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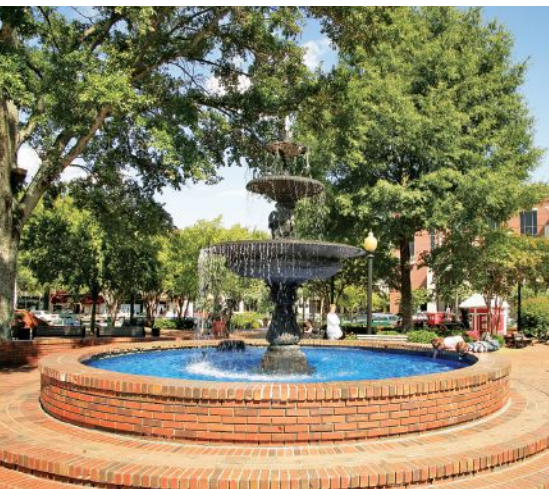


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On the Cover

Georgia's musical legacy is cemented in artists like The Allman Brothers Band, James Brown and the B52s. Not only have they played a significant role in the evolution of music but also established a legacy in the communities from which they got their start in the industry. Today, performers like Outkast, Luke Bryan, R.E.M., Ray Charles, and their communities and hometowns have welcomed fans from around the world to the see where each artist's rise to fame began. Music is more than notes; it's an economic powerhouse.

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GaC Contributors



GENIE SMITH BERNSTEIN includes favorite *Georgia Connector* Connections stories in her newest book, *Skating on the Septic Tank – telling stories*. As an award-winning author whose work appears in magazines, anthologies, newspapers, novels, a catalog, plus an art quilt, Genie believes writing is magic. Devoted encourager of writers, she speaks at book groups, conferences, and to anyone who will listen. geniesmithbernstein.com



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Advertising Inquiries: Email advertising@georgiaconnector.com or call 912.977.3435.

Customer Service: *Georgia Connector*, P.O. Box 1205, Monroe, Ga., 30655. Office: 912.977.3435.

Event Submissions: Submit events along with their respective websites and contact information directly to our online calendar at www.georgiaconnector.com or send event and contact information to jgarrison@georgiaconnector.com.

Subscriptions: Mailed subscriptions are available for \$21 annually by contacting publisher@georgiaconnector.com.

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To reserve the conference room/fire ring, visit GaStateParks.org/FortYargo

Letter from the Publisher

~ KENNY SMILEY, Publisher



As the holidays approach, I get a little misty-eyed as I reminisce about all the wonderful traditions and special occasions that I have been able to enjoy with my family and friends. Although they look differently than they once did, old memories and the newer ones being made continue to be an integral part of my life.

Thanksgiving has always been a favorite of mine. Not because of the delicious food but because of the time spent with family. When I lived in South Georgia, Thanksgiving was the time when friends would come home from college, excited to be back in their hometown; everyone would catch up at the local watering hole and recap what had happened since our last meeting. We, along with every cousin on both sides, spent a few turkey days at my great aunt and uncle's cabin in Bryan County. Another day of thanks was spent in a cabin in Helen. My nephew was just a toddler then and looking back at photos of him and my dad playing in the fallen leaves, make me smile. That 2008 holiday, which was also days that preceded my birthday, is one I fondly remember.



Christmas through the eyes of a child.

My now wife gave me the best 40th birthday present ever that year – a video montage of my life. I cried like a baby. My most recent memorable Thanksgiving was at St. Augustine. Once again right at ye old birthday, this time 50. Lots of fun was had at the beach during wintertime. Now I marvel at how that video clip would have changed.

Outside of birthdays and Thanksgiving, Christmas is a special time for me. Growing up, I spent it with my little sis, my mom and dad. I now know why parents always celebrated the holiday with such gusto. As I watch the holidays through the eyes of my grandchildren, I totally get it. I can't wait until Christmas morning to watch their faces glow with joy and amazement.

And for the life of me, I can't forget Halloween. The costumes are not what they used to be, but there's still such joy in becoming characters that only live in our dreams. Walking the neighborhoods have been replaced with lifts on golf carts. Halloween carnivals are now fall festivals. Candied apples and popcorn balls are now Reese's and Kit Kats. No matter the label, the holiday still spells sugar and sweets.

These special times mean so much to many people. We are only granted a limited number during our lifetime. Now is the time to make each one count.

Let's make this issue of *Georgia Connector* count, too. Let's follow the music as it creates new legacies throughout the cities in our state. Looking for a local holiday date night with that special someone? We have some great ideas for you. Follow us to cities where the square is the thing. And if you are ready to get away by yourself, we have some vacation recommendations that will make you start thinking solo. And my favorite—the food section. We will tempt your palate with some delicious recipes from the waters of Georgia.

As we wind down a tough and unprecedented 2021, my hopes and prayers are that each of you find health and happiness. I wish you the best in 2022. I think we all agree that it's time to make each moment, event, trip, and celebration count.

Now, sit back, flip through these pages, and let us connect you with things to do, places to go, and people to see in our great state of Georgia this special holiday season.

GEORGIA'S PREMIER REGIONAL QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

GEORGIA Connector

Connecting YOU with things to do, places to go & people to see

Winter Issue, 2021 • Volume 12, Issue 4

GEORGIA CONNECTOR
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MAGAZINE AVAILABILITY:
Free issues are available at regional chambers of commerce as well as businesses, organizations and other high traffic areas and online at www.georgiaconnector.com

JOB OPPORTUNITIES:
In addition to freelance writers, *Georgia Connector* seeks experienced advertising sales staff for several counties in Region 5. Sales position inquiries should be sent to publisher@georgiaconnector.com

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The Editor's Pen

~ JUDY GARRISON, Editor

"Writers aren't people exactly. Or, if they're any good, they're a whole lot of people trying so hard to be one person."

~ F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

As a writer, I can—without reservation—certify that writers are peculiar people. Think about it. We spend our days, and if you're like me, and nights manufacturing stories about subjects we may or may not know anything about. Emails and phone calls take up most of the hours of the day and usually include graveling and begging. Dates on our calendars predict our next move or cancel out personal schedules. Our computer chair holds the indentation of our rear end more distinctly than the living room recliner. Multitasking is our natural state of mind, and much of what we do is done with a cat or dog in our lap or at our feet. And at the end of each assignment, flipping through the printed product and seeing our words spread across a page is like giving birth, each and every time. *Pain. Pressure. Anticipation. Giddy.* Yes, giddy. And then, we do it all over again for the love of the craft rather than the possibly of becoming rich.

All this to say, I work with a whole lot of amazing peculiar people. Each writer has his own process—distinctly honed and personally sculpted, but I would be willing to bet, the resolution is always the same. Pride in work. Thankful for publications.

When the pandemic erased many writers' outlets, I'm pleased that *Georgia Connector* remained, and the collection of writers I have been honored to lead have remained steadfast. New ones have trickled in and some have moved on, but there have been some that have had a byline in this publication since 2010.

I hope you'll take the time to read about each contributor in the front section of the magazine. Get to know them as they share their end-result with you time-and-again, documenting much of the area's history as well as shining a light on the future of Georgia and beyond. Many have changed their bios over the years, but one person has not. I have been waiting a decade to comment on this one.

Randy Southerland is my business guru, and I thank my lucky stars for him. As knowledgeable as he is at business, I consider myself situated on the opposite end of the spectrum. In his bio, for as long as I have known him, he has been waiting . . . *and waiting* . . . for the University of Georgia's return to the national championship arena.

I'm thinking 2021 might be as close as we'll ever get to making Randy's dream come true. Every quarter when I submit his bio, I keep waiting for it to be different. It's not. Next issue, his bio might require a revision. So, we need your help. As the Dawgs finish their season, scream a hefty chant in the stands or in front of the TV: *For Randy. For Randy. For Randy.*

As we close out a precarious 2021 and begin a crisp new year, the writers hope you'll continue to read and enjoy the words that are compiled with the utmost professionalism. And next issue, if we don't have a new ending to Randy's bio, I'm coming for you.

Judy

InBox

A WORD
from our
READERS



Is the Deer Festival in Jasper county cancel or on for November?

~ Marie S.

NEWTON COUNTY, GA

We are happy to say the Deer Festival took place in Monticello on November 6th.

Good afternoon. If there are recent *Georgia Connector* magazines for November/December the Visitors Center could use some. Hours Tues-Friday 10-4:00 and Saturday 10-2:00. Thanks! Pam

~ Pam P.

MONROE, GA

We have restocked you with our Fall issue, and here is your Winter issue (December - February).



Congratulations to writer Polly Dean, awarded first place in the Georgia Outdoors Writers Association in the Non-Game Outdoor Recreation category for her Excellence in Craft.

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Georgia Connector wants to SEE what you have been up to and we welcome your high resolution Georgia photos. Please submit them to ksmiley@georgiaconnector.com and include photographer's name, location, and photo details.



Keith Glass takes the stage with the Tams at Downtown Monroe's final concert of the year.



The United Way of Walton County kicked off their 2021-2022 campaign and announced a goal of raising \$315,000.



Teri Smiley, IOM (right), president of the Walton County Chamber of Commerce, is recognized for her efforts serving as two-year chair of the U.S. Chamber's Southeast Institute of Organization Management (IOM) at UGA's Center for Continuing Education in Athens. Honoring her is Jeremy Arthur, IOM, national chair of the US Chamber's Board of Trustees.



(Above) The Deer Dash took place November 6 in Jasper County where over 138 vendors gathered to greet the visitors. (Right) Haunticello brought out the ghosts and goblins in downtown Monticello. Local business owners enjoyed distributing candy to the little ones.

Jasper County Happenings



Gene Simmons (left) and Paul Stanley of KISS rock Atlanta's Cellairis Amphitheater at Lakewood in October.



Walton Chamber Fall Events



(Left) The first annual Paws & Pals BFF Race in Social Circle was held. Walton Chief Magistrate Judge Mike Burke participates with one of his best friends, Zoey. (Above) A crew at the third annual Battle of the Burgers. Judges' Choice went to LR Burger and People's Choice was awarded to Philanthropy Grill.



Georgia continues to be a movie and television hub for producers and film companies. MGM recently filmed in Monroe.



Even though this pic of Teri and Kenny Smiley was not SNAPPED in Georgia, it was all about Georgia as the Dawgs took on the Volunteers at Neyland Stadium in Knoxville and came out with a 41-17 victory.



Georgia Southern University Eagles' mascot Freedom and his owner Steve Hein commands the stadium following a football game in Statesboro.

SIGNED SEALED And DELIVERED

Local legends leave legacies
to small Georgia towns

~ Story by Randy Southerland

Atlanta may be the undisputed capital of music and the first stop for big name artists on tour, but other Georgia cities are making their mark.

From some of the great artists of soul music, Southern rock and classical music to up-and-coming musicians, Georgia's rich musical heritage is getting noticed and drawing travelers to cities like Macon, Augusta, and Athens. These hometown artists who made it big are inspiring new generations of performers eager to follow in the footsteps of legends like James Brown, the Allman Brothers, R.E.M., and Otis Redding.

