

# SMOKE SIGNAL

VOLUME 58, ISSUE 11

*Serving the Smoke Rise Community since 1968*

February, 2026

[www.smokesignalnews.com](http://www.smokesignalnews.com)



## Look inside for...

New Fire Station Coming to Tucker .....pg. 3  
Mama Debbie's Art Emporium .....pg. 4  
Monks Walk for Peace in Smoke Rise .....pg. 6  
NETWorks Bicycle Project .....pg. 7  
Grandparenting 101 .....pg. 8

## New Era Begins: Tucker Welcomes Mayor Anne Lerner

Tucker has a new mayor! Anne Lerner was sworn in on January 12, 2026, at a packed city hall ceremony. Judge Stephen Nicholas led the oath of office next to a special piece of history—a desk that belonged to Tucker's very first postmaster back in 1892.

Lerner wasn't the only one sworn in that day: Council members Roger Orlando, Cara Schroeder, and Alexis Weaver all returned for another term, ready to continue their work for the community.

In her first remarks as mayor, Lerner paid tribute to outgoing Mayor Frank Auman and his family, recognizing their dedication to Tucker. She emphasized that leadership isn't a solo act—it's about teamwork, listening to different voices, and keeping the community's best interests front and center.



Re-elected City of Tucker Council Member Roger Orlando with Council Member Virginia Rece at City Hall on January 12, 2026.

in each district. Councilmembers Roger Orlando (District 1), Cara Schroeder (District 2), and Alexis Weaver (District 3) reaffirmed their commitment to the City of Tucker, surrounded by family and warmly cheered on by members of the community.

The Mayor and City Council of Tucker meet on the second and fourth Mondays of each



People pack Tucker City Hall for the swearing-in of the city's new mayor and three re-elected council members on Jan. 12, 2026. DEAN HESSE/APPEN MEDIA



The City of Tucker's new Mayor Anne Lerner sits at the dais following a swearing-in ceremony at City Hall on January 12, 2026.

The ceremony drew quite a crowd, including officials from neighboring cities and DeKalb County. Stone Mountain's new Mayor Jelani Linder and DeKalb County Commissioner Robert Patrick were among those celebrating the transition.

Lerner's message was clear: Tucker's strength comes from people working together, even when they don't see eye to eye. With the gavel now passed, the city moves forward with fresh leadership building on the foundation already laid.

The oath of office was also administered to the three councilmembers re-elected to Seat 1



## A Smoke Rise Christmas Tradition Shines Bright

By Victor Economy, Smoke Rise Resident

The 2025 Christmas season was as merry and bright as ever! We proudly continued our tradition of decorating our home with thousands of lights and once again featured our countdown-to-Christmas clock. Santa and Mrs. Claus made another special visit to hear Christmas wishes and pose for photos. We were thrilled to welcome them back and hope they will be able to stop by again next year.

With the incredible support of our neighbors, friends, Make-A-Wish volunteers, and a generous matching donation for the second year in a row from Cy Hume and A.S. Turner & Sons, we raised \$26,099.56 in 2025 for Make-A-Wish Georgia. One hundred percent of the funds collected were given directly to the organization when we proudly presented a check on Wednesday, January 7, to Sophia Janney of Make-A-Wish Georgia, continuing our commitment that every donated dollar goes straight to the charity. This year's total brings our grand total raised since 2012 to \$141,286.91, all of which has gone directly to Make-A-Wish. We are deeply grateful to everyone who has donated and supported this effort over the years. With the average cost of granting a wish being approximately \$10,000, we are incredibly proud that our 2025 efforts will help grant two life-changing wishes for local children.

We'd also like to extend a heartfelt "thank you" to our wonderful Summit neighbors for their patience and understanding with the increased traffic on our street during the holiday season. We hope everyone had a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year - and we are already hard at work planning a new addition for the 2026 Christmas season!

The *Smoke Signal* is enhancing some of our issues with COLOR!

Find out how to become a Patron  
or Sponsor a color edition  
[at Staff@smokesignalnews.com](mailto:Staff@smokesignalnews.com)

Special Thanks to our 2026 Color Sponsors:  
Susan & Joel Gilbert – February



## Smoke Signal

P.O. Box 1038, Tucker, GA 30085

A non-profit service organization devoted to furthering neighborhood cooperation with the aid of good neighborhood communication.

Editorial Committee: Gia Anderson  
\*AvivA Hoffmann  
Maureen Kofkee  
Cheri Schneider  
\* This Issue's Editor of the Month

Church News.....Susan Gilbert  
Health Notes .....Cheri Schneider MD, Pat Baumann MD  
Recipes and Home.....Joyce Ray  
Social and Digital Media.Pat Soltys  
News You Can Use.....AvivA Hoffmann  
Tech Talk .....Susan Gilbert  
Out the Window .....Beth Henson  
Other Staff Writers:.....Victoria Crosby  
Joel Gilbert  
Linda Karr  
Pat Soltys  
Barbara Luton  
Frank Luton  
Distribution & Delivery Bob Espy  
Flyer Inserts Noelle Joy and Rita Casteel  
Advertisements Noelle Joy and Rita Casteel  
Classifieds Noelle Joy and Rita Casteel  
You may contact all Smoke Signal Staff [staff@smokesignalnews.com](mailto:staff@smokesignalnews.com)

*Views and/or opinions expressed in articles, stories or letters published in this newspaper are not necessarily those of the Smoke Signal or its staff. The information contained in it is believed to be accurate, but not warranted in any way. Technical and Medical information is not to be construed as professional advice. It is the policy of the Smoke Signal to publish signed letters to the Editor. We will not publish unsigned letters, but will withhold the writer's name upon request. All content may be edited.*

### ATTENTION ADVERTISERS:



The *Smoke Signal* has reached its ad-space limit and we are now keeping a waiting list for future advertisements. Please send your ad requests to [staff@smokesignalnews.com](mailto:staff@smokesignalnews.com) and you will be contacted as space becomes available, in the order requests are received.

Classified ads and flyers are still available!

### Smoke Signal Deadlines

#### FEBRUARY 13

Please e-mail articles to:

[staff@smokesignalnews.com](mailto:staff@smokesignalnews.com)

Articles and photos should be sent in .doc or .docx format. Articles sent in .pdf format cannot be edited. Photos and graphics should be submitted in .jpg or .pdf format.

**Deadline for classified ads is FEBRUARY 10**

“Like” us on Facebook at  
[www.facebook.com/SmokeSignalNews](https://www.facebook.com/SmokeSignalNews)

You can also visit our Facebook page to view postings of newsletter pictures and stories throughout the month.



**Serving Smoke Rise Families Since 1946!**

Flowers & Gifts For All Occasions!  
Green & Blooming Plants For Your Home & Garden  
404-292-8446  
[www.HallsFlowerShop.com](http://www.HallsFlowerShop.com)  
5706 Memorial Dr, Stone Mtn, 30083  
Daily Delivery To Metro Atlanta, DeKalb and Gwinnett!

Digital copies of the *Smoke Signal* can be requested at [Staff@smokesignalnews.com](mailto:Staff@smokesignalnews.com).

You can also visit our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/SmokeSignalNews](https://www.facebook.com/SmokeSignalNews) to view postings of newsletter pictures and stories throughout the month.



Looking for a way to give back to your community? The SMOKE SIGNAL is looking for a few more writers or people with a passion for storytelling. SEND YOUR INQUIRY TO: [staff@smokesignalnews.com](mailto:staff@smokesignalnews.com)

### ATTENTION GRADUATES, NEWLYWEDS, AND HONOREES

Please send in your picture and a brief article for publication in the *Smoke Signal*. Email submissions to [staff@smokesignalnews.com](mailto:staff@smokesignalnews.com)

## Smoke Rise Baptist Church

5901 Hugh Howell Road  
Senior Pastor: Dr. Chris George, [cgeorge@smokerisebaptist.org](mailto:cgeorge@smokerisebaptist.org)  
Phone: 770-469-5856 [SmokeRiseBaptist.org](http://SmokeRiseBaptist.org)

SUNDAY  
9:45 a.m. - Attend Sunday School through Zoom or In-Person  
11:00 a.m. - Attend Worship via Live Stream or In-Person  
WEDNESDAY  
5:00 p.m. - Attend our Wednesday Dinner  
6:00 p.m. - Followed by activities and Bible Study for all ages

## Eastminster Presbyterian Church

5801 Hugh Howell Road  
Rev. Jeanine Fulton, Pastor  
Phone: 770-469-4881 Website: [Eastminster.us](http://Eastminster.us)

SUNDAY  
9:15 a.m. Adult & Children's Sunday School  
10:30 a.m. In-Person and Live streaming of Worship service

## First Moravian Church

Pastor: Reverend Elroy Christopher  
(770) 491-7250  
Website: [Gamoravian.org](http://Gamoravian.org)

SUNDAY  
10:00 a.m. Sunday School—Adults & Children  
11:00 a.m. Worship  
12:00 p.m. Fellowship Time

## Mountain West Church

4818 Hugh Howell Road  
Pastor: Mo Huggins  
770-491-0228 [Mwchurch.com](http://Mwchurch.com)

SUNDAY 9:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., and 11:55 a.m. Worship  
MONDAY 7:00 p.m.  
In-person and streaming online on [Facebook.com/mwchurch.com](http://Facebook.com/mwchurch.com)



## ART Station

### 40 Year Anniversary Season

5384 Manor Dr, Stone Mountain, GA 30083

[info@artstation.org](mailto:info@artstation.org)  
**(770) 469-1105**

### OUR FLYER POLICY HAS CHANGED:

Reservations Required:  
Email Noelle Joy at [Staff@smokesignalnews.com](mailto:Staff@smokesignalnews.com)  
by 15th of the month

Cost \$150 by check to the Smoke Signal:  
P.O. Box 1038, Tucker, GA. 30085

ALL PRINTING is now done by  
Greater Georgia Printers, Inc.  
Send Flyer Ready Artwork (8 1/2 x 11 size) to  
[Staff@SmokeSignalNews.com](mailto:Staff@SmokeSignalNews.com)  
and [bobby@georgiaprinters.com](mailto:bobby@georgiaprinters.com) will contact you directly.



