

Chautauqua Watershed Notes
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The Little Creek that Ate a Yard
By Jeff Tome for the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy



Careful management of our land and water resources can keep little streams like this one from becoming big problems for landowners and municipalities later on.

fell into the creek and the creek began to get wider. Every time there was a storm, more of the bank crashed into the creek.

The family that had a chicken coop on the other side of the creek couldn't jump across the creek anymore, so they built a bridge to get to the other side. The creek kept eating at its banks until it had carved out a ravine 20 feet wide and eight feet deep.

I came to know this little creek well as I grew up. It was in my grandmother's backyard in Erie, Pennsylvania. We threw leaves off one side of the bridge and watched them fall into the creek and then raced to the other side of the bridge to see who had the fastest leaf.

It was always hard as a kid to understand that what I thought of as a 20-foot wide-ravine

This is a story about how a little creek ended up needing a bridge. Once upon a time, there was a little creek that was bubbling along in the country. A little boy's chickens lived on the other side of the creek, so every day he jumped over the little creek and went to the chicken coop. He collected the eggs from the chicken coop, jumped back over the little creek and took them to the kitchen.

Time passed. The chicken coop and the little house stayed the same, but the city grew and soon surrounded the area. The little creek was channeled into an eight-foot-high pipe and covered with plazas, parking lots and fast food restaurants. Water ran off the parking lots and into the little creek, giving it more and more power.

The pipe came out at a slight angle from where the creek normally flowed. With its newfound power, the creek began to gnaw at its own banks. Dirt

had once been a quiet meandering brook that could be jumped over with ease. This is a great example of how development can harm a neighborhood and a watershed, but it doesn't have to be that way. Envision development done with forethought as to how the water flows through, over and away from the development. The plaza by my grandmother's house could have had a 20-foot-wide scenic area with a creek in the middle surrounded by natural grasses and shrubs instead of forcing the stream underground. The restaurant could have been built with windows overlooking the creek where herons hunted fish. The whole area could now be a beautiful natural area in the city instead of a crumbling parking lot. Neighbors could still have a bubbling stream instead of watching their backyards get smaller every year.

There are ways to build and grow the businesses we need without destroying the land and water around us. Kim Sherwood, curator of the Conewango Creek Watershed, gave a great presentation at the Audubon Center and Sanctuary last week about the benefits of taking the watershed into account when working on roads, houses and more. I won't go into all the details, since Mr. Sherwood does a much better job at that than I, but his program was a very eye-opening look at how to prevent little creeks from getting big and angry, as well as how to save money and resources that can be put to better use in the community than fixing the same water problems over and over.

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a local, private, not-for-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization with the mission to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. CWC relies on membership donations to undertake its conservation activities. Its annual membership campaign is underway. For more information or to support these efforts call 664-2166 or go to chautauquawatershed.org.