In each of these cities, music is more than just entertainment; it is a powerful jobs creator. The impact of concerts reverberates throughout local economies from restaurants to hotels to an array of behind-the-scenes workers like ticket-takers to sound technicians to publicists.

One study says arts and cultural economic activity accounted for 4.5 percent of gross domestic product or \$877.8 billion in 2017. Georgia is getting its share, say local officials and members of the music industry.



Cities throughout
Georgia are capitalizing
on music and the
heritage of creativity
and performance.

Georgia's rich musical heritage is getting noticed and



Macon's Rock Candy Tours lead visitors to the places and venues where some of America's greatest music was made.

Drive down just about any street in Macon, and you'll pass a part of music history. It could be an old house where the Allman Brothers and their band lived (now a museum) or the studio where they recorded (renovated and working again). There is the church where Little Richard found his performance voice and the modest Pleasant Hill neighborhood house (now a historic landmark) where he grew up.

Musical heritage is also driving the city's downtown renaissance. Capricorn Records, an independent label founded by Phil Walden and Frank Fenter in 1969, is credited with birthing Southern Rock. After the label and recording studio closed, the block of historic 1880s era buildings sat empty and in disrepair.

Thanks to the efforts of Mercer University and other local

organizations, the structures were rescued and renovated.

Record producer Phil Walden had started assembling the properties in 1969

"The first building he bought with Otis Redding was to put in a recording studio, so Otis wouldn't have to go to Memphis to record," explains Larry Burmley, Mercer University's senior vice president for marketing communications and chief of staff. "We were able to preserve the original historic recording studio where the Allman Brothers, Wet Willie, Charlie Daniels, Marshall Tucker, and others recorded those great songs in the 70s."

Mercer Music at Capricorn, which opened in 2020, includes a high-tech recording studio that is laying down tracts for some of the biggest names in music. There's also a music incubator helping rising local artists develop their careers.

There's even a museum that includes many Capricorn Records artifacts. Here you can see hand-written letters exchanged by Walden and Otis Redding about plans to develop the studio.

"The crown jewel of our museum is the touch screen (listening stations) loaded with every Capricorn record ever made," says Bob Konrad, museum director.

The revitalization of Capricorn also spurred an adjacent mixed-use development including apartments, retail and office space. This contributed to the ongoing transformation of downtown Macon.

Valerie Bradley, executive director of the Macon-Bibb County Convention & Visitors Bureau, says "we get people from all over the world who want to learn more about the

The artifacts of Macon's musical heritage is preserved in the Capricorn Music Museum, a part of the adaptive reuse of the buildings.



drawing travelers to cities like Macon, Augusta, and Athens.



Revitalization and reuse has transformed the long abandoned Capricorn Records building into a modern recording studio and incubator for up-and-coming acts.

musical heritage and influence.”

Athens is famous for University of Georgia football and birthing the “Athens sound” of legendary bands like R.E.M., the B-52s, and others.

Fans come looking for the kudzu-choked Georgia Railroad trestle that appeared on the cover of R.E.M.’s 1983 debut album *Murmur*. Another R.E.M. landmark is the steeple of the church where they first performed.

Landmarks like the 40 Watt Club and the Georgia Theatre are providing stages for rising artists. Other clubs and performance spaces have sprung up such as The Foundry, a circa 1850 mill where making music has replaced making iron.

Music is a big deal for the local economy. Statewide, seven cents of every dollar of domestic tourism spending went to entertainment and recreation, according to Hannah Smith, executive director of the Athens Convention & Visitors Bureau.

“Those are visitors, not our local residents,” says Smith. In the Athens region, “it is closer to eight cents of every dollar spent was on entertainment and recreation.”

Just for Athens-Clarke County, spending for entertainment and recreation was almost \$30 million in 2019.

The music scene in Athens doesn’t just have a past, but a vital present and future.

“We don’t have a ton of huge artists that are in the same realm as R.E.M., B-52s, the big bands,” says Troy Aubrey, a music promoter and founder of Aubrey Entertainment. “There are hundreds and hundreds of acts still producing music, recording, and bands starting to tour.”

And the music here is more diverse than just indie rock.

Athens has an active and growing hip-hop scene.

Along with a wealth of small clubs, Athens is also home to larger venues like The Classic Center and the University of Georgia Performing Arts Center.

The Classic Center is a “performing art theater,” says Philip Verrastro, executive vice president of entertainment and administration for the Classic Center Theatre. “Where some venues are more specialized, more focused on certain types of art, we do a little bit of everything.”

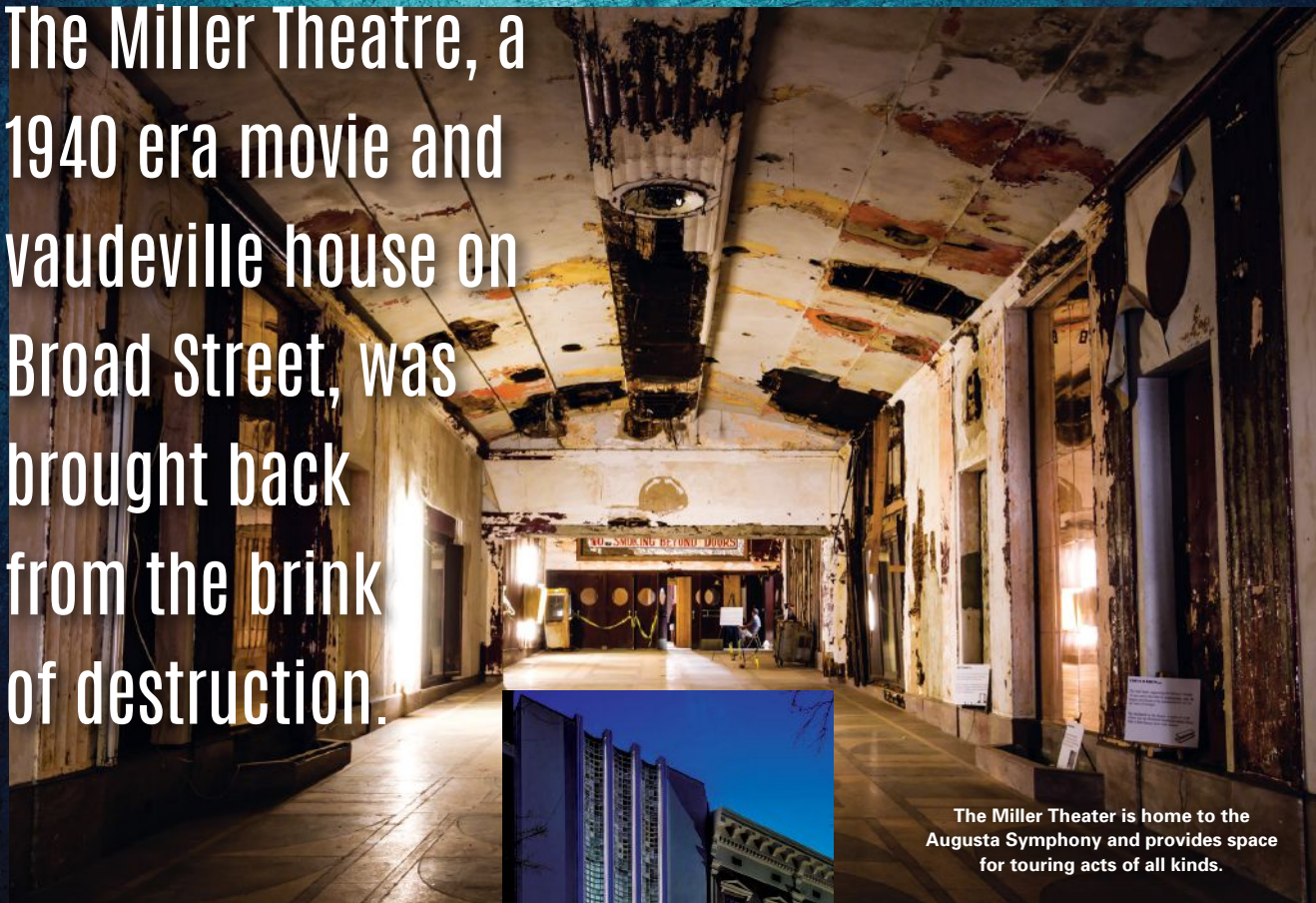
The Akins Ford Arena at The Classic Center can host concerts for up to 5,000 attendees. It’s also in the process of building a new 5,500-seat arena that will allow it to book about 125 new events annually

UGA’s Performing Arts Center is aimed at fulfilling

Augusta’s Jessye Norman Amphitheater honored one of the city’s great artists in a venue that is presenting new artists and music to the public.



The Miller Theatre, a 1940 era movie and vaudeville house on Broad Street, was brought back from the brink of destruction.



The Miller Theater is home to the Augusta Symphony and provides space for touring acts of all kinds.

the University's mission of expanding knowledge by bringing in more commercial classical and world music performers including the Danish String Quartet; Ranky Tanky, a Charleston based jazz band; Wynton Marsalis, and violinist Joshua Bell, according to the center's director, Jeff Martin.

The University supports the music industry with a music business certification within its Terry College of Business. The program attracts students who want to get into the music business at some level. While some are already playing and managing bands, others don't have a clear idea of where they can find a niche, according to David Barbe, a veteran musician and producer who directs the program.

As the music business has undergone its own transformation from physical discs to streaming, the opportunities to find employment have expanded.

"Information, media, music, it's all one thing now," explains Barbe. "Music is a huge part of TV or film or (video) gaming. The media world is one thing now; there's so much crossover."

When you say Augusta, music fans think of the legendary Godfather of Soul, James Brown. He lived, performed, and died here. The Augusta Museum of History has the country's largest exhibition of Brown-related artifacts and memorabilia.



Augusta also produced famed opera singer Jessye Norman and Lady A's country superstar Charles Kelley. Christian and pop performer Amy Grant was born here.

"It is such a rich heritage that just crosses so many different genres and types of music, but it still represents this community in such a wonderful way globally," says Bennish Brown, president and CEO of

Destination Augusta.

In this city, music venues are contributing to the revitalization of the city.

The Miller Theatre, a 1940-era movie and vaudeville house on Broad Street, was brought back from the brink of destruction and now is home to the Augusta Symphony Orchestra and a stop for touring acts.

Following a \$23 million renovation, the theatre is contributing to the renewed vitality of this section of downtown Augusta. Restaurants are opening to accommodate concert crowds and other venues along the thoroughfare, say locals.

Appropriately, a towering bronze statue of a smiling James Brown stands in the middle of Broad.

