

In the Loop

A Neighborhood Publication Serving Austin's Northfield & Ridgetop Communities

Summer 2011

Not So Stealthy

Invasion of dormitory-style housing undermines our neighborhood's charm

By Sebastian Wren

Thanks to a perfect location, funky and cool neighbors, and an endless supply of interesting things to do, Northfield is, without a doubt, one of the best places in all of Austin to live. But if there is one flaw in this gem of a neighborhood, it is clearly the invasion of "Stealth Dorms," aka "McDorms," which are slowly taking over every one of our streets.

A Stealth Dorm, for those of you not in the know, is a newly constructed building that looks like a house on the outside, but which is actually designed to be a rental property for a large group of unrelated people. They are built on lots and under regulations that are designated as "Single Family," but there is no way a single family is ever going to live in one of them. They are designed through and through to be a dormitory/frat house/party barn, not so subtly hidden behind a suburban-tract-home veneer. With the excessive noise, trash, traffic, and parking problems they bring, living next to one is unpleasant to say the least.

But, of course, nobody lives next to just one. As soon as one gets built on a street, the neighbors in close proximity to it quickly try to sell their houses and move away. Alas, nobody wants to buy their houses because they're located in the long, dark shadow of a Stealth Dorm, and so they sit on the market dropping in value. Eventually, the owners get fed up and become willing to take any reasonable offer no matter who is presenting it, and guess who is right there ready to pay bottom dollar for another house they can turn into a Stealth Dorm? This is the "domino effect" of Stealth Dorms, and it explains why there are clusters of them on certain streets all built by the same investor. You can see this happening right now at the corner of Zennia and Leralynn. A year ago, there weren't any Stealth Dorms there, and now there are five.

Throughout the neighborhood, there are about 60 of these structures that have been built in the past 10 years, and the Neighborhood Association

has finally decided that it's time to do something to curtail future Stealth Dorm development. A neighborhood task force put together a position paper (www.NorthfieldNA.org/stealthdorms.html) describing the problem and offering solutions. The task force made the following recommendations for single-family rental properties:

- Require all landlords to register their tenants with the city.
- Allow neighborhoods to reduce occupancy limits from six to four unrelated adults
- Clarify the distinction in the city building code between a "Group Home" and a "Single-Family structure"
- Impose new safety standards and inspections



I have shared this position paper with a wide range of city leaders and with members of the Austin Neighborhoods Council (ANC), and nearly all of them agree that these Stealth Dorms are a terrible problem and that something must be done. Council member candidates Randi Shade and Kathie Tovo both visited Northfield in May and agreed to the creation of a city task force to look into the problem and offer suggestions for possible solutions.

If you agree that Stealth Dorms are undermining our neighborhood's unique character and charm, then I encourage you to get involved. We need the support of the entire neighborhood to make ourselves heard. Please lend your time, your ideas, and your voice to the fight against this insidious invasion of our neighborhood.

Formerly the Northfield Neighborhood Association's president and newsletter editor, Sebastian Wren can be reached at swren@balancedreading.com.

Upcoming
Events:



Northfield Neighborhood Meeting
Monday, July 11th
7:00 PM - Dayspring Chapel
5500 Avenue G

13th Annual North Loop Block Party
Saturday, September 17th
11:00 AM - 7:00 PM
North Loop Boulevard



A Note from the Editor

By Storms Reback

As you can see, the newsletter has changed quite a bit since the last issue. We have a new name, a new layout, and a new distribution area—in an alliance of like-minded neighborhoods we have expanded to include the homes and businesses in nearby Ridgetop. We also have a new team in charge of producing the newsletter.

When the longtime editor of the newsletter Beka Clark-Smith was forced to step down in the summer of 2007 due to health issues, Sebastian Wren dutifully took over the publication, thinking he would fill in for a year. Well, one year led

to two, which led to three, and, despite his best efforts to pass the position on, he managed to stick with it for four years and nine stellar issues. Beka turned a two-page flyer into an actual newsletter running as long as 12 pages, and Sebastian took her efforts even further, consistently producing a publication that was as interesting as it was informative.

Thank you, Beka and Sebastian, for giving so much of your time and energy to the neighborhood.

Following the high standards created by those who came before us, we hope to produce a newsletter that reflects all the major happenings in the area while

allowing any and all who live here to freely speak their minds. Something bothering you? Want to make yourself heard? We're always looking for contributing writers, and we strongly encourage you to participate as much as you can in what is, ideally, a community-driven publication. Send us your comments and ideas, remember to contribute your neighborhood dues, and, above all, participate. After all, this is your newsletter.

