
The Chattanooga Times

ESTABLISHED 1869 / ADOLPH S. OCHS, PUBLISHER 1878 · 1935

RUTH S. HOLMBERG
Chairman
PAUL NEELY
Publisher

RONALD C. SMITH
Managing editor
MARY CLARKE GUENTHER
Assistant managing editor

MICHAEL LOFTIN
Editorial page editor
PAT WILCOX
HARRY AUSTIN
Associate editors

Editorials of The Times

... And environmental cleanup

Just as being smart about the environment and business simultaneously requires new ways of thinking, so, too, does being smart about environmental cleanup, specifically the cleanup of Chattanooga Creek.

The Army Corps of Engineers, however, is thinking the same old way.

It wants the Environmental Protection Agency to view the cleanup from the seat of a bulldozer. It wants to reroute the creek, dig up contaminated sediment in the existing creekbed and burn or bury it. Such an approach would mock Chattanooga's claim to be an environmental city.

It would destroy the natural creek. And rather than cleaning up the pollution, it would mostly transfer it to a landfill or, by incineration, into the air. That's no real solution.

The real solution can be found by following nature's example. That was the message Stephen O'Neil brought to last week's Chamber of Commerce conference on sustainable development.

Mr. O'Neil is executive director of Dr. John Todd's Southeast Center for the Restoration of Waters here. He said that as years of debate about Chattanooga Creek drag on, the creek is beginning to cleanse itself.

It is growing more plants, which work with mi-

cro-organisms, snails and fish to clean the water and draw the contamination out of the creekbed. That is nature's way of correcting environmental abuse, but it's a slow process.

Chattanooga Creek, so long an industrial sewer, is now a state and federal Superfund site. We can't wait the many decades it would take the creek to cleanse itself without assistance. But natural processes still contain seeds of the solution.

A system created by Dr. Todd uses nature's methods to break down pollution into harmless substances. It simply employs modern science and technology to accelerate the process by 700 to 800 percent, and has been used successfully in sewage treatment and pollution remediation projects.

In a bench test here almost five years ago, Dr. Todd's method removed 85 percent of toxic contaminants in a sample section of Chattanooga Creek. With technological advances in the interim, even higher levels of removal could be expected now. And there would be no danger of pollutants "migrating" into the land, ground water or air.

EPA should approve that approach and let Chattanooga demonstrate the value of following nature's lead in reversing environmental damage. As Mr. O'Neil put it, poetically, "We should listen to the lesson the creek is giving us."