Hemphill’s heyday ended with westward campus growth

A 1965 plan called for extensive building projects west of a main thoroughfare

By Chris Webb
Staff Writer

As Georgia Tech is in the heart of its trek to conquer the land across the highway that until recently defined the eastern border of the school, campus has once again been thrown into a chaos of endless fences and torn-apart roads. The campus students once knew will become a memory as they shuffle instead of walk to class and dine in instead of run for safety from the building across Fifth Street. The school is undergoing massive growth, but this is not, by far, the greatest change ever. This is the tale of those times.

In March 1965, a plan was developed by an architectural firm to address the possibility of student enrollment reaching 25,000 in 1985. The Comprehensive Campus Development Plan was a blueprint for expanding the campus’ size from 153 to almost 400 acres. It involved tearing down a bordering neighborhood, utilizing massive federal funding and virtually unprecedented cooperation between the city and the university.

Georgia Tech had been expanding for some time, grabbing up pieces of land around it in small bursts. This new plan would expand the school across Hemphill, at the time a major thoroughfare of the city. This was not Tech’s first attempt to cross a major road. During President Brittain’s years, the administration hoped to convert Techwood Homes, the first federal housing projects, into student dormitories. The 1965 plan sought to bulldoze and build on top of about 220 structures such as homes, apartments and churches.

The place we now know as west campus was, at one point, a vibrant neighborhood. The Couch Building was an elementary school that provided the local residents’ children their education. The Burger Bowl functioned as a city park for relaxation from a developing area. The land the police station and a portion of Woodruff dorms are on were once churches. Unfortunately, it was a neighborhood in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Federal Housing policies changed in 1959 to relax urban renewal spending to universities for development. The area to the west of Hemphill was a vibrant neighborhood, but it was also poor. Of the 220 structures, 122 were substandard residential and 13 substandard commercial. With over 61 percent of the buildings in a poor state, the neighborhood was susceptible to expansion plans by Georgia Tech.

The school’s plan was simple: either residents sold their land or the school could condemn it. The administration, working hand-in-hand with the city, would then purchase all the condemned land. J.R. Anthony, Georgia Tech Vice-President/Comptroller, explained in a interview years after the expansion that only about two to five percent of the land was condemned. The prices offered were acceptable to most residents.

To prevent costs from rising beyond the original estimates, Georgia Tech actively intervened in order to prevent individuals from obtaining business permits that might raise their property values. In an unsigned letter, J.R. Anthony explains, “We have...tried to discourage major property redevelopment which would have to be acquired in the near future, adding both substantial costs to the public and inconvenience to residents in the neighborhood. The Comprehensive Campus Development Plan was designed to be a future-oriented plan that would meet the needs of the school as it grows.”

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Slam poetry champ Smith brings fresh, lively style to town

By Jennifer Lee
Staff Writer

If you were one of the many people who weren’t able to get a ticket to the first Poetry at Tech event this past October—which featured U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins, the Bourne Poetry Chair at Tech, Thomas Lux, and other nationally-known poets—because it was sold out, then you’ll be pleased to hear that there’s another event coming up on Monday, March 24, at 7 p.m.

This time, Ginger Murchison wants you to know: “It’s totally free—no tickets, no reservations! It’s important to say that,” she motioned to me when I interviewed her. “The Ferst Theater really messed us up, because now people have the idea that they have to have tickets for our reading in the fall and a smaller one last February that took place in the Clary Theater, were packed. Murchison, who works as assistant to Thomas Lux and who also does most of the organizational work in planning the Poetry at Tech events, said, “Poets really like for the place to be overflowing. Then the audience puts an energy into the room that the poets really like,” she added with a laugh, “So maybe we’ll always underbook the room.”

In the case of the March 24th event, the venue will be the 14th Street Playhouse, which holds about 450 people. It will be the third installment of the Poetry at Tech series, and this time Patricia Smith, a four-time National Grand Slam Champion, will be performing, along with a band, Bop Thundershoot.

“Among slammers, she’s a household name,” said Murchison. “She’s a hot ticket; they know who she is like rock people know Madonna.”

“She’s a wonderful poet, and very energetic,” added Stephen Dobyns, Tech’s current McEver Chair in Poetry, who is sponsoring this event. It was Dobyns who invited Smith to be the featured poet. “In bringing Smith here, it’s easy to make people more interested in poetry,” he said. “I think there’s a need for that.”

It might also help...
so I swallow hard, turn the photo face down and talk numbers instead. The high price of miracles startles the still-young woman, but she is prepared.”