Brown's name is also affixed to the city's largest concert venue, the James Brown Arena. The 6500-seat former civic center is a stop for shows passing through the region looking



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December 31st



Christmas Parade ~ December 2nd

**Photos with The Grinch, Carriage Rides,
Marshmallow Roasting ~ December 9th**

**Photos with Santa, Carriage Rides,
Marshmallow Roasting ~ December 16th**

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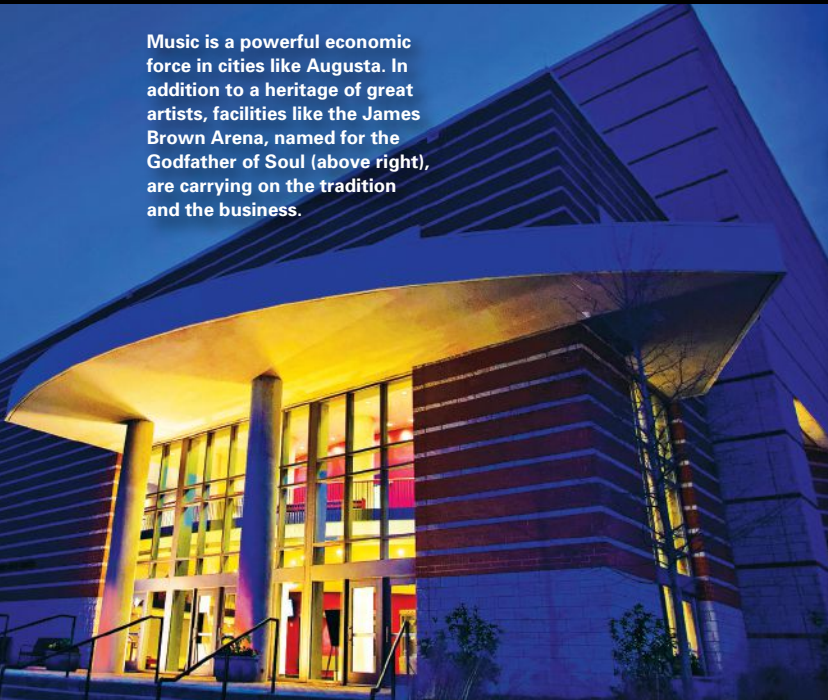


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Music is a powerful economic force in cities like Augusta. In addition to a heritage of great artists, facilities like the James Brown Arena, named for the Godfather of Soul (above right), are carrying on the tradition and the business.



Even if the industry can't always put a precise figure on its impact, music is clearly a major driver of the economy.

for mid-sized markets. The Bell Auditorium, a historic 2700-seat theater built in 1940, is also part of the Augusta Entertainment Complex, also in the downtown area.

"These are the two largest venues in the Augusta River region with three quarters of a million people," says General Manager Chris Bird. These venues drive shopping, dining, and hotel reservations as fans flock here from throughout this region of Georgia and South Carolina.

While there are no firm figures on how much the venues contribute to the local economy, the impact is well into the

"tens of millions of dollars," according to Bird.

Even if the industry can't always put a precise figure on its impact, music is clearly a major driver of the economy. This became obvious when the pandemic shut down venues and put millions of people out of work. Today, the venues are mostly open again, and the music engine is revving once more.

For more information on these music cities, visit the following websites: rockcandytours.com, maconga.org, maconmusictrail.com, visitaugusta.com, visitathensga.com, pac.uga.edu, capricorn.mercer.edu. and classiccenter.com. ■



FAIR & SQUARE

THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN

~ Story by Cheré Coen

When European settlers arrived in Georgia, they looked to develop communities as the population increased. Railroad lines and their corresponding depots created instant towns, but many times town founders built courthouses to instill justice within the county with retail businesses surrounding the building. These squares became the heart of the communities.

“In most cities, it was the courthouse or the railroad track that started it all,” says Laura Sullivan, City of Covington’s downtown coordinator.

There are many Georgia towns sporting unique town squares, some featuring historic courthouses dating to the early 1800s. Others contain fountains, gazebos, historic monuments, and statues. Today, these squares mainly draw tourists — and occasionally movie producers — with their charm.





Downtown Dahlonega



There are many Georgia towns sporting unique town squares, some featuring historic courthouses dating to the early 1800s.

Photo by Seeing Southern Photography



Historic Marietta Square

Covington

When Atlanta grew in popularity for film and TV production, Hollywood came searching for that quintessential town within easy proximity—a quaint community that could become the background town for any story. Covington fit the bill, with its historic square and a centerpiece courthouse



The square in Covington

sporting a dramatic clock tower. So many films and TV shows have filmed in Covington, it's now labeled The Hollywood of the South.

"It's vibrant," says DJ Waller, tourism coordinator for the City of Covington. "The square is very popular."

Covington is likely best known as the fictional Virginia town of Mystic Falls in the hit TV series, *Vampire Diaries*. Other TV shows that have used the now famous courthouse square include *In the Heat of the Night* and *The Dukes of Hazzard*. Some of the films that have used Covington as a location include *Sweet Home Alabama*, *Remember the Titans*, the remake of *Vacation* and Tyler Perry's *The Family That Preys*.

Because there are so many films and TV shows filmed here, visitors may choose between several guided tours of the filming locations. Covington's tourism website offers a list at discovercovingtonga.com.

For those wanting a weekend getaway, Waller recommends a night at The Twelve Oaks, a historic antebellum mansion turned bed and breakfast, that has served as a filming location for many projects. It is conveniently located right off the

square. As for dining advice, Waller couldn't commit.

"Every restaurant on the square is amazing," he says.

Monticello

Like many Georgia towns, Monticello dates to the early 1800s and offers a nod to an early American hero — Thomas Jefferson's Monticello estate in Virginia. Much of this Jasper County seat is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including its famous Neo-Classical courthouse with its hexagonal cupola clock tower.

It, much like the Covington square, gained world-wide attention when *My Cousin Vinny* came to town. Along with the iconic downtown square and its courthouse, the film ventured to the Ocmulgee River for road trip snacks at Sac-O-Suds.

Today, the historic square offers shops and restaurants.

Lawrenceville

Another impressive courthouse that's listed on the National Register of Historic Places stands proudly in the middle of Lawrenceville. Built in 1885, the current Gwinnett courthouse replaced the 1824 courthouse that was lost to fire, and replaced a poorly built one from 1872. Visitors can see remnants of that early fire on basement bricks.

When the McShane Bell Foundry bell rang from the courthouse belfry, it was said the sound could be heard for miles. The balcony on the West Crogan Street side allowed the bailiff to shout out, calling people due to court. On the land surrounding the courthouse is a small cemetery marking the burials of soldiers who died in the Creek Indian and Mexican wars, in addition to other historical markers.

Now known as the Gwinnett Historic Courthouse, the building is open for self-guided walking tours daily except Sundays and is used for weddings and other special events; brides use that balcony now to toss bouquets. The square surrounding the courthouse includes a variety of shops, restaurants, and the historic Aurora Theater.

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Cleveland

There's a town square surrounding Cleveland's White County History Museum, once used as the White County Courthouse. But, the historic building, consisting of handmade bricks and dating to 1859, rests inside an oval stretch of land.

Visitors to the museum, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, may learn more about White County and Cleveland, viewing artifacts from days gone by. The museum, operated by the White County Historical Society, is open Wednesdays through Sundays and admission is free.

Cleveland offers Christmas in the Mountains Celebration and Lighted Parade on December 4, and the festivities include the Holiday Market on the Cleveland Courthouse Square.

McDonough

Like other Georgia cities, McDonough's life began and still revolves around the Henry County Courthouse. This historic beauty, built in 1897 in a Romanesque Revival architecture style, still operates as a functioning judicial space. In fact, the outside may exude history, but its renovated interiors are modern.

The square offers wonderful retail bliss, including Story on the Square, an independent bookstore that features special author events and includes the Rough Draft, a wine and beer bar. Visitors may also pause at Queen Bee Coffee Co., view original artwork at the Hood Street Arts Center, or peruse antique stores. Special events happen regularly on the square, including the tenth anniversary Geranium Drop for New Year's Eve.

Dahlonega

The 1836 Old Lumpkin County Courthouse rests at the center of Dahlonega's quaint square, and today, it explains the story of the town's origins and development. The Cherokee first inhabited the land, but the area grew with European settlements after gold was discovered in the region, marking America's first gold rush. Visitors learn about both at the Dahlonega Gold Museum, located inside the old courthouse, which includes an informative film.

Surrounding the building are a variety of businesses



The square in McDonough

situated in Victorian buildings, which is why the Dahlonega Downtown District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The town's boutique shops and eclectic restaurants, plus annual festivals, attract thousands of visitors annually.

The Gold Museum is open daily by admission. The annual old fashioned Christmas celebration continues through December.

Marietta

Marietta remains a large city in the Atlanta metropolitan area, but visitors to its historic square will feel like they've stepped into small-town America. The centerpiece is a working



One of the most popular is Chippewa Square, where the bus stop scenes of *Forrest Gump* were filmed on its north side, including the bench that actor Tom Hanks sat on.

fountain inside a large park that also contains statues, band-stands and a train engine playground for kids. Boutiques, restaurants and historic buildings make up the square, and the historic depot overlooking the train tracks that created the town contains the welcome center.

There's lots of Civil War history in Marietta, including being part of the Great Locomotive Chase. The Kennesaw House is one of the few buildings that survived Sherman's March to the Sea and now houses the Marietta Museum of History.

The popular square hosts numerous festivals and special events throughout the year, plus a large farmers market on Saturdays.



Savannah

What's a story about Georgia town squares without mentioning Savannah, a city laid out with several squares? There are 22 park-like squares throughout the original city, and each are unique. Some contain fountains and gazebos; others present statues and historic monuments. Calhoun Square, for instance, contains a statue of Vice President John C. Calhoun in its center and is the only square surrounded by the original historic buildings. One of the most popular is Chippewa Square, where the bus stop scenes of *Forrest Gump* were filmed on its north side, including the bench that actor Tom Hanks sat on, which has since been moved to the Savannah History Museum. 📌

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Ushering in the New

~ Story by
Randy Southerland

Winder's downtown has developed a rich offering of one-of-a-kind shops and restaurants. In fact, it's become a destination for area foodies in search of unique cuisine.

*and
preserving
the past in
Barrow*



B

arrow County may be miles from the sprawl of Atlanta, but this fast-growing community is rapidly transitioning from rural to suburban, and it's getting a lot of attention.

People and businesses are moving into its charming small towns and lush countryside.

Even as late of 2010, Barrow was a predominately rural county with vast expanses of farmland. As the growth has expanded from Metro Atlanta, the rural area is increasingly giving way to development – both commercial and residential. Farms have been sold off by new

DEMOGRAPHICS

BARROW COUNTY

Barrow County Chamber of Commerce

Tommy Jennings, president
#6 Porter Street
Winder, Ga. 30680
770.867.9444
barrowchamber.com

By The Numbers

Land area (in square miles)
163

County Population

88,052 (2021)

Median Household Income

\$62,345

Municipalities

Auburn
Bethlehem
Braselton
Carl
Statham
Winder (county seat)

Historic Downtown Braselton has undergone a complete revitalization that is attracting a growing number of visitors in search of the main street town experience.



