

Dick Williams

A red hot Atlanta dog is again in jeopardy

This doesn't rank up there on the list of priorities with a second Atlanta airport, the Swedish dream for Midtown, Jimmy Carter's Ex-PresWay or the fate of Techwood Homes.

This is more serious.

Yes, Five Points is at risk of even further decline from its halcyon days as commercial hub of the South.

And no, it's not the prospect of Trust Company joining C&S and First Atlanta in calling Bulldog Movers. It's not the constant irritant of bums and winos in Woodruff Park.

No, this is still more serious.

Barker's Hot Dogs is in jeopardy once again.

It's as sure a sign of late summer and fall as Ray Goff sweating out the grades of football players in developmental studies, optimism over the Falcons and 1,689 fans at the Braves games (okay, okay, some things do change).

One of Atlanta's most successful and comforting businesses must every two years be threatened with removal.

Downtown denizens know Barker's. They know Glenn Robins and his sidekick, Vivian Swiatek.

They are willing to ignore the pigeons and winos and stand in line more than 20 minutes just for a large hot dog grilled to order over charcoal. The quality of the dog and the hot sauce make the wait worthwhile.

"Are you going to enjoy your hot dog in the park," is the corny but ritual question to thousands.

"Enjoy" and "park" are oxymorons to many looking for a clean seat in that park.

The problem here is a concept of fairness taken to extremes.

The city, eager to regulate street vendors, instituted a lot-



tery to award locations. Glenn Robins and Barker's have defied the odds, winning four such lotteries to hold their spot on the Peachtree Street side of Woodruff Park.

Other vendors have opened up against them, only to see customers prefer to stand in line at Barker's.

As Sept. 3 and this year's drawing approach, the tension rises. Vivian will be near tears. Customers will damn City Council, the mayor and all power structures real or imagined.

Fairness is no longer the issue. Barker's has survived and prospered and reinvested in other city locations. It renovated and operates a commissary in a part of downtown that Evander Holyfield would avoid.

But by pulling the wrong number, it could be out of business at Woodruff, replaced perhaps by a person without the capital to satisfy city requirements. Mr. Robins notes that of seven vending locations approved for Woodruff Park, only two have been used on a regular basis the last two years.

Mr. Robins serves on a city task force to more fairly regulate vendors, but has grown impatient as this year's lottery nears.

He notes that some vendors require more investment and so will not be content with permits of only one or two years. He worries that vendors like Barker's will take the risk and establish a market, only to lose it to a late lottery entry.

He would do away with the lottery, at least for established vendors, and allow them to continue their city permits if they are in compliance with city codes. If there were hundreds of quality merchants fighting for the same space, a lottery might be needed, but that isn't the case.

Five Points is failing. Barker's business has declined as banks and law firms move uptown. But Mr. Robins is willing to stick it out. He deserves the chance.



Dick Williams

Fat jokes, not candidacy, in

Even though Maynard Jackson has missed his own deadline for announcing his mayoral candidacy, he is having a whale of a time as a tease.

That, by the way, is the only fat joke that was missed Friday night when Jackson took part in a roast of Sen. Wyche Fowler. The Orotund One and the potential of a clash with Fulton County Commission Chairman Michael Lomax in 1989 dominated the proceedings.

Lomax, Jackson and others violated a cardinal rule of public speech: They followed Bob Steed, the attorney and writer, to a podium.

To speak anywhere in the same earshot as Steed is to tempt, nay defy, the fates. When Steed talks, people laugh. Those who follow are doomed to polite chuckles.

Nonetheless, Jackson took the risk. Steed introduced him with the obligatory nod to the former mayor's girth.

Jackson, he said, is making a fortune as a bond lawyer and modeling clothes for Lane Bryant.

"When Maynard Jackson steps on a cigarette," said Steed, "that sucker is out."

And so are my opponents. Jackson responded, with a nod toward Lomax. Teasing, apparently, is more fun than an active candidacy.

