



Athens Land Trust

685 N. Pope Street
Athens, Georgia 30601
www.athenslandtrust.org
706.613.0122

Newsletter

Summer 2023 • Volume 26 • Issue 1



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 Meetings are open to the public.*

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 Young Urban Farmers Coordinator
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WEST BROAD FARMERS MARKET

2023 SPECIAL EVENTS CALENDAR

April 1	Opening Day Celebration Baked Cookie Contest
May 6	May Day Celebration Berry Pie Contest
June 17	Juneteenth Celebration Red Velvet Cake Contest
July 15	Dawg Days of Summer Peach Cobbler Contest
Aug 26	Health & Wellness Day Pepper Eating Contest
Sept 30	Youth Day Celebration Salsa Showdown
Oct 28	Fall Festival Jack-O-Lantern Contest
Nov 18	African American Heritage Festival Thanksgiving Pie Contest
Dec 16	Holiday Market & Craft Fair Gingerbread House Contest

WEST BROAD FARMERS MARKET & GARDEN

**EVERY SATURDAY
 ONLINE & IN PERSON**

**APRIL 1 -
 DECEMBER 16
 11 AM - 2 PM**

**300 S. ROCKSPRINGS ST.
 ATHENS, GA 30606**

**SHOP LOCAL WITH
 YOUR FAVORITE
 FARMERS, GROWERS,
 BAKERS, & MAKERS**

NOW EVERY WEEKEND!



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Athens Land Trust is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to improve quality of life for all and to strengthen the fabric of the community through education and the stewardship of land for purposes of affordable housing, conservation, agriculture, and economic development. We respond to community-identified needs and build individual and collective power among historically marginalized people.

Executive Director's Note | Heather Benham

Dear friends and supporters,

When I joined the Athens Land Trust two decades ago, I had no idea the profound impact it would have on my life and the community we serve. From the very beginning, I was captivated by the organization's mission to promote affordable housing, sustainable development, and conservation of natural resources.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of working alongside incredibly talented and compassionate individuals who share the same commitment to making a positive difference in our community. The collective efforts of our ever-growing team, along with the support of donors, volunteers, and community partners, have allowed us to achieve remarkable milestones.

Together, we have transformed vacant lots into vibrant community gardens, preserved vital green spaces, and provided affordable housing options to those in need. The impact we have made on the lives of countless individuals and families is truly awe-inspiring.

As I reflect on the past 20 years, I am filled with a profound sense of purpose and fulfillment. The accomplishments we have achieved together are a testament to the power of collective action and the



Joining West Broad Farmers Market Manager Javier Zavaleta (far right) and Athens Baked Cookie Contest judge ShaRhonda Johnson (front left) of Flossycakes and Desserts (and her young assistant) at the market's Opening Day, April 1, 2023.

unwavering commitment of our team as it works to address community identified needs. It is an honor to be associated with an organization that has made such a significant and lasting impact on our community – a community that has real meaning as we have been able to build bridges and networks that weave a fabric of social connections that go beyond each individual project.

Finally, I want to express my deepest appreciation to the donors, volunteers, and community members who have supported Athens Land Trust throughout the years. Your generosity and unwavering belief in our mission have been

instrumental in our success.

It is because of your support that we have been able to create meaningful change and improve the lives of so many individuals.

With heartfelt appreciation,

The Interview

Ethel Collins

On a lifetime of growing good food and feeding people well

Ethel Collins has been a vendor at the West Broad Farmers Market since its birth in 2013, selling healthy soul food as *Soul Food with a Twist*. She grew up on a farm outside of Athens as the daughter of sharecroppers. "Ms. Ethel", as she's known, started cooking when she was 12 years old to help run the household. What followed is a lifetime connection to food -- growing it, cooking it, and sharing it.

Who taught you how to cook? When did you start?

My oldest brother...he says, it's a girl's job to do the inside work." Well you see, he didn't know what he['s] talking about... we were down in Oglethorpe County, and we had a farm, and we did so much work out on the farm. So anyway, I did all of it! But I've been doing it since I was four years old, and at twelve years old I was cooking for about 30 people, three meals a day -- for my mother, father, sister and brothers, and my grandma, my granddaddy and then my cousins.

What does cooking for others mean to you?

