

Eyesore no more

Good food, good people, beautiful surroundings, what more could you want?

Shannon Carey



The Beaver Creek Watershed Association hosted a party Thursday to celebrate progress in the Halls Outdoor Classroom. Hallsdale Powell Utility District provided barbecue, and the group tucked in under the open sky.

Plantings of native grasses waved in the breeze, crickets chirped, and the rain held off just long enough.

As the group polished off their vittles, Knox County Watershed Coordinator Roy Arthur gave the classroom's history.

"Five years ago, where you were sitting would be in someone's living room," he said. "And God willing and the creek don't rise, they were going to live here the rest of their lives. Unfortunately, the creek rose."

Four homes used to grace the site, located across a small creek from the Halls High School softball field in Bonta Vista subdivision. After near-continuous flooding, the families asked for help. Through FEMA, Knox County Stormwater purchased the homes and demolished them.

The area became an eyesore.

"After the demolition, you realized that all you had was a barren

piece of land that you couldn't do anything with," said Arthur.

Then, Chris Granju of Knox County Stormwater came to the Beaver Creek Task Force with a vision of the property as an outdoor learning space.

The idea blossomed from there. The space is not complete yet. Organizers still envision public walking trails, informative signs and even an amphitheater. But students are using it now, and it's definitely not an eyesore.

Arthur emphasized that the classroom is a collaboration of many individuals and agencies.

Eagle Scout Shamus McGowan mobilized his troop to build a sturdy wooden bridge spanning the creek from the school. HPUD build a low fence around the classroom. Students led by teachers Mike Blankenship and Kerrie Coley and many CAC AmeriCorps volunteers planted seedlings of native trees and shrubs. The seedlings were provided by TVA.

The Halls Crossroads Women's League recently took the fore on a new initiative in the classroom. Community groups may adopt a section of the classroom to maintain. The league adopted the area under a huge maple tree at the classroom's entrance from the school. They will plant and maintain a garden of native plants there.

Arthur recognized Doug and Susan Cox, a family whose home used to be on the site. They donated an extra plot of land to expand the classroom.

The list went on and on. Arthur recognized Daniel Horne of

Think Green

Knox County Soil Conservation, Robin Mayberry of the National Resource Conservation Service, naturalist Dr. Bob Collier, John Watson of Common Grounds and Adopt-A-Watershed Coordinator Ruth Anne Hanahan.

The ultimate goal, Arthur said, is to make the Outdoor Classroom accessible and enjoyable for the whole community.

"This is the Halls Outdoor Classroom," said Arthur. "It is for the community as well as the school."

For more information on how you can support the Halls Outdoor Classroom, contact Ruth Anne Hanahan at 974-9124 or Mike Blankenship at 925-7565. There is need for hands-on volunteers and monetary donations.

Down the hatch

Before the sun went down, HPUD representatives had a special treat for the gathering. Scott McDonald of wastewater con-

sulting firm Jordan, Jones and Goulding and HPUD's Randy Byrge demonstrated a sewer line inspection camera.

HPUD is using cameras like it to look for problems in its aging wastewater infrastructure. HPUD's wastewater system is so extensive, they plan to complete the inspection by 2013. Problems are prioritized and fixed as they are found by inspection crews.

The small camera runs down sewer pipe and sends a picture back to a handheld monitor. McDonald and Byrge showed the group some problem areas, including roots encroaching into the pipes.

The water and nutrients in wastewater attract roots, McDonald said.

"They'll find any weak point in the pipes," he said.

The camera is also equipped the attachments to saw out roots.

Info: www.beavercreekwatershed.org.