

RESTORE

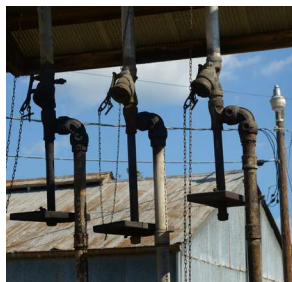
Ben Laseter broadens his skill set to save the brownfield next door.

Coming into the LTLT offices from the back parking lot each morning, Ben Laseter slowly began to notice what was around him.

"I never paid that much attention to this part of town until our offices moved here. LTLT staff parks behind the building, so every day I'd park

Main Street just see the front of the closed service station and don't know that there is over an acre of land, adjacent to Friends of the Greenway headquarters, with 350 feet of frontage along the Little Tennessee River. This looked like a perfect water quality project."

Neglected Treasure



my car and be face-to-face with this adjacent lot full of tanks, barrels, and pumps from its days as an oil distribution business and service station. It seemed kind of ironic that this was right next door to a non-profit dedicated to conserving this wonderful part of the world we live in." It wasn't long before LTLT discovered the property was available for purchase, but was probably contaminated due to 40-plus years of storing and distributing petroleum. Far from being deterred by that undesirable selling point, LTLT saw this as fitting right into its mission. "Most people driving down

Indeed. Already considered a brownfield, several rounds of environmental site assessments revealed an ongoing gas leak underground into the ground water, in addition to other contaminated areas. Left alone, these leaks could eventually make their way into the Little T.

So Ben, whose career began in wildlife ecology, immersed himself into learning everything he could about brownfields. "It was a pretty substantial learning curve— understanding the different rules, different agencies, the technical aspects. Thankfully, there are a lot of

agency folks in Asheville, Raleigh and Atlanta who have really gotten behind this project and have taught me quite a bit."

An Eagle Scout since 1991, Ben had childhood aspirations of following in his father's steps as an attorney. But a love of the outdoors led him to study

"When I drive into the parking lot now, I don't just see the polluted lot next door. Instead, I think even beyond the benefit of water quality and consider the additional potential—of beautiful green space in downtown, of possible access to the river, new commercial use, or



forest resources at the University of Georgia, followed by a master's at the University of Memphis and then back to UGA to complete his Ph.D. Ben spent a few years at an environmental consulting firm until an opportunity with LTLT came along.

Ben feels the time investment he's made to learn all he can about brownfield regulations, funding options for cleanup and coordinating with multiple agencies has been worth it. "It's been a lot of fun to learn a completely different area of expertise outside of what we normally think of as natural resource management."

maybe even a pedestrian bridge connecting the Greenway. There are so many options, and I hope by LTLT cleaning up this one property, we can have a hand in helping start the revitalization of this area in Franklin."

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