

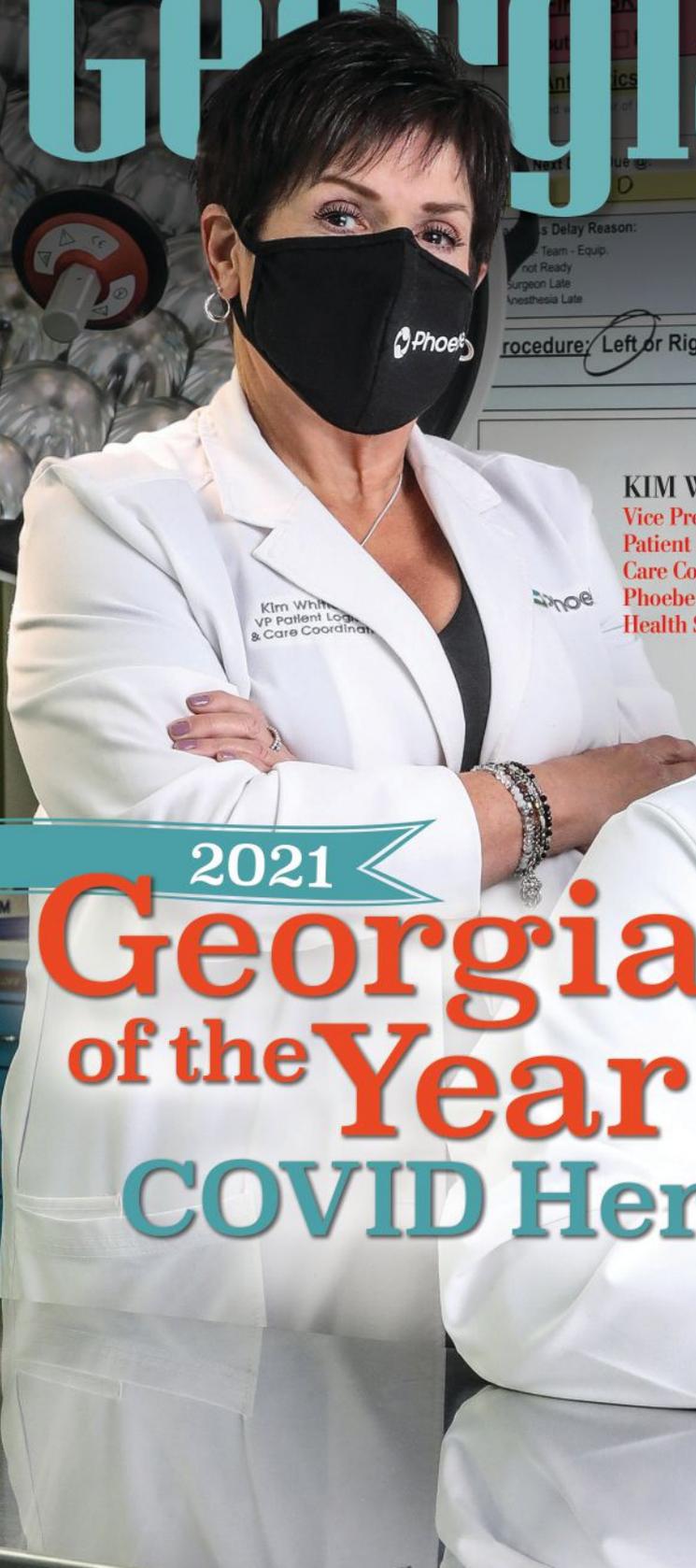
Inside

100 Most Influential Georgians

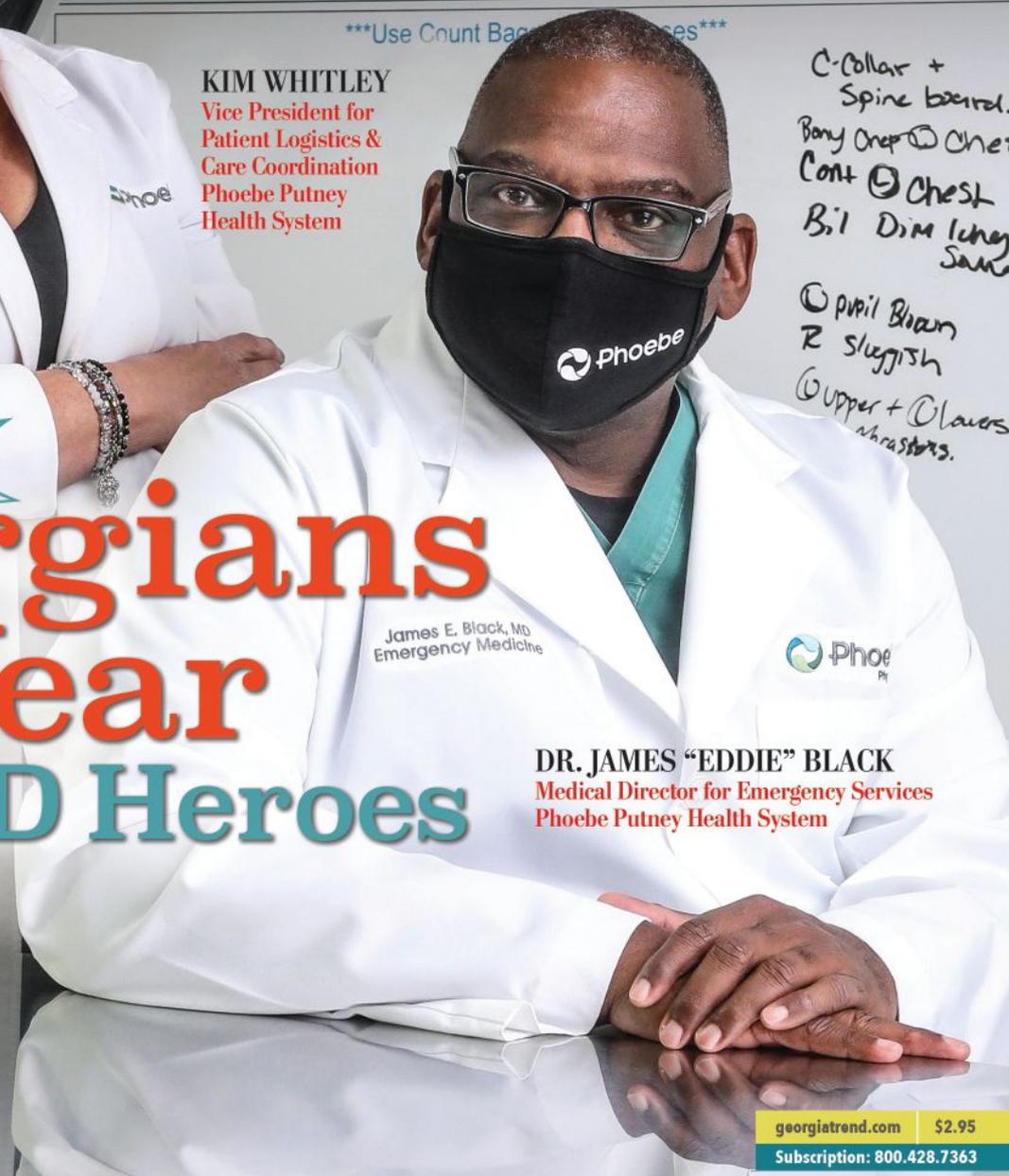
The Magazine of Georgia Business, Politics & Economic Development Since 1985

JANUARY 2021

Georgiatrend



KIM WHITLEY
Vice President for
Patient Logistics &
Care Coordination
Phoebe Putney
Health System



James E. Black, MD
Emergency Medicine

DR. JAMES "EDDIE" BLACK
Medical Director for Emergency Services
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2021

Georgians of the Year COVID Heroes

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A man in a light blue short-sleeved shirt, dark pants, and a grey cap is walking from right to left in the foreground. Behind him are three large red Coca-Cola delivery trucks parked in a lot. The trucks have white lettering on their sides, including the Coca-Cola logo. The background shows green trees and a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

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WE HEAR YOU!

Thanks to our friends at @GeorgiaTrend for highlighting the diligent efforts we have undertaken to remain open during the COVID-19 pandemic. Go, Eagles! @LoganBowlds_SA

