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A new year swirls in



PHILIP MOSIER

Dancers from the Chinese Atlanta Dance Company perform as part of the Asian New Year Celebration at the Atlanta

Standout Student
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Buckhead grades well in charges of test cheating

By John Schaffner
editor@reporternewspapers.net

No Buckhead schools appeared on the state's list of Atlanta schools facing strong suspicions of possible cheating on high-profile state tests, a school board member told residents recently.

In response to state claims raising suspicions of possible cheating at about two-thirds of the city's elementary and middle schools, the Buckhead Council of Neighborhoods earlier this month voted to urge the Atlanta school board to hire independent auditors to investigate the allegations. A week later, on Feb. 18, the Atlanta school board did just that and initiated plans for an independent investigation.

The Atlanta Education Fund, a not-for-profit organization, will choose the outside investigator to perform the audit and will pay for the investigation. The investigation will center on schools listed by state officials as being of "severe" or see BUCKHEAD, page 18

Hermi's Bridge: A love story

By Wright Mitchell

Cecil Alexander and Hermi's Bridge have had a long courtship. Although the bridge is named for Cecil's first wife, Hermione, who died in 1985, Cecil's connection to the bridge goes back to childhood. Born in 1918, Cecil remembers walking beneath the bridge as a young boy and looking at the remains of a pontoon bridge built by General William Tecumseh Sherman's federal troops during the Battle of Atlanta.

The bridge, which is located on the Chattahoochee River at Pace's Ferry Road, was built in 1904 to replace the ferry operated by Harold Pace. For many years, the 280-foot bridge was the only way to get from Buckhead to Vinings.

Local residents, weary of having to take a ferry to cross the River, urged county authorities to build the bridge. And Judge E.B. Rosser, who was the Chairman of the Roads and Bridges Committee of the Fulton County Commission at the time, spearheaded the effort to make the bridge a reality by negotiating with Cobb County officials to share in the cost of construction.

On Nov. 14, 1903, a public bidding for the construction contract took place on the banks of the Chattahoochee at the site of the future bridge. A total of 47 bids were submitted and a local company, the Cotton States Bridge Construction Company, submitted the low bid of \$9,260. According to the original bridge construction contract on file at the Atlanta History Center, Fulton County agreed to pay \$6,945 of the cost while Cobb County agreed to bear the remaining \$2,215.

Although construction of the bridge was slated to begin in 1903, a Cobb County cash shortage delayed the start of construction until May 1, 1904. And while the actual date of the bridge opening is unknown, the contract called for a completion date of August 15, 1904.

According to an Atlanta Journal article, the bridge opening was to be celebrated with "one of the biggest and finest barbecues ever given in this section." The article also noted that there was a strong sentiment among residents to name the bridge Rosser's Bridge after the chairman of the Roads and Bridges Committee, but it does not appear this name ever took.

After spending lazy summer days walking beneath the bridge as a child, Cecil Alexander subsequently left Atlanta to fly dive-bomber missions for the Marines in World War II and to study architecture at Harvard and Yale. When he returned to Atlanta, he designed and built a home on Mount Paran Road not far from the bridge. At the time, Life Magazine hailed the house as the embodiment of "Tomorrow's Life Today." And over the years, the house has come to be recognized as one of the finest examples of modern architecture in the city.

Cecil and Hermione, better known as Hermi, raised three children in the round house. Living there afforded Cecil and Hermi numerous opportunities to drive across the bridge. According to Cecil, the bridge was an integral and cherished part of life in

Buckhead and Vinings. Cecil fondly remembers waiting to take his turn to cross the one-way bridge on frequent family trips to Cobb County. Although Buckhead was changing rapidly, the bridge was a quaint reminder of a simpler time.

When Fulton County announced plans to tear down the bridge and replace it with a new one in 1972, Cecil and Hermi could not bear the thought of losing such a vital part of Buckhead history. So they urged the Fulton County Commission to save the bridge. It would be more cost effective, Cecil argued, to simply leave the old bridge in place and build the new one alongside it. And that is exactly what Fulton County did.

Thanks to Cecil and Hermi, the bridge found new life as a pedestrian walkway. And for many years, Lovett students who parked off campus walked across the bridge to reach class. In the summer months, a passerby was always sure to encounter renegades jumping from the old steel trusses of the bridge into the cold waters of the Chattahoochee below.

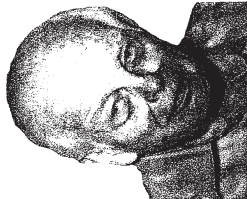
But on the night of Oct. 25, 1983, Cecil's life and the identity of the bridge changed forever. Returning from a Yale fundraising dinner, Hermi and Cecil were struck head on by an intoxicated 16-year-old driver. Hermi was killed in the accident and Cecil suffered a broken hip and numerous other injuries.

While Cecil was recuperating in the hospital, then Fulton County Commissioner Michael Lomax visited and asked Cecil if there was anything he could do for him. Without hesitation, Cecil asked Lomax if the county could rename his beloved bridge for Hermi. Lomax readily agreed.

So in 1984, Fulton County passed a resolution officially naming the bridge for Hermi. There was a large dedication ceremony at what is now Canoe Restaurant. The bridge dedication was an especially fitting tribute to Hermi who, like her husband, was very active in the Civil Rights movement. She was also the first female jury commissioner in Fulton County history. In recognition of these accomplishments, Fulton County installed a plaque on the bridge which states "Hermione Weil Alexander. She built bridges across gulfs of prejudice and intolerance."