The City of Braselton is located in four different counties including Barrow. The home of Chateau Elan Winery & Resort, tourism is one of its largest industries.

generations no longer tied to the land.

The migration to Barrow has made it one of the ten fastest growing counties in the state.

“Most of the development occurred on projects that had been rezoned, started or infrastructure put in prior to the recession,” observes Barrow County Commission Chairman Pat Graham. “And then about three years ago, we exhausted all of the pre-approved rezoned, pre-developed residential lots. It was a natural cycle for the development community to come in and add more new development and proposed new development.”

Younger generations are discovering the pleasures and opportunities offered by Barrow. Millennials and those of Generation Z are finding their way here in search of bigger homes at lower prices. They are following a familiar pattern, according to Barrow County of Commerce President Tommy Jennings.

“We’re seeing a great surge in that age group moving our way,” says Jennings.

To meet those needs, developers are rushing to build new homes and subdivisions. He notes “every week, it seems like new developments



are being approved for housing, because obviously, statewide and even nationwide, there is a lack of housing.”

Central to development is Georgia Highway 316 (also known as University Parkway or the Innovation Corridor), which stretches from Atlanta to Athens.

“For quite a number of years, our growth has been focused on the Highway 316 corridor,” says Jennings. “Accessibility to the Atlanta area and to Athens and the University of Georgia has been the viaduct to growth here.”

Companies are increasingly looking at Barrow for expansion due to its proximity to Atlanta and its international airport, as well as “access to the workforce we’ve got,” says Lisa Maloof, executive director of the Barrow County Economic Development Department. “We’ve got about a million workers within a 45-mile drive to Barrow County. That puts us in a really good position.”

A recent example is Spring Mountain Center. The company is investing \$45 million in opening a manufacturing and distribution headquarters that will be located at Park 53 Industrial and Technology Complex in Winder. The 275,000-square-foot facility will mean 205 new



Photos by Christina Barnett

Unique dining is one of the factors that make Winder and Barrow County a destination for a growing number of young couples and families.

jobs in the community.

The company sells home and lifestyle products to customers across the world through their global distribution partners. As a core manufacturer for many top U.S. brands including Kohler, their products have been among the bestsellers for The Home Depot, Wayfair, and other major retail outlets for the past decade.

Companies like Park 53 are part of the Georgia Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) sites program. GRAD certified means the park has all the assets – from zoning to environmental assessment to infrastructure – needed for development.

Another driving factor for Barrow is that economic expansion doesn’t recognize political boundaries. Just across the



The historic city of Statham is known for its many antique shops.

As the growth has expanded from Metro Atlanta, the rural area is increasingly giving way to development – both commercial and residential.

line in Gwinnett County, a major medical, environmental and agricultural mixed-use research park is taking shape.

The nearly 2,000-acre development, known as Rowen, will be located along more than two miles of State Route 316 and is expected to rival Research Triangle Park in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, and Tech Square in Atlanta.

“Once the development gets going, I could see a large amount of spillover into western Barrow County, and it may even proceed all across the county from there,” observes County Manager Kevin Little of the sprawling development.

Some of the greatest changes are taking place in the county’s towns and cities. Multiple municipalities offer a wealth of ambience that gives each community its unique appeal and charm.

Following a major streetscape and facelift in 2014, downtown Winder (county seat) has undergone a rebirth. New shops and a diverse offering of new restaurants has made the city a foodie destination. From bistros to Cajun and Mexican cuisine to speakeasies and rooftop bars, there’s something

for every taste, and the word is getting around.

People are not only visiting; they’re staying. The residential area known as Old Town is attracting new residents.

“A lot of the millennials and Gen Zs are moving into Old Town Winder, and they are renovating some of the older houses and turning those neighborhoods into a young up-and-coming area,” says Jennings. “The new restaurants are a great attraction for those folks living in the neighborhoods. They’re able to walk to downtown and enjoy the evenings there in Winder.

Situated along I-85, Braselton is one of those unique cities located in four different counties including Barrow. The home of Chateau Elan Winery & Resort, it has been attracting a flood of new residents and businesses.

The town has three “very distinct commercial centers,” according to Town Manager Jennifer Scott. Over the last 15 years, the historic downtown has undergone a complete revitalization, and once empty storefronts are filled with “new, unique, locally-owned businesses and restaurants.”



Lisa Maloof (left), executive director of the Barrow County Economic Development Department, and Tommy Jennings, president of the Barrow County Chamber of Commerce, discuss Park 53 Industrial and Technology Complex in Winder. This industrial park is getting a lot of attention from companies seeking to relocate to the county.

Photo by Christina Barnett

The second is anchored by Chateau Elan and is the center for the area's tourism industry with hotels, retail and dining options.

Western Braselton has also become a center of traditional commercial activity.

The City of Auburn is building a mixed-use development on 15 acres in the downtown district that will include a city hall and police department headquarters, along with a mix of commercial, retail and residential called Harmony.

"That will be one end, and then the other will be our historic downtown," says Mayor Linda Blechinger. The Downtown Development Authority is in the process of finding developers for the old city facilities once they are vacated.

Auburn has also launched a program to encourage small business growth and startup. The Auburn Whistle Stop Shops is a collection of 11 storefronts, most measuring less than 100 square feet. For budding entrepreneurs, it's a way to start selling their products without the prohibitive investment required for a larger store.

Historic Statham has garnered a reputation as a prime source for antiques. You can shop along the main street as well as in the old converted apparel manufacturing plant.

Throughout Barrow, change and transformation is taking place. For long timers as well as newcomers, the idea is to preserve the best of the old while welcoming the new. 📍



(Above) Winder's Smokey Gringo is a BBQ taqueria and one of Winder's newest unique downtown restaurants. (Below) Barrow also has its share of national retailers offering shoppers everything they need. Several can be found along Highway 316 in Bethlehem.



Auburn's Whistle Stop Shops offer startup entrepreneurs a way to open their own store without a large upfront capital investment.

Photos (above and left) by Christina Barnett

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Q&A

Homegrown

TOMMY JENNINGS



Tommy Jennings

For those that know Tommy Jennings, president and chief executive officer of the Barrow County Chamber of Commerce, the revelation that conversations with his grandson and goats trump every vacation in the history of the Jennings family isn't a stretch. It's his family that propels everything he does as a community leader, piloting Barrow County toward expansion and improvement.

With every move he makes, Jennings remains centered in his values which allows him to be dedicated to his family and community. Get to know Tommy Jennings, the man who measures his successes by the moments that change lives.

GaC: Where were you born and what brought you back?

TJ: I was born in Winder and grew up there in the 60s and 70s, until work moved me to Dallas, Texas, in 1977. I lived there until 1981, when I returned to our family-owned manufacturing company in Winder and have lived here since that time.

GaC: Tell readers about your family.

TJ: I am at least the fourth generation growing up and living in Winder. My great, great grandfather Woodruff had seven sons, all who were entrepreneurs. My grandmother Vallie Woodruff Jennings married William Jennings, Sr., and started a manufacturing company (Barrow Manufacturing Company) in Statham. Then they moved it to Winder. My father, then my brother, Don and I all worked in the family business.

Our father, Bill, passed away in 1999, and our mother, Edna, passed in 2004. Don and I sold the biggest division in 2005 and decided to cease operations on the balance of the business in 2005.

I grew up in the Winder First Methodist, and then Winder First United Methodist Church, where I still attend. I am active in the chancel choir with Winder FUMC, and I am one of the church liturgists. I attended Winder-Barrow High School and the University of Georgia. My wife Danette and I have been married over 45 years, and we look forward to celebrating a special anniversary in the coming years. We have two sons, Jon and Will. Jon is married and living in Hoschton and has two sons, Davey and Casey.



Jennings is an advocate for all things Barrow.

known. Several years ago, Fort Yargo State Park would have been defined as unknown. Today, however, it is one of the top three most visited state parks in Georgia.

Downtown Winder shopping and dining would have been called unknown (but it wouldn't have been called a gem) 10 years ago. But it is now not only a gem of a location for foodies but also very well known.

One fairly unknown gem in Barrow is the Whistlestop Shops in downtown Auburn. These eleven tiny storefronts, just off the town green, are the first step for entrepreneurs looking to go from their basements to a store front. There are a variety of choices and selections of different and unique shops, including bakeries, clothing designers, artwork, and various

others from which to choose.

GaC: Three words that describe you and why.

TJ: *Optimistic.* I see little need to view life with a dark cloud over my head. I look for the best in people, situations, and ideas. My glass is never half full; it's totally full.

Honest. I want there to never be a question about anything that is done here at the Barrow chamber. I am upfront with my leadership, and while I enjoy spreading good news, I want bad news to travel faster.

Dedicated. I am dedicated to my God, my family, my job, and my community and in that order. My decisions are based on considerations of each of them.

Photo by Christina Barnett

Will is married and living in Brookhaven and has one son, Hayden.

GaC: What is the most challenging aspect about what you do?

TJ: We are busy. The Barrow Chamber of Commerce always has something going on. We continually have activities to benefit our business and community membership. Whether it's informative luncheons, activities for networking such as Network Barrow and Business After Hours, events such as the annual golf tournament, and the annual dinner, designed to recognize the best of Barrow County, and ribbon-cuttings for new members and businesses, there's always something happening. We have a pause in the summer, but from September through the next June, we are continually on the move.

GaC: What is your greatest achievement?

TJ: My family. My wife Danette makes me who I am. She keeps me centered. My sons and my grandsons are my enjoyment and pleasure. Whatever I have accomplished in my work environment pales in comparison to my family.

GaC: What is the most important goal you have in relation to Barrow County? Where do you see your community in five years?

TJ: Barrow County is like a glacier – always on the move; nothing will stop it. My goal for Barrow is increased prosperity. As more people move to Barrow, more commerce is conducted. With more people comes increased opportunities for jobs and increased opportunities for wealth creation and wealth expansion. I look for Barrow to be a place where prosperity lives. In five years, continued growth and continued prosperity will compound upon itself.

GaC: Share with us an unknown gem in your area.

TJ: I struggled with this because most of our gems are



Jennings and his wife Danette created a partnership that has provided a solid foundation for their large family.




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GaC: What do you do in your spare time?

TJ: When my wife Danette allows me, I enjoy playing golf. Actually, I enjoy the competition and camaraderie of my fellow golfers and friends; golf is just the vehicle in which we gather, harass, giggle, and generally act like kids, while still accomplishing a goal of a good score.

I also enjoy fall seasons when the Dawgs play. I've been a season-ticket holder for over 45 years and continue to enjoy the games. And I enjoy travelling the mountains with Danette. We usually end up in one of the North Georgia Mountain wineries. Yonah Mountain Winery is our favorite for just sitting, visiting and sampling a variety of Yonah's creations.

GaC: What is the best family vacation you have ever been on?

TJ: For me, any family vacation can be classified as the best. But one that sticks out is a one-day road trip with only me and my seven-year-old grandson Hayden. We left Winder, headed for the mountains and Clayton.