As it stands today, only about 30% of Colquitt County residents have access to internet. Local leadership plans to change that: Find out more about their success in @GeorgiaTrend #BroadbandReady #DigitalDivide #InternetAccess #GeorgiaBroadband @GA_DCA

From @GeorgiaTrend: Aerospace products are Georgia's No. 1 export thanks to a bevy of organizations – @LockheedMartin, @NxtComm1, GTRI, and others. @GTRI

TOP Reads

Here are the most popular articles from the November issue:

"75 Years of Success," Georgia ports celebrate a milestone while breaking records

"What the World Needs Now," the Silver Spoon Awards spotlight restaurants and people who have stepped up during the pandemic

"Up for the Challenge," the state's research community is attacking COVID-19 with expertise and commitment

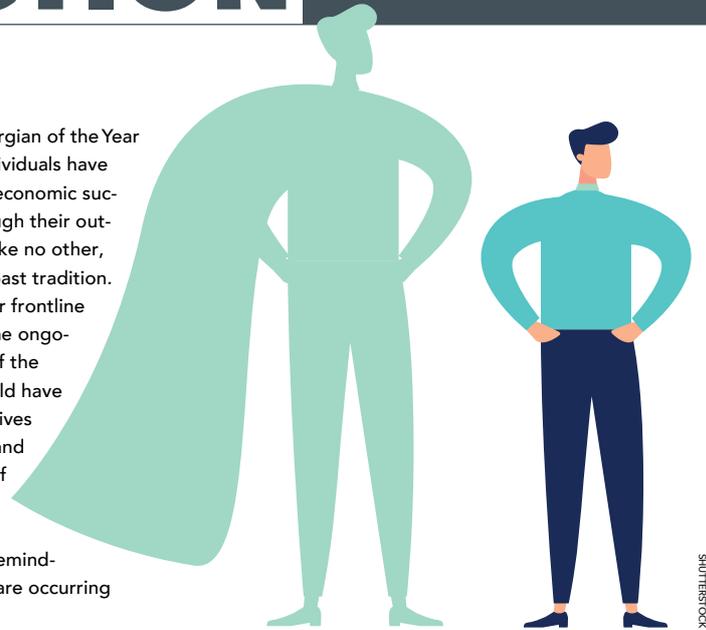
"Transforming the Future," the 2015 Transportation Funding Act is changing the landscape of Georgia

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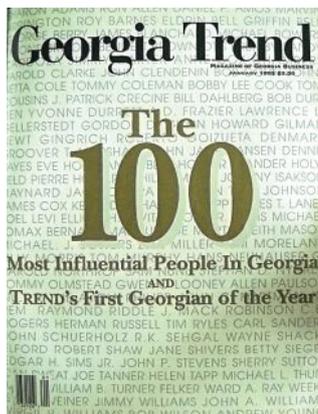
Not one, but many

For 29 years, *Georgia Trend* has chosen a Georgian of the Year who has graced our January cover. These individuals have made significant contributions to the state's economic success and have distinguished themselves through their outstanding accomplishments. But with 2020 being a year like no other, the staff decided it was only appropriate to break with past tradition.