It means the whole world to me. [Back then] it was just a thing we had to do, but that kind of experience at home cooking led me to get a job at the Board of Education cooking at 15 years



"Honey, that's my thing. My thing is just putting something healthy on the table. That's what it's about."

old. After cooking up there for four or five years I left and went to the University of Georgia...I was cooking at one fraternity house and supervised two others. [Now] it's a way of life. And you need to know to prepare it and get it right...now that's my main thing. Make sure they know how to cook and eat healthy.

Did the idea of Soul Food With a Twist come from the food your family had growing up?

It was good food, but putting all

that fat and grease and all that stuff in your vegetables, you don't need that. That's where the twist comes in. I found out because I had to...I had a life threatening heart attack. That led me to cook and eat and put what's healthy in your body. And it made a difference like night and day.

You've devoted a lot of time to working with young people at the West Broad Garden and in the Young Urban Farmers program. What has that been like for you?

I miss that. I do miss that. I would love to be out there with them right now. We had it going on. They [were] a pleasure to work with. They [were] learning... always learning, and they were just on top of it.

If you were going to make your favorite meal, what would be on that plate?

It would be a seafood casserole. I got all kinds of vegetables chopped up, with spices and herbs, lobster, shrimp, and I put it in the oven and roast it. I just love seafood. I do deep fry, but I like to roast it. And if I don't do a casserole, I do a seafood stir-fry, and put my brown rice in there.

That sounds really good. I could go for that.

I'm trying to tell you now! ♦

West Broad Farmers Market Season is in Swing!

*Local fare and convenient online ordering with pick-up options
at the market every Saturday*

In December 2019, the West Broad Farmers Market packed its supplies and years of memories into a 20-foot shipping container. The new market location would be 300 S. Rocksprings Street, in the parking lot of the Athens Housing Authority. Just two months later, the pandemic challenged Athens Land Trust to adapt again. We created an online ordering platform and drive thru pickup to facilitate social distancing, and the eventual introduction of monthly in-person markets.

This year, the West Broad Farmers Market is back for a full season of in-person markets, every Saturday from 11 AM to 2 PM, through December 16th. Our return to a weekly schedule is made possible by our continued partnership with Athens Housing Authority.

"What gives this market power is our privilege to serve a diverse customer base and our ability to

provide a low-barrier venue where a farmer/a maker/an artisan can start their dream for the cost of a tent and a table," says Javier Zavaleta, the West Broad Farmers Market Manager.

"Many established Athens businesses got their start in our market and we are excited to see what passion project emerges next."

Lettuce Grow Garden Network, for instance, is a burgeoning garden operation run by Elixies White. Elixies is a local champion in her community in creating edible landscapes out of any space. Colby Quack started with Athens Land Trust as a 'Grow Your Business' student. Visiting his stand is an exercise in being pleasantly surprised by a savory pancake, an operation he sharpens each week.

In other exciting news, our online market is also active.



Visit wbfm.farmfreshnetwork.net to explore the new and improved online sales platform. There, shoppers can pre-order or make special orders to pick-up at the market on Saturdays. ♦

Left: New vendor Elixies White shares her passion for creating unique edible landscapes with a market customer.

Center: We are a SNAP/EBT eligible market, and through our partnership with Wholesome Wave Georgia, the Fresh for Less program matches each EBT dollar spent on fresh produce.

Right: Athens Land Trust board member Willie Thomas (left), CCSD teacher Sarah Lockman and restaurateur Peter Dale judge the May Day Berry Pie Contest, May 6, 2023.



Feature Story

Athens Energy Opportunity

How neighborhood residents are shaping local solutions to climate change

In 2019 Athens Land Trust launched a two-year project with the Athens-Clarke County Sustainability Office to respond to West Broad neighborhood residents' concerns about flooding, poor quality tree canopy, and increasing utility costs.

While these may sound like disconnected issues, they're all examples of the impact that climate change – severe storms, rising temperatures, and urban heat islands – can have on a neighborhood level.

And because low-income communities of color are the least equipped to prepare for or respond to these challenges, there are neighborhoods dotted all across Athens that are becoming increasingly vulnerable. These communities are also the most likely to

be left out of conversations around solutions.

