

time

## JDLand

BY PETER J. WALDRON

A blog gone wild. Or more accurately a blog that is so comprehensive, so rich in detail and so sophisticated that you wonder not who created it but who are these guys. JDLand ([www.jdland.com/dc/](http://www.jdland.com/dc/)), whose focus is the development of our new neighborhood in near Southeast, is among the most indispensable community blogs of its kind. It sets the standard. And it's not a guy.

In January 2003, Jacqueline Dupree gave birth to her brainchild, the JDLand blog, which has meticulously traced with photos and commentary the new residential and commercial community south of the freeway that now includes the new baseball stadium. The impetus for this vast project was simple. She was curious. And from her vantage point as a resident of Garfield Park, she is perfectly situated for the monumental task of cataloguing the development of this area.

Dupree has compiled an exhaustive series of daily updates that detail the changes from demolished buildings to the construction of shiny glass condo and office buildings, from new roads to ever changing plans for traffic and its affects on Hill resident's lives. And if you want a history of the new stadium, this is a can't-miss site.

JDLand's pictorial and real time history has become a valuable resource for commercial and residential real estate professionals, multiple city agencies and more than a few of the 41,000 baseball fans who follow the area's progress with eager anticipation.

All this investment of time and effort have been an uncompensated community service with Dupree's reward being a deep sense of satisfaction. "I am really proud of what I have done," Dupree adds.

I asked Dupree about the blog's future. Dupree who spends "two to three hours a day depending on what is happening" says she would like to get through the difficulties of the opening of the stadium and its aftermath and then perhaps make an announcement that daily JDLand postings will cease and the site will be updated intermittently.

As for the future, Dupree is considering a book. And a movie I ask? She laughs and quickly maps out how it could be shaped as a documentary.

When Dupree began JDLand, the "near Southeast" was a semi no man's land. Previously, this huge swath was a sad potpourri of dilapidated public housing units scheduled for demolition, a dangerous drug corridor, a half a dozen chop block body shops, nightclubs of various stripes and huge parcels of overgrown industrially zoned land.

Dupree points out that the current pace and size of the this development has become the equivalent of the growth of a "new downtown in a small to medium sized city."



Photo by Andrew Lightman

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“There are 10,000 new residents expected to move in over the next ten years with over 5,000,000 square feet of office space,” she adds. The stadium deal accelerated the growth of an area that was already targeted for development. This explosive growth and density compares in scope with the expansion of neighborhoods and infrastructure that took place after the Civil War, the halcyon days of Boss Shepard when so much of the current District was built.

Dupree is a University of Florida graduate who ironically majored in journalism but rejected that career path because she “had no patience for it.” She is someone who by her own account never went near a computer till after college.

It was with the passage by the City Council of the baseball stadium legislation in February 2006 that Dupree realized that she had something of real value in her sight lines and with this enactment came a consequent uptick in interest in her blog. She began to take even more pictures and added reports of the various Council hearings, Zoning Board decisions, plans of developers, work of the Office of Planning and condensations of ANC 6B and 6D meetings. Dupree says that now she hears from DC government officials who want to know what she knows.

In addition to the JDland blog Dupree writes a column in the Washington Post’s District Weekly on this unfolding project.

And the scope of Dupree’s project? In 2007 alone JDland had 1.3 million hits, 662 separate blog entries, 135,000 words, 3100 pictures ( of 30,000 plus she has taken) as she has single handedly logged and mapped the history of the beginning of a huge and new neighborhood.

I asked Dupree what she will do with this information. “I hope that some day I can donate it to Washingtoniana or some historical library” she responds. It will be surprising if there is not a JD-

Land collection in the Library of Congress.

Dupree explained to me how what she is doing fits into this new age of super-organized information. “It is a combination of transparency and information aggregation. There is an amazing amount of time required. I keep it organized. Information management is something I seem to have a head for. And when you add pretty pictures, it completes the puzzle.”

“It is my milieu” Dupree finishes, her diction as precise as the click of a camera or the stroke of a keyboard.

### Center For Inquiry

For too many it’s been a long and desultory trek backward to days before the Age of Enlightenment. For others, there has been a live and let live complacency that seems to be shifting. And since November of 2006, for the Center For Inquiry ([www.centerforinquiry.net/](http://www.centerforinquiry.net/)), now occupying a small store front at 621 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, there is a mission, a determined push back against what CFI believes are misguided forces of belief, myth and superstition, and a return to reality based on evidence and facts.

CFI, a decidedly secular humanistic non profit, keeps it simple if a bit grand in purpose, its website claiming a global enterprise dedicated to “Scientific Thought, Reason, Free Inquiry, Secularism and Planetary Ethics.” Quite a mouthful and words not so easily matched with deeds. Its American membership is reported to be 100,000.

Most of us will readily accept a community that believes the world was created in six days -- that’s fundamental to tolerance. I’ll even politely go along with the occasional miracle or two. After all, haven’t I experienced more than the usual number, my own existence surely being one. But there are days when I grow nervous with what CFI refers to as “paranormal and fringe

science claims.”

There is after all that whole business of Galileo and the Inquisition. We know or should know unequivocally by now, that we are not the center of this universe.

That is what CFI appears to be tackling with a stepped-up Washington presence. Toni Van Pelt, Public Policy Director and chief lobbyist with a decidedly feminist bent, is its Washington face.

There is a steely passion in Van Pelt as she takes me on a guided tour of the world of CFI. Currently they are working the issue of “charitable choice,” in their view a pervasive component of the SAMSHA Act now up for re-authorization in the Senate. “Charitable choice” or faith based treatment initiatives have huge implications for how we tackle mental health issues and fact based treatments, especially if funded.

Van Pelt feels this is a perfect example of people “who want to tear down the wall between church and state.” CFI and Van Pelt’s work seems so much a larger mission in such an unprepossessing place.

In the hinterland, CFI is among those taking on school boards stacked with the intelligent design crowd as well as taking on issues that are fundamental to women like the Supreme Court ruling dismissing equal pay for women (*Ledbetter v Goodyear Tire Co.*). “Many people think the ERA Amendment passed,” Van Pelt reminds me.

Facts are, after all, facts. And AIDS virus research and treatment regimens are a strong argument if not proof of genetic mutation, a fundamental validation of Darwin’s theory of evolution.

I’m with Van Pelt that it is time that we take a hard look at what is real. At the evidence. And that there be a strengthening of the will to be less tolerant of intolerance and spurious claims. While not yet on my knees, I pray that CFI finds some success in their efforts. ■