Rather than single out one person, we chose to honor frontline workers who have helped reduce the heavy burden of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It was impossible to name all of the countless individuals throughout the state whom we could have highlighted for their service. So we selected representatives from healthcare, scientific research, education, the arts and organizations devoted to feeding the growing number of Georgia's hungry residents. Each of these eight individuals symbolizes thousands we want to thank and honor. We hope the 2021 Georgians of the Year also serve as reminders of the sacrifices, creativity and acts of kindness that are occurring daily during this extraordinary time. – *The Editors*



Master crafter of winning teams



Baseball's Best: *Georgia Trend's* first Georgian of the Year was John Schuerholz, in 1992

Georgia Trend's first Georgian of the Year was then-Atlanta Braves President and General Manager John Schuerholz in 1992. The former GM was an apt choice. He took over a losing Braves team at the beginning of the 1991 season and helped nurture it to a division championship that year and for an unprecedented 14 consecutive seasons.

During his tenure, the Braves won the World Series in 1995, making Schuerholz the first GM to lead teams to the championship in both the American and National Leagues. He was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 2017. And, the Georgia Historical Society named him a 2019 Trustee, reflecting his contributions to the quality of life in the state. When it comes to sports, there are few who've achieved more. – *Mary Ann DeMuth*

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Preserve the postal service

I enjoy reading and reviewing *Georgia Trend* each month and thank you and your staff for a comprehensive coverage of the entire state. I particularly liked your opinion piece from the October issue regarding the USPS ["Protect the Post" by Ben Young]. You are correct that the USPS is critical to the everyday lives of so many citizens. The business model may have changed but that does not make it less relevant. Hopefully, the forthcoming administration will appoint a Postmaster General who will be visible, accessible and promote a positive feeling about the service and the many employees. Thank you for highlighting an essential but often "taken for granted" part of our government service (even though not supported as it should be).

✉ **Steve Greenberg**
The writer is an attorney in Savannah.

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Ben Young is Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of *Georgia Trend*.

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Diversity Focus

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) are hot topics in 2021. In many ways Georgia is at the vanguard in successful corporate and civic practices. At the recent Georgia Chamber of Commerce D&I Summit it was evident that business leaders intend to escalate D&I training in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Discriminatory practices against minorities and women are rampant in nearly every sector, but access to capital is perhaps the greatest hurdle to minority-owned businesses and entrepreneurs. In the broader corporate realm, barriers to advancement prevent the diversification of leaders and stockholders. It will require a cultural change and a bit of reconciliation to remove these barriers.

Some changes are structural. Gas South President and CEO Kevin Greiner spoke at the summit of the company's subtle shifts to impact career advancement, such as altering a policy requiring a college degree to qualify for a position to allow for employees willing to pursue education. Blind hiring and software that blocks applicant names are other ways Gas South works to eliminate implicit bias in the hiring process. By not doing so, "not only are you not doing the right thing, but you're selling yourself short in terms of long-term success of business," he said.

Delta has also implemented blind hire and other entry requirements, said Executive Vice President and Chief Legal Officer Peter Carter. Extending beyond the company, Delta has changed its political action committee criteria to align with antiracism campaigns and expanded its social media policy and travel requirements to ban racist and hate symbols. "No one better connects the world, and we don't want people spreading venom and toxicity," he said.

Greiner noted that his company's acquisition of Infinite Energy provides a chance to reinvigorate and expand this mission to meet the moment. "It's different today than two years ago, when you didn't look at that D&I strategy being a core element [of] a project plan," he said. "It's a testament to how much further we've come as society, and how far we need to go."

What does D&I strategy look like? Conversation is seen as a critical component of any D&I effort. Gas South implemented a TEDx-style program inviting employees to engage in ideas about workplace D&I through talks delivered by senior leadership. It can be awkward to discuss target topics at first, but employees take ownership in the process when sharing their own ideas and experiences.

Mentorship is a highly successful D&I method. Cox Automotive is heavily engaged in career development, with 100% participation in the Executive Sponsorship Program, which matches executives to company-engaged women and people of color for relationship development and career guidance.

Continuing education is another area of unequal access for minori-

ties and women. Since 2011, ThoughtWorks Atlanta, a technology consulting company, boasts 50% female representation in ThoughtWorks University, a two-year entry-level program that offers new hires a path to careers in IT. Such programs increase retention efforts as well.

Many companies use surveys to engage in employee D&I. The Home Depot collects results from an annual Voice of the Associate survey, which has seen an increase in associates' commitment as a result. In Georgia we should see a lot of focus on efforts targeting veterans, who are often included in D&I initiatives. The Home Depot exceeded its goal to hire 55,000 veterans in five years and has hired over 79,000 veterans.