So at the end of our two-year project, while 40 homeowners benefited from 70 interventions to improve energy efficiency, water conservation, and tree care, the biggest impact is on the horizon as we kick off the expansion -- Athens Energy Opportunity -- to reach neighborhoods and communities across Athens.

What's the Opportunity?

Housing conditions can amplify the environmental injustices faced by low-income communities of color, as substandard conditions make many green building and renewable energy solutions inaccessible. In historic neighborhoods like West Broad, many older homes require costly maintenance to prevent

from falling into disrepair, and they lack resource efficiency, making residents particularly impacted by high utility costs. Early in the project we recognized the need to ensure homes were in shape for prescribed energy measures. Locally, ACTION, Inc. helps homeowners to access Georgia's state Weatherization Assistance Program, but many can't qualify until their homes receive baseline repairs.

With two new grants from the US Department of Energy and Drawdown GA, as well as American Rescue Plan funding from Athens-Clarke County, over the next three years we'll work with ACTION, Inc. to bridge this gap for more homeowners in West Broad, then expand services to neighborhoods in North Athens and East Athens.



Members of the North Athens Advisory Board host neighborhood residents and representatives from Athens Land Trust, the ACC Sustainability Office and ACTION, Inc. at a kickoff event for Athens Energy Opportunity at New Grove Baptist Church, March 28, 2023.

Young Urban Builders

The Young Urban Builders program (YUB) has been active in the West Broad neighborhood for more than five years in delivering home repair, rehabilitation and weatherization services that have improved safety, livability, energy efficiency and affordability for homeowners.

As we expand our work to new Athens neighborhoods, the YUB program will give participants new opportunities and exposure to new career pathways including renewable energy. A key component of this is certification in Building Science Principles – an industry credential for overall energy efficiency home performance, and the first step in certification for those interested in green building careers.

Community-Led Solutions

One of our key values is to work with communities, and not for them. With the establishment of the West Broad Neighborhood Advisory Board in 2019, we have developed community trust and partnership as a group of low-wealth homeowners – the eyes and ears of the community – serve as an accountability arm. Through leadership

training and leading bi-monthly community meetings, residents are building capacity for the neighborhood as they advocate to county staff, elected officials, and service providers. Athens Energy Opportunity is expanding this model as well, with the establishment of advisory boards in North and East Athens, with West Broad leaders shaping the leadership training for new neighborhood representatives.

Stronger Neighborhoods

Community led climate solutions are making neighborhoods stronger in other ways, too. Many homeowners who can't afford to make repairs are forced to sell, and investors are moving into Black and Brown communities and replacing affordable housing with luxury rentals.

By helping homeowners stay in their homes and communities through energy and climate solutions, these historic neighborhoods will stay strong, vibrant, and connected. ♦

To learn more or to apply for the program, please contact:

Dr. Tawana Mattox

Education & Empowerment Director
tawana@athenslandtrust.org

Right: In addition to repairs for weatherization and energy efficiency, the Young Urban Builders are addressing accessibility and safety needs for aging homeowners such as ramps, etc. installing pavers for a ramp and a storm door.

ENERGY & CLIMATE EQUITY

IN ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY, GA

THE GOAL BY 2035:

The community will derive 100% of electricity needs from clean & renewable resources*

THE GAPS



POVERTY

22% county-wide; 54% in majority Black & Brown neighborhoods

energy spending as a share of household income is 3X the national average

ENERGY BURDEN



HOUSING QUALITY

43% of homes in majority Black & Brown neighborhoods are 40+ years old and can't readily accommodate energy upgrades

**ACC Unified Government 100% Clean and Renewable Energy Resolution, May 2019*



Money Matters

Student Financial Navigators engage communities with financial literacy

Melvin Pitts is charting a path to success: he's majoring in business organizational management and leadership at Morris Brown College while serving as a pastor at his church, and he has a decade of banking experience including branch management. Still, he's the first to admit that he could have benefited from an introduction to financial literacy at an earlier age. Reflecting on the stresses faced by many of his peers he says, "most of them have not been pre-exposed to living on their own as adults who manage their own finances."

Melvin's experience highlights a larger issue facing many families in the English Avenue and Vine City neighborhoods surrounding Morris Brown College, which are rich with African American history but also bear the scars of discriminatory housing policy and disinvestment. The homeownership rate is 17%, and rising housing costs threaten both renters and homeowners with displacement.