YOUR SMOKE RISE CORVETTE FULL SERVICE REPAIR FACILITY

**Call for Seasonal Specials!**

**10% Off Smoke Rise Special!**

- Military Active Duty & Veterans
- First Responders & Educators
- Seniors

\*See Advisor for details

**770-496-0890**

**4633 Hugh Howell Road – Tucker, Georgia 30084**

**Four Years In, One Year Refined, 2026 Ahead**

By Virginia Rece, Tucker City Council, Dist. 1, Post 2

Mother Theresa said, "I can do things that you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things." Happy New Year!

This year marks our city's 10th anniversary. It's surreal that we are celebrating our first decade milestone. We have evolved over the past decade tremendously. I am reflecting on the work done and the countless community neighbors that jumped in with passion, and persistence, for love of our city. I'm filled with gratitude and pride at our collective progress. We are a community of deeply committed volunteers who treasure Tucker's unique charm and welcoming vibe. We also see continued opportunities to improve our walkability, greenspace, public safety, infrastructure, transportation, workforce, housing and service delivery. In summary, a lot of great work has been done in just 10 years, but the work continues.

I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to speak about Mayor Auman's deep and abiding commitment as our first Mayor of Tucker. Mayor Auman has worked tirelessly for our community with Gaye by his side. Mayor Auman taught me to seek creative solutions for issues that seemed insurmountable. I'm grateful to him and his entire family for their service to our town.

The torch was passed to our second mayor and first female mayor, Anne Lerner on January 12, 2026. I'm eager to get started on 2026 priorities and look forward to what we can do to continue improving the quality of life for all of us. I look forward to continuing the work on public safety, beautification, improving green space, and quality economic growth with your ideas and involvement helping to guide us.

Virginia Rece  
(470) 817-7864  
vrece@tuckerga.gov

# Scott's Pressure Wash

Professional pressure washing—all surfaces  
Decks, Stained and Sealed

678-469-1599

scottspressurewash.net • scottpressurewash@gmail.com



**Local. Trusted. Proven.**  
Your Mortgage Guy — Still on Main Street!



**Buying or refinancing?**

I've got your back.

- ✓ 20 Years of Experience  
(15 years on Main St. in Tucker)
- ✓ Trusted Community Leader & Founder of Taste of Tucker
- ✓ Helping Families Build Wealth Through Homeownership

**Let's Talk Home Loans.**  
Quick Answers. Local Help.

Call or text Art Wood  
Your Local Mortgage Expert.

**404-909-3567**

[art@artwoodmortgage.com](mailto:art@artwoodmortgage.com)

[www.artwoodmortgage.com](http://www.artwoodmortgage.com)

2323 Main St, Ste A2, Tucker, GA

**Art Wood**

Mortgage Loan Originator  
NMLS# 118234

**Born in Tucker.  
Work in Tucker.  
Helping Neighbors in Tucker.**



Saturday, March 7 - Open House at Smoke Rise Country Club from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Meet the staff and representatives from the golf, tennis, gym, social, and pool operations.

### Saturday, March 14 - 15 Year Anniversary of the Tucker Walk to Remember

9:30 a.m. meeting at Smoke Rise Baptist Church and walking three miles around the green spaces in Smoke Rise, ending back at the church. Watch for the white tent in the parking lot.

### Journey Through Lent

*Worship, Reflection, and Community at Eastminster*

By Christina Wetzel Sizemore, Office Coordinator, Eastminster Presbyterian Church

At Eastminster Presbyterian Church, we invite you to join us in the meaningful journey through Lent. Lent is a sacred season of reflection, repentance, and spiritual renewal that represents the time Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness, enduring temptation, and preparing for His ministry (Matthew 4:1-11).

Eastminster School Age Program is offering a fun and faith filled Winter Break Camp, February 12 – 20, 2026. Children ages three to 12 years old are welcome. Visit [www.eastminster.us/esap](http://www.eastminster.us/esap) for more information.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 18. This year we will have ASHES ON THE GO. Drive-thru, walk up, or pause longer to receive ashes and experience outdoor prayer reflection stations and neighborly conversation in our parking lot, 4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. If you have a busy schedule, this is a quick and special way to observe Ash Wednesday. We will also have dinner at 5:15 p.m. Reservations for dinner are required. Our Ash Wednesday service will begin at 6:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary with inspirational music, imposition of ashes, and a meaningful message.

#### Upcoming Special Events:

- Winter Concert: "Spirituals for the Soul" celebrates the music of the African American diaspora, featuring acclaimed local singers Samantha Burke and Mali Browning on Saturday, February 21, at 3:00 p.m.
- Heritage Sunday is on February 22, celebrating the rich diversity of our Eastminster family, as we honor and learn about the many cultures and traditions represented within our community of faith.
- Vespers Service is Wednesday, March 11, at 6:30 p.m. Participants will experience a sacred space for renewal, where music and prayer invite God's peace into our lives. The service blends familiar traditions with contemporary expressions.
- Friends & Neighbors Day is on Sunday, March 15. This special Sunday is all about building community, sharing laughter, and making lasting connections with friends, old and new.

#### Holy Week Schedule

- Palm Sunday | March 29 – Sunday School at 9:15 a.m. | Worship at 10:30 a.m.
- Maundy Thursday | April 2 – Evening Service with Communion at 6:30 p.m.
- Easter Sunday | April 5 – Fellowship at 9:15 a.m. | Worship at 10:30 a.m.

Eastminster Presbyterian Church welcomes neighbors of all ages and backgrounds to take part in upcoming gatherings and events. We look forward to sharing these moments with our community.

### Building for the Future: New Fire Station 5 Coming to Tucker

DeKalb County is building a new, modern Fire Station 5 in Tucker at the site of the former Public Health building, 4329 Cowan Road. Funded by the county's first Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST 1), this project will replace the outdated 1955 station on Lawrenceville Hwy., better serve growing needs, and feature state-of-the-art facilities for firefighters.

#### Key Details:

- New Station 5 Location: 4329 & 4345 Cowan Road, Tucker, GA 30084.
- Status: Demolition of the old building occurred in July 2023 to make way for construction.
- Connectivity: Plans include a trail connection for the South Fork Peachtree Creek Greenway and several public parking spaces along Cowan Road for trail access.

This new station is part of a larger DeKalb County effort to build multiple new fire stations to enhance emergency response across the county.



### DID YOUR PAPER GET WET?



EXTRA COPIES OF THE SMOKE SIGNAL  
ARE NOW AVAILABLE AT THE COMMUNITY GARDEN

Look for the wooden box labeled **Smoke Signal**.

(They are no longer available on Smoke Rise Drive.)

## Did You Know?

### *Property Tax Exemptions Can Offer Savings for Smoke Rise Homeowners*

Smoke Rise homeowners may be eligible for property tax savings through DeKalb County's Homestead Exemptions, which can reduce annual real estate tax bills. A basic Homestead Exemption typically saves a homeowner 1/3 of annual taxes. Once the exemption is granted, it remains in place, as long as the applicant continues to reside at the property.

To qualify, homeowners must own and occupy the property as their primary residence within DeKalb County. The Basic Homestead Exemption is required before applying for any Special Exemptions, which are available for eligible seniors, disabled residents, and disabled veterans.

Homeowners are encouraged to review the Homestead Exemption information carefully to ensure they are receiving all exemptions for which they qualify. Staff from the DeKalb County Tax Commissioner's Office are available to answer questions and assist with determining eligibility and completing applications.

The deadline to apply for homestead exemptions for the current tax year is April 1. Applications received after the deadline will be applied to the following year. Applications are accepted year-round in person, by mail, and via dropbox. Online applications may be submitted from January 1 through April 1.

For more information or assistance, go line to: <https://dekalbtax.org/property-tax-exemptions/>. To schedule an appointment, go to: [dekalbtax.org/make-an-appointment](https://dekalbtax.org/make-an-appointment), email [proptax@dekalbcountyga.gov](mailto:proptax@dekalbcountyga.gov), or call (404) 298-4000.