Patricia Smith
From her poem “Undertaker”

“Poetry shouldn’t be competitive,” said Murchison. “I’ll bet you anything Dr. Clough will be there. We had a slam for an event two years ago, and he came to that, and I think he… was knocked off his feet. And I know that he’s been astounded that we have audiences like we do.”

“I told her, ‘Well, I’ll definitely be there if I’m not busy.’”

“If you’re not busy?” she repeated, in mock-horror. “This should be your first priority!”

And as if to persuade me further, Murchison said, “The next time I find a really good slam event, I’m going to invite you.”

I thanked her enthusiastically, but didn’t really think she would remember. But a week or two later, I got an excited phone call from her, telling me about an upcoming spoken word event at the Alliance Theatre’s Hertz Stage featuring some very well-known poets, and asking if I wanted to go. I gladly agreed, and it was one of the coolest experiences I’ve ever had.

This isn’t meant to be a review, so I’ll leave it at that. However, now that I’ve gotten a taste of what slam poetry is like, I encourage Tech students to get a similar taste by going to see Patricia Smith on March 24. “I expect you to be there and applaud,” said Dobyns. I know I will.
In a unique minority, gay women face more struggles on campus

By Joshua Cuneo
Staff Writer

It's unknown exactly how long gay women have been on campus. The highly prejudiced yet unspoken attitude society held against homosexuals in the mid-20th century would have intimidated most into silence. In fact, the first official declaration that gay women were present at Tech didn’t come until the winter of 1988, when a dozen or so friends met and formed the Gay and Lesbian Alliance (GALA), which was officially chartered as a student organization by SGA the following October.

GALA quickly became involved in the gay community on campus, in Atlanta and nationwide. Since its chartering, GALA has participated in a wide variety of activities, including Georgia Tech’s Coming Out Week, the Martin Luther King Day Parade, the Day of Silence and Atlanta Pride, the city’s gay festival.

The organization renamed itself the Pride Alliance last year to reflect its broader diversity of sexual expression, including straight, bisexual, transgender and questioning students. It’s through the Alliance that the struggles that Tech has faced with this diversity are revealed, especially in the case of gay women, who find themselves in two prominent, unique minorities. But the women who are part of the Alliance—whether gay, straight or otherwise—have the most thorough understanding of what it means to be a gay woman on campus.

Sara Marshall is a third-year HTS major who’s been involved with the Alliance since she saw the booth advertising the organization at FASET. “The people were all really nice, and I made some friends, so we started going to the meetings together,” she said. She now serves as Vice President of the Alliance, a position she said her friends encouraged her to accept.

Kristen Reynolds, a second-year Aerospace Engineering major, found out about the organization through friends. “It’s a nice group of people,” she said. “[There’s] a lot of support. I appreciated that...It’s therapeutic sometimes.” She also mentioned that it’s helped her get to know a different side of Atlanta.

Valerie Garrison is a third-year Psychology major who’s also heavily involved with the Alliance. She recalled how she first found out about the organization through friends. “It’s a nice group of people,” she said. “[There’s] a lot of support. I appreciated that...It’s therapeutic sometimes.” She also mentioned that it’s helped her get to know a different side of Atlanta.

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Third-year Psych major

By David Jelinek / STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

The official history of gay women’s presence on Tech’s campus started in 1988 with the creation of GALA, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance. Some of the first members are seen here in a 1989 Blueprint yearbook photo.

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Reynolds and Marshall feel that the mere presence of the Alliance put Tech in a positive light. "It says that the school is very open-minded to all sorts of activities," said Reynolds. "It sends a good message to the rest of the university."

Marshall agreed. "It says that Georgia Tech is becoming a little bit more liberal than it was 20 years ago." This greater tolerance of the gay community is reflected in the increased membership that the Pride Alliance has acquired since its inaugural year, but things aren’t perfect. "Sometimes the idea of homosexuals (as in when we advertise events) is not taken well with the Tech community," said Garrison.

Although gay women, in a rare turnabout for the Tech community, apparently have the upper hand over their male counterparts in being more accepted. "You can’t look at a female and say ‘she’s gay,’ whereas most times you can look at a male and automatically recognize stereotypes associated with homosexuality within the male gender," said Marshall. "They’re easier targets." Furthermore, she said, "guys tend to think lesbians are cool." Still, said Garrison, "Stereotypes and name-calling occur to both males and females." Reynolds said the Alliance works to discourage this attitude by bringing more straight allies into the fold.

Yet the Pride Alliance still shows a lack of female membership that’s common among a number of organizations. "They’re easy to target," she said. "People think.”

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the private investor.”