In the aftermath of Hermi's death, Cecil founded the Hermione Weil Alexander Fund Committee to Combat Drugged and Drunken Driving. The driver of the car that killed Hermi received only several months in a youth detention facility and the boy's father, who had allowed his son to drive despite the fact his license was suspended from a previous DUI, served just a brief jail sentence. In response to this injustice, Cecil's group successfully lobbied the Georgia legislature for more severe penalties for drunken drivers.

Following the accident, Cecil continued his successful career as an architect and took leadership roles in many prominent Atlanta organizations including the Atlanta Symphony, the Citizens Advisory Committee for Urban Renewal and the Atlanta Regional Metropolitan Planning Committee. He also married one of Hermi's best friends, the for-



Cecil Alexander

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Hermi's Bridge is being renovated once again

continued from page 1

the Cobb County Department of Transportation, who is overseeing the project.

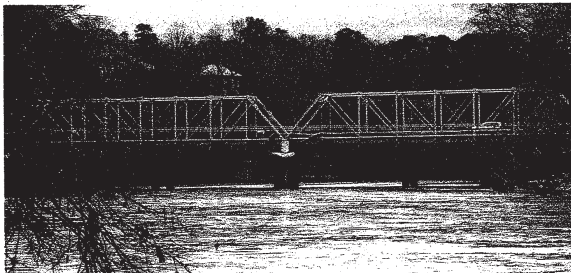
"For years, if you wanted to cross the Chattahoochee there, you had to wait your turn," said Buckhead architect Cecil Alexander, now in his 90s and husband of the woman for whom the bridge was named. Alexander and his architectural firm designed the Coca-Cola headquarters, the former Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium and other structures that are part of the Atlanta skyline.

His wife, Hermione Weil Alexander campaigned to save the old bridge in 1972, when it was retired from service. A decade later, Hermione Alexander was killed and her husband was injured when a drunken driver crashed into the car they were riding in.

Michael Lomax, a friend of the couple who was then Fulton County Commission chairman, visited Cecil Alexander in the hospital and asked if there was anything he could do. Alexander had a quick answer: They could name the bridge for Hermi, which is what everyone called his late wife.

The Fulton Commission officially named the span for her in 1984.

Fulton County took the lead in the effort to refurbish the bridge by securing a \$320,000 federal grant from the Atlanta Regional Commission. But it turned out that Fulton had no authority over the bridge, which connects Cobb County to the Buckhead area of the city of Atlanta. So Fulton transferred the grant to Cobb County, which has taken the lead on refurbishing the span.



Hermi's Bridge, connecting Buckhead and Vinings, is scheduled to reopen for pedestrian and bicycle traffic in early June. The Chattahoochee River bridge was originally opened in 1903 and is named for Hermione Weil Alexander, the late wife of architect Cecil Alexander.

The restoration project is funded mostly by Cobb County's 1-cent sales tax for road projects. Also, in addition to the \$320,000 federal grant, the city of Atlanta and the non-profit PATH Foundation, which supports greenways and trails, have provided funding.

Dan McDuff, a consultant who works with Cobb DOT on its projects, said the original Fulton estimate for refurbishing the bridge was \$400,000. He said the largest cost has been associated with sandblasted the peeling, based paint and repainting the bridge. He said that work alone cost \$400,000.

Cates and McDuff explained that work has been delayed by cold weather because

they can't paint below 50-degree temperatures, rain and high river levels. They need to build coffer dams around the bridge pilings in the river in order to reinforce them with new concrete. Many of the bridge's structural members have been replaced. The final piece of work will be replacing the wood planks.

When it's finished, the restored pedestrian bridge will be slate blue. It will have sturdier trusses and piers and new wooden decking.

It will again live as a worthy memorial to Hermione Alexander. Her former husband, Cecil, hopes "it'll inspire more preservation than we've had."

mer Helen Harris. Hermi and Helen were so close in fact that Hermi frequently told Cecil that if anything ever happened to her, "Helen is the gal for you".

Cecil and Helen settled into a happy life in the Round House, although they ultimately moved to another home in Buckhead. But the passage of time was hard on Hermi's Bridge and in 2006 it was deemed unsafe for travel and closed. With only minor repairs over the years including a new coat of paint in 1914 and new steel approaches in 1916, Hermi's Bridge was in desperate need of attention. So Cecil sprang into action.

With the help of the PATH Foundation, the city of Atlanta and Cobb County, Cecil headed up an effort to raise the necessary funds to restore the bridge to its former grandeur. Cecil printed up flyers outlining the history of the bridge, the details of his wife's life and a tally of the associated costs of the restoration. He also prevailed upon his friends to contribute to the worthy cause. And within a relatively short period of time, Cecil had raised the almost \$1million price tag for the restoration.

Now Hermi's Bridge has a nice new coat of blue paint, which is especially fitting given its proximity to Lovett. The restoration has also given it new wood decking, which will permit it to be reopened to foot traffic.

So once again Cecil can sit back and take solace in the knowledge that Hermi's Bridge is safe. But rest assured, Cecil will be watching closely. And even at 91 years of age, he will continue to make sure that Hermi's legacy is not neglected or forgotten.

Wright Mitchell is the president of the Buckhead Heritage Society.