## Mama Debbie's Art Emporium Brings Inclusive Creativity to Tucker

Reprinted and abstracted from the Tucker Today Newsletter, January 15, 2026  
(<https://tuckertoday.beehiiv.com/>)

Tucker will soon welcome a vibrant new creative space with the opening of Mama Debbie's Art Emporium, founded by local artist Angelica Bakhsh. More than a gallery, the emporium is designed as a welcoming place for artists and community members who may have felt overlooked or excluded elsewhere.

Named in honor of Bakhsh's late mother, an activist known for opening her home to young people who didn't always fit in, the space reflects that same spirit of belonging. Bakhsh, who grew up in South Georgia, says her goal is to recreate the sense of refuge her mother provided - this time through art.

Bakhsh and her longtime friend Clay Morey have spent months renovating the former Treasures on the Railroad building into a 7,500-square-foot creative hub. Community support has been strong, with a recent fund-raising campaign exceeding its goal and helping fund a classroom space.

The emporium will feature gallery areas, local artist retail booths, shared workspaces, and hands-on classes ranging from sewing to woodworking. With bold décor and an emphasis on accessibility - especially for young and emerging artists - Mama Debbie's Art Emporium is rooted in inclusivity, creativity, and community connection.

Mama Debbie's Art Emporium is located at 4290 Railroad Avenue. An official opening date has not yet been announced.



## New Era: New Mayor...continued from page 1

month at City Hall, located at 1975 Lakeside Parkway, Suite 350B, Tucker, GA 30084. Meeting agendas and live-streams are available online at [tuckerga.gov/agendas](http://tuckerga.gov/agendas).



New Tucker and Stone Mountain Mayors, Anne Lerner and Jelani Linder at Tucker City Hall on January 12, 2026.



Call or text today and let us help you with a pest solution.  
Monday-Friday 9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
**(770) 931-4397**



### Why Choose Olivia...

- Over 18 years serving Dekalb and Metro Atlanta
- Top Selling Realtor and Life Member Atlanta Board of Realtors
- Concierge service to buyers and sellers
- Free Home consultation and evaluation
- Your Smoke Rise / Kanawha neighbor



Turning Dreams into Addresses  
678.923.3232  
[oliviabuckmon.com](http://oliviabuckmon.com)

## DAVID S. WALKER, ATTORNEY AT LAW

Wills, Probates and Trusts

Walker Law Firm  
770-972-3803



[david.walker.law.firm@gmail.com](mailto:david.walker.law.firm@gmail.com)

[www.walker-law-firm.com/](http://www.walker-law-firm.com/)

Smoke Rise Resident      Offices in Duluth and Snellville

DULUTH OFFICE- 6340 SUGARLOAF PARKWAY, SUITE 200, DULUTH GA 30097

SNELLVILLE OFFICE-2330 SCENIC HIGHWAY, SNELLVILLE GA 30078

Admitted In GA AND D.C. -UGA LAW  
Certified Mediator -Georgia Bar No. 731725

**4633 Hugh Howell Road – Tucker, Georgia 30084**

**770-496-0890**

25+ Years Strong! Proudly Serving Smoke Rise & Greater Atlanta!

### Specialized In

- Routine Maintenance & Service
- Brakes, Tires, Alignment
- Major Engine & Transmission Repair
- Emissions Related Repairs & Readiness
- Coolant, Power-steering, Transmission, Brake Flush
- Check Engine Light & Warning Indicator Diagnostics

**MVP** GERMAN AUTO  
YOUR SMOKE RISE EUROPEAN SERVICE AND REPAIR FACILITY



Dearest  
esteemed readers:

In what seems like an eternity of parties, celebrations, and grand openings to attend (one can't complain, but too many oysters is not good for the girdle), it gives me great delight to be back in your humble dwellings and bringing a small amount of joy to your everyday life. The New Year was celebrated in Smoke Rise with many friends, some affable acquaintances, and some people from further afar hoping to be better acquainted. One does draw the line at going to Lilburn for parties, though, so these people were quietly left on the sidelines as we danced to the Minuet and the Waltz. I'm sure they were used to a let-down, like we are when someone mentions Trader Joe's in the same breath as Tucker. Oh, but what bubbles we did have as we partied the season away. One has lately been committed to patronizing Wine & Whimseys on Main Street, Tucker, for their premium libations. Heavens, we even purchase Champagne libations from the revolutionaries in France! I do hope you continue to join my noble family in supporting this local business and all the local business owners on Main Street in 2026. You may see my carriage under the streetlamp, and you are permitted to ask my footman for my afternoon tea availability. One will never turn down a crumpet and a discussion of world affairs and the latest gossip from the scullery.

Looking ahead, as we crawl out of an ugly January and spring into the coming months, do ensure your country estate is not neglected. Having sufficient notice of one's groundsmen to prepare for the coming spring months is the epitome of society here in Smoke Rise. A tidy curb, a trimmed bush, and a friendly wave to your neighbor are all that's needed for horticulture couture.

On behalf of my estate and my family, we do look forward to sharing some excitement, a little scandal, and some tips for landed gentry happiness with you in 2026.

Your most humble resident, Lady Summitdown.



joyceray126@gmail.com  
404-316-2299

**Joyce Ray**  
The best way home.

Chapman Hall Premier Realtors  
1772B Century Boulevard, Atlanta Ga. 30345

Since 1987 - Metro Atlanta & Smoke Rise

Kitchens, Basements, Decks, Additions, Baths, Screened Porches, Window and Door Replacement, All Phases of Construction, General Improvements & Repairs



ATLANTA CUSTOM CONSTRUCTION

Keith Tindle

atlcustomconstruction.com  
Office: 770-452-1925  
Cell: 404-432-0535

Light Commercial Work Welcomed  
Handyman Services also Available.

Serving the Atlanta area since 1980  
References Available

Licensed & Insured

## techtalk

By Joel Gilbert, Staff Writer

### The Course Toward Fully Autonomous Vehicles

This article is a summary of a recent article by Dr. Johnathan Slotkin of the New York Times called The Data on Self-Driving Cars Is Clear. We Have to Change Course. It once again shows the hypocrisy of our elected officials about public safety which can be improved by eliminating local taxi drivers.

The self-driving car company Waymo recently released data covering nearly 100 million driverless miles in four American cities through June 2025, the biggest trove of information released so far about safety. The results were impressive. When compared with human drivers on the same roads, Waymo's self-driving cars were involved in 91 percent fewer serious-injury-or-worse crashes and 80 percent fewer crashes causing any injury. It showed a 96 percent lower rate of injury-causing crashes at intersections.

For context, remember that Waymo operates cars with no human driver. Its vehicles use cameras, radar, and specialized sensors known as lidar, which create detailed 3-D maps. They operate only in cities where Waymo has studied every intersection.

If Waymo's results are indicative of the broader future of autonomous vehicles, we may be on the path to eliminating traffic deaths as a leading cause of mortality in the United States. The reasons autonomous vehicles are safer are straightforward. They are systems that follow rules, avoid distraction, see in all directions and prevent high-speed conflicts that often avert deadly collisions.

While there is a public health imperative to quickly expand the adoption of autonomous vehicles, some cities are not onboard. Rather than grapple with these challenges, some cities are erecting roadblocks. In Washington, D.C., local politicians have long postponed a key report that would facilitate the broader use of these vehicles despite 18 months of successful vehicle testing. In Boston, the City Council is considering mandating a "human safety operator" in every vehicle, effectively stalling meaningful deployment. Policymakers need to stop fighting this transformation and start planning for it.

The issue is important. More than 39,000 Americans died in motor vehicle crashes last year, more than homicide, plane crashes and natural disasters combined. Crashes are the No. 2 cause of death for children and young adults. But death is only part of the story. These crashes are also the leading cause of spinal cord injury. Surgeons see the aftermath of the 10,000 crash victims who come to emergency rooms every day. The combined economic and quality-of-life toll exceeds \$1 trillion annually, more than the entire U.S. military or Medicare budget.

Federal leadership is essential. Current regulations require companies to report crashes, but not the number of miles driven or where. We need the denominator, not just the numerator. Data-reporting requirements should include crash rates, miles driven and where, and safety performance. Independent auditors should verify this data against police reports, insurance claims and privacy-protected medical records.

This transformation will happen. We can guide it toward a safer, more equitable future or let it unfold haphazardly around us. There's a future in which manual driving becomes uncommon, perhaps even quaint, the way riding horses is today. It's a future where we no longer accept thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of broken spines as the price of mobility. It's time to stop treating this like a tech moonshot and start treating it like a public health intervention.