When the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded funding to 177 HUD-approved housing counseling agencies in 2022 through the Department's two-year Comprehensive Housing Counseling Grant Program, Athens Land Trust was one of only 16 to be awarded funding specifically for partnerships with Historically

Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

And this is where Melvin comes in: We worked with Morris Brown faculty and staff to identify emerging student leaders with an interest in engaging their peers and their community with financial literacy and tools for homeownership.

Ten promising students became Morris Brown College Student Financial Navigators. Through this "train the trainer" program -- facilitated by ALT's Director of Education and Empowerment Dr. Tawana Mattox, and HUD-certified housing counselor Ayanna Hall -- they received stipends to learn HUD-approved curriculum including the fundamentals of housing counseling, practice instructional methods, and develop and present their own capstone financial literacy workshop to students at Atlanta's Frederick Douglass High School.

Dr. Anthony Johnson, Vice Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at Morris Brown College, says of the collaboration, "As Morris Brown prepares the next generation of leaders and scholars, there is an opportunity to impart to them crucial skills for their own success, as well as connect students and faculty with the surrounding community. Research has demonstrated that early education on financial



MBC Financial Navigators Jaye Meggs, Shetila Pratt, and Melvin Pitts will continue to study financial principles with the goal of becoming HUD-Certified counselors.

literacy is important to long-term outcomes, but conventional higher education does not typically invest in these kinds of personal skills."

"This program has been an accountability piece in my own financial discipline."

Melvin Pitts
Morris Brown College
Student Financial Navigator

Melvin knows the value of this early intervention, "This program in my opinion is a catalyst for change in our community. By teaching and sharing this knowledge we can help break generational curses of poverty." ♦

News in Conservation

Protecting diverse lands & celebrating our partners

Our Conservation easement program worked on six projects in as many counties in 2022, protecting a mix of agricultural, historic, greenspace, public recreational land, and restored wetlands, which are critical to Georgia's ecological health and economic vitality as they enhance biodiversity, deliver natural flood control, and protect water quality.

In Screven County, we worked with a private restoration partner and a landowner who was passionate about seeing her land restored. We placed permanent protection on 46 acres of restored wetlands that had been damaged by unsustainable farming practices.

This year, we'll expand wetland protection through the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WRE).

Black landowners are more likely to be encumbered by title issues on family lands that have been passed down informally. This has led to a history of exclusion from many USDA programs. Through the WRE these landowners will receive legal services to clear title issues, enroll in WRE to restore wetlands that have been impacted by historic farming practices, and secure capital for the value of the conservation easement once the lands are restored and removed from production -- a win for both the farmer and the land. ♦



Pictured: Walker Wetlands, Screven County, Georgia.



Athens-Clarke County's Green Life Awards were held on April 20th at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, and we recognized these partners who have made real impacts toward a more sustainable and environmentally just future for our community!

Achievements in Sustainable Farming

Joy Brown, Almeta Tullos, Jean Young, Imani-Scott Blackwell, & Dana Nivens for their commitment to sustainable farming at ALT's Williams Incubator Farm

Outstanding Conservation Partner

Greg DeBacker, for his dedicated volunteer service to ALT's Conservation Program

Neighborhood Sustainability Champion

Monacita Simmons and Hill Chapel Baptist Church for leading energy efficiency upgrades through the Georgia Interfaith Power & Light program

The Mack Burney House

Step inside this historic home, newly rehabilitated for permanently affordable apartments



Above: Future resident Dora Price does the honors at the ribbon cutting and open house for the newly completed renovation of the historic Mack Burney House.

After three years of extensive historic preservation work we celebrated with new tenants, neighbors, affordable housing partners and Athens-Clarke County staff. The house was slated for demolition, but thanks to an agreement between the County and its former owners it was donated to Athens Land Trust for preservation. The building, parts of which may predate the Civil War, was the lifelong home of Annie Mack Burney, teacher and Assistant Principal of Athens' first Black high school. She also provided boarding to area teachers. A portrait of Ms. Burney by local artist Broderick Flanigan (below center) will hang in the home's common area.



Thank You To Our Partners, Members, and Donors!

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(as you would like to be acknowledged. Please print)

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Would you like to join our email list? ☐ Yes ☐ No

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