



◀ Angelina's passion
Page 5



◀ Choosing a church
Page 10

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- ▶ Al McSurely remembers the late Margie Ellison
- ▶ Tom Glendinning on the Chatham County Tax Reduction Initiative



Nature nurtures

A walk in the wilds helps focus the mind.

By Ginny Gregory

Each morning as I walk my dog Chloe and my now puppy Jackson, I try to keep my mind only on what I am seeing. Focus is so helpful. In yoga it allows you to totally feel and experience your body. When working, it allows you to be more effective and efficient. In every day life it allows you to experience the moment. All that having been said, I fear my most creative moments occur when my mind wanders. I will see something that is orange and before I know it I am thinking about pumpkins. This time of year that makes perfect sense ... mid summer not so much. It is the mental grazing that allows the boundaries to sort of fade out and the new vision to become more clear.

I design on my feet. I start with a collection of plants that the client and I both love and are suitable for the space and environment and then I sit with the space for a bit. I'll site one plant or ten plants and then pause to look. Usually in an hour all plants are set and ready for installation. There are times when I sleep on the design and go back the next day to move just one plant or container to make the picture come into focus. Sometimes my client may give me one piece of information in passing that makes me go from mulch to washed river stone at the last minute. Being present has so many advantages, but I find it challenging the best.

Being present: there are the cell phones, the instant e-mail on the phone, the e-mail and the messages left on the land lines as well as the mobile ... and then there is the home computer with the e-mails. Whew! No wonder my mind is always planning a swift get away. The pressure to be in three places at once is amazing. When I worked at

NATURE continued on page 10.

Hispanic Protestant churches thrive

By Leah Hughes

The region traditionally known as the "Bible Belt" is changing. Hispanic churches are appearing in many communities throughout the South. Evidence of these changes is present in Chatham County.

In 2007, Hispanics made up 13 percent of Chatham County's total population, according to statistics from the Pew Hispanic Center. Chatham's percentage of Hispanics was higher than the statewide percentage, which was seven percent.

The changing face of the population brings many changes to the local community, and religion is no exception.

The churches provide a peaceful and comforting pace for Hispanics who often experience stress and uncertainty that comes along with their transitions to the United States, said Daniel Pantoja, the pastor of The Way United Methodist Church in Siler City.

The church turns 20 years old in December. It is the first Hispanic mission of the United Methodist Church



The Way United Methodist Church in Siler City. The 20-year-old church is the first Hispanic mission of the United Methodist Church in North Carolina. At left, the bilingual sign above the door.

PHOTOS BY LEAH HUGHES

in North Carolina.

Despite the prevalence of the Catholic religion throughout the history of Hispanic culture, many new Hispanic churches in the United States are Protestant. This trend exists across the nation. The majority of Hispanics in the United States are still Catholic, 68 percent, but 15 percent are Protestant, according to the Pew Hispanic Center. Many Hispanic Protestants are Catholic converts.

Pantoja said he knows of 16 Hispanic Protestant churches in Chatham County, but he knows of only one Hispanic Catholic church.

Some of the members of Pantoja's church are neither Methodist nor Protestant, Pantoja said. But the member's religious affiliation is not the most important factor. The church's objective is to create a community environment to worship God.

"Even though Latinos are facing stressful immigration status and not many job options, they are faithful," Pantoja said. His church has about 65 people for its main service at 11 a.m. every Sunday.

The Lily of the Valley Church, a Pentecostal church in Siler City, has 160 members. Pastor Juan Castillo said practicing Protestant religion

in the United States is easier than in many other countries, such as places in Mexico, that do not provide citizens with the freedom to practice their chosen religions.

Many new Protestant churches in the United States are embracing their religious opportunities and are becoming important participants in the community. Local churches have been successful at providing religious options for Hispanics, which is evident by the lack of people who have to go to Hispanic organizations to

PROTESTANT continued on page 12.

Taking ownership of your health

By Michael Clark

A big part of my job is to work with people on a one on one basis to help them become more physically active. And literally, every aspect of what I do leads back to movement, and helping people realize all the benefits that exercise has to offer. Last month one of my new participants said, "I want to take ownership of my health." I was shocked; mostly because this kind of health accountability can be hard to come by, and it is exactly what it takes to make long term positive changes. His health history is not uncomplicated. He, like many Americans, has a



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health problem that can be treated without any medication, and most likely, could have been prevented altogether if he had taken personal responsibility for his health a long time ago. The story is the same for millions of Americans.

It's no wonder that we are getting sicker each year. Over 25 percent of Americans are obese and 41 percent are overweight. Tobacco related illness, heart disease, diabetes type

II, certain forms of cancer, and other preventable conditions continue to be a normal part of American life. These conditions have strong ties to sedentary lifestyle and poor diet; and it's costing billions of dollars each year. Current estimates state that preventable diseases account for 75 to

90 percent of the nation's total health care cost. While preventable sickness cost so much in dollars and health problems, current and future health care policies provide little incentive for wellness through physical activity.

One research measure that health and exercise scientists study is called "all cause mortality," an outcome measure that literally means death by any reason. Over 70 studies show that increased levels of physical activity consistently decrease all cause mortality by 30 percent in individuals

HEALTH continued on page 10.

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