**OUTDOOR LIGHTING  
& IRRIGATION**



**Convenient One-Stop Shopping for Home Outdoor Lighting and Irrigation.**

- Winterizing Irrigation System
- System Design
- Installation
- Controls
- Custom Fabrication
- Maintenance & Service

**FREE system assessments  
for the first 10 callers mentioning  
the Smoke Signal!**

Call Owner Brian Major to schedule.  
**833.843.6957**  
outdoorswellit@gmail.com  
outdoorswellit.com

## NEWS YOU CAN USE

BY AVIVA HOFFMANN, STAFF WRITER

## A Walk for Peace Brings a Message of Love to DeKalb County... and Smoke Rise!

December 30, 2025, began as an ordinary day in DeKalb County... until it became something extraordinary. Neighbors and visitors paused their routines, lined local streets, and gathered quietly as a powerful message of peace walked by - quite literally.

Nearly two dozen Buddhist monks passed through DeKalb County as part of the "Walk for Peace," a 2,300-mile spiritual pilgrimage on foot from Fort Worth, Texas, to the White House in Washington, D.C. The walk, which began in October 2025 and is expected to conclude this month, spans roughly 120 days and 10 states, drawing attention and admiration along the way.

As the monks moved through DeKalb County, community members gathered to observe, reflect, and take part in blessings and moments of quiet contemplation. Beyond a few scheduled stops, residents also spotted the monks walking along familiar corridors - including Old Stone Mountain Road. For many Smoke Rise residents, seeing the monks walk quietly down this well-traveled road was an unexpected and moving sight. Some paused along sidewalks and driveways, others slowed their cars, all drawn by the calm presence and purpose of the walk.

The monks' mission is simple but profound: to promote peace, unity, compassion, and healing through mindful action. During the past few months, people across the country have followed their progress online, many hoping for a chance to witness the walk in person. Along the route, the monks have gained a kind of rock-star-like following... an unlikely status for travelers whose journey is rooted in silence, humility, and ethical conduct.

Georgia marked the midway point of the walk and the fifth state along the route, making DeKalb County not just a stop, but a meaningful moment in the pilgrimage. During their time here, the monks paused for lunch, met with local leaders, and hosted peaceful gatherings, sharing messages centered on mindfulness, service, interfaith dialogue, and cross-cultural connection. Dressed in traditional robes (some walking barefoot) and accompanied by their loyal dog, Aloka, the monks carried only essential items. They do not purchase supplies along the way, instead accepting only what is freely offered by the communities they encounter.

For DeKalb County, and especially neighborhoods like Smoke Rise, the walk placed the community directly on the path of peace, offering a quiet but powerful reminder that meaningful moments can happen right outside our front doors. As the monks continue toward the nation's capital, they leave behind more than footprints. They leave inspiration and a lasting impression that standing together, even in silence, can help heal the world.

For more information about the Walk for Peace and to follow the monks' journey, visit Walk for Peace USA on Facebook.

To see a video of the Walk for Peace as it passed through Georgia, watch this short piece produced by me and my team at DeKalb County Television, Channel 23:

<https://youtu.be/16SZLVkOLJw>

LAW OFFICE OF  
PEATSA C. WALLACE LLC

Estate Planning, Wills, Trusts, Powers of Attorney  
Health Directives, Probate & Administration  
Business Formations/Contracts, Tax Law,  
Domestic Partnership Agreements & Dissolutions

## SENIOR DISCOUNTS AVAILABLE



"Have briefcase, will travel"  
- She will come to you!

Office: 2345 Main Street, Tucker  
770.938.3919 or 678.570.8543  
peatsawallace@bellsouth.net

Over 36 years experience  
Tucker Resident

Over 36 years experience

Tucker Resident



Old Stone Mountain Road at Brentwood Entrance, 12-31-25

Picture by Frank Luton

for travelers whose journey is rooted in silence, humility, and ethical conduct.

Georgia marked the midway point of the walk and the fifth state along the route, making DeKalb County not just a stop, but a meaningful moment in the pilgrimage. During their time here, the monks paused for lunch, met with local leaders, and hosted peaceful gatherings, sharing messages centered on mindfulness, service, interfaith dialogue, and cross-cultural connection. Dressed in traditional robes (some walking barefoot) and accompanied by their loyal dog, Aloka, the monks carried only essential items. They do not purchase supplies along the way, instead accepting only what is freely offered by the communities they encounter.

For DeKalb County, and especially neighborhoods like Smoke Rise, the walk placed the community directly on the path of peace, offering a quiet but powerful reminder that meaningful moments can happen right outside our front doors. As the monks continue toward the nation's capital, they leave behind more than footprints. They leave inspiration and a lasting impression that standing together, even in silence, can help heal the world.

For more information about the Walk for Peace and to follow the monks' journey, visit Walk for Peace USA on Facebook.

To see a video of the Walk for Peace as it passed through Georgia, watch this short piece produced by me and my team at DeKalb County Television, Channel 23:

<https://youtu.be/16SZLVkOLJw>

## Monks Walking in Smoke Rise

By Victoria R. Crosby

Buddhist monks, more than twenty men strong  
walking in single file as they move along.  
Some young men and some old,  
from their twenties to their seventies, I was told.

Aloka, the peace dog, walks by their side.  
He's a rescue from India and is their pride.  
His name in Sanskrit means light,  
an enlightened dog that brings such delight.

Many miles they walk each day  
happy and smiling as they go on their way.  
Walking through Smoke Rise to a Buddhist Temple  
where they stayed,  
and ate, and rested, and prayed.

From Texas to DC is their goal,  
and to bring peace to every soul.  
People stood watching, some in silence, some in prayer,  
some cheering and waving as they saw them there.

Dressed for cold weather,  
orange robes in layers they wore.  
Food donations have been enough;  
they don't need any more.  
Some monks were barefoot, some had shoes.  
It was at their discretion; they got to choose.

Crowds were there in person, some watched it online,  
and the experience they said was almost divine.  
It was an emotional sight to behold.  
Many were in tears as they stood in the cold.

Peace begins inside each of us, is what the monks say.  
"Today is going to be my peaceful day."  
"Let There be Peace on Earth" some people sang,  
as echoes of words of other prophets rang.

Many states they have already passed through  
past places of worship of different faiths too.  
Walking by day and resting at night,  
bringing mindfulness and peace  
to all who witness this sight.

© Copyright 2025 Victoria R. Crosby All Rights Reserved.



Villas, Cottages, & Houses with 1, 2, & 3 Bedroom Floorplans  
Active Adult • Assisted Living • Memory Care  
Visit Us at [ParkSprings.com](http://ParkSprings.com) or Call 678-684-3300 Today to Schedule a Tour



An Isakson Living Community | Stone Mountain, GA

STORIED  
LIVING

Based on People,  
Not Protocols

Visit [ParkSprings.com/Events](http://ParkSprings.com/Events)  
Discover More About Our February  
Virtual & In-Person Events



PARK SPRINGS®  
A Life Plan Community



## Smoke Rise Country Club Creates An In-House Wine Cellar Paradise

by Roger W. Orlando, Tucker City Council, Dist. 1 Post 1

Many will remember that the clubhouse at Smoke Rise Country Club flooded as a result of broken pipes in December 2022 and had to be restored in its entirety. It took 18 months to salvage the building and all its equipment and furnishings. Fast forward to the summer of 2025 when a former member who newly purchased a beautiful home in Big Canoe telephoned to say, "I am renovating and have a wine cellar that I do not want, and if the club could benefit, I'd love to have you come and get it." A rental truck, a long drive and much sweat equity later, the club had a brand new wine cellar of classy mahogany racks, a heavy marble centerpiece and a cooling unit to maintain optimal temperature.



The wine cellar is now open and has become a new and elegant centerpiece to the club's upgraded food and beverage program and experience. The first image you experience is an ornate, wrought iron and glass door adorned with decorative grape clusters. Inside, under a new, modern chandelier, the room is finished in gold leaf wallpaper against which the mahogany racks are anchored. It's a room of cool and dimly lit luxury, able to cellar nearly 700 bottles of liquid sunshine.



Smoke Rise is in the process of forming a wine club with a number of members having joined already. The wine program has two levels available - Diamond and Gold - with personal wine storage options of 12 or six bottles. Additionally, club members enjoy other benefits such as eliminated or discounted corkage fees, a brass label identifying the member's private collection and engraved wine glasses. Those who joined before January 30 will have their names inscribed on a plaque as "Founding Members" directly outside the cellar door.

## Smoke Rise Elementary School Soccer Team Shines

By Tonna Jones, Smoke Rise Elementary School Teacher

The Smoke Rise Elementary School soccer team had an outstanding season, bringing home 1st place for Area 2 and earning an impressive 2nd place finish at the district level. Through hard work, teamwork, and determination, these 5th grade student-athletes represented their school with pride and sportsmanship on and off the field. Their success is a testament to their dedication, supportive coaches, and encouraging families who cheered them on every step of the way. Congratulations to our Jaguars on an amazing season. Go Smoke Rise Elementary School!