Along the way we experienced many views, unencumbered by modern technology, as he ditched the iPad, sat up straight in his car seat, and looked outside. And



talked. And talked some more. And saw things and talked some more. We stopped at Tallulah Gorge to look out over the great gorge and saw where Karl Wallenda walked. He peered over towards the edge of the cliff, and then, slowly, started backing away. I think he felt butterflies.

From there we went towards Clayton, only to be sidetracked at Goats on the Roof, for an intimate conversation with several goats and kids (the baby goat kind), sampling different ice creams, hand-made right there, and buying the one extravagance – a wooden rifle that shot double-barrel rubber bands. What fun he had with a \$9 toy.

Then, we went to our five-wheel camper at Turner's Corner, sitting by the Chestatee River, where he learned to skip a rock on the top of the water. We also see-sawed, swung on a tire, and stuck our feet in the cold water of the river. Our trip back home that day was a continuation of non-stop conversation, seeing things along the route home that he'd never have seen if he had an iPad in his hand. Now that, my friends, was the best family vacation.

GaC: What is your definition of success?

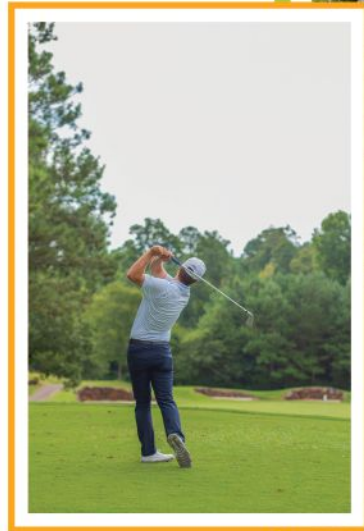
TJ: Success is seeing what I've helped build go forward on its own. Whether it's my children, two sons now married with successful jobs and wonderful children of their own; the chamber, which has had some rough patches financially through the years, now in a much stronger position; or my relationship with my wife, which took two to build, I am now enjoying the fruits of that work.

I'm not worried about success as a financial goal or measuring stick. To me, success is the satisfaction of seeing what I'm doing and what I've done mean something.

So there. 🐶

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Everything is **Better** *in Metter*



Scoops Ice Cream shop is one of a growing number of restaurants and stores filling downtown Metter.

~ Story by **Randy Southerland**

For many driving down Interstate 16 through eastern Georgia toward the coast, the Metter exit is a rest and refueling stop. The Welcome Center, housed in a 1928 lumber commissary on a reflective lake filled with lilies and edged with moss-draped trees, beckons.

For those inspired to travel a little further down a tree-lined parkway to the downtown, they find much more. Metter is a bustling community in Candler County that has developed a national and even international reputation as a progressive home of

business and industry.

Its commitment to progress is reflected in the city's decision to become the first community to embrace the state's Georgia Grown program that promotes the state's agricultural industry.

"Agriculture is the largest industry in Georgia and here in Metter as well," says Heidi Jeffers, the city's economic development director.

Georgia Grown products are stocked at the welcome center, and you can find them prominently displayed throughout the town.

The city offers programs and incentives to help showcase agriculture, food, and retail businesses



Visitors seeking ample helpings of small town charm along with a vibrant downtown have discovered Metter. This small southeast Georgia city is a destination for the region.

that are Georgia Grown and Metter Made.

The local economy is driven by agriculture, both farming and the ancillary businesses that support the farm economy like equipment dealers and farm supply stores. Metter has two cotton gins and a fertilizer store that offers soil testing to ensure farmers are getting just the right mix of nutrients for their particular needs.

Production agriculture fuels the economy of Candler County to the tune of \$47 million per year. Annually, its producers grow approximately 25,000 acres of row crops including cotton, corn, peanuts, and soybeans, according to the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service.

Metter has done more than just promote its existing businesses. It has partnered with Georgia Grown and Georgia Southern University's Business Innovation Group to create the Georgia Grown Innovation Center (GGIC), a unique business incubator that focuses on agriculture.

Thirty startups have joined in the business growth



The historic welcome center is the first introduction for visitors.



The chapel at Guido Gardens

Guido Gardens

A seed from the sower

Metter may be best known as the home of the radio and TV ministry, *The Sower* with Michael Guido. He delivered short evangelical PSAs on late-night television nationwide for decades.

Most of Dr. Guido's messages were filmed at Guido Gardens, which houses a public botanical garden and a school of ministry. Although the evangelist died in 2009 at the age of 94, his legacy remains.

Visitors are treated to a green meditative garden of waterfalls, babbling brooks, music, and a prayer chapel.

The gardens are the site of an annual Christmas lighting display. Visitors can even get out of their cars and walk through the expanse of holiday lights.

The garden is open 24 hours a day year-round. For more information, visit sowerministries.org.

by creating more than 70 new jobs and more than \$1 million in capital investment.

"We're growing and adding more clients to our base," says Metter City Manager Carter Crawford. "Our clients are spread out across the state as far as Cleveland, Georgia, and we even have two clients in Canada."

While some members are virtual, others have located in Metter bringing an added boost to the local economy.

In addition to fully furnished office space, member companies have access to coaching, market research, mentoring, networking events, workshops, technical support and other resources provided by Georgia Southern's business school.

One client is the 920 Cattle & Company. It provides fresh-from-the-farm meats, hand butchered, on-site at the company's family-owned butcher house.

"They are in the process of remodeling a facility for their packing and retail sales," says Crawford. They also plan to lease grazing land in the county as well.

The facility's location close to the interstate will allow the company to

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Heartland





Guido Gardens provide visitors with both the beauty and meditative quiet of its lush natural surroundings.

“People are looking for a different experience. They’re looking for a small-town experience in which they can walk through town, dine at a restaurant, buy a gift, and play in the park with their kids.”

host a series of culinary events.

Better Fresh Farms is a family owned and operated hydroponic farm.

Agripreneurs assist socially disadvantaged veterans, new farmers, and ranchers connecting them with the resources they need to develop a successful farm operation.

Another developing startup is Stateside Microgreen, which produces organic vegetables using an advanced hydroponic growing system.

“(The company) is using Georgia Grown to develop their products, and they are also using Georgia Southern for the design of their equipment,” explains Crawford.

Metter’s downtown has undergone a renaissance. Buildings have been renovated and are now filled with shops, restaurants, and other retailers.

The revival has been spurred by “building owners who are willing to make the investment for getting everything up to date and making the outside of the buildings more

upscale,” explains Victoria Gaitten, executive director of the Metter-Candler Chamber of Commerce. “And people are more willing to invest in opening up a business inside a building that has been renovated.”


Metter is part of a trend toward downtown revivals that are increasingly attracting locals and visitors.

“People are looking for a different experience,” says Jeffers. “They’re looking for a small-town experience in which they can walk through town, dine at a restaurant, buy a gift, and play in the park with their kids.”

A key to Metter’s success in attracting new business has been attention to infrastructure. Unlike many rural areas, Candler County has deployed broadband countywide thanks to the local telecommunications provider Pineland Telephone Co-Op Inc.

Technology has enabled businesses to locate here and even to be operated from a distance. When the owner of a local startup couldn’t return from his native Australia during the pandemic, he was able to communicate and run the company from half-way around the world, according to Crawford.

There is no shortage of things to do in Metter and Candler County. One of the biggest events of the year is Another Bloomin’ Festival, an arts and crafts festival held the day before Easter. The festival draws more than 15,000 visitors for festivities that include homemade desserts, barbecue, and crafts. In addition, it serves as a homecoming celebration for former residents who return to celebrate the holiday with their families.

Local officials will tell you that “things are better in Metter.” For many this slogan is proving to be a way of life. For more information, visit metter-candler.com. 





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Fore!

Playing it through at state parks



~ Story by Pamela A. Keene

Jack Hill State Park, Reidsville

Don't underestimate the challenges of golf courses at Georgia's state parks. Whether you choose play in the mountains or the Piedmont, these public courses are picturesque, relaxed and affordable.

"You'll find challenging golf year-round at eight Georgia state parks," says Kim Hatcher, public affairs coordinator for Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites. "We often hear from players how much they appreciate the quality of our courses and affordable rates."

An added bonus—all offer accommodations, from lodges and cabins to RV hook-ups and camper/tent sites. They

are surrounded by forests, recreating a resort-like setting without residences lining the fairways. Some are located on lakes or with mountain backdrops.

"Georgia state park courses have been called the sweetest deals in golf," Hatcher says. "Because of our state's diverse and varied terrain, these courses give players many choices." Interesting enough, when Meadow Links at George T. Bagby opened in 1998, it was ranked as the nation's sixth-best new affordable public course. Today, three are listed in the top 25 of the 2021 Best of Georgia Golf Courses Golfer's Choice Award: Arrowhead Point Golf Course (Richard B. Russell State Park); Meadow Links Golf Course (George T. Bagby

State Park); and, Highland Walk Golf Course (Victoria Bryant State Park).

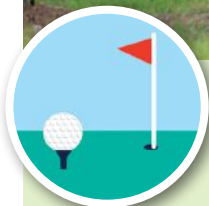
“Being included on this high-profile list with other private and high-end courses is quite an honor,” she says. “It says volumes about the level of play, the condition of the courses, and the value for golfers of all levels.”

Georgian Denis Griffith designed several of the courses, including Brazell’s Creek Golf Course at Jack Hill and Georgia Veterans Memorial Golf Course at Lake Blackshear. Steve Burnes designed The Lakes at Laura S. Walker, which features three lakes and native sand in the bunkers.

Several of the state park courses are part of the Georgia Golf and Travel Trail, including Arrowhead Pointe, Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa (located on Georgia State Park property), Highland Walk, Lake Blackshear, Little Ocmulgee, Meadow Links, The Creek at Hard Labor and The Lakes.

“The golf courses at Georgia state parks are the hidden gems of golf in our state,” says Doug Hollandsworth, founder of Georgia Golf and Travel Trail. “From the location and the scenery to the upkeep, and from the top of the state all the way south, they have given golfers plenty of reasons to play them.”

Little Ocmulgee State Park and Lodge, McRae



Georgia State Park Golf Courses

Plan your tee time

- **Arrowhead Pointe at Richard B. Russell State Park, Elberton**
- **Brazell's Creek at Jack Hill State Park, Reidsville**
- **Georgia Veterans Memorial at Lake Blackshear at Veterans Memorial State Park, Cordele**
- **Highland Walk at Victoria Bryant State Park, Royston**
- **Meadow Links at George T. Bagby State Park, Fort Gaines**
- **The Creek at Hard Labor Creek State Park, Rutledge**
- **The Lakes at Laura S. Walker State Park, Waycross**
- **Wallace Adams at Little Ocmulgee Lodge and State Park, McRae**



Jack Hill State Park, Reidsville



Hard Labor Creek State Park, Rutledge

State park attendance has increased significantly since the pandemic, and Hollandsworth says that this increase has been good for golf and the courses at state parks.

