

OAKHURST COMMUNITY GARDEN ANNOUNCES NEW NAME: WYLDE CENTER

To better reflect its broadening scope and to honor its founder, the late Sally Wylde, the Oakhurst Community Garden Project is proud to announce its new name, the “Wylde Center.” For the past 15 years the Oakhurst Community Garden Project, a regional non-profit organization, has been an integral part of the Decatur community, cultivating vibrant greenspaces and inspiring diverse communities of environmental stewards.

“We are ‘Wylde’ about our new branding. It captures the heart of our organization – and the heart of our founder – more carefully and thoughtfully,” said Stephanie Van Parys, executive director of the Wylde Center. “Sally inspired many of us with her leadership, vision, creative spirit, community enthusiasm, and tireless dedication to the planet and the health of children. It means so much to be able to share her story this way and to continue the good work she started in 1997.”

For the past 15 years, the Wylde Center has engaged youth, families, and individuals in their environment and health within communities. The Center’s organized programs, classes, and events develop creative skills in sustainable urban living, organic gardening, health, and nutrition. The youth program has grown to be one of the largest youth service organizations in the metro area, providing a year-round slate of youth education programs that focus on developing creative skills in organic gardening, health, and nutrition. The two managed garden sites serve as demonstration gardens, gathering spaces, and wildlife habitats. The Wylde Center fosters community engagement by promoting and collaborating on programs and projects that improve and protect the environment.

WHAT IS THE WYLDE CENTER?

The Wylde Center is a nonprofit organization that grew out of a coordinated effort in Decatur to expand green space while promoting health, nutrition, and environmental education. This effort began in 1997 with the creation of the Oakhurst Community Garden Project. The key components that make up the Wylde Center are the Oakhurst Garden, the Sugar Creek Garden, Decatur Farm to School, environmental and education-based youth outreach programs, garden coaching, community-wide education, and events throughout the year.

WHY WAS THE NAME WYLDE CENTER CHOSEN?

The roots of the organization began in 1996, when a group of children leaving the nearby elementary school cut through a neighbor’s yard and trampled her garden. Instead of involving the police, Sally and the neighbor partnered with a group of neighbors to invite the children to become caretakers of the garden. The following year, a nearby, half-acre lot became available. Sally and her husband acquired it, and the Oakhurst Community Garden Project was born. Through her enthusiasm, creative spirit, and a mission to create a space where children could come for hands-on environmental education, Sally encouraged a decade’s worth of youth who are our next generation of environmental stewards. From its inception as the Oakhurst Community Garden Project, the organization has taken on its own life, branching into an environmental education center and force for the preservation of gardens and greenspaces in and around Decatur. On August 19, 2010, Sally died from complications of breast cancer. The name Wylde Center was chosen to honor Sally and to give a broader name to the organization that has grown out of the Oakhurst Community Garden Project to include many other areas of education and outreach.

WHY NOT KEEP OAKHURST COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT AS THE NAME FOR THIS ORGANIZATION?

What began as a community garden is now a large, diversified organization with many projects including but not limited to community gardens. Other branches of the organization are Sugar Creek Garden, Decatur Farm to School, environmental education based youth program outreach, garden coaching, community wide education, and events. Wylde Center is an organization that includes the Oakhurst Garden as well as these other projects.

DOES THIS MEAN THAT THE OAKHURST GARDEN’S SITE’S NAME WILL CHANGE?

The organization’s name is Wylde Center. The current garden sites will retain their names as Wylde Center at Oakhurst Garden and Wylde Center at Sugar Creek Garden.

IS OAKHURST GARDEN STILL A BIG PART OF THIS ORGANIZATION?

Yes! The Oakhurst Garden still houses

the organization’s office space, classroom space, event space, community garden plots, and garden space for the community to enjoy.

WHOM DOES THE WYLDE CENTER SERVE?

The Wylde Center touches the lives of many metro-Atlanta community residents. Hundreds benefit every year from the Growings On classes, which teach everything from gardening to composting to beekeeping. Every child enrolled in the City of Decatur Schools is taught about health and nutrition via the Decatur Farm to School Program, which is also part of the Wylde Center. The plant sale, the largest fundraiser for the Wylde Center, provides fruit and vegetable plants, herbs, and even trees to home gardeners all over Atlanta. The Wylde Center also manages two gardens (Sugar Creek and Oakhurst Garden), supports six school gardens, and one garden at the Decatur Housing Authority to help bring fresh vegetables to all in our community. The Wylde Center will also partner with the United Methodist Children’s home in Decatur to provide youth enrichment activities. The Wylde Center hosts many events: the Decatur Garden Tour, the Decatur Earth Day Festival, the Urban Coop Tour, and Martinis in the Garden.