## SRA SIGNATURE REALTY AGENTS

*The Market is Heating Up...*  
**We are ready!**



770-573-9715

[www.SRASignatureRealty.com](http://www.SRASignatureRealty.com)  
[team@SRASignatureRealty.com](mailto:team@SRASignatureRealty.com)



## NETWorks Bicycle Project

By William Henry, Smoke Rise Resident

NETWorks Cooperative Ministry is a faith-based charity located in Tucker, Georgia. The organization provides support to low-income families in the area. Some of the services provided are a client choice food pantry where families that are struggling to make ends meet can get three to four days' worth of food. Depending on the size of the household, they can shop for food at the pantry multiple times a month. NETWorks also provides other services to low-income households including the Back2Shool shop to provide school supplies, the Good Neighbor Christmas Store for presents for children, and limited rent/utility assistance.

NETWorks has partnerships with multiple churches including Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Lutheran, and non-denomination churches. This year, NETWorks asked Smoke Rise Baptist Church (SRBC) for assistance in providing bicycles for the Christmas Store. The SRBC Discovery and the Pairs and Spares classes both agreed to take on the challenge. If there was a contest between the classes, I would have to rate it as a tie. Each class brought in about the same number of bikes. A total of 41 bicycles were successfully donated to NETWorks. The bikes were delivered to SRBC by Sunday School members where a group of volunteers met to assemble, repair, and complete anything else that was needed before being delivered to the NETWorks store. In addition to the SRBC bikes, NETWorks received approximately 20 more new and previously owned bikes from other individuals. A volunteer, who is a bike mechanic for REI, repaired and spiffed-up any used bikes. Because of these initiatives, 60 children, who might not have had the opportunity otherwise, received bicycles from Santa. The old adage, "It is better to give than receive" is so true. SRBC is proud to partner with NETWorks Cooperative Ministry and these two Sunday School classes look forward to participating in this meaningful project again next Christmas.

Anyone that wants to donate food, school supplies or money should visit the website at [www.networkscoop.org](http://www.networkscoop.org).



**Foundation and Water Problems?  
We've Got the Solution!**

*Don't wait for problems to worsen!!*

Call 678.920.8128 for a free consultation today!



**Don Trueblood**  
404-386-9291 | [dontrueblood@gmail.com](mailto:dontrueblood@gmail.com)  
[www.truewayrenovations.com](http://www.truewayrenovations.com)  
Call now! FREE estimates

## HEALTH NOTES:

by Cheri Schneider, M.D., staff writer

### Grandparenting 101: Preparing for the Little One in Your Family

When I found out I would be a grandmother this spring, my world shifted a little. Many of you grandparents know what I mean. At my age, it is hard to imagine baby-proofing my house again. Especially since I just got out all that cool looking glassware and china! And my coffee tables both have sharp edges!

Several new "rules" are making the rounds among young parents. One of them is that grandparents or caregivers need to have a TDaP vaccine in place before holding the baby. It made me think that there may be other things I could do to prepare for the arrival of little Lucy. I decided to make myself a list of things to do to get ready. Here is my list. If you are expecting a newborn in your world, you can make it your list too.

1. Update your own immunizations: Babies have a weak immune system in the first six months of life. Some of the vaccinations they will need, cannot be given until two to six months of age. If they are premature or were born a few weeks early, they will be more susceptible to illnesses in general. Also, respiratory illness can be worse due to tiny airways.
  - a. TDaP (Tetanus, Diphteria and whooping cough or Pertussis). Adults need this every 10 years, or immediately, if they do not know their last dose, and they will be around babies. There is a Whooping cough outbreak in the U.S. every few years. The last peak was in 2024. This can be a deadly disease in infants and newborns.
  - b. Influenza and COVID updates: updating your own vaccine may prevent you from getting these diseases and passing them on.
  - c. RSV: Now there is an RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) vaccine for third trimester pregnant women and there is an infant vaccine. The RSV vaccine is also available to adults older than 75 or 50-75 with high-risk status (primarily lung and immune risk). This common virus can be deadly in newborns.
2. MMR: Encourage women in your family who are trying to get pregnant to update the Measles, Mumps and Rubella shot before pregnancy. Miscarriage, birth defects or stillborn babies can result if the mother gets Rubella during pregnancy.
3. If relatives who live overseas come to visit a newborn or infant, make sure all their immunizations are updated. Some diseases are still endemic in other countries.
4. Good handwashing. It is a simple thing. Don't forget to do this around the baby - especially after touching your face or any bacterial laden surface.
5. If you have a history of cold sores or herpes on the face and have an outbreak: Do not kiss the baby. Overall, the safest place to kiss a baby is on the top of the head. Also again, use good hand washing
6. If you buy cribs and baby furniture: Make sure it is up to code. The mattress should be firm and tight against the crib.
7. Do not sleep the baby on their side or tummy. While no one knows the real reason for Sudden infant Death syndrome (SIDS), back sleeping has decreased the rates of this. Daytime tummy time under direct supervision is fine and will help with development of neck muscle strength.
8. Do not sleep the baby on soft pillows and do not crowd the crib with stuffed animals and blankets. A footie pajama is better. Keep the bedroom slightly cool.
9. Make sure you always use a car seat when transporting baby and always CHECK THE REAR SEAT when you get out of the car.
10. Finally: have fun. At the end of the day, you get to hand your grandchild back and get a good night sleep. So many people I know were deeply impacted by the love of a grandmother or grandfather. Go take your place!

## Love, "Through the Years" – A Valentine's Day Story from Smoke Rise

By Joyce Ray, Staff Writer

There is some difference of opinion on what transpired to actually bring Buddy and Marsha Pittard together in 1961 and which of the two first noticed the other. The facts are that they were both working temporary jobs at the CDC at Christmas time, although not in the same building. A party held for all employees was a chance for Marsha to be smitten by this nice-looking guy who was singing and dancing "The Twist" on stage that night. Buddy's version is that he had already spotted Marsha before that. Later, in 1962, a chance meeting in the elevator led to their first date to the "Atlanta Crackers" baseball game. Afterward, Marsha remembers confiding to her mother that "I'm going to marry that boy someday."



They dated for two years while in school, enjoying Atlanta's restaurants and entertainment. On Buddy's birthday, December 23, 1963, at Kings Inn on Peachtree Street, he proposed, with violins playing "Love is a Many Splendored Thing" as snow started to fall. She said YES!

In August of 1964, they were married at the First Baptist Church of Tucker. They left immediately after the reception for the airport with an entourage of friends seeing them off to Miami for their honeymoon. Buddy's flair for making big plans on a small budget landed them in the Eden Rock Hotel in Miami – adjacent to the Fontainebleau Hotel where they were able to see Frank Sinatra perform. Buddy scheduled a romantic cruise to the Bahamas. They enjoyed a wonderful honeymoon despite Marsha getting bronchitis, both getting extremely sunburned, Marsha's fall on a bicycle, getting robbed of most of their money, and Hurricane Cleo touching down in Miami. Love conquers all!

After living in Decatur apartments, they settled in Winding Woods where they formed lasting friendships and raised their son, Chris. Marsha enjoyed tennis, Buddy golf, and together they supported Chris in school, sports, and church, staying active in the Tucker community. In the early 1990s, they built a home in Smoke Rise and still remain engaged there. They are proud grandparents of three and cherish time with their grandchildren.

Marsha and Buddy have supported the UGA Bulldogs for more than 60 years as season ticket holders, attending many bowl games, including the Rose Bowl, and never missing a televised game that they could not attend.

TUCCO Concrete was founded by Marsha's Dad, Mark Henderson, in 1959. It was primarily staffed by the large Henderson family. Buddy began working there when he joined the family and was next in line to become the leader in 1988. He managed it for 22 years, until it was sold and he retired.

As a businessman in Tucker, Buddy believes that it is both an obligation and a profound joy to give back to the community. The Pittard's have supported organizations like FODAC (Friends of Disabled Adults and Children), where Buddy embraced the role of Santa Clause for many years. They were founding members of The Smoke Rise Country Club and continue to support many community endeavors.

Marsha reflects that when they met and married, Buddy was a "diamond in the rough." As a young man he was carefree and lived for fun and a good time. She witnessed him becoming a compassionate leader and a superb father. He devoted his life to Christ in the late 80's, and she has seen the transformation that compels him to live a dedicated life with care for his family and love for other people.

Buddy treasures the qualities in Marsha that he admires most, which are her open and honest heart, her commitment to her family and to their marriage. As a member of the Tucker/Smoke Rise Community for many years, I was thrilled to learn more about the story of Marsha and Buddy, and to say a big "Thank You" for all you have given. Happy Valentines Day!

Call for free consultation

GEORGIA  
Will & Probate  
Lawyers, LLC

Latawsha Little-Hill  
Steven R Ashby  
4500 Hugh Howell Road  
Suite 600 Heritage Place  
Tucker, GA 30084  
770.493.4924  
www.gwaplaw.com

## Meet Your Neighbor!

### At the Kitchen Table: A Smoke Rise Family Story

By Alex Helton, Smoke Rise Resident

Smoke Rise neighbor, Anna Dunigan, and I were setting up a time to chat about her children's book, and I came close to suggesting we do it by phone. She's a busy mom of two, and I wanted to protect her time.

Thank goodness I didn't. The day came and seeing the sweetness and anticipation on the faces of her children, Sorren and Aster was the highlight of my day. Maybe even my week.

