

Riding the Can Do Express

By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – December 2, 2012

Last Sunday, sitting mesmerized by Cirque du Soleil's Totem, I was struck by how the show challenges our notions of human limitations. With feats of incredible athleticism, agility, strength, and grace – framed with soaring imagination and creative artistry -- Cirque reveals the amazing possibilities to be discovered beyond the boundaries of what we believe is humanly possible. Every act was something I wouldn't have believed possible before seeing with my own eyes.

Standing outside Le Grand Chapiteau (the Big Top) at intermission, I recalled walking those same grounds decades ago as a young boy touring the Atlantic Steel mill. Back then, and later with the mill sitting idle, who could have imagined a live-work-play development like Atlantic Station arising from such an industrial wasteland?

Leave it alone, everyone said. It's too contaminated. Move on. But, someone looked across that landscape and saw something magnificent.

That's how it is with great ideas. They're unimaginable until someone dares to dream them... unthinkable until someone risks speaking them... impossible until someone refuses to let them die... improbable until the perseverance and will of a few outlast the doubts and reservations of the many.

Earlier that day, before Cirque, we visited Historic Fourth Ward Park on the Atlanta BeltLine. Another once unimaginable idea, the BeltLine is the brainchild of Georgia Tech student Ryan Gravel, whose 1999 graduate thesis described a 22-mile greenway encircling Atlanta with light rail transit, parks, multi-use trails, and mixed-use development built along unused railroad corridors.

Of the BeltLine segments built to date, Historic Fourth Ward Park is a crowning achievement and showcase for a project that will transform downtown Atlanta. Opened this spring, the 17-acre park features lawns, a playground, a splash pad, an outdoor amphitheater, and a two-acre lake. Nearby, connected via the BeltLine's Eastside Trail, sits a world-class skate park, another playground, and a large multi-use athletic field. The complex would be stunning in any location, but against the backdrop of Atlanta's skyline, it's breathtaking.

That day, the playgrounds were filled with families and children. The path around the lake was bustling with walkers, joggers, and bicyclists. Water fowl landed and took flight from wetland areas. It was beautiful.

Not only is the park an oasis for healthy living and social interaction in a busy urban landscape, it also solves practical problems. As a storm water detention basin, the park's lake increases sewer capacity, reduces the burden on aging city infrastructure, and prevents flooding. Developed in partnership with the Atlanta Department of

Watershed Management, the design saved the City over \$15 million compared to a traditional system.

Closer to home, on a more approachable scale, two local efforts to enrich our community will intersect this afternoon behind the library on Floyd Street in Covington. Before the annual Twilights at Chimney Park event at 5 pm today, the City of Covington, Newton County, and non-profit Newton Trails will host a 4:30 pm ribbon cutting for the Eastside Trail – a 2.6-mile paved multi-use trail between the Library and Eastside High School.

For my fellow Newton Trails board members and me – as well as our many supporters – the trail opening is a moment of pride, excitement, and anticipation. Seven years after the City and County sought federal grants for construction, the trail is now a reality (with a few boardwalk sections over wetlands still to be completed in the next few weeks). Our goal is county-wide connectivity via greenway trails, but the popularity of this first phase will give first breath to the healthy, vibrant, prosperous, connected community we envision.

Like the trail for us, Chimney Park is a burning passion for another dedicated group of hard-working volunteers, Friends of Newton Parks, who are building a universally accessible, urban woodland park amid the ruins of a home which once stood behind the library. Twilights is a not-to-be missed event for the child in each of us – an evening when already magical woodlands are transformed into an enchanting wonderland of lights, sounds, and fantasy. The annual event is the embodiment of the group's vision for "a peaceful urban woodland that attracts children and adults of all ages and abilities with community activities and elements that encourage passive play, exploration, imagination, quiet contemplation and respect for nature and history."

Come to Chimney Park today. Experience what can happen when we dream the unimaginable, give voice to the unthinkable, attempt the impossible, and put enduring will power to work on the improbable.

Next stop for the Can Do Express: Porterdale's Yellow River Park.