Storms Reback has lived in Northfield since 2006. He can be reached at news@northfieldna.org.

In the Loop

Summer 2011

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TITAYA'S THAI CUISINE

The 3 buildings across from U-Haul & McDonald's

Challenge Accepted!

City-sponsored program encourages residents to attract wildlife

By Nissa Brown Reback

It was the owls that inspired us. They arrived each spring, six or seven at a time settling in the branches of our trees. While we were never able to positively identify them—being nocturnal, they of course only showed themselves at night—we came to consider them our guests and missed them when they moved on. This brief glimpse of nature made us want to take a longer look and encouraged us to transform our front and back yards into places that owls—and snakes and frogs and other birds—might want to settle down and stay a while.

So it was with great delight that I discovered the City of Austin's 2011 Neighborhood Habitat Challenge, a two-part program designed to promote the creation of wildlife habitats in our yards and encourage neighbors to work together to do the same in a community-wide effort.

The neighborhood that gets the most residents to certify their homes as wildlife habitats with the National Wildlife Foundation by November 14 wins a prize. Previous years' prizes have included a tree planting in a local park, a picnic, a Designing for Wildlife Workshop, tree giveaways to individuals, and a canoe trip on Lady Bird Lake. To be considered a wildlife habitat, your yard

should contain a water source, shelter for animals, and plants that provide seeds, pollen, and berries. One of the easiest ways to fulfill the last component is to replace part of your lawn with native plants, which generally require less maintenance and watering as well as create habitat suitable for wildlife such as birds and butterflies.

If you're interested but not sure where to start, the City of Austin provides an excellent search tool (<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/growgreen/plantguide/searchplant.cfm>) for finding native plants to put in the ground and identifying non-native plants to avoid. Those interested in taking the Challenge should contact the Wildlife Austin Program at wildlife@ci.austin.tx.us or 512-974-9540. A limited supply of pre-paid habitat certifications is available, so don't delay. After meeting the criteria, residents may then certify their homes with the National Wildlife Foundation (www.nwf.org/backyard/certify.cfm).

With the approval of a subcommittee of the Northfield Neighborhood Association, it was decided in early June that our neighborhood would be working to beautify the stretch of Chesterfield Avenue between North Loop and West 56th St. to fulfill the Challenge's community-project element.

Specific ideas approved by the subcommittee include planting trees for shade, removing non-native grasses from the creek bed, commissioning a sculpture from a neighborhood artist, installing bird and bat houses, and building benches. Your participation in this project will be a vital component of its success; residents will be alerted about upcoming workdays through the neighborhood's Discussion List (<http://www.northfieldna.org/discussion.html>). Volunteering a few hours of your time is a great way for those who are unable to transform their own yards into a wildlife habitat to participate in the Neighborhood Habitat Challenge.

Currently, 20 residents have expressed interest in certifying their homes as wildlife habitats. If you'd like to participate, you can join the Google group (Northfield 2011 Neighborhood Habitat Challenge) or email news@northfieldna.org. You can also learn more about the Habitat Challenge requirements at <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/parks/wildlifehabitatrequirements.htm>.

Hopefully our efforts will allow native wildlife to thrive in our yards as well as throughout the neighborhood. And who knows? With a little effort and luck, you may just get visited by a family of owls next spring.

The City of Austin recommends the following websites for more information on gardening for wildlife:

National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat Program
<http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife>

Travis Audubon Society
<http://www.travisaudubon.org>

National Audubon Society: Audubon At Home
http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/index.html

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
<http://www.wildflower.org>

Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept. Wildscapes program
<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildscapes>

Austin Butterfly Forum
<http://www.austinbutterflies.org>

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Growing Community

Gardening Initiative Gains Momentum in Ridgetop

By Anne Woods & Martha Ward



Somewhere between the drear of winter and the doldrums of summer, did you surrender to the urge to turn the soil and to plant seeds and sprouts? Did you dream of teasing some tasty tomatoes, herbs, greens, and peppers from the earth? Or are you a garden gawker, someone who strolls through the neighborhood, noting who is planting what where, but never pulls the trigger and does it himself?

In our walks and drives through our neighborhood, fellow Ridgetopper Anne Woods and I have noted more and more homegrown gardens springing up. After visiting several Austin area community gardens, we asked ourselves, why not here?

A site that seems to be begging for the opportunity is a nearby open field bisected by a branch of the Upper Tannehill Watershed that belongs to our venerable neighbor Ray Robertson and is registered as a Wildlife Habitat. Robertson recalls how he and his longtime friend Jack tended this parcel for many years, developing a voluptuous rose garden as well as a substantial

vegetable garden, and shared the abundant produce with neighbors. Robertson is delighted about the possible revival of gardening in that location and is also eager to learn more about the growing interest in developing a community garden at East 55th and Bennett along the south side of the creek.