Some companies work to diversify their supply chain, such as Southern Co.'s Second Tier Program, which strongly encourages prime suppliers to extend subcontracting opportunities to minority and female owned firms. Southern Co. also provides sponsorships for suppliers to attend Dartmouth University Tuck School of Business and a mentor program for supplier companies. These programs help increase suppliers' awareness of contracting opportunities and provide employees who make purchasing decisions with more supplier choices.

“
At the recent Georgia Chamber of Commerce summit it was evident that business leaders intend to escalate diversity and inclusion training.
”

There are D&I practices within the corporate community to build on, as well as initiatives from the Georgia Bar Association, which established a Diversity Program in 1993, to the Associated General Contractors of Georgia, which established a taskforce in 2016 to address lack of diversity in the construction industry.

One takeaway from the D&I Summit is the need for more mentorships and access to successful entrepreneurs for women and minorities. In 2019, Georgia was ranked second among states with the largest growth in number of women-owned firms and there are a number of programs, such as the city of Atlanta's Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative, aimed at helping more women succeed in business.

Georgia has an exciting D&I culture in and of itself. It can only get better. ■■



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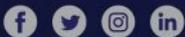
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Susan Percy is Editor-at-Large for Georgia Trend.

Ready for Normal

The year 2020 brought a lot of crazy – along with a lot of sadness, a lot of disruption and a lot of heartbreak. Topping the crazy list was the end to the presidential election: a defeated candidate refusing to acknowledge the will of the electorate and clinging pathetically to power.

And, of course, for Georgians, there was the additional drama of our state becoming the focus of world attention with the Senate race runoffs this month. That got a bit livelier – and stranger – after the two sitting senators in November called for the resignation of Georgia’s secretary of state, a fellow Republican, presumably at the behest of their wounded presidential candidate. (It almost sounds like a plot point in a bad Netflix movie, the kind that sends you scrambling for the remote. But it was all too real.)

This played out against the backdrop of a worsening worldwide COVID-19 pandemic that is still claiming thousands of lives each day – and persistent problems of social justice, poverty and inadequate health coverage.

A heartfelt request: Could we please get back to normal?

You know, the place where responsible leaders do their best to guide us through difficult times and work to improve the lives of those they represent. We may disagree with these leaders on particular issues or on their timing or their solution to certain problems, but we can generally feel confident that they are serious about addressing the concerns they were elected to deal with.

In recent times, Georgia leaders have shown themselves willing and able to rise to the occasion. The 2020 General Assembly, suspended for several weeks because of the COVID crisis, nonetheless passed a much-needed hate crimes bill, HB 426, mandating tough penalties for those convicted of crimes motivated by racial, gender, cultural or religious prejudice.

This came largely in response to the murder of Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick, a Black man killed by two white men while he was out jogging, and the police killings of George Floyd in Minnesota and Breonna Taylor in Kentucky. Until the bill passed and was signed into law by Gov. Brian Kemp, Georgia had been one of only four U.S. states without a hate crimes bill.

The same session saw tougher laws against human trafficking and a measure that would help foster parents. Legislators confronted the difficult challenge of passing a budget that reconciled economic issues with the state’s most pressing social, health and educational needs.

As for the election itself, after a near-disastrous rollout of new voting machines for the primary season in June, the secretary of state’s office went to work to tackle systemic problems, increase the number of poll workers and enhance their training, and reduce the amount of time

voters had to spend waiting in line, all to ensure a seamless November election. The office sent out absentee ballots and worked with local elections officials to increase the opportunities for early in-person voting. The process was well-scrutinized – the voting and the counting of votes – and it went smoothly.

Additionally, state leaders rallied to deal with the COVID crisis. The Georgia National Guard was dispatched to help with food distribution, COVID testing and even the cleaning and disinfecting of hundreds of nursing homes throughout the state. The Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency arranged for supplies, staffing help and patient transport for hospitals struggling to treat the influx of COVID cases.

Our leaders know how to do the things that need to be done. I hope – and believe – most of them, whether they are completely happy with the November election results or not, and whether or not they like the way things turn out in this month’s runoffs, are ready to put their disappointments aside and get to work.

I hope – and believe – most of our leaders, whether they are happy with the November election results or not, are ready to put their disappointments aside and get to work.

We still have a lot to do in our state. There’s the day-to-day business of keeping a government running – highways to pave, bridges to repair, infrastructure to keep up. There are children to educate, jobs to create, healthcare issues to resolve, injustices to confront. There are divisions to heal, inequities to address.

There’s the still-struggling economy and another difficult budget to pass, with all the attendant wrangling that requires. These are things we look to our elected officials to take care of, regardless of the obstacles and distractions that come their way. It’s the normal task of governing.

And normal is looking awfully good about now. ■■



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Helping Hand: AARF Executive Director Bridget McCarthy showcasing a tote bag for sale on the group's website

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ORGANIZATIONS

Atlanta Artist Relief Fund

By Candice Dyer

Many artists – musicians, dancers, painters, actors and others – struggle to make ends meet even during prosperous times.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit Atlanta artists especially hard, closing down their venues. “Also, most of us have a day job we rely on, and the pandemic killed those, too,” says Paul Glaze, an actor, musician, sound designer and director of business and operations for nonprofit Atlanta Artist Relief Fund (AARF).

In March, he and his friends launched a Kickstarter fund with a goal of \$1,000, just to feed each other. “We wanted to see what would happen,” Glaze says, “and it quickly blew up. We had \$7,000 by the end of the week.”

