

Construction raging beyond its borders, Pine Lake still placid

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City councilwoman Jennifer Brabson says the tiny town of **Pine Lake** "is undergoing something of a renaissance." The 49-year-old city is making a "comeback," she said. Residents are fixing up their homes, the city council is working to renovate the town clubhouse, etc. Of course, the recent activity in **Pine Lake** - which Ms. Brabson termed "a general sprucing up" - pales in comparison to the typical suburban development that is raging just outside the borders of the one-square-mile town. But DeKalb's tiniest municipality - a quiet cul-de-sac of a town with almost 300 modest homes clustered within its corporate limits - has no plans for shopping malls, condominiums or subdivisions, and none are likely to be built there. City councilwoman Jennifer Brabson says the tiny town of **Pine Lake** "is undergoing something of a renaissance."

The 49-year-old city is making a "comeback," she said. Residents are fixing up their homes, the city council is working to renovate the town clubhouse, city offices have moved into a renovated former chapel and the town's eight-acre lake now is clean and will open to swimmers when school gets out in early June.

Of course, the recent activity in **Pine Lake** - which Ms. Brabson termed "a general sprucing up" - pales in comparison to the typical suburban development that is raging just outside the borders of the one-square-mile town.

Subdivision signs hang from nearly every utility pole along Rockbridge Road, and new apartments are rising in the fields behind **Pine Lake**'s northernmost homes.

But DeKalb's tiniest municipality - a quiet cul-de-sac of a town with almost 300 modest homes clustered within its corporate limits - has no plans for shopping malls, condominiums or subdivisions, and none are likely to be built there.

For one thing, **Pine Lake** is simply too old to be developing.

The town, which will celebrate its 50th birthday on the last day of this year, went through its initial period of construction and growth back in the 1930s, when founder Carl Schaub put together a resort town for Atlanta residents who sought a summertime haven.

Of course, even if there were undeveloped land in town, **Pine Lake**'s 900 residents would not necessarily rush to plan an upscale mixed-used development for the site.

The folks who come to **Pine Lake**, and especially those who stay, are not the type attracted by cries of "bigger! better! newer!" Laid out by Schaub in 20-by-100 foot lots intended as camping sites or plots for small cabins, the town best accommodates buildings of humble proportions.

"We have a couple of big houses, but certainly nothing you would call a mansion," says city clerk Judy Griswell.

"We feel like we want that home-town feeling," agreed Mayor Myra Singer.

But while the **Pine Lake** mindset is not pro-development, residents do not seem opposed to a little redevelopment, which is precisely what some denizens note is now happening in their town.

"**Pine Lake** has changed an awful lot since we moved in about five years ago," said Judy Touch, who lives in a large home with her husband, Ralph. "There are a lot of younger people moving in, and people are putting additions on their homes and sprucing up their yards.

"People see other people doing it, and everybody seems to be getting in the spirit, trying to improve the town," she said.

Of course, the `sprucing up' does not mean **Pine Lake** has traded its rural touches for citified gloss. Many houses still shows signs of benign neglect, and ducks and muskrats are still a common sight down at the lake.

However, the town's two recent problems stem not from backwardness on the part of the city, but from the actions - and inactions - of DeKalb's county government, which delights in billing itself as both progressive and well-prepared for development to come its way.

The creek water in the lake that is **Pine Lake**'s raison d'etre has only reached normal levels this week. Earlier this year, the flume that fills the man-made lake had to be left closed because a leak in a county sewer line would have pumped raw sewage into the town's fishing and swimming hole.

And traffic circulation in the long, narrow town - which can only be entered from two intersections on Rockbridge Road - has been hampered by construction on the new county sewer line that is planned to cut across the town just south of the lake.

Construction workers from DeKalb County have been working in **Pine Lake** every day since early March, blasting out a deep trench in the bedrock around the lake so they can lay pipe for the sewer project.

Long stretches of Lakeshore Drive - the street that rings the town's lake and is the only connection between the north and south halves of town - must be closed while the sewer pipe is being laid. And **Pine Lake** residents naturally are not happy that the project - intended to serve the burgeoning subdivisions north and east of **Pine Lake** - has been underway for nearly two months now and shows no signs of ending soon.

County officials "told me it would take two weeks," said Ms. Griswell. "That was two months ago."

The sewer work in **Pine Lake** should be completed by the end of May, according to A.C. Monroe, deputy director of DeKalb's water and sewer department. "At one time," the **Pine Lake** portion of the project was scheduled to begin and end in March, he acknowledged. But he said "that schedule was abandoned pretty rapidly" when workers hit bedrock.

"In the long-run, the project will benefit us, because it's obviously in our interest to have enough capacity in the sewers in the area, whether it's growth in our town that necessitates the expansion or not," said Ms. Brabson. "But," she said, drifting into silence as she watched a bulldozer claw at the earth at the west end of the otherwise-quiet lake, "in the short run . . ."

Despite the recent low levels of the lake water and the current cacophony of sewer construction work, residents seem satisfied with conditions in their town.

"I am in love with this little community," said Pasquale Provitere, who moved to town with his wife, Ms. Brabson, four years ago and now runs the town's only restaurant, **Pizza On the Lake**. Provitere says business is improving at the restaurant, which he opened almost three years ago in a former beach house that he leases from the city. He said he hopes to prove wrong his doomsayer friends who told him, "You're crazy. That town will never, never support you." Not only does he spend each day fashioning pizzas from Italian olive oil, fresh garlic and real cheese, he also photographs the rare birds that visit the tiny lake. From the deck of his restaurant,

he also can toss chunks of his all-natural pizza to an appreciative school of fish or feed the ducks that wander up to the restaurant's back stairs.

"I wouldn't be doing this just anywhere in metro Atlanta. This town is an oasis."

Photo: OASIS: From the deck of Pizza On the **Lake**, restaurant operator Pasquale Provitere overlooks the lake for which the tiny city of **Pine Lake** is named/Betsy White