Anne recently took a community garden guidance course at the Sustainable Food Center and discovered the vast amount of local resources that are available, including soil, seed, tools, water, and manpower. The most essential ingredient, however, is you. Spread the word to family members, neighbors, and anyone interested in pursuing the many opportunities to dig in and get involved that community gardening has to offer.

Those interested in participating should also note that plans are in the works for an upcoming series of short walks to various garden plots in Ridgetop and Northfield. We'll be looking at the variety of styles of gardens in our neighborhoods and different composting options as well as learning and sharing tips and skills about what works and what doesn't.

If you have questions or a garden you'd like to add to the tour, please contact Anne Woods: awoods71@yahoo.com or Martha Ward: koockward@yahoo.com.

A Load of Shipe

Possible closure of local pool has some area residents up in arms

By Bryan Hadley

Facing a projected \$9.8-million shortfall for fiscal year 2012, city manager Marc Ott sent a memo to the mayor and city council members on May 23 presenting 289 possible cuts saving approximately \$34.4 million. While 288 of these cuts would have very little direct impact on residents of the Northfield and Ridgetop neighborhoods, one has sent a ripple of dissatisfaction through the community. This time next year, the swimming and wading pools at Shipe Park could very well be closed. Wars have been started over less.

The six neighborhood pools selected for possible closure in Ott's memo (Kennemer, Gillis, Civitan, Kealing, and Reed are the others) were chosen because they are all within 2.1 miles of another facility and collectively account for only 6.6 percent of all neighborhood pool usage. All told, the estimated savings from closing the six pools would be approximately \$406,000.

The most organized response to Shipe's possible closure came from the Friends of Shipe Park, which has worked on a variety of park improvement efforts over the last few years. The neighborhood group convened on the park's

grounds on June 11 to discuss ways to keep the pool open. On June 25, the same group hosted a cookout and party to show off the first installment of the Shipe Park Mural and raise awareness about the possible closure of the pool.

Adam Wilson, one of the group's organizers, encouraged residents to call or write the mayor and city council members to voice their disapproval. He also invited anyone who wanted to follow this issue—the city council won't be voting on the budget for fiscal year 2012 until mid-September—to become Facebook friends with Friends of Shipe Park. If Shipe does end up on the chopping block, the closure would be effective starting the summer of 2012.

This is not the first budget cycle in which the city has been forced to make these kinds of difficult choices. In fiscal year 2010 the city recognized that its deficit would be a recurring problem due to structural deficiencies and since then it has worked to correct them. Some of these corrective measures have included eliminating vacant city jobs and programs such as the Trail of Lights while increasing some city fees and forgoing wage increases for city employees. In the past Austin residents have swallowed each of



Friends of Shipe Pool

these changes like a bitter pill—uncomfortably but with resigned acceptance. But closing the pools at Shipe?

The closure of any pool during a long, hot Austin summer is enough to drive people crazy, but shuttering one as beloved as Shipe could very well have the same effect as the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the first in a series of events that led to World War I. Or not. It's up to you.

Anyone seeking more information can contact Alison Young: Alison@alisonyoungdesign.com or Adam Wilson: Adam@griffinschool.org

Fowl Play

In Northfield chickens are becoming as common as cats and dogs

By Leif Johnson

Anywhere you find people in the world today, you're also likely to find chickens, and Northfield, despite being smack dab in the middle of the 14th largest city in the country, is no exception. When I moved to the neighborhood, I was excited to raise a small flock that would provide me with eggs and help fertilize my garden. It turns out many other residents of our 'hood have had similar thoughts. This spring, my neighbor told me he'd started keeping chickens, which surprised me because I'd always thought chickens were noisy, but I'd never heard so much as a peep out of his birds.

Inspired by this discovery, I decided to conduct a chicken census in our neighborhood. I sent out a survey (<http://goo.gl/GffN1>) and within a day received a wide variety of interesting responses. From Lamar and Zennia to East 52nd and Harmon, chickens are being raised in all corners of our neighborhood. The survey indicated that there are at least 70 chickens spread out over a dozen coops throughout this relatively small slice of Austin.

You might be surprised to look on the map of the census (<http://goo.gl/maps/JqYg>) and find that someone right around the corner from you is raising chickens!