Soon after, about 50 volunteers were assembling and distributing frozen meals from hubs all over Atlanta. That initiative grew into AARF, which has expanded its services to include help with filing for unemployment. “Applying for assistance can be a confusing process,” Glaze says.

In partnership with community-based mental health initiative Mental Wellness/Emotional Learning, AARF also connects artists with free and low-cost licensed therapy. “We are hoping to expand to include urgent care and dentistry,” Glaze says.

So far, the organization has worked with nearly 500 artists. It has connected more than 100 to mental health services, served over 1,000 meals and helped nearly 300 in their pursuit of state benefits.

“This group is important because arts and entertainment bring in billions to the Georgia economy, yet Georgia is dead last in the nation in terms of [state] arts funding,” Glaze says.

“We initially thought this would be a short-term enterprise, but we believe we’ll be helping artists for years to come,” says Executive Director Bridget McCarthy. ■

 atlartsrelief.org

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT Around the State

By Christy Simo

No. 1 Record: Georgia is now the only state to have been named No. 1 for business climate for eight years in a row by *Site Selection* magazine, an internationally circulated business publication that covers corporate real estate and economic development. This year, Georgia shares the top ranking with North Carolina.

Covington Face Masks: FiberVisions is investing \$48 million to expand its polyolefin fiber manufacturing operations in Newton County. The expansion will create 21 new jobs and be complete by the first half of this year.

Gainesville HVAC: Korean company Dongwon Tech Corp., a supplier of heating, ventilation and air conditioning products, is investing \$700,000 to open an advanced manufacturing facility and sales office in Hall County that will bring 40 new jobs to the Gainesville area.

Butts Co. Cabinets: MasterBrand Cabinets Inc. is opening a Southeastern U.S. manufacturing and distribution facility near Jackson that will add nearly 400 jobs when it opens this year.

Houston Co. Solar: Silicon Ranch Corp. is investing \$55 million in a 68 MW solar project in Houston County. The energy generated will serve more than 30 Electric Membership Corporations (EMCs) and 11,000 households throughout the state.

Calhoun EV: TEKLAS, a Turkish manufacturer and supplier of electric vehicle parts, is investing \$6.5 million to open its first North American facility and headquarters in Gordon County. The 200,000-square-foot facility will bring 120 jobs to Calhoun when it opens this spring.

Delicious Expansion: Ken’s Foods, known for its dressings and marinades, is expanding its manufacturing and distribution operations in Henry County. The \$103-million investment will create 70 new jobs.

Jackson County Growth: Automotive parts supplier Toyota Industries Compressor Parts America is expanding in Pendergrass. The \$5.5-million investment will add 15,000 square feet and a new production line as well as at least 27 jobs. ■

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2021

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Our State

- Cherokee County



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**RESERVE BY JANUARY 25
MATERIALS BY JANUARY 29**

- Small Business
- CIDs - North Fulton
- Georgia Education Guide
- Georgia Getaways

Our State

- Macon-Bibb County
- Valdosta



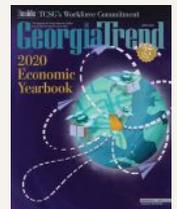
April

**RESERVE BY FEBRUARY 22
MATERIALS BY FEBRUARY 26**

- Economic Yearbook
- Industry Outlook
- Healthcare: Mental Health
- Technical Colleges
- Four for the Future

Our State

- Savannah-Chatham County
- South Metro Atlanta
- LaGrange-Troup County



Small Business Guide

**RESERVE BY MARCH 22
PUBLISHING MAY 2021**

Resource Guide for Small Business Owners and Entrepreneurs



May

**RESERVE BY MARCH 22
MATERIALS BY MARCH 29**

- Most Respected Leader
- Top Doctors in Georgia
- MBA Programs
- Georgia's Film Industry

Our State

- Perimeter Area
- Newton County



June

**RESERVE BY APRIL 26
MATERIALS BY APRIL 30**

- ACCG - Counties of Excellence
- Healthcare - Cancer Treatment
- Ecotourism
- 2021 Manufacturers of the Year Awards

Our State

- Columbus
- Brunswick-Golden Isles



July

**RESERVE BY MAY 24
MATERIALS BY MAY 31**

- Agribusiness
- Banking
- 25th Anniversary of Olympic Games
- Global Trade & Logistics
- Women Leaders

Our State

- Moultrie-Colquitt County
- Thomson-McDuffie County



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race for the District 4 seat on the Public Service Commission, choosing between Republican incumbent Lauren “Bubba” McDonald and Democrat Daniel Blackman for the six-year term.

Turning Blue: Democrats, notably a number of Black candidates, made inroads in Cobb and Gwinnett counties, both long-time Republican strongholds. In Cobb, Lisa Cupid becomes the first Black woman to chair the county commission after defeating Republican Mike Boyce. Police Major Craig Owens is the first Black sheriff of the county, having won over Republican Neil Warren. In the race for district attorney, Democrat Flynn Broady defeated Republican Joyette Holmes; both candidates are Black.

In Gwinnett, Democrat Nicole Love Hendrickson won election as county commission chair, defeating Republican David Post. Hendrickson, who will preside over an all-Democratic commission, will be the first Black chair, replacing retiring Republican Charlotte Nash. Attorney Patsy Austin-Gaston defeated long-time District Attorney Danny Porter and will be the first female and first Black person to hold that position. Keybo Taylor defeated Republican Luis “Lou” Solis Jr. to become the county’s first Black sheriff. He replaces Butch Conway.