In August, Jackson mounted a behind-the-scenes campaign to scare off candidates hoping to succeed Andrew Young. In a series of interviews, Jackson said he was 99 percent certain to announce his candidacy by Labor Day. Aides continue to meet in planning sessions, but no announcement has been made.

Lomax used a narrative approach to the Fowler roast to benefit the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, but he began with a poem about a race against Jackson, a former mentor.

"Sure I can dance like a butterfly and sting like a bee," he intoned, "but I'm really afraid he'll sit on me."

Later, Jackson responded.

"I have a great deal of concern," he said, "about butting heads with my good friend, Michael. I'm afraid he'll outpoll me with the black members of the Piedmont

Hot (dog) times in court

Vivian Swiatek goes to Atlanta Municipal Court this morning. The 26-year-old is considered a clear and present danger to the common weal.

Ms. Swiatek is cashier and cheer dispenser for the Barker's Hot Dog cart at Woodruff Park. She was handed a citation by police last week for not having a valid street vending permit. To wit, she was guilty of three on a cart. The ordinance prescribes that only two people are allowed to work on a food cart at a time.

Ironically, Glenn Robins, Barker's owner and champion of the charcoal-grilled hot dog, is a member of the city task force working to refine the street vending law.

"I know we've been breaking the law," he says, "but for three years, we've been told that part of the ordinance would be changed. The two-person limit was put in to prevent impeding pedestrian flow. But the law also says how big a food cart can be, and we're within that limit. Three people are needed to run my business efficiently."

City Councilwoman Barbara Asher introduced the amendment for first reading at Monday's City Council meeting.

In the meantime, those waiting patiently in Barker's lunchtime line can watch Ms. Swiatek practice friendly civil disobedience.

Worse late than never

Your tax-dollars at work, sort of.

The day after New Year's 1986, the owner of a new home in Crogan's Bluff subdivision in North Fulton County contacted the Atlanta Water Bureau and requested that an unsightly fire hydrant be lowered a few feet. Over time, he made nearly 10 phone calls. Eventually, he gave up and planted bushes around it.

He reports now that a crew repaired the hydrant Sept. 14, 1987. The bushes, of course, had to be cut back to allow the work.

Lifestyle

The Atlanta Journal

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1986



Dick
Williams

Odds and ends to catch up with

Never leave 'em hanging, my daddy used to say. It's rude to make folks awaken in the morning with questions on their mind.

So once more into several breaches.

Asgar Kachwalla, careful readers will recall, runs Oscar's delicatessen in Cobb County's Terrell Mill Village. He's the immigrant success story whose deli and liquor store have become neighborhood fixtures in a franchised, look-alike world.

After 15 years at the same stand, running a sort of mini-United Nations, Kachwalla's lease was in jeopardy, presumably so that the Big Star next door could expand.

An outpouring of neighborhood support appeared to have won him a new lease near the end of October. We thought Oscar's would continue to be the spot for Saturday coffee and sandwiches and ice cream for the Little Leaguers.

Now, however, Kachwalla is operating on a month-to-month renewal at double his former rent.

His support troops are rallying once again.

If you've stopped for a Barker's Hot Dog at Glenn Robins' stand at Woodruff Park, you'll note that cheerful Vivien Swiatek is back at work with Robins and Sherman Burroughs. She's no longer a hunted woman.

Ms. Swiatek was cited by police for violating the "two-on-a-cart" ordinance and faced a misdemeanor charge in Municipal Court.

Quick work in City Council by Barbara Asher resulted in an ordinance change, allowing the extra pair of hands within the prescribed space.

When Ms. Swiatek makes your change, it's perfectly legal. The ordinance, says Robins, remains somewhat cumbersome. It contains a "no substitutions" provision, meaning that if one of the Barker's three-some is sick, only two can work.

A column on the perils and inefficiencies of Atlanta's 911 emergency phone service drew more than a score of horror tales.

Alice McDonough told us the story of how, after her car was stolen, she tracked down her car and the thieves. She was unable, however, to get 911 operators to send a patrol car to make an arrest.