As far as the owners of these birds go, their chicken-raising experience varies across a wide range. A handful of folks are just getting started, while a few others have been at it for only a few months. On the other end of the spectrum are the "chicken experts" who have been keeping chickens for over ten years! For example, local expert Monty Newton got his first birds in 1999 and now keeps a flock of 16 hens and one "noisy as heck" rooster.

Having one of the greatest chicken-raising resources in all of Austin—Buck Moore Feed & Supply—within walking distance is surely helping to fuel the backyard chicken movement going on around us. According to one of the employees, business for chicken feed and supplies has been booming since about 2003. It's not uncommon for the store to see one or two customers a day saying they've been thinking for a while about raising chickens and they've finally decided to give it a try.

And why not? There are countless benefits to keeping chickens, including the tidy disposal of kitchen scraps—listed by nearly half of the survey's respondents as a reason for raising chickens—and use of the birds' composted manure, which provides excellent fertilizer for your garden. But for most people the primary motivation for keeping chickens is the many eggs they produce. Monty says his flock yields five dozen eggs a week, while consuming about \$6 of feed and "all my kitchen scraps and yard waste." I myself am hoping to collect up to a dozen eggs a week from my three hens once they start laying at about six months of age.

But don't count your eggs before they get laid! Monty and the folks at Buck Moore have lots of advice to give on the subject of egg laying. While a hen can produce nearly an egg a day, the amount will fluctuate due to changes in temperature, water, nutrition, and stress level. During the height of summer and winter, chickens in Austin tend to lay approximately 30 percent fewer eggs than they do in the spring and fall. Monty emphasizes that during the summer it's crucial to ...(story continued on page 8)



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Meet your Neighbor | Dorothy Ryden

By Storms Reback

While biking around the neighborhood, my son couldn't have picked a better spot to run into a parked car. Dorothy Ryden was out of her house in a flash, bringing consoling words and, of much more importance to my son, an ice-cold Coke.

Dorothy has been looking after our neighborhood's children ever since she moved to Northfield from South Austin with her husband Leon and their two young kids in 1952, settling in one of the many houses in the area built by Thomas Brothers Lumber. Typical of that era, their house wasn't very big—the four of them squeezed into less than 700 square feet—but what it lacked in size it more than made up for in affordability. They paid just \$6,825 for the house, and their mortgage payment that first year was a mere \$36 a month.

The way she describes it, life was a lot easier back then, slower, simpler. Koenig Lane actually resembled a lane and not the veritable highway it's become today. Her family shopped for groceries at the Cash and Carry store on North Loop just east of where Breakaway Records sits today. They got baked goods at Mrs. Johnson's on Airport, hamburgers from a little stand on North Loop, and fried chicken from Leslie's on Lamar.

Austin was also a far more compact city, Northfield much closer to farmland than downtown. "I can remember when the city limits stopped at 45th and Guadalupe," Dorothy said during a recent conversation at her house. "I can also remember when the street cars stopped at 29th St. and Guadalupe and turned around and went back down to 1st St."

As idyllic as the neighborhood during that time sounds, it did have one major flaw, its proximity to Mueller Airport. "Oh my god, when the planes used to come over here you would not believe it! You could always tell it was a weekend because they would come in lower. The dishes in my cabinets would shake. They would come down right over McCallum and then over Ridgetop, and it was really loud."

Otherwise Northfield provided a near perfect setting for children to grow up in. Dorothy estimates that during the 1950s there were at least 40 kids living on her street alone. Her own children attended Reilly Elementary and later Baker Junior High (now Baker Center, an AISD administrative building in

Hyde Park) before finally graduating from McCallum High School. One now lives in Kingsland, the other in Point Venture, but they're not kids anymore.

"They're 61 and 60. One of my grandkids is 25, one's 30, and one's 33 going on 34. I'm older than dirt."

Long after their children moved out, Dorothy and Leon tried to fill the void in their house by purchasing a miniature dachshund from a breeder in Elgin. Beau served as Leon's "bed partner" during his final years, and after Leon's passing Beau became Dorothy's walking companion.

"Just around the block. I usually go up to Link and then down to 56th St. and then around and back here. That takes 30 minutes. He's fat so by then he's ready to come in."

During their walks Dorothy makes a point of catching up with everyone she bumps into, longtime neighbors and newcomers alike. "I try to let everybody know when they move in that I'm available if they need something and to holler at me because it's hard moving to a place you don't know."

And when she isn't catching up with her neighbors on the street, she's inviting them to her house for various gatherings throughout the year. She frequently has large groups of women over for lunch,

and last year she hosted a Christmas party that doubled as a wedding celebration for her neighbors, Daniel and Patrice Baugh.