HOW MAY I GET INVOLVED IN THE WYLDE CENTER?

Become a member! Membership is vital to keeping the Wylde Center and all of its branches alive. To join, click the Get Involved link on our website at wyldecenter.org or email director@oakhurstgarden.org. Participate! Take a class, come to an event, or volunteer. To find out more, visit wyldecenter.org

DOES THE WYLDE CENTER TAKE DONATIONS?

The Wylde Center is a member-supported regional non-profit. Thirty percent of our annual budget consists of support coming from families and individuals. All supporters are considered members of the organization.

HOW LONG DO MEMBERSHIPS LAST?

Memberships last one calendar year. We ask our supporters to renew their support on an annual basis.

--Lee Beasley



photo by twmeyer.com

SALLY WYLDE FOUNDER OF THE OAKHURST COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT

This month, the Oakhurst Community Garden Project officially becomes the Wylde Center, honoring the organization’s founder, Sally Wylde, and propelling the project’s potential in new directions that Sally would have relished.

With her passing in August of 2010, Sally is missed by many. Family, friends, and those lucky enough to share some electric moments with her mourn her loss but cherish the many lively memories she left, along with the daily reminder of what Sally loved, which flowers on in the gardens.

“Sally was a mother to two wonderful daughters, grandmother to three fabulous grandchildren, a beloved wife, a dear friend, an artist, and champion of the Earth, to which she felt deeply connected,” her husband, Britt Dean, says. “It is out of her passion for our planet and for art that she wanted to create a place of community, especially for children, in which care and attention would make things grow.”

A native of Massachusetts, Sally grew up following her brothers through the countryside, much more at home in their world of lush adventure than with what was expected of young ladies at the time. She first shared that love of land and freedom with her two daughters, Michaela and Caitlin Wylde, who carry it into their own lives to this day:

“She really was able to impart a love of nature and the land, especially with kids. She respected their opinions and saw them as

equals,” Michaela says. “That makes you feel special when you’re a child, makes you feel heard.”

A life-long dynamo, Sally was universally known as a charismatic powerhouse, petite yet formidable. Whether she was organizing an all-woman art show in 1970s South Dartmouth, Mass., or driving the truck for the volunteer fire department, Sally was an



unstoppable force.

Coming to Atlanta in 1993, Sally was able to explore her abilities in a new part of the country, with a fresh canvas, in a community that was poised for her creative energy.

“She was really ready for a change, ready for adventure,”Michaela says. “She started to trust her own strength, and when she got to Atlanta she was able to harness it there, because there were no preconceived notions about who she was. She was different there—freer.”



ABOVE Sally’s vision for a place of “secret wild spaces for children” and hands-on environmental education became reality with the Oakhurst Community Garden Project. She inspired neighbors of all ages to become caretakers of the earth, of one another, and of themselves.

Caitlin agrees that Sally and her new home were meant for each other: “Georgia opened up her world and led her to the garden, which was a culmination of everything she loved—nature, creativity, freedom, children, and animals—coming together in this amazing contribution.”

In Oakhurst Sally found an opportunity to create her ideal environment with plants and animals, a sacred and soily space of magic and adventure for kids who didn’t have anything like it in their daily lives. When Sally and Britt purchased a piece of land in rapidly developing Oakhurst in 1996 with the plan of making it a community garden, the Oakhurst Community Garden Project began. With its founding, a new world opened up for the community and school children who never dreamed of the chance to spend days as caretakers and nurturers.

For Stephanie Van Parys, the Wylde Center’s Executive Director, the organization’s new name was a natural decision: “Without Sally, the center wouldn’t exist. The name change honors her and the wild parts in all of us.”

With the renaming of the organization, the many facets of Sally and her boundless energy will be even better remembered. A gifted artist, gardener, and organizer, among other abilities, Sally completed a Master of Fine Arts from Boston/Tufts University and a Master of Theological Studies from Candler School of Theology of Emory University. As a woman who could do so many things, Sally was able to plant her gifts in a way that continues to grow and give to generations to come.

Says Allison Adams, a longtime friend and former Oakhurst Community Garden board president, “Sally had wings, and she inspired others—including me—to flight, too.”

-- Emily Soares