“Not only can people play these courses that are close to home but also they have excellent choices to turn a golf outing into a travel opportunity,” he says. “The state parks have all kinds of choices for overnight stays and we’ve been putting together some golf packages with them.


“Besides, once you’ve played golf for four-or-five hours, there are so many other things to do nearby, so why not stay and have fun?”

Park courses periodically offer special pricing and promotions. Other have league play. Golf passes are \$35 plus tax and can be purchased at any state golf course. Benefits

include discounts at specific parks for lodging, restaurants, cart and green fees.

“We also offer membership cards with varying benefits at select courses,” Hatcher says. “Our pros are experienced with helping organize tournaments and club outings, as well as classes.”

Tee times can be arranged online by visiting gastateparks.org/golfing. The site also lists golf packages at each course; costs vary. Some include overnight stays and other extras, depending on the park.

Choose a location close to home for a quick round during the week, or make it a golfing weekend with the family or friends. From North Georgia to its southern tip, there’s a state park offering amenities perfect for your outing. 



Richard B. Russell State Park, Elberton



Victoria Bryant State Park, Royston

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CITY OF LOGANVILLE *events*





~ Story by **Tifanie Bean Ring**

Christmas is coming; the season is approaching. The stores are decorated, and the shopping carts are filled with gifts. Christmas parties and events are scheduled, and family gatherings are being planned. But with all of the busyness of the season, don't forget to put on the calendar a Christmas date night with the one you love.

There's no better place to plan a Christmas date night than the community one lives in, because it's close to home and helps support local businesses and restaurants. There are many local options for the perfect Christmas date night.

Braselton begins their season at their annual holiday parade and Christmas tree lighting. The parade begins at 10 a.m., but a date night option is to start the evening at the lighting of the Christmas tree in downtown Braselton.

After the lighting, continue to FernGully Garden and Gifts



Spend some alone
time with your
favorite person this
holiday season.

for a stroll through their enchanted garden of Christmas trees and a chance to find a unique gift. Hilary Halstead, FernGully's administrative assistant, says there are fire pits in case it's time to warm up after the tree lighting.

"Our winter garden is a charming oasis in downtown Braselton. It's more of a destination than a shop. There are [Christmas] lights everywhere," she says. "The employees make you feel welcome and are so helpful. It's a great spot to buy local gifts."

Have dinner at Jack's Local Station, a charming restaurant with outdoor seating, and then finish the night at Braselton Brewing Company for a pint or two.

Nearby, Winder's downtown thrives with shoppers and restaurant-goers all year, but at Christmastime, it's even more cheerful and lively. Its light displays add to the Christmassy feel and welcomes the young and old alike. For date night, try Bistro Off Broad for dinner. Its farm-to-table cuisine is delicious, and their gorgeous bar is perfect for

enjoying cocktails.

After dinner, drive to Winder's Innovation Amphitheater for their Capital City Express Orchestra Christmas at 8 p.m. on November 19th. The concert features a live orchestra playing yuletide favorites. There will be Christmas festivities on site and heaters scattered around the theater to stay warm.

Nancy Golden, the theater's CFO, believes this event is a great kick off to the season and perfect for couples.

"Bring some hot chocolate and a blanket. [The theater] is very intimate and an absolutely beautiful environment. The atmosphere is so pleasant," she states. "It'll be a very nice night out in Winder under the stars. It sounds like a great date night to me."

Golden specially arranged for a date night discount code: buy two tickets, receive two tickets free. Use code GACCN.

Keep downtown Monroe on the list of potential Christmas date nights, too. During the holiday season, visit downtown shops by candlelight on Thursday evenings from 5 - 8 p.m.. While there, cuddle up by a bonfire and

Take advantage of the cooler weather to cuddle up and explore all the outdoor activities in your local communities.



Whether it's enchanting lights, a Christmas play, or an orchestral performance, there's plenty of Christmas date-night options nearby to suit any preference.



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roast marshmallows together. Enjoy dinner at Amici Monroe Pizzeria or have a beer at Southern Brewing's Tap Room.

Downtown Monroe has its own community theater, On Stage Playhouse. It's celebrating its fiftieth season and is presenting *The Christmas Window* this holiday. Shows run December 3-19, and begin at 8 p.m.

Marc Hammes, On Stage Artistic Director, thinks dinner and *The Christmas Window* pair together for a very memorable date night.

"There's Monroe's Christmas parade, a live nativity scene, carriage rides through downtown. It feels like you've stepped into a movie set or a Norman Rockwell painting," Hammes says. "There's unique restaurants and shopping downtown. Come to downtown Monroe to shop, catch a bite to eat, relax in one of the restaurants, and then come see a show."

The Christmas Window is an original play written by Johnny Griffith, who is a teacher at George Walton Academy." Hammes continues. "It has some comedy to it, and it has some romance to it. To me, it has all the feel goods of a Christmas show. It's reminding you of what Christmas is about and reminding you of your loved ones. It's like a Hallmark movie."

The State Botanical Garden of Georgia's Winter WonderLights at the Garden in Athens would fit right into a holiday movie plot. Hold hands while walking the half-mile path through the garden of fanciful lights and displays. This is WonderLights inaugural season and is hosted by the University of Georgia. Tickets are \$15 each.


Michele Turner, University of Georgia's director of donor relations at the Georgia Museum of Art, is a long-term Athens resident and member of the garden. She's looking forward to strolling through WonderLights and experiencing the magic.

"It's always wonderful to support an institution like the botanical gardens, which is under the umbrella of the University of Georgia," states Turner. "It's a great way to support their program. They do a lot of free programs and tours for children and young adults. The garden is free to attend, so these types of fundraisers help them do their work and keep the garden free."

Turner thinks WonderLights is a great idea for a Christmas date night and suggests dinner at one of her favorite restaurants The Last Resort in downtown Athens.

"Lights are very romantic. It's a great way to work on your holiday Christmas list while you're enjoying it, and it incentivizes you to,

hopefully, visit the garden in the spring and summer when everything is blooming," she recommends. "The Last Resort could be fun, because they have in their new garden space individual greenhouses, so you're staying in that theme of an outdoor garden with the botanical gardens but you're having a nice, cozy dinner in a greenhouse downtown."

Whether it's enchanting lights, a Christmas play, or an orchestral performance, there's plenty of Christmas date-night options nearby to suit any preference. So, make a plan to celebrate with those you adore, stay local, and cozy up by the fire for a memorable time together this season. 



Get in the holiday spirit by attending a show at the neighborhood community theatre.



Stepping OUT

Going solo



SAM Shortline Railroad

~ Story by **Pamela A. Keene**

When you're traveling solo, destinations can seem daunting. But not so, especially in Georgia, where state parks, small towns, and friendly folks are always nearby.

These destinations are great for group travel, but keep in mind that many locales cater to the independent traveler offering special pricing as well as unique excursions. Not only is solo travel a chance to set your own pace or explore on your own without having to please anyone else but also a chance to pamper yourself and scout new places to take friends and family.

Solo stops in the north

North Georgia's Cartersville offers two of the nation's top museums: The Booth Museum of Western Art and Tellus

Science Museum. Both are perfect for immersing yourself in an afternoon of meandering through these world-class museums. And on tap is the third Smithsonian affiliate opening soon: Savoy Automobile Museum.

Downtown Cartersville's dining options are diverse. From meat-and-three Southern diner classics and 4 Way Lunch to gourmet meals at Table 20 owned by Chef Chris Lyons, there's no shortage of good food.

Choose from a wide selection of lodging, from the luxurious Barnsley Resort with charming modern English village cottages and the Inn at Barnsley Resort to lakeside cottages and cabins at Red Top Mountain State Park, or cottages at Holiday Harbor Marina. For pampering, Barnsley's spa offers massages, facials and relaxation sessions.

In the Classic City of Athens, ATH/BNB The Rushmore boutique bed and breakfast in Five Points offers finely



Cumberland Island



Solo along the Georgia coast

appointed guest rooms in a 100-year-old home. Once you park your car, you can meander the tree-lined streets to visit museums, art galleries like the Georgia Museum of Art, and restaurants. Breakfast, different every day, is included.

A great restaurant that makes dining solo is 5 & 10 located on Milledge Avenue. Enjoy the walkable downtown and make a stop at The Place on East Broad Street and have a nightcap at the rooftop bar at Georgia Theatre. Plan ahead and take in a show at the Georgia Theatre that has been a YMCA, a theatre and a Methodist church. And for that late night munchie, The Grill on College Avenue will satisfy cravings. Start the day with breakfast at Mama's Boy.

Consider state parks

Georgia State Parks are a good resource. As diverse as Georgia itself, you can pick locations in the mountains, by

the sea, along a river or out in the woods. Check out tall, cascading waterfalls throughout North Georgia, a train ride on the SAM Shortline to visit the boyhood home of former President Jimmy Carter, and wild horses on Cumberland Island. They're all part of the Georgia State Park network of nearly 65 state parks and historic sites.

Cloudland Canyon in Rising Fawn offers 12 comfortable cabins with furnished kitchens. The smallest is a two-bedroom but think of indulging yourself over the weekend by sleeping one night in each bedroom and not having to make the bed or change the sheets. Cook what you want, from steaks and burgers to fresh seafood, and eating anytime you want.

Plan to hike down the 600 metal steps to the base of the park's Hemlock and Cherokee Falls. When you're by yourself, you can go at your own pace, stopping to take photos or simply to catch your breath. After all, you aren't

Not only is solo travel a chance to set your own pace or explore your own without but also a chance to pamper yourself and scout new places to take friends and family.



Cloudland Overlook



Red Top Mountain Cabin



Cumberland Museum



Red Top Mountain campsite

on a schedule. Visit nearby attractions with the park as your home base, including Chattanooga's Aquarium, Lookout Mountain, and Rock City.

The presidential route and the coast

Book a ride on the SAM Shortline, with air-conditioned 1949 vintage train cars and explore South Georgia. Routes include a trip to Jimmy Carter's boyhood home in Plains, along with a chance to explore downtown Plains' shopping and historic sites.

The SAM Shortline features various routes, but you can also drive to nearby Andersonville National Cemetery and the St. EOM's Pasaquan Museum and Preservation Site, a tribute to folk artist Eddie Owens Martin near Buena Vista.


Nearby Americus offers the restored Ryland Theatre and the Best Western Plus the Windsor Hotel, an elegant five-story, 120-year-old historic hotel now restored to its former glory days from the 1890s.

If the sand and sea are more appealing, take a trip to Georgia's coast to Cumberland Island National Seashore. Home to a herd of wild horses, the island is managed by the National Park Service. St. Mary's, the gateway to Cumberland Island, offers a quaint seaside community where the people are friendly and the lifestyle is laid back. Two downtown bed and breakfast inns – The Spencer House and Goodbread House – provide a homebase for exploring the area.