For her 80th birthday last July Dorothy went out to dinner with ten friends, but this social butterfly actually has a quiet side too. "I don't really get out and mess around much. I don't go to concerts. I cannot stand the music they play now. It drives me insane because to me it's not music. They holler and they bang. My kids say I'm cranky, and I am."

As hard as Dorothy tries to maintain a cantankerous façade, it's easily melted by holidays and little kids, and when the two converge her angelic nature truly shines. Throughout December she likes to bake cookies for all the children on her street. And if one of them happens to crash his bike into a car parked on West 55th ½ Street, he might just get a Coke as well.



Ryden, with neighbor Daniel Baugh

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BUSINESS BEAT

Sure, we could give you our opinions of our favorite local businesses, but where's the fun in that? Instead, we decided to give the assignment to you, our readers, so you could unleash your inner Yelper. Here's what you had to say about:



House Pizzeria:

I love their use of fresh, local ingredients in creative pizzas and salads. My favorite place to sit: **by the jukebox, or outdoors in the screened-in porch** Creative pizza menus are risky.

Just because you can put a bunch of crazy toppings together doesn't mean you should, or that the result will be very good. House Pizzeria makes a creative pizza menu look easy. They do have conventional offerings, like margherita (which has an especially tasty sauce) and pepperoni (which is **the most appealing meat pizza this vegetarian has seen** in years). I recommend trying out some of the odder combinations, though, because that's **what sets House apart** from the local pizza boom of the last few years. The Potato and Goat Cheese makes good use of two second-string pizza ingredients. The Blue pizza, though, which features Stilton and port reduction, is **House's masterpiece**. The restaurant also puts much more effort into their salads and appetizers than they need to; all are **highly recommended** A wide variety of **tasty beers on tap**? A jukebox you actually want to listen to? Affordable and delicious pizzas brimming with **local ingredients**? Yes, yes, and yes! *House Pizzeria is located at 5111 Airport Boulevard; (512) 600-4999 www.housepizzeria.com*



Crystal Nails:

I always have a **relaxing time** getting a pedicure here. The chairs have massage options, and the employees will offer you a glass of (alcoholic and non-alcoholic) beverages. I **never feel pressured** to engage in idle chatter and can just **relax** and enjoy the hot towels, sugar scrub, and foot rubs. One of the best things: I never worry about an appointment—the longest I've waited is five minutes for **45 minutes of goodness** As someone who is very much married to my manicures (I go just about every week), I will go out of my way to find a salon that is **affordable, clean, and attentive to details**. Fortunately, I didn't have to venture too far away to find Crystal Nails. I've **never had to wait** for service, the staff is incredibly friendly, and their work is thorough. For as often as I go, price is a big factor and I find them to be **incredibly reasonable**, especially when compared to "foo-foo" places. Bluntly put, there is no excuse to walk around with to'-up feet when Crystal Nails is so accessible to Northfield! I've never been there, but 100 percent of the dudes I know who get pedicures rave about this place Ask for "**funky toenail art**" and you won't be disappointed. *Crystal Nails is located at 5501 N. Lamar Boulevard; (512) 454-2875*

Want to see your reviews in print? Send comments about **Titaya's**, **Forbidden Fruit**, and **Great Hall Games** to news@northfieldna.org.

Bits from the Beat



After 11 years of pizza & punk music, rising rent prices forced the North Loop location of The Parlor to close its doors on June 21st.



Congratulations to cocktail pub The Tigress and gastro-great Foreign & Domestic, which both recently celebrated one-year anniversaries.

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Fowl Play

(cont'd from page 5)

give chickens lots of water—he even uses a sprinkler on extremely hot afternoons to keep his birds cool. “Farmers with 150-200 chickens will typically lose two to four per day on these 100-plus-degree days,” he says.

According to the survey, more than ten different chicken breeds are represented in the neighborhood, but most flocks include at least one Ameraucana (black birds that lay blue eggs), Australorp (green-black birds that lay pale-brown eggs), or Orpington (buff or black birds that lay brown eggs). Most people like to keep a variety of chickens in their flocks. Different types of chickens have different temperaments and lay dissimilar eggs, so having a variety gives you a nice mix of colorful eggs and encourages entertaining interactions.

No matter what color they are on the outside, eggs from healthy backyard chickens are higher in Omega-3 fatty acids than their factory-farmed counterparts and they simply taste better. As for the chickens themselves, they are increasingly becoming a vital part of our neighborhood’s colorful tapestry, converting our carrot peels and garden beetles into eggs, staring at us with their reptilian eyes, and serenading us from the coop with their distinctive clucks, chirps, and bawks.



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