I learned that shortly after Sorren was born seven years ago, he was diagnosed with Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS). It was a huge shock for Anna and her husband Patrick.

"I was a gooey pile and couldn't function. Thankfully Patrick put me back together." She had to be strong, since early intervention has major advantages for someone with PWS.

PWS is a rare genetic disorder that affects the brain and the challenges that it causes vary from person to person. The most common issues are an insatiable hunger, low muscle tone, and a range of behavioral and physical challenges.

Anna left her career as a neuroscientist and researcher at Emory. Managing Sorren's care was going to need her full attention. The whole family pitches in. Sorren's five-year-old sister Aster is already talking about becoming a nurse when she grows up and Patrick is still Anna's rock, keeping her from feeling overwhelmed.

#### Welcome Dr. Thumper

One day, Sorren asked Anna to write a book about a bunny orthopedist. Where some parents would see that as one more thing to do, Anna thought "hey, why not?"

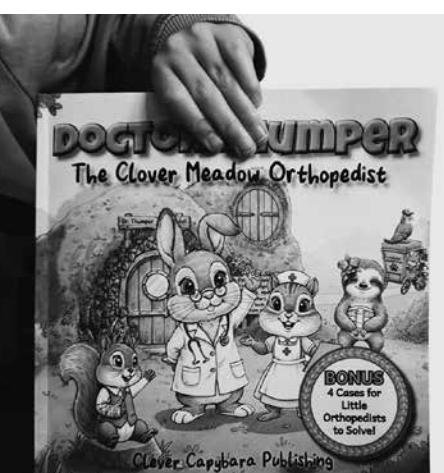
Plus, Anna and Patrick saw the book as a way to present a perspective that's different from the tales of mischief so often found in children's books. In Sorren's world, rules are critical. Anna points out how adults love to offer sugary treats. "I'm not always there to make sure they don't take them, and avoiding sugar is part of keeping Sorren safe. There's a risk that his brain will be triggered and kick off an insatiable hunger," Anna explained.

The book is called *Doctor Thumper: The Clover Meadow Orthopedist* and it was a group effort. Aster nominated a sloth to be the patient. Sorren was positive that the pesky character ought to be a weasel.

In the story, Dr. Thumper helps Sylvia with her scoliosis in the same way doctors have helped Sorren. The book is entertaining and educational.

Later, I realized I had overstayed my welcome. As I got up to leave, it dawned on me that I came close to missing all of this. I wouldn't have met sweet Sorren or been there when Aster asked politely if I wanted to see her first aid kit before I left.

Anna's book is called *Doctor Thumper: The Clover Meadow Orthopedist*, and it's available on Amazon.



salon j. christian

Serving our community for 24 years.

Seasoned stylists can help you easily achieve your style, classic or sassy.

770-879-1071 APPOINTMENTS PREFERRED

## Belco Electric

FAMILY OWNED & OPERATED SINCE 1972

Fast, Dependable 24-hr. Service by Professional, Uniformed Electricians

770-455-4556

Check out our website: [BelcoInc.com](http://BelcoInc.com) and follow us on



PROVIDING PERSONALIZED SERVICE FOR OVER 10 YEARS

Call for a bundle quote today!

AMERICAN FAMILY INSURANCE  
Insure carefully, dream fearlessly.

Thele Moore, Agent  
[thelemooreagency@amfam.com](mailto:thelemooreagency@amfam.com)  
(678) 537-8430  
1685 E Park Place Blvd Ste 107  
Stone Mountain, GA 30087

Get a Quote



HOME | AUTO | LIFE | BUSINESS | FARM & RANCH

American Family Mutual Insurance Company S.I. & its Operating Companies. Life Insurance underwritten by American Family Life Insurance Company, 6000 American Parkway, Madison, WI 53783 ©2022 21178 - 8/22 - 2072798

## Meet Dietre Ffrench

YOUR SMOKERISE NEIGHBOR & REALTOR®



As a resident of the Smoke Rise community, I'm deeply connected to the people and businesses that make this neighborhood unique. With over 20 years of experience, I help my clients realize the full potential of their homes. Thinking of selling? Let's connect and turn your real estate dreams into reality, together.

### Ditre Ffrench

NEIGHBOR | REALTOR®

m. 404.663.9701 o. 404.237.5000  
[dietrefffrench@atlantafinehomes.com](mailto:dietrefffrench@atlantafinehomes.com)  
[dietrefffrench.atlantafinehomes.com](http://dietrefffrench.atlantafinehomes.com)



Atlanta Fine Homes

Sotheby's  
INTERNATIONAL REALTY

ESTD 1962  
**BOB BAILEY'S**  
APPLIANCE C°

[bobbbaileys.com](http://bobbbaileys.com)

770-979-1077



Your home appliance experts since 1962

Come visit our newly remodeled showroom at

5100 Highway 78

Stone Mountain, GA 30087

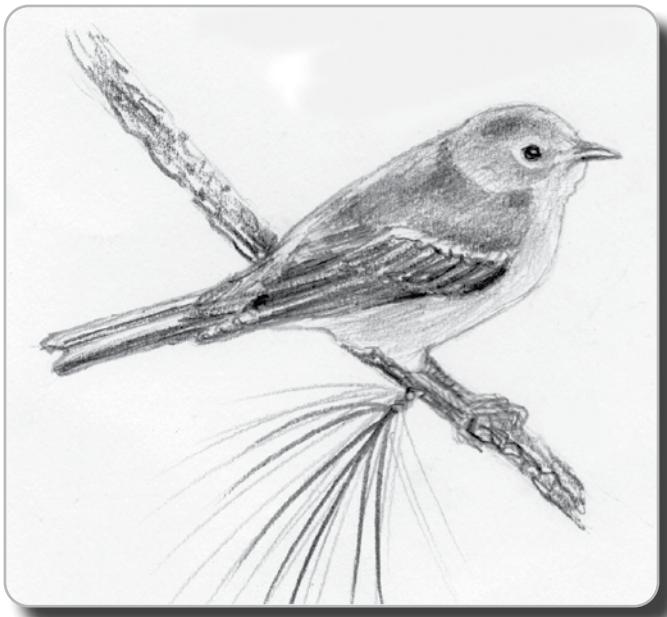
## Out the Window Article and illustration by Beth Henson, Staff Writer

### Pine Warblers

Gazing out my office window, I watched a parade of hungry, wintering birds at the nearby feeder. Sweet wrens and shy cardinals visited off and on throughout the day, alongside fussy titmice and the occasional tiny chickadee. Much to my delight, vivid lemon-green pine warblers had recently appeared. Their tropical-colored plumage always reminded me of the fun parakeet I had as a child.

Unlike most warblers, which fly further south for the winter, pine warblers are year-round residents of Georgia. They are the only warbler that regularly consumes large quantities of seeds, especially pine seeds. Because of this unusual diet, they are often seen at feeders during the colder months and can be found in every county of our state. In winter, their numbers swell as northern populations drift south into the pine forests.

Thank you for visiting my bright little friends. You added a cheerful splash of color and a bit of unexpected joy to a gray winter day.



## Share Your Love of Birds – Join in!

By Linda Karr, Staff Writer

The annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a joint project of the National Audubon Society, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Birds Canada. This four-day wintertime event spans the globe and is integrated into eBird. You can spend as little as 15 minutes or as much as four days observing birds. The GBBC is February 13 - 16.

It is easy to participate and can be done alone or with others - and you can observe birds anywhere.

Identify all the birds you see and/or hear and use one of the following tools to share your observations:

- Identify birds with Merlin Bird ID app and add sightings to your list
- Use the eBird Mobile app

Submit one or more lists during the four days of counting, and you become a contributing citizen scientist. All eBird entries and saved Merlin Bird IDs during the four days contribute to the Great Backyard Bird Count.

The website has more useful information on how to participate. Visit the Great Backyard Bird Count web page [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). Have fun!

## Georgia Iris Society Meeting

Saturday, February 14, 2026

The Georgia Iris Society will meet at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, February 14, at St. Bartholomew Episcopal Church, 1790 Lavista Road, NE, Atlanta, GA. 30329.

Georgia Iris Society member and former President, Henry Everett will present the program on "Louisiana Iris."

Meetings are free to the public and all are welcome. Join for education, beautification and recreation.

For more information, contact Henry Everett, (678) 684-3729.

After 14 years with Keller Williams,  
we are proud to announce our affiliation with HomeSmart!

## Eleanor Patrick Homes Group HomeSmart Properties

Over 15 Years Serving Buyers and Sellers in Smoke Rise and Metro Atlanta!

For Excellent Personalized Customer Service  
Tailored to You – Buy & Sell with Elle!