The 45-minute ferry to Cumberland Island offers access the walking trails or, if you take the 9 a.m. ferry, you can

experience the 5-to-6 hour motorized Lands & Legacy Van Tour past island historic sites. Taking a tour offers a chance to meet new people, if you want to, or simply enjoy the scenery, history and culture of this protected barrier island.

Make it an adventure and stay on the island at Greyfield Inn. Built by the Carnegies in the last 1800s, its luxurious style remains true to history while offering modern conveniences. Overnight rates are all-inclusive including transportation to the island plus adventures.

Follow the coastline north to Savannah and Tybee Island, making stops at Jekyll or St Simons Islands along the route. Stop for lunch in Darien at Skipper's Seafood or B & J's Steak and Seafood. Fort Morris State Historic Site in Sunbury is the perfect way to cap off the afternoon. 

Tips for Your Adventure

If you want to travel solo, here are some tips:



Select a site where other people will be around, such as a state or national park close to home.

Or journey to a nearby small town with an attraction or two, a museum or garden, plus boutique shops and smaller specialty restaurants.

- Consider building your trip around a special event, museum exhibition or festival. Good choices include LaGrange, Dahlonega, Macon, Greensboro or Warm Springs.

- Pack some of your favorite foods and treats to enjoy.

- Before you leave, notify a friend or family member of your plans and schedule. That way, you'll have someone aware of your trip for safety's sake; advise this person about any scheduling changes.

- Plan at least one or two specific activities to get you going each day and make a commitment to a friend that you'll share your explorations when you get home.

- When you check in, provide an emergency contact for the staff.

- If you're eating out, select a low-key restaurant that serves one of your favorites, and take the time to enjoy your meals, every bite, without rushing.

- Make photos with your phone and consider posting a few after you get home.

- Make a resolution for the coming year to step out of your comfort zone and experience something new. Living in Georgia offers a world of choices.

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Steamed mussels are popular menu items at Jekyll Brewing in Alpharetta.



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~ *A Moveable Feast*, Ernest Hemingway



~ *Story by* **Doc Lawrence**

Donna Bostick, a genuine Georgia girl, regularly teams up with friends to go fishing. The Stone Mountain resident has been fishing Georgia's lakes and streams since childhood, mastering the skills of catching and cleaning with cooking. "Fresh," she declares, means "cooking what you've caught." Her companions attest to her expertise.

Coastal Georgia and the state's creeks, rivers and lakes offer shrimp and oysters, bass, bream, crappie, perch, walleye, redfish, flounder, and clams throughout the year. Is there a more delicate and delicious fish than Georgia mountain trout? Ask a chef.

The shrimp boats at Darien and other coastal venues stand ready to meet the demand for highly-prized wild-caught Georgia shrimp. Clams are not exclusively New England products. Atlanta's Lyla Lila, selected by *The New York Times* as one of America's top new restaurants, serves treasured Sapelo Island clams, found just off Georgia's beautiful coast.

Dr. Patrick J. Holladay lives on St. Simons Island. His wife Elizabeth grew up on St. Catherines Island in Liberty County. Their interests focus on sustainability, tourism, food security, and natural resources.

Coastal Georgia and the state's creeks, rivers and lakes offer shrimp and oysters, bass, bream, crappie, perch, walleye, redfish, flounder, and clams throughout the year.



Donna Bostick's just-caught fish on the way to her skillet

"We are big advocates for local seafood," he says. "Mullet tastes best when caught close to home, fried up fresh, and served with grits for breakfast."

Holladay is a man on a mission. "If you really want to bring someone around to your point of view, feed them local shrimp, wild blackberries, or amazing vegetables from the local farmers market. Local, seasonal, and poison-free are not only tastier but also better for us and the planet, too."


Ted Varno's popular Hook Line & Schooner Seafood Restaurant in Vinings sources grouper, mahi mahi, snapper, live oysters and plump scallops from Atlantic and Gulf waters. Chowders, she-crab soup, and baked oysters are menu favorites. Lagniappe On The Bayou: it's a good place to spot sports and movie celebrities .

City Market Packing House is located right on the Brunswick River. Local shrimp is popular. Crews work the Brunswick docks daily to unload boats filled with the Southern staple. They also sell fresh flounder, snapper, grouper, trout, oysters, and scallops.

Anchored Shrimp in Brunswick is the largest distributor of Wild Caught Georgia Shrimp in the state. Both City Market

and Anchored Shrimp only buy from local fishermen and the fleet in Darien. Anchored Shrimp even has its own shrimp boat docked with the Darien fleet. There are three oyster businesses in McIntosh County. One, E.L. McIntosh & Son Seafood, is an African-American father and son team operating around Harris Neck.

The Fish Dock restaurant in Darien doubles as a shellfish processor. Clams and oysters are placed on a conveyor belt into the processing area, entertaining diners watching through glass windows.

Eating is good along Georgia's waters. 



Fresh blue crabs are a Georgia coast staple.



A shrimp boat heads back to Brunswick's docks after a long day.

Pride and Joy

A fisherman's feast

Sometimes, the moment calls for fish. Whether the fish show up from the fresh waters of the North Georgia Mountains or the salty ocean waters of the Georgia coastline, fish creates a tasty foundation for chefs. Enjoy these delicacies during your holiday season.

Cornmeal Crusted Redfish and Grits

~ Dr. Patrick Holladay
St. Simons Island

2 eggs
2 cups Nora Mill Granary cornmeal
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 pound of redfish fillets
Salt and pepper
3 cups Nora Mill Granary speckled white grits
6 cups of water
2 teaspoons of salt
2 tablespoons of unsalted butter

FISH: Beat eggs in a bowl. Add cornmeal to a second bowl. Salt and pepper fillets. Dip fillets in the egg. Then dip the fillets in the cornmeal to coat. Place on a plate and set aside to rest.

Heat oven to 425 degrees. Place iron skillet in oven while oven preheats to heat the skillet. When oven is hot, take out the skillet and add the oil to hot skillet. Add the cornmeal crusted fillets. Put back in the oven, and cook 10-12 minutes, turning once.

GRITS: Bring water to a boil. Stir in grits, return to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and cook 20-25 minutes.

SERVE: Dish grits into shallow bowl. Place fish on top. Garnish with Greenway Gardens microgreens and nasturtium.

Crab and Shrimp Mold

~ From the kitchen of Angie Smiley,
Liberty County, Ga

This dish makes a beautiful display on a table and has always been a hit at parties.



The docks in Darien and Brunswick are always busy with shrimp and fish boats.

1 can cream of mushroom soup, undiluted
1 package cream cheese, softened
1 envelope Knox unflavored gelatin, diluted in 3 tablespoons boiling water
1 cup mayonnaise
1 cup celery, finely chopped
1 cup scallions, finely chopped
1 pound fresh blue crab meat, picked through for shells
1 to ½ pounds boiled shrimp (seasoned to taste), peeled and chopped

Heat soup in saucepan. Add the gelatin mixture and cream cheese. Stir until smooth. Set aside to cool. In separate bowl, combine mayonnaise, scallions, celery,

crab and shrimp and stir until mixed. Add cooled gelatin mixture and mix well. Pour into a mold that has been greased with mayonnaise. Chill overnight. Release mold onto serving platter or dish, and serve with various crackers.

Georgia Girl Fried Trout

~ Donna Bostic, Stone Mountain

4 fresh Georgia mountain trout fillets, approximately 8 ounces each
½ cup Parmesan cheese, grated
½ cup saltine crackers, crushed
½ cup Logan Turnpike (Blairsville) cornmeal
¼ to ½ teaspoon garlic salt



Cornmeal Crusted Redfish and Grits

Pinch of pepper
2 eggs
½ cup milk
½ cup canola oil

Rinse fish in cold water; pat dry. In a shallow bowl, combine the cheese, cracker crumbs, cornmeal, garlic salt, and pepper. In another bowl, beat eggs and milk. Dip fish in the egg mixture; then gently roll in the crumb mixture.

In a large cast iron skillet, fry fish in oil for 3-4 minutes on each side or until it flakes easily with a fork. Garnish with lemon and parsley.

Jekyll Brewing Beer Steamed Mussels

~ Alpharetta City Center

(Inspired by the classic French Moules Marinieres)

1 pound mussels (medium), beard removed and rinsed
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons shallots, minced
2 tablespoons fresh garlic, minced
3 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
6 oz. Jekyll Big Creek Kolsch (or your favorite lager style beer)
3 tablespoons Cajun seasoning
2 tablespoons butter, unsalted

Heat olive oil over medium, add shallots and garlic and sauté till translucent. Cook over medium heat for 2-3 minutes. Deglaze with beer; add parsley, Cajun Seasoning, and butter. Cover and steam for 4-5 minutes until all the mussels have opened. Serve with fresh lemon and crusty bread.

Wild Georgia Shrimp and Rice

~ Dr. Patrick Holladay, St. Simons Island

2 pounds of large Wild Georgia Shrimp
1 ½ cups long grain white rice (preferably Carolina Gold rice)
3 cups of chicken broth, vegetable broth or water
1 tablespoon of unsalted butter
1 stalk lemongrass, chopped
1 large leek, chopped
1 tablespoon sunflower oil
Salt and pepper

Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add peeled shrimp and cook until pink. Watch closely because they will cook fast. Drain and set aside.

Rinse rice 3-4 times in a bowl until water runs clear. Bring water or broth to boil. Add rice. Cover and reduce heat to low and cook for 15 minutes. Remove from heat. Keep

covered and allow to sit another 10 minutes.

Heat iron skillet over medium heat with sunflower oil. Add chopped lemongrass and leek. Lightly salt and pepper. Sauté until fragrant, about 3-4 minutes.

Dish rice into shallow bowl. Add 6 shrimp per bowl. Cover with lemongrass and leek. Garnish with microgreens and serve with a slice of lime.

Stone Crab Claws

2½ pounds stone crab claws (available in seafood markets)

¼ cup olive oil
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon white pepper
¼ cup extra dry vermouth
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice

Crack claws and remove outer shell leaving meat attached to one side of the claw.

On medium-high heat in a large skillet, combine oil, salt, pepper and stone crab claws. Cook 3-4 minutes or until claws are heated through, stirring frequently. Add vermouth and lime juice. Raise the temperature to high and cook 1 minute longer, stirring constantly. Drain. Serve hot or cold as an appetizer or entrée.

Warren LeRuth's Oyster & Artichoke Soup

~ A heritage recipe from Doc's Dining Journal

½ cup unsalted butter
1 large yellow onion, finely chopped
1 bunch green onions, chopped
2 ribs celery, chopped
4 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped

2-12-ounce packages frozen artichoke hearts, quartered and defrosted
¼ cup all-purpose flour
1 carton good quality or homemade chicken stock (4 cups)
½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
½ teaspoon thyme, fresh or dried
2 pints oysters, drained with reserve liquor
1/3 cup sherry
1 cup heavy cream
1 cup milk

In a heavy bottom pot, melt the butter over medium heat. Add both chopped onions, celery, garlic and ½ teaspoon salt. Sauté for 8-10 minutes until soft. Sprinkle the mixture with the flour, and stir to coat the vegetables well. Continue to sauté for a few minutes, but do not let the flour brown. Add the artichokes and sauté for 5 minutes or so.