Mrs. McDonough got some satisfaction. Police brass pulled the tapes of her repeated phone calls, and took some disciplinary action.

Atlanta police are training a squad of new civilian operators to man the emergency phones — judging from the mail here, the training can't be done quickly enough.

In September, Paul Ryczek, the former Falcon center working as a stockbroker for Oppenheimer & Co., shut down his computer, hitched up his belt and went off to play three weeks of replacement football for the Philadelphia Eagles during the National Football League strike.

At age 35 and but 235 pounds, he could be described as middle-aged crazy.

Ryczek, it must be noted, left work in the middle of a bull market and played in three losing causes. He returned to work Tuesday, Oct. 20, just in time to explain to his clients the stock market's biggest losses ever.

If those weren't headaches enough, Ryczek now finds himself working in a bear market — and with persistent shoulder pain that he believes will need arthroscopic surgery. The shoulder was hurt, but of course, against the Bears.

Oh, yes. A reader or two asked that I update the Gold Club, the nudie bar at Piedmont and Lindbergh opposed by several neighborhood groups.

As Jonathan Winters said of shavetail officers in World War II, I'd love to, but I can't.

"I'll be watching," he said, "from some 3,000 yards through heavy lenses."

Which is exactly my reply to the woman who occasionally shares my name.

THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 1987

People

Lee
Walburn



Frankly, there's a doggone crisis over in the park

Do you realize that while editorialists dueled with word processors at 10 pica distance over Fred Davison and the University of Georgia, while sports savants analyzed the lucidity of the Falcon draft plan, while cartoonists drew pictures of Joe Frank Harris with his particles dangling, they totally ignored the possibility we could be without Barkers charcoal broiled hot dogs in Woodruff Park by this time next year?

Why is it always left for me to deal with the big stuff?

Apparently unnoticed by our ivory tower journalists is a major crisis in the area of street vending that could result in 1) Barkers having to relinquish its familiar spot on the sidewalk near the park or 2) lines so long that the current 30-minute wait in line is doubled, or 3) Sherman Burroughs going to jail for being the third person in a two-person hot-dog stand.

In September of 1984 a new ordinance was passed by the Public Safety and Legal Administration Committee. Now, they meant well, because everybody was a little upset by fake Rolex watch salesmen and vendors with their chenille bedspreads draped over the fire hydrants, but there needs to be some fine tuning of their document.

Damned by faint praise

First, a little background. Feature writer Jack Wilkinson first brought Barkers to my attention with a story so effusive in its praise of the frank imported from Buffalo that I suspected he must be getting extra helpings of salsa on his dogs. After trying the product myself I concluded that Wilkinson had, instead, virtually damned them with faint praise.

Since then I have regularly waited in the long line for my two hot dogs with mustard, ketchup and relish, plus a can of Sprite to enjoy in the park. I have waited in the broiling sun, I have hunched over in the rain and I have shivered in the cold. But last week I waited 37 minutes for my hot dog and I was tempted to join the dribble of folks at the cart nearby which caters to the Type As who don't have the patience to wait even for the best hot dog in Atlanta.

"Why don't you open up another cart so we won't have to wait in line so long?" I asked proprietor Glenn Robins. It was then I learned of the possibility of a cuisine crisis, the likes of which Atlanta has never seen.

A quick summary of the dilemma. Barkers was awarded its space on the basis of a drawing after the ordinance went into effect in January 1985. Robins is working on the last year of an agreement consisting of one year, with a one year option. Unless the ordinance is changed he could go back into the hopper and wind up with the muscadine salesmen in Plaza Park.

Additionally, Barkers cannot open a second stand even though it could easily double its current average of 600 hot dogs per lunch hour if awarded a second location. Otherwise, the lines will grow to the point we will have to have reservations.

Take him over our bodies

Third, the ordinance states that only two people can work in a cart and Glenn has had to employ both his girlfriend, Vivian Swiatek, and Sherman Burroughs in order to move the dogs in an assembly line that is equally as effective, if not yet as famous as The Varsity. So far the law has shown wisdom in overlooking the violation. And I think I can speak for the people when I say, keep looking the other way, because you take Sherman over our bodies.

