

Thursday, July 26, 2018

# Gardening Glimpses

OUR TRIP to the marvelous Huntsville Botanic Garden made us wonder, "Why doesn't Jackson have something like this?" And I realized very quickly that we could have a unique set-up, without a whole lot of extraordinary expense.

When I pulled out my file of clippings early this afternoon, I discovered that the relevant ones were two pieces written by Anthony Warren, and I was rather startled to read them. It seems that in March of 2018, the Jackson Zoological Society voted unanimously to begin studying the moving of the Jackson Zoo to the golf course at Lefleur's Bluff State Park.

I'm not exactly sure where the golf course is at Lefleur's Bluff, but it makes perfect sense to me otherwise.

But the two articles document some very wrong-headed thinking, and include the spending of our tax dollars to fund a study about keeping the zoo in its present location. In 2017 the Zoological Society formed a task force to study locations. (If you are interested in tracking the money spent on these, go back to the two thoroughly researched articles by Warren, who is noted for covering all the bases.)

Location, location, location is everything.

Any talk of rebuilding a marvelous new zoo at the site of the old one is nonsense. No matter how many ice cream socials draw news cameras, spending city or state money on a totally new building for an adventure zone for children and an indoor rain forest, in a difficult to reach location on West Capitol Street, even if it were in great shape zoo-wise is nonsense. Since 2003, attendance has dropped to half what it was, forcing the zoo to get rid of popular exhibits such as elephants.

**A NEW ZOO**, wherever, would have to be built from scratch. Today the Jackson Zoo owns only seven of the park's 180 animals - one alligator, one Aldabra tortoise, one West African dwarf crocodile, one flamingo, one cockatoo, one spider monkey and one orangutan.

In December of 2017, the same society spent \$40,000 to determine a new location. That should have been a no-brainer, given the fact that the Lefleur's Bluff golf course is at the southeast corner of I-55 and Lakeland Drive (Highway 25).

But look what else is there ... the Mississippi Children's Museum, the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science,

the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame and Museum, all top-ranked in their categories, and uniquely, the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Museum. I'm not sure what this committee plans to do with Smith Wills Park, though the city of Jackson covets the property for retail development.

And all of this property, this fine collection of family-oriented museums, belongs to the state, and is managed by the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks - worthy companions for the new Jackson zoo.

Imagine the drawing power of this collection, with a new zoo, for families and school trips, all the year round. And if Smith-Wills is left in place, surely a creative new board could schedule many types of educational-but-fun events.

And I even know who is inevitably the ideal choice to be chairman of the board for this whole complex - Cheryl Welch. She is noted for the different educational endeavors she plans, and right now is "just a member" of the Garden Club of Jackson, after all manner of unique projects - the marvelous "bring your part-time gardener with you to a free question-and-answer session on how to garden better," being



By Mrs. Herman McKenzie

one of my favorites. And she is known for her aggressive directing of the slash and burn clearing of saplings of my beloved Chinese tallows trees which are choking out the river below Lefleur's Bluff.

Given all of the noted establishments, and most uniquely the forestry and agriculture museums, I can see Cheryl's mind spinning, with year-round events that could result in a whole batch of interesting new animals for the newest resident of this complex.