Add the stock, cayenne, salt, Worcestershire sauce, and thyme. Stir and taste and adjust seasonings.

Over high heat, bring the soup to a heavy simmer. Cover with a lid allowing steam to escape through a small gap and simmer for 45 minutes over low heat.

Stir now and then to prevent the soup from sticking to the bottom of the pan. Add the oysters, oyster liquor, and sherry and simmer for 7-10 minutes. Stir in the heavy cream and milk. Warm through, but do not allow the soup to boil.

Cool and refrigerate for at least 8 hours if not the next day allowing all the flavors to meld. Before serving, heat the soup slowly over low heat and serve warm.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

ATHENS-CLARKE

December 1 – January 31

Ice Skating

Akins Ford Arena
Classic Center
visitathensga.com

December 2

Light Up Athens

Downtown Athens
visitathensga.com

December 2

St. Paul and the Broken Bones

Georgia Theatre
visitathensga.com

December 3

Deck the Hollow Holiday Light Show

Memorial Park and Bear Hollow
visitathensga.com



December 4

Breakfast with Santa

The Classic Center
classiccenter.com

December 7

Irish Christmas in America

The Classic Center
classiccenter.com

December 21

Christmas with John Berry

The Classic Center
classiccenter.com

December 21

Ricky Skaggs and Kentucky Thunder

UGA Performing Arts Center
visitathensga.com

January 1

Athens Haunted History Walking Tours

Downtown Athens
visitathensga.com

January 12

Drive by Truckers Homecoming

Downtown Athens
visitathensga.com

January 16

Athens Bridal Show

The Classic Center
Classiccenter.com

BARROW

December 2

Cravin' Bacon Walk

Downtown Braselton
braselton.net

December 5

Sounding Off the Christmas Season

Downtown Auburn
cityofauburn-ga.org

December 11

Christmas Parade

Downtown Winder
cityofwinder.com

ELBERT

December 5

Christmas Parade

Downtown Elberton
elbertga.com

JACKSON

December 1

Business & Breakfast

Jackson EMC
jacksoncounty-chamber.com

December 4-5

Commerce Hometown Holiday Weekend

Downtown Commerce
commercega.org

December 4

Commerce by Candlelight

Commerce
commercega.com

December 5

Christmas Parade

Downtown Commerce
commercega.org

JASPER

December 15

Light Up Monticello

Downtown Monticello
jaspercountycoc.com

MORGAN

December 1-31

Holiday Artists Market

Madison Artists Guild Gallery
visitmadisonga.com

December 3

Visit with Santa

Madison-Morgan Cultural Center
mmcc-arts.org

December 11

Holiday Parade and Caroling by Candlelight

Downtown Madison
madisonga.com

December 17

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

Madison-Morgan Cultural Center
mmcc-arts.org

January 14

Music City Comes to Madison, Songwriter Series

Madison-Morgan Cultural Center
mmcc-arts.org

NEWTON

December 1 - February 21

Ice Days Ice Skating

Legion Field, Covington
discovercovingtonga.com

December 3, 5

Christmas at Porter with the Oxford Singers

Porter Performing Arts Center, Porterdale
newtoncountyarts.org

December 7

Christmas Parade

Downtown Covington
gocovington.com

December 10-12

The Nutcracker

Porter Performing Arts Center, Porterdale
newtoncountyarts.org

OCONEE

December 3-5

OCAF Holiday Market

OCAF, Watkinsville
ocaf.com

December 5

Christmas Parade

Downtown Watkinsville
visitoconee.com

PUTNAM

December 11

Eatonton's Hometown Holidays

Downtown Eatonton
downtowneatonton.com

ROCKDALE

December 1 - February 21

Ice Skating in Olde Town

Olde Town Conyers Pavilion
icedays.com/conyers

December 3

Conyers Christmas Party

Olde Town Conyers
visitconyersga.com

December 3

Out of this Galaxy Festive Food Truck Event

Olde Town Conyers
visitconyersga.com

December 3-5

Circle of Friends Dog Agility

Georgia International Horse Park
circleoffriendsagility.com

December 4

Winterfest

Olde Town Conyers
visitconyersga.com

December 4

Conyers Christmas Parade

Olde Town Conyers
visitconyersga.com

December 11-12

Five Star Hunters Holiday Classic IEA Show

Georgia International Horse Park
georgiahorsepark.com

January 22

Phoenix Pass Frosty 5K, P'tree Road Race qualifier

Georgia International Horse Park
georgiahorsepark.com

January 29

The Gobbler 6/3 hour Mountain Bike Race

Georgia International Horse Park
georgiahorsepark.com

February 5-6

GEM Capitol Gun & Knife Show

Georgia International Horse Park
georgiahorsepark.com

February 17 -20, 24 -27

Do Not Go Gentle

Paula Vaughn Black Box Theater
newdepotplayers.com

February 26

BRC Global (Canine Pedigrees) Bully Festival

Georgia International Horse Park
georgiahorsepark.com

WALTON

Thursdays in December Candlelight Shopping

Downtown Monroe
monroedowntown.com

December 1-31

Twelve Days of Christmas Lights Display

Childers Park, Monroe
monroedowntown.com

December 1-5

Monroe Bicentennial Week

Downtown Monroe
monroedowntown.com

December 2

Christmas Parade

Downtown Monroe
monroedowntown.com

December 4

Christmas Parade & Tree Lighting

Loganville
loganvilleevents.com

December 4

Walton Chamber Harmony Half and 5K

Harmony Elementary Monroe
waltonchamber.org

December 9

Walton Women in Business

Chamber Offices, Monroe
waltonchamber.org

December 11

Holiday Tour of Homes

Monroe
monroedowntown.com

December 3-4, 10-12, 14, 17-19

The Christmas Window

On Stage Walton
onstagerawalton.org

December 20-24

Live Nativity

Downtown Monroe
monroedowntown.com

January 6, 13

Walton Chamber Women in Business

waltonchamber.org

January 27-30

Goodnight, Princess

On Stage Playhouse
onstagerawalton.org

February 18-19, 25-27

The Drowsy Chaperone

On Stage Playhouse
onstagerawalton.org





The Pippa Perspective



~ Story by
Genie Smith Bernstein

One cold, rainy trip into town, I had to stop in a tight curve behind a county work truck blocking my lane. A man hopped out, grabbed a shovel from the truck bed, scooped a flattened 'possum from the road, and sent me on my merry way.

Since I couldn't thank him, I thanked God, along with my tax dollars. It's nice knowing, in freezing winter drizzle or melting summer sizzle, someone is out there clearing roadkill from the tight curves in my life.

I admit it brought to mind the old joke: *Question – What's a 'possum? Answer – Little critter born dead on the side of the road.*

My friend Billie tells a story from her childhood in South Carolina, about eating delicious 'possum gravy at a playmate's house. Billie's mother was less than pleased and, henceforth, required her to be home for supper. A state away, my mother shared that same attitude. There may have been families in our county eating 'possum, but Mama wouldn't have it on her table.

Once when I was rambling barefoot down the dirt lane to my grandmother's house, I found what looked like a dragon skull. Poking a stick between its fifty fearsome teeth, as one does at nine years old, I took my trophy to Nannie. She hollered through the screen door for me to stop dangling that "nasty thing" over her porch and put it in the ditch, well away from her yard.

Except for learning the official name opossum comes from the Algonquian word meaning white beast, and it is the only marsupial in North America, I accepted Nannie's ill-disposed opinion of 'possums.

And then I became acquainted with one called Pippa. Some years ago, right in front of my friend Susan's house, a hairless joey was thrown out of its pouch when a car going highway speed collided with its mother. A trained nurse, Susan doesn't give up on people or 'possums. She contacted The Opossum's Pouch for advice. We watched in amazement as little Pippa survived, outgrew her bedroom slipper/pouch, and transitioned to an ever larger and creative pouch substitute. Hitting fifteen pounds and resembling an over-inflated football, she grew pale gray, cashmere-soft fur with

bristly guard hairs sprinkled along her back.

A normal 'possum's life in the woods requires tree climbing. Susan tried to teach Pippa, but without riding on her 'possum mother's back while she demonstrated the skill, Pippa failed the course. Already accepted by Susan's family dog and cat, this gentle critter bonded with her humans. She perched on her mistress's shoulder, draped herself around her neck, self-groomed like a cat, occasionally purred, and went potty in her designated spot. She delighted in meals of fresh fruits and vegetables, especially grapes, and companionably joined Susan and her husband while they watched television and gave her belly rubs.

I followed Pippa's exploits, laughing at her funny waddle and fat prehensile tail, all the while marveling at her kind. Daddy used to say I "played 'possum" when I had my nose

stuck in a book, but Pippa never needed to play dead

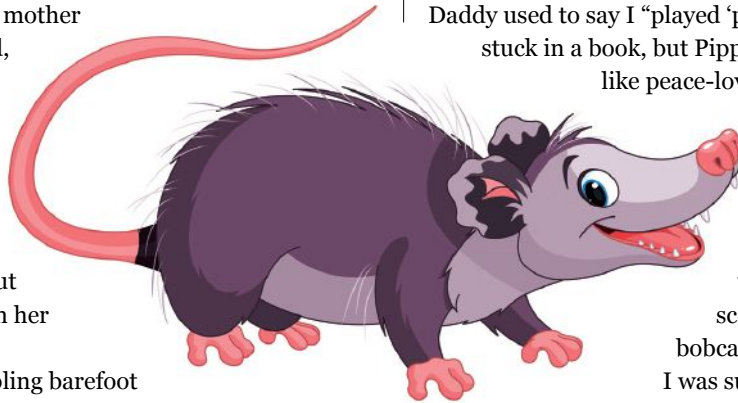
like peace-loving possums are known

to do. Their involuntary physiological response of fainting when confronted is doubly effective because, normally odorless, when in that state they emit a putrid scent that sends foxes and bobcats looking for dinner elsewhere.

I was surprised to learn 'possums are far from dimwitted. They have impressive

memories and can recall the smell of toxic substances up to a year. They aren't the cutest animal in the forest, but they are smarter, cleaner, and more beneficial to humans than many of their woodland neighbors. They almost never get rabies and they slow the spread of Lyme disease since a single opossum can consume 5,000 ticks in one season. Immune to the venom of most snakes, they do us the favor of regularly feasting on them, as well as mice and cockroaches. Their reproductive systems are so complicated and confusing an early explanation was that males, known as jacks, impregnated females, known as jills, through the nose. That's worth a Google search.

Opossums are not long-lived, and I mourned Pippa's passing, but that odd, misunderstood little creature changed my perspective about more than 'possums. I am reminded, there is no shame in being wrong. When I take sides on an issue, I don't want to become so entrenched that I lose sight of the other side. I changed my mind about roadkill; what else might I have misjudged? 🐾



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