The answer to the situation is not complicated. Allow the vendors to come before the board each year for review. Those who have made a contribution to the enjoyment of life downtown should be permitted to remain in their current location for the convenience of their loyal patrons. Those who have proved worthy entrepreneurs should also be awarded additional vending areas up to a reasonable limit. And finally, no government agency should be able to tell a business how many employees it can hire.

This predicament must be remedied. Frankly, with no wieners, we have only losers.

Dick Williams

Competing eateries say 'Gone with the Hot Dog'

Food fight! Yessiree, a food fight in downtown Atlanta — and among friends yet.

Atlanta may not have engaged in a proper observance of the "Gone With the Wind" anniversary.

We may have succeeded in transforming Light Up Atlanta to Light Up Dunwoody or Light Up Loganville. We are, however, celebrating the image of that great American staple, the hot dog.



Your basic dog is the subject of a petition sent to Mayor Andrew Young by 20 downtown food purveyors. They want to eliminate the pushcarts and sidewalk vendors lining Central City Park and siphoning off lunchtime business.

The real target is one of Atlanta's great success stories, Barker's Hot Dogs. Glenn Robins and company move their trailer onto the Peachtree Street sidewalk each day, carefully grilling their Buffalo-style franks and slathering them with a delectable hot sauce.

The lines start forming by 11:30 a.m. and are still in place at 2 p.m. Robins invented a better mousetrap. Their success is such that their dogs, for grilling only they emphasize, now are available in a few supermarket delicatessen sections.

Since the Varsity won't open a downtown stand (Nancy Gordy, for the umpteenth time, please hear our plea), Barker's dogs own downtown.

They have spawned sidewalk competitors, but only Barker's draws lines of uncomplaining, hungry workers. The rest seem to be for those in a powerful hurry or in search of basic nourishment.

Light Up Atlanta brought things to a head. According to Lenny Nachbin of the L.B. Munch sandwich shop, the city allowed five times the usual number of trailers, pushcarts and stands to set up on Peachtree. Revelers didn't need to wander one block to the fast-food row that is Broad Street.

"You encouraged us to stay open and support the events," writes Nachbin. "We did. And we suffered an incredible reduction in

sales as compared to previous years."

Nachbin, presumably, was left with a slew of moldering gyros and cheese steaks. He is joined in his quest by a who's who of the Maalox set. The lunch bunch runs from Pop-eye's to Church's to Wendy's to the wonderfully named Tokyo Shapiro.

Those stores have rent, employees and heat and light bills. Barker's operates on a city permit, takes the store home at night and generates its own power.

On the other hand, of course, Barker's and the other mobile chow lines are dependent on the weather.

Since your humble opinion-purveyor must eat in many of these places on a regular basis, he will not take sides. He will throw this pressing city problem into the laps of the mayor and City Council, particularly Councilman Bill Campbell.

Young Campbell long has needed an issue of truly gut concern, to which he can apply Solomonic wisdom, garnished with a touch of Julia Child. Housing in Vine City, the Presidential Parkway and other issues of his cannot compare in political danger to the question of free enterprise in the form of a hot dog on the street.

Until a few years ago, Atlanta prohibited sidewalk vending, for health and esthetic reasons. Now we have charges of a glut. Lenny Nachbin's cohorts want to remove all the peddlers from Central City Park. It's a two-edged sword. Since the park was redone as Woodruff Park and vendors have moved in, the number of screamers, preachers and weirdos seems to have diminished.

The park has flavor — and the pleasant aroma of the grilled frank. On the other hand, too many food carts would turn it into a less-than-aromatic version of a street in the Bronx. How to reconcile free enterprise vs. the preservation of businesses committed to downtown?

Barker's has an incredibly loyal following. It offers a quality product, the ambience of the park benches and sunshiny days. Yet restaurant owners worried about their rental payments have a right to look with anger on the crowds so tantalizingly close to their establishments.

It's a case for two aspirin and a Turn.