- Positive Solutions Teamed with the Ease of Doing Business
- Protect Your Best Interest At All Times
- Excellent Client Reviews
- Over 20 Years as A Smoke Rise Resident

Contact us Today for a free home Consultation

[eleonorpatrickhomes@gmail.com](mailto:eleonorpatrickhomes@gmail.com)

404-721-2904 Direct/ Mobile/Text



Eleanor Patrick, Realtor



## February Garden of the Month: From Lawn to Living Landscape

By Maureen Fraser, Publicity Chair and Newsletter Co-Editor, Mountain Mums Garden Club

This February, the Mountain Mums Garden Club is delighted to recognize the garden at 1709 East Gate Drive, home to Dr. Mike Rogulski and Dr. Liz Krupinski, residents of Smoke Rise for the past 10 years.

What makes this garden especially meaningful is not just its beauty today but the thoughtful transformation that brought it to life. When Mike and Liz first moved into their home, the front yard looked very different. There were no trees, no planting beds, and no circular design - just a wide expanse of grass. Coming from Tucson, Arizona, where lawns are rare and desert landscapes dominate, the couple quickly realized that "it was way too much lawn." Liz recalls looking at the yard and thinking it was simply "ugly grass" and asking, "What can we do with this?"

They began by bringing in professionals to help with the initial vision, removing the grass, planting the trees, and laying the stonework that now anchors the space. From there, the garden became a hands-on, collaborative labor of love. "They helped with the bones," Liz shared, "but we do everything else." For the past decade, that partnership between structure and personal care has resulted in a landscape that feels layered, intentional, and alive.



What stands out most, especially in winter, is the garden's richness of texture and color. Mike says he loves the mix of colors during the colder months, when so many landscapes fade. Variegated greens, golden tones, and winter interest plants keep the garden vibrant year-round. A Siberian dogwood provides striking red stems in winter, ornamental grasses add soft movement and puff-like texture, and carefully shaped trees, some pruned into playful "lollipop" forms add architectural interest.

Liz's favorite plants are the camellias and rosebushes, which reward patience with beautiful blooms, while Japanese cherry trees - one in the front and two in the back - offer breathtaking spring displays. Banana plants lend a bold, tropical flair, reflecting Liz's love of plants that evoke warmer climates, even if they don't always survive Georgia winters.

The garden also reflects what Mike and Liz love about living in Smoke Rise itself. Mike speaks warmly about the neighborhood's spacing, trees, and privacy, as well as the stunning views of Stone Mountain. From their driveway, they can even see the high fireworks displays an unexpected bonus. Both enjoy walking their street daily, appreciating the individuality of each home. "Nothing here is cookie-cutter," Mike noted. "Everyone does their own thing, and it's beautiful to see."

Their story mirrors that diversity. Liz, originally from New Jersey, met Mike, who is from France, while working at the University of Arizona. Liz was a professor at the time, and Mike was a graduate student (not hers, she quickly clarified). Today, Liz works in radiology research and mentors others in academic work, while Mike works from home in software design. Together, they represent the rich mix of backgrounds, professions, and perspectives that make Smoke Rise such a special place to call home.

As we celebrate this February Garden of the Month, we are reminded that great gardens are rarely instant. They grow over time, shaped by intention, curiosity, and care. This garden once just a stretch of lawn is now a living landscape that continues to evolve, season by season, and stands as a beautiful example of what thoughtful stewardship can create.



L-R: Pat Mitchell, Denise Finley, Gary Pfeiffer, Victoria Crosby, Margo Collin

## Smoke Rise Garden Club Learns of a Local Gem

By Victoria Crosby, SRGC President

The January meeting of the Smoke Rise Garden Club took place at the home of Margo Colin, with Pat Mitchell and Denise Finley supplying the refreshments.

Our guest speaker was Gary Pfeiffer, who is a co-leader with Valerie Maier of the Wells Brown House at 1036 Ridge Avenue in Stone Mountain. Gary is a retired extension agent of the University of Georgia in DeKalb County, where he worked for 38 years as horticulture and Master Gardener Coordinator.

Gary spoke of the 1870 neo-classical historic home, which is the headquarters of the Stone Mountain Historic Society, and was donated to the society by the Brown Family in 2005.

In 2018 the Historic Society purchased the property next to the Brown House. The house had been condemned and demolished. The property needed a lot of work, much of it has been accomplished by many volunteers over the years by helping to clear out the English Ivy and bamboo.

A plan was designed by master gardener Paula Refi, a local landscape designer. Now there are native plants and trails, and an herb garden which was designed by Sue Pickens and installed in 2022. Some of the larger trees on the property, Camellias, Magnolias, Old Oaks and Pecan trees, are well over 100 years old.

Future projects include a butterfly garden, outdoor seating, picnic tables, and of course to raise funds for these projects. The help of local garden clubs is most appreciated.

SRGC is a member of the DeKalb Federation of Garden Clubs in the Redbud District of Garden Clubs of Georgia, which is part of the National Garden Club organizations. We meet on the first Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at members' homes.

For information or to attend a meeting, contact Marisa Fernandez at [marisa.fernandez@0212@gmail.com](mailto:marisa.fernandez@0212@gmail.com) or call (305) 590-7186.

**SQUEEGEE SQUAD®**  
YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD WINDOW CLEANER

- Window Cleaning
- Pressure Washing
- House Washing
- Gutter Cleaning
- Solar Panel Cleaning

**CONTACT US:**  
**404-383-5678**

**Love Your Home!**  
**20 Windows**  
**Exterior Cleaned**  
**for \$199 & 10%**  
**Off Additional**  
**Services**  
**Completed By**  
**02/28/2026**



## Mountain Mums Garden Club Members Learn and Grow Together

By Maureen Fraser, Publicity Chair & Newsletter Co-Editor, Mountain Mums Garden Club

Mountain Mums Garden Club President Sally Young opened the January meeting at the welcoming home of Susan Gilbert. Members enjoyed a seasonal meditation presentation by Kate Graham, setting a thoughtful tone for the gathering.

The featured speaker was Neil Duggan, Volunteer Farm Coordinator for NETWorks GROWINGS, who shared how innovative gardening practices support the organization's food pantry mission. NETWorks operates a grocery-style food pantry focused on providing nutritious, appealing food to neighbors. Because purchasing fresh produce can be costly and donated items are not always at peak quality, NETWorks made the decision to grow its own food.

Traditional outdoor gardening can present challenges such as limited space, weather variability, and maintenance demands. NETWorks addressed these issues through hydroponics—growing plants indoors using nutrient-rich water instead of soil. Inside the NETWorks warehouse, leafy greens, tomatoes, cucumbers, and herbs are grown year-round. This approach produces consistent, high-quality harvests with a longer shelf life, ensuring neighbors have access to fresh food they are proud to serve their families.

Members also shared practical gardening resolutions to support successful growing throughout the year. Tips included nurturing Georgia's red clay soil by keeping it covered with mulch or cover crops, incorporating native plants to support pollinators, watering at the base of plants to reduce fungal issues, and trusting local seasonal cues rather than generic planting calendars.

Beyond gardening, Mountain Mums members recently visited ATRIA Park of Tucker, a senior living center, where they assisted residents in creating Snow Angel door hangers using materials from Scraplanta. Each angel featured the resident's own photo, spreading creativity and joy throughout the community.

You are invited to lace up your walking shoes and mark your calendar for Saturday, March 14 at Smoke Rise Baptist Church, as we join together for the 15th Annual Tucker Walk to Remember. Every step taken, and every daffodil bulb planted along the way, reflects the Mountain Mums Garden Club's commitment to safe driving and to honoring young lives tragically lost too soon. The opening ceremonies will be in the parking lot at 9:30 a.m. with a three-mile loop through Probst Park and Smoke Rise Crossing. The church is located at 5901 Hugh Howell Road, Stone Mountain.

This meaningful walk honors those remembered at the Triangle of Trees Memorial located at Highway 78, Exit 7. The memorial garden pays tribute to Mandi Smith, Brandon Hubbard, Brandon Stovall, Matt Taylor, Charlie Wellman, Julian Carter, and Ben Lollies. Their trees stand as a lasting reminder to us all to Please Drive Safely. Scholarships for Taggart Driving School are still available, so please help spread the word about this wonderful opportunity.

The next Mountain Mums Garden Club meeting will be held Wednesday, February 11, featuring Sam Landes of the Georgia Mushroom Club. Those interested in joining may contact Mary Jacobson at [mjacob1010@gmail.com](mailto:mjacob1010@gmail.com). More information and photos of the club's projects are on our Facebook page.



Neil Duggan



Sheldon Fleming, City of Stonecrest Naturalist

## Stonecrest Botanical Garden – a Bright Future for DeKalb County

By Quill Duncan, Morning Glories Recording Secretary

The Smoke Rise Morning Glories January meeting featured an interesting presentation by Mr. Sheldon Fleming of the City of Stonecrest. Sheldon serves as the Naturalist Coordinator for the City of Stonecrest, which became a city seven years ago. He was born in Anchorage, AK and has been a nature lover all his life. His talk to the club reviewed his unique history with gardening in DeKalb County over the last few decades, including his position as Director of Wonderland Gardens on the site of the former Mathis Dairy property. Many of our community volunteered or attended events there over the years of its existence. He pioneered creative recycling efforts there using old concrete and recycled plastic to create raised beds for gardening, pathways, outdoor classrooms and community gardening. Today, that space is a DeKalb County Park titled Rainbow Park.

Now he and the City of Stonecrest are focused on turning the former Farrington Golf Club and later named Metropolitan Golf Course into a 100-acre botanical garden. The plan is to devote 70% of the space to horticulture and 30% to agriculture. The grounds contain hundreds of beautiful trees and shrubs that once were part of the golf course, including a creek and a waterfall. The fairways are overgrown with pine trees today after 30 years of untended land, and they will be removed to create more open green spaces for park use and trails leaving the existing oaks, maples, tulip poplars and understory trees along the edging of the open grassy spaces. With a three-year timeline and a budget, Sheldon is confident this will become a very welcome greenspace for DeKalb citizens for many years to come. We will look forward to watching the progress.

If you are interested in programs like this, contact our President Amie Walsh at (404) 729-4871 to attend our next meeting on February 10, which will be held at Park Springs. That meeting will feature a demonstration and talk on Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging.

ATTENTION ADVERTISERS: All ad submissions and advertising inquiries should be directed to:  
Classified and Display ads: Staff@smokesignalnews.com  
Flyers: Barbara Luton at barluton@aol.com.

All classified ads are limited to 20 words, with the *Smoke Signal* reserving the right to edit any copy. Ads are \$240 per year. Please submit a copy of ad to staff@smokesignalnews.com with your full name, address and phone number. Make checks out to *Smoke Signal* and mail to P.O. Box 1038, Tucker, GA 30085. We require full payment prior to ad placement.

For information on display (box) advertisements or flyer inserts, see contact information on page 2.

## Classified Ads

### WAGNON

### LANDSCAPE GROUP

Residential, commercial, design and installation. Year-round maintenance, light tree work and cleanups. Licensed/insured SR resident with SR references.

770-381-3697.

**A KICKIN' & PICKIN' ESTATE SALES** We stage, price and sell your treasures and offer liquidation and cleaning services. Contact Rick Kicklighter at 678-234-6956.

**TOTAL HOME CARE** - Deep cleaning, decluttering, windows, auto detailing, house/pet sitting, pressure washing, light yardwork, errands. Call Dana @ 706-228-0593

Need a professional pet sitter? Call Critter Sittin' Sisters at 404-409-3765. We make your pets smile!

### AFFORDABLE LAWN CARE

Mowing, edging, pruning, trimming, etc. Reasonable, dependable, insured. Call Mark at 404-697-7426.

**SR Handyman** - painting, household fixes, landscaping, stonework. Deliveries. No job too small. Also experienced with internet connection. Call Peter @ 770-595-0077

**OUTDOOR LIGHTING & IRRIGATION** Convenient one-stop outdoor lighting/irrigation. FREE assessment for first 10 callers mentioning *Smoke Signal*. 833-843-6957 or outdoorswellit@gmail.com.

### DOG BOARDING:

Loving dog care. Small, selective, safe, fun. Your dog will be glad you went on vacation!

Call 770-510-8641 or visit

[www.theshepherds-glen.com](http://www.theshepherds-glen.com)

### PLUMBER

Plumbing-Electrical-H.V.A.C Repairs-Replacement

New Installation

Family Owned and Operated

38 yrs Experience,

Senior Discount

Call Troy-770-256-8940

**PIANO TUNING AND REPAIRS** Over 40 years of professional experience. Contact Smoke Rise resident Steve Duncan at 770-414-4766 or 1swd@att.net

### DOG GROOMING

**Smoke Rise Resident** Call/Text Lisa 404-444-7763

Loving Care for your Under 40lb Furbabies

Professional Groomer since 2006

### DAVE'S LANDSCAPING

Year-Round Lawn Maintenance.

Licensed and insured.

For an estimate, please Call/Text 404-822-6319

### PETS, PAPERS, & POSIES.

I'll take care of them while you're away.

**Smoke Rise resident** 40+ years.

Karen Bouchard

Please text or call 404-472-7348

**Computer Service.** Repairs, Upgrades, Setups and Training Trusted company working with local community since 1995. References available. 770-309-4735 [www.thepclink.com](http://www.thepclink.com)

The *Smoke Signal* currently has space available for more Classified Ads!

Contact staff@smokesignalnews.com to get your ad in next month's paper!

*The purpose of the *Smoke Signal* classifieds is to advertise goods and services to the community.*

## Artist at Work

Besides consulting with our military on the uses, dangers, and challenges of AI, when he is not piloting an 80' boat, pushing out two blogs each week (Captain-Obvious.com and GeekTheology.net) and playing multiple wind instruments in four orchestras while serving on the Board of Directors of the Sarasota Pops, and teaching several Sunday School classes at Smoke Rise Baptist Church...Joel has taken up another hobby.

With some coaching from our friend and talented artist, Beth Henson, he is finding his way through an array of paper types, charcoal, pastels, and shading.



For over three decades, **Blankenship Family Dentistry** has been treating the Smoke Rise Community with a personal touch.

You will feel comfortable with our father-daughter team that offers an abundance of dental talent, in a judgement-free environment.

Call to make your appointment today.  
**770.879.0732**

## Food & Home Fixin's

by Joyce Ray, Staff Writer

### Valentine's Day Decadence

*Break out the red roses, the champagne, and the chocolate covered strawberries, and invite Cupid to visit. This month, we celebrate Valentine's Day with a delicious Chocolate-strawberry cheesecake and a Chocolate Martini, an original made by our own Bob Espy.*

#### Chocolate Cheesecake

##### Step 1 - Crust:

2 1/4 cups graham cracker crumbs

6 T salted softened butter

3 T sugar

Spray inside of a 9-inch spring-form pan. Mix all ingredients and press into the bottom and 1 inch up the sides of the pan. Preheat oven to 325°F. Wrap outside of pan with heavy duty aluminum foil. Bake until set (7-8 Minutes). Cool completely for about 30 minutes

##### Step 2 - Filling:

4 (8oz) pkgs cream cheese, softened

4 large eggs

1 large egg yolk

1 T grated lemon rind

2 T. all-purpose flour

2 tsp. vanilla extract

1-2 drops soft pink food coloring gel

1 1/4 cup sugar

1 cup coarsely chopped ripe fresh strawberries



Process chopped strawberries in a food processor or blender until completely smooth, about 1 minute. Scrape down sides as needed. Set aside.

Beat cream cheese with a stand mixer fitted with paddle attachment on medium speed until creamy, 1-2 minutes. Gradually add flour and 1 1/4 cup sugar, beating until smooth, about one minute. Add whole eggs, one at a time on low speed – do not overbeat. Add egg yolk and beat just until incorporated. Beat in lemon zest, strawberry puree, and 2 tsp vanilla on low speed just until combined. Gently stir in food coloring gel. Pour batter into baked crust and place on a large, rimmed baking sheet in the oven.

Bake just until center is set – 1 hour 10 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes. Cheesecake will have small cracks on the top when done. Turn off oven and allow to stand with door closed for about 15 minutes. Run a knife around the outer edge of cheesecake to loosen from sides of pan. DO NOT REMOVE FROM PAN. Cool completely (2 hours) and wrap top with foil and refrigerate four to 24 hours.

##### Step 3 - The Chocolate Ganache:

6 ounces (one cup) semisweet chocolate chips

1/4 cup salted butter

4 tsp. light corn syrup

1/2 tsp vanilla

Place chocolate chips, butter and corn syrup in small microwave bowl and microwave on medium power until melted and smooth (1-2 minutes), stirring every 30 seconds. Stir in vanilla.

Remove sides of pan and transfer cheesecake to serving platter that is about 2 inches (at least) larger than the cake. Slowly pour chocolate ganache over top of cake and allow some to drip down the sides and to pool on the plate. Chill cheesecake until ganache is firm, for about 20 minutes. Garnish top of cake with a nest of whole and half strawberries or chocolate dipped strawberries as desired.

#### Bob's Chocolate Martini – "A dessert in a glass"

1-3 tsp. Hershey's chocolate syrup (to taste)

1 oz Vodka (Grey Goose)

2 oz. Vodka (Cold Brew Infused Skyy)

2 oz. Irish Cream Liqueur (Bailey's Irish Cream)

1.5 oz Crème de Cacao chocolate liqueur (DeKuyper)

.5-1 oz Kahlua

2 dashes chocolate bitters

Dark Milk Chocolate shavings, for garnish

Espresso Powder – for garnish on rim of glass

Ice

##### Step 1

Drizzle 1 tsp. of chocolate syrup inside a martini glass. Rim glass with espresso powder if desired. Place glass in freezer or refrigerator to chill while preparing drink.

##### Step 2

Combine Vodka, Irish crème liqueur, chocolate liqueur, Crème de cacao, chocolate bitters, chocolate syrup, Kahlua. With spoon, stir gently - mix the syrup in with other ingredients. Add about 1/3 full of ice.

##### Step 3

Place lid on shaker; shake until well combined and chilled, 1 to 2 minutes. Strain the cocktail into prepared glass. Garnish with chocolate shavings, if desired. Enjoy.