying down new pathways or installing playgrounds; instead, they have an architect and a director of community building who help them look at several factors to create a master plan for the park.

"We do go out there and get dirty, but a huge part of what we do is coordinate and empower community members to find the organizational tools they need to create more and better parks," Paine says.

After you've formed a Friends of the Park group, the visioning program helps you understand where your park



**VERNON JONES**, chief executive officer for DeKalb County, speaks with a concerned citizen at Park Pride's 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Parks and Greenspace Conference.



**PARENTS AND CHILDREN** get involved in the redesign of Collier Heights Park.



**AT THE PARK PRIDE CONFERENCE**, attendees also took a tour of Atlanta parks. Here, R.R. Harris explains the strategy for the Collier Heights Park redesign to the group.



**FRIENDS OF COLLIER HEIGHTS PARK** attended the Parks and Greenspace Conference at the Atlanta Botanical Garden to learn more about how to keep their group active and effective.

or greenspace stands at the moment, list your park's amenities and features, describe the lay of the land, understand the uses and ask the neighbors how they use the area. Then, they find the people who have a vested interest in the park, such as other neighborhood and religious groups, schools, businesses and officials, and ask for their support and input. They help you ask the questions and find viable answers so that ultimately, they are just the conduit for your organization that is entirely powered by your community.

Park Pride is heavily involved in its own vision of reminding people how much of an impact parks and greenspaces have on our health and our environment,

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Remember, our backyards  
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and how urban development in Atlanta is changing the way we live. In 1991, the push for parks gained speed and the group helped form PARC, the Park Atlanta Rescue Campaign. Since then, Park Pride also has helped block the sale of six Sandy Springs parks to developers, and is now very active in the Atlanta Beltline project. Recently, the group held its 5 annual Parks and Greenspace conference where several high-profile officials from Atlanta spoke to citizens and where citizens had the opportunity to discuss how parks affect our health and economic development and help build communities, and how to raise and maintain park programming.

Remember, our backyards and parks don't have to disappear. If you need help getting organized, contact Park Pride at (404) 817-6761 or [www.parkpride.org](http://www.parkpride.org). 🏠