Rebecca Hooper, an owner of residential property in the area, had her efforts to rezone her land into a commercial area thwarted by Georgia Tech. The offer she received from Georgia Tech was woefully unacceptable to her, so she pursued legal action. Her appraisers valued the land at $140,000 with rezoning, while the Atlanta Real Estate Board found a price of $70,000 more appropriate. After dispute, the property was condemned in order for Georgia Tech to purchase the lot at a cheaper price.

Very little opposition came from the community. Most residents’ concerns centered on difficulty in getting to church amid all the construction in the neighborhood.

These concerns were great enough that President Harrison gave this unique response, to justify his school’s idea that students were poor and in need of on-campus housing; the dislocated people from the Tech area could then move to the students’ former residences. “Because of known poor financial status of many of these [Georgia Tech] students, it is very probable that some of them are living in substandard housing throughout the city,” he claimed. “The place we now know as west campus was, at one time, a vibrant neighborhood.”

Information about the buildings that were destroyed is only a minor part of the story. Unfortunately, finding out about the people is extremely difficult. Letters saved in desk drawers tell a tale of World War I veterans on $125-per-month pensions and ladies concerned about saving plants from demolition. Census records show that the area was about 60 percent white and 40 percent black. By 1970, during the height of construction the neighborhood had dramatically changed to 83 percent white and 15 percent black.

Georgia Tech removed many housing units, but this was not uncommon for the city of Atlanta. As Ronald Bayor, a Georgia Tech professor, explains in his book Race & the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta, by 1968, 95 percent of those displaced in Atlanta’s urban renewal plans were African American and that the city actually became more segregated over the course of the time period. The same dollars that funded Georgia Tech’s dorms came from a national policy that also funded the destruction of about 243,000 housing units while only creating 68,000. Because of the vastly disproportionate number of African Americans affected by these policies they earned the nickname “Negro removal.”

Taken within the framework of city and national policies, Georgia Tech was well-behaved in comparison to the level of unethical politics that occurred at the higher levels of government. J.R. Anthony recalls a specific example of Tech’s benevolence: the story of one neighborhood resident who spent all of the money she received by selling her house on furniture. Upon hearing of the incident, the school was able to bargain with the furniture store to refund the woman’s money without penalty. This way, the woman had money instead of a set of furniture with no place to put it. Tech’s seldom use of its condemnation powers also indicates a resolve by the school to make their transactions as legitimate as possible.

This photo shows McMillan Street in 1967 during the height of construction of the newly-purchased parts of campus, which eventually led to campus being almost three times larger than it was originally.

By 1966, the Bunger-Henry building was already standing, but instead of the Campanille or the Sustainable Education building. Hemphill Ave. ran by Bunger, with Atlantic Drive bordering the other side of the building.

“The place we now know as west campus was, at one time, a vibrant neighborhood.”
to the ever-prevalent “Ratio,” but Marshall also noted that gay women tend to fall out once they’ve entered into a relationship. Furthermore, she said, “women don’t become involved in activist groups, and this is such a conservative campus, a lot of women might be uncomfortable connecting themselves with a gay group.” On the other hand, said Reynolds, some women hold out on the meetings and just attend the Alliance’s events. “I don’t know why. Maybe [there are] issues there with each individual.”

They said that being a woman, though, didn’t compound any problems they had in their association with the Alliance or even with Tech in general. Garrison felt that “lesbians or bisexual women possibly have as much of a difficult time as other women in society,” so being associated with the Alliance didn’t make a difference. Echoing the voice of many other Tech women, Reynolds and Marshall have noticed few problems on campus due to their gender. “I haven’t felt discriminated against,” Reynolds said. “I think we [women] have the same advantages and disadvantages as any other student.”

In short, gay women, one of the newest minorities on campus, have managed to advance and become accepted more quickly at Tech than women in general. And while there have been scattered abuses that homosexuals have suffered at the hands of fellow classmates, gay women have overall encountered few difficulties due to their sexual orientation and/or association with the Alliance. This reflects both Tech’s increasing diversity of women and Tech’s growing acceptance of that diversity, including those women that come from a minority that still bears one of society’s strongest stigmas.

But that doesn’t mean they’ve achieved full acceptance. “Compared to the greater Atlanta area and other colleges (including non-technical schools), Tech could be more accepting,” said Garrison. “I know that Tech has improved its diversity and acceptance thereof. I just believe it can be improved even more.”

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Editor’s note: The Technique apologizes for the misspelling of Mandy Lowey’s last name in this series on 2/21. The correct spelling is Lowey, not Lowry. Also, the series will be on hiatus 3/28 because of the Technique’s annual April Fool’s issue.
Winner of the Tech Up Close contest receives a *Technique* T-shirt and a coupon for a free student combo at Li’l Dino’s.

Last week’s Tech Up Close:
New trash can

Last week’s winner:
Shane Warren