House Leaders: No surprise, the Georgia House Republican Caucus has re-elected Speaker David Ralston (R-Blue Ridge) and Speaker Pro Tempore Jan Jones (R-Milton) to their positions.

Rep. Jon Burns (R-Newington) is majority leader; Rep. Matt Hatchett (R-Dublin) is Majority Caucus chair; Rep. Micah Gravley (R-Douglasville) is caucus vice-chair; and Rep. Bruce Williamson (R-Monroe) is caucus secretary and treasurer.

The House Democratic Caucus elected Rep. James Beverly (D-Macon) as minority leader; Rep. Billy Mitchell (D-Stone Mountain), minority caucus chair; Rep. Erica Thomas (D-Austell), minority caucus vice-chair; Rep. David Wilkerson (D-Powder Springs), minority whip; Rep. Deborah Bazemore (D-South Fulton), minority chief deputy whip; Rep. Park Cannon (D-Atlanta), minority caucus secretary; and Rep. Mary Robichaux (D-Roswell), minority caucus treasurer.

MAC Leadership: The Metro Atlanta

Chamber announced that Raphael Bostic, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, is its 2022 board chair-elect. He will succeed 2021 Board Chair Ed Bastian, CEO of Delta Air Lines.

The chamber also announced that key areas of focus for the year will be racial equity, public health and economic recovery.

USG Enrollment Up: Fall 2020 semester enrollment in the University System of Georgia’s public colleges set a record, with 341,485 students. The number represents a 2.4% increase over fall 2019.

Growth among Hispanic and Asian students grew by 7.2%, and by 3.9% among Black students. 



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Early Onslaught:

Dr. James "Eddie" Black, Phoebe Putney Health System medical director for emergency services

PATIENT NAME: Mea, Phoebe

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PreAnesthesia (Anesthesia Led) prior to indu

Next Dose Due @: 1800

Readiness Delay Reason:

- Room - Team - Equip
- PT not Ready
- Surgeon Late
- Anesthesia Late

Procedure: Left or Right (Circle):

Laps: 10

Raytec: 10

Suture: 4

Blades: 5

Bovie Tip:

Hypo:

Par:

Accountabilities:

Fish:	
Fogarty Inserts:	
Fred:	
Kilners/Peanuts:	
Neuro Patches:	
Penrose:	
Scissor Tips:	
Scratch Pad:	
Shods:	
Sucker Tips:	
Stapling:	

Verify - Visualize - Verbally

NKS
LTV 4/7/18
SS

1/6 @ 9:55
1/2 @ 9:20

COVID HEROES

BY SUSAN PERCY

• PHOTO BY FRANK FORTUNE •

This year, *Georgia Trend* honors those working to combat and mitigate the COVID-19 crisis that upended the state so dramatically last spring. Bestowing our Georgian of the Year award on a group rather than an individual is a first for us, but we are proud to pay tribute to all those who have confronted the health, economic and social challenges of the pandemic, often at considerable personal cost.

The roster of Georgians going above and beyond the call of duty is a long one that includes healthcare professionals, researchers, educators, food bank workers, business owners, first responders, service industry personnel, retail and delivery employees, public officials, artists and ordinary citizens.

In recognition of all Georgia's heroes, we are highlighting eight individuals who have used their work to help guide the state through a difficult and dangerous time.

Dr. James "Eddie" Black

*Medical Director for Emergency Services
Phoebe Putney Health System*

ALBANY

When Albany became an early COVID hotspot thanks to a super-spreader event – a large funeral – Dr. James "Eddie" Black and his colleagues at Phoebe Putney were among the first in the South to deal with an influx of infected patients.

"We got our first patient, who had a history of respiratory problems," Black says. "The second came in – and had no history of respiratory issues." More followed. Yet doctors were hesitant to jump to conclusions because there hadn't been many COVID cases outside of distant places like Washington State and New York.

Early on, Black recalls, it was difficult even to run a test. "You had to go to a website, print out a form, fill it out, fax

it to the CDC, then wait till they called you back to let you know whether or not you were OK to give a test." Everything had to be sent to Atlanta, with the results coming back a week or two weeks later. "That wasn't necessarily helpful to early management. We were making treatment decisions without knowing exactly what it was."

But it soon became apparent they were treating COVID-19 patients – sometimes 70 or 80 a day.

"We're used to compartmentalizing," says Black of his ER colleagues, "but it became very personal to all of us. You'd walk into work praying you are going to see two less patients than you saw the day before and, invariably, it was two more patients. The numbers just kept going up, the sheer numbers of sick people."

Black grew up in Albany, went away for his medical training, then came back when his father's health began to decline. He didn't intend to stay but is glad he did. "This is what I was meant to do, this is why I was here."

He lost count of the number of days he worked without

a break. In the face of such a crisis, he says, “Do you sit at home? I guess I could clean out my garage, or I could be at work helping people, doing what I was trained to do.”

Kim Whitley, RN

*Vice President for Patient Logistics & Care Coordination
Phoebe Putney Health System*

ALBANY

While her medical colleagues were determining the best way to treat COVID-19 patients, many of the logistical concerns were the responsibility of Kim Whitley, Phoebe Putney Health System’s vice president for patient logistics and care coordination.

She was dealing with bed placement and care management, addressing questions of staffing and supplies, making

decisions about converting units to COVID-only, and – no small task – keeping up with the CDC’s changing guidelines.

At one point, there were more than 160 COVID-19 patients in the hospital. “We had ceased normal operations,” Whitley says. “The hospital was mainly COVID patients or non-COVID patients who were so ill they had to be cared for.”

COVID patients coming in would deteriorate quickly, she says. “A patient might come in with a little shortness of breath, then all of a sudden they were so severe they had to go to the ICU. They might have to be placed on a ventilator or high-flow oxygen.”

Staffing became a problem. “We had no more nurses. It got to the point that the hospital had to start transferring patients to other facilities.”

Senior administrators met every morning and afternoon to assess the situation. “In between, we were consumed with what fire are we having to put out to meet the needs of our patients and our community.” It was not unusual for the staff to come in at 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning and go home at 11:00 p.m.

The intensity lessened in June, when some state help came; but cases spiked again in July. By late October, Phoebe was seeing 30 to 50 COVID patients every day but was able to get back to a more normal routine.

“It was very intense, but there was a camaraderie,” Whitley says. “We just hunkered down and did what we had to do to take care of our patients.”

Mary Jane Crouch

*Executive Director
America’s Second Harvest of Coastal Georgia*

SAVANNAH

In good times and bad, food banks provide nutritious food to people who need it, but the pandemic ramped up the challenges.

“We all pivoted to be able to deliver that food,” says Mary Jane Crouch, who heads America’s Second Harvest of Coastal Georgia, which covers 21 counties. The Kids Café, an after-school program offering an evening meal at several different sites, required immediate changes. “When the school system went virtual,” Crouch says, “we went to a grab-and-go program to make sure that children out of school were able to have some sort of nutrition.”

Staff members would come in at 3:30 or 4:00 in the morning to prepare the food – sometimes as many as 7,000 meals a day. Second Harvest started a mobile food pantry, offering contactless drive-through delivery, with assistance from the Georgia National Guard, which helped load groceries into car trunks.

“Hunger is one of the major issues with COVID,” Crouch says. “People have lost everything. I’m not just talking about people at risk for hunger before, I’m talking about people who probably were never at risk.” Some in the mobile pantry lines told her they have always been food drive donors, not recipients.

Throughout the first few months of the pandemic,

Putting Out Fires:

Kim Whitley, vice president for patient logistics and care coordination at Phoebe Putney



FRANK FORTUNE



Delivering Much-needed Meals:

Mary Jane Crouch, executive director, America's Second Harvest of Coastal Georgia, with staff heroes

the food bank provided more than 15 million pounds of food – the equivalent of about 12 million meals. “Our staff really were the heroes. They were willing to do anything,” she says.

Rafi Ahmed

*Director
Emory Vaccine Center, Emory University
ATLANTA*

Researchers at the Emory Vaccine Center were not caught off guard, as most of us were, when the COVID-19 crisis hit.

“It was not a surprise at all to any immunologist,” says Rafi Ahmed, the Georgia Research Alliance Eminent Scholar who directs the center. “Every time a new pathogen emerges, in 99% of the cases this happens because one of the animal viruses is coming to humans. In the case of COVID-19, it’s a very, very different virus from what we have seen before.”

So the center’s scientists went to work quickly, drawing on previous research to help in the effort to develop an effective vaccine.

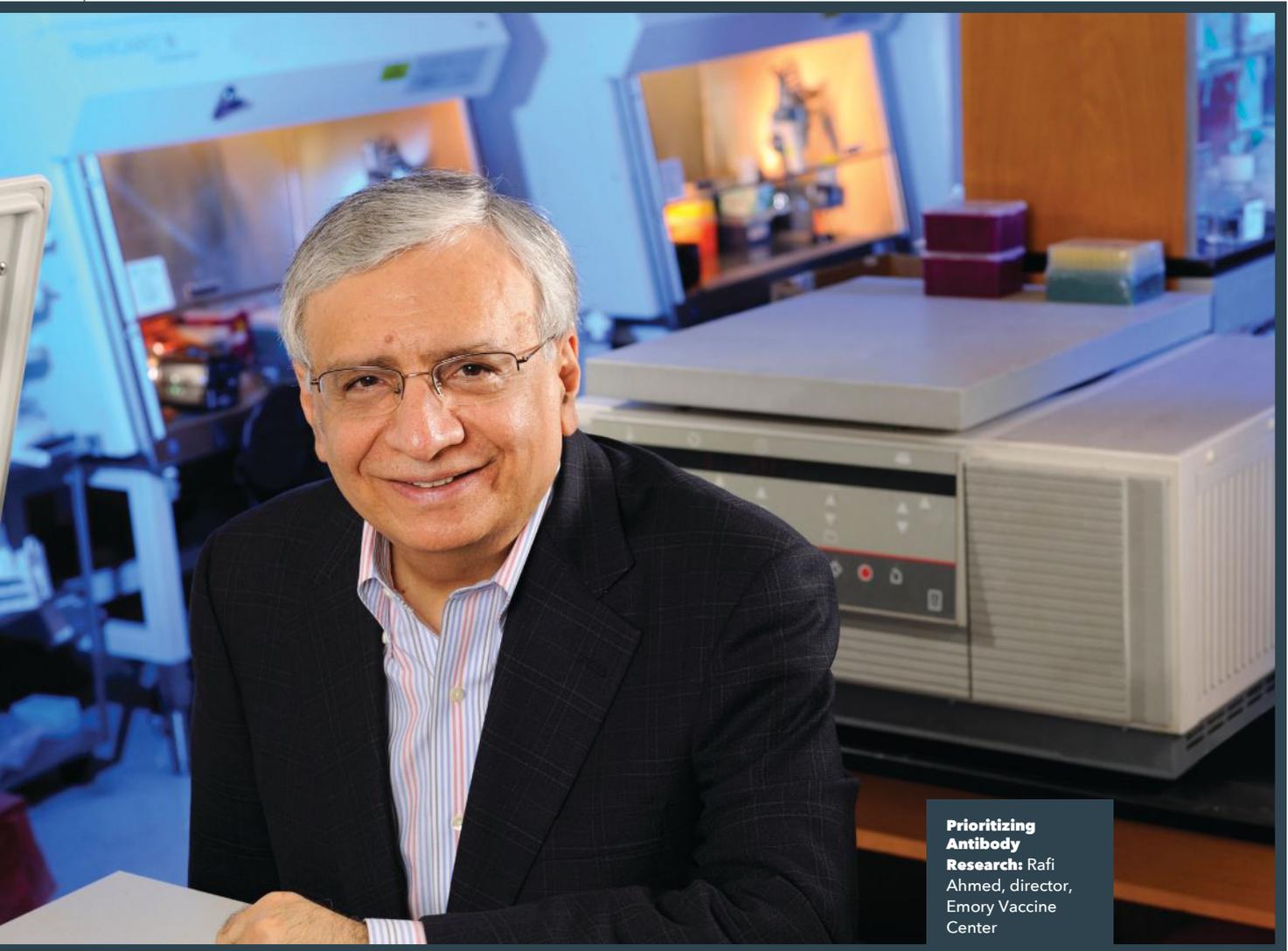
Jens Wrammert, an assistant professor in Emory Medical

School’s Department of Microbiology and Immunology, and Mehul Suthar, an assistant professor in the Pediatrics Department, were able to work even when some campus labs were still closed.

Wrammert’s expertise is in characterizing B cell antibody responses, Ahmed says. B cells, part of the body’s immune system, are a kind of white blood cell that makes antibodies. Wrammert’s earlier work characterized influenza-specific responses during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic.

“Jens made some very important observations about the antibody responses of people who were infected,” Ahmed says. Wrammert also developed a technique for making monoclonal antibodies from the patients – cloning and producing the antibodies that could be used for diagnostic or therapeutic purposes. “He had the skill sets needed to tackle the COVID-19 issues.” He quickly developed serology tests so he could look at antibody response in patients with COVID.

At the same time, Suthar was focusing on developing neutralizing antibodies. Their work, Ahmed says, “showed that pretty much all COVID-19 patients made neutralizing antibodies. This finding was very important because very often after a [viral] infection, it takes several months to develop new antibodies. But this virus is letting antibodies



Prioritizing Antibody Research: Rafi Ahmed, director, Emory Vaccine Center

EMORY UNIVERSITY

develop quite quickly,” within two weeks of the onset of symptoms.

The early demonstration of antibody response and the development of serology tests were a huge step toward developing effective COVID vaccines. “We prioritized COVID,” Ahmed says. “We have done our part and contributed, as many, many people across the world have done.”

Krystle Rodriguez

*Owner
Hodgepodge Coffeehouses
ATLANTA*

Krystle Rodriguez’s focus has been offering “a space where the community can gather” ever since she opened her first Hodgepodge Coffeehouse in 2012 in East Atlanta’s Ormewood Park neighborhood.

“When COVID hit, it was a pretty sudden pivot,” she says. Sales dropped about 70%; she feared if she closed, it might be for good. So she decided to remain open – for takeout –

and to expand the offerings at the original Hodgepodge and a second location in nearby Reynoldstown.

First she addressed shortages facing her regulars in the early days of the crisis. “There were a lot of shortages – basic necessities like toilet paper, flour, yeast.” Grocery stores were out, but she could still get the items through her suppliers. She sold them, typically at lower prices than the stores. “We also had COVID-impact pricing: If you were financially impacted in any way by COVID, we gave it to you at cost,” she says. “Didn’t want any proof, it was just on the honor system.”

Rodriguez had been planning a Hodgepodge market; she finished the buildout and obtained a loan for refrigeration equipment that allowed her to add more products, including some from local food merchants. She even found artisans to make cloth masks, which she sells without taking a cut.

Her Ormewood location has become part of the national Free99Fridge network, with a well-stocked refrigerator outside so neighbors can help themselves to things they need but can’t afford – or make a food contribution. “We try to help as much as a coffee shop can,” Rodriguez says.

Sandy Weaver

*Assessment & Curriculum Coordinator
Annandale Village*

SUWANEE

The pandemic brought major changes to educational activities at Annandale Village, a residential community for adults who are intellectually or developmentally disabled or have had traumatic brain injuries.

Early on, the staff recognized that they were getting the health part under control, but didn't want to neglect the residents' emotional wellness.

Sandy Weaver, assessment and curriculum coordinator at the facility, put her almost-30 years of experience to work to come up with what she calls a "corona-riculum," developing new subject matter and different teaching methodologies for the 190 or so people they serve, including about 145 residents. "We look at areas where there are deficits, where we can support villagers to be more independent. That really is the focus in the disability world," she says.

She and the staff had to work around some technological shortcomings but devised a series of presentations and videos to supplant in-person offerings. "We had to think about content that would still be engaging. It had to be on a basic



New Curriculum:
Sandy Weaver, assessment and curriculum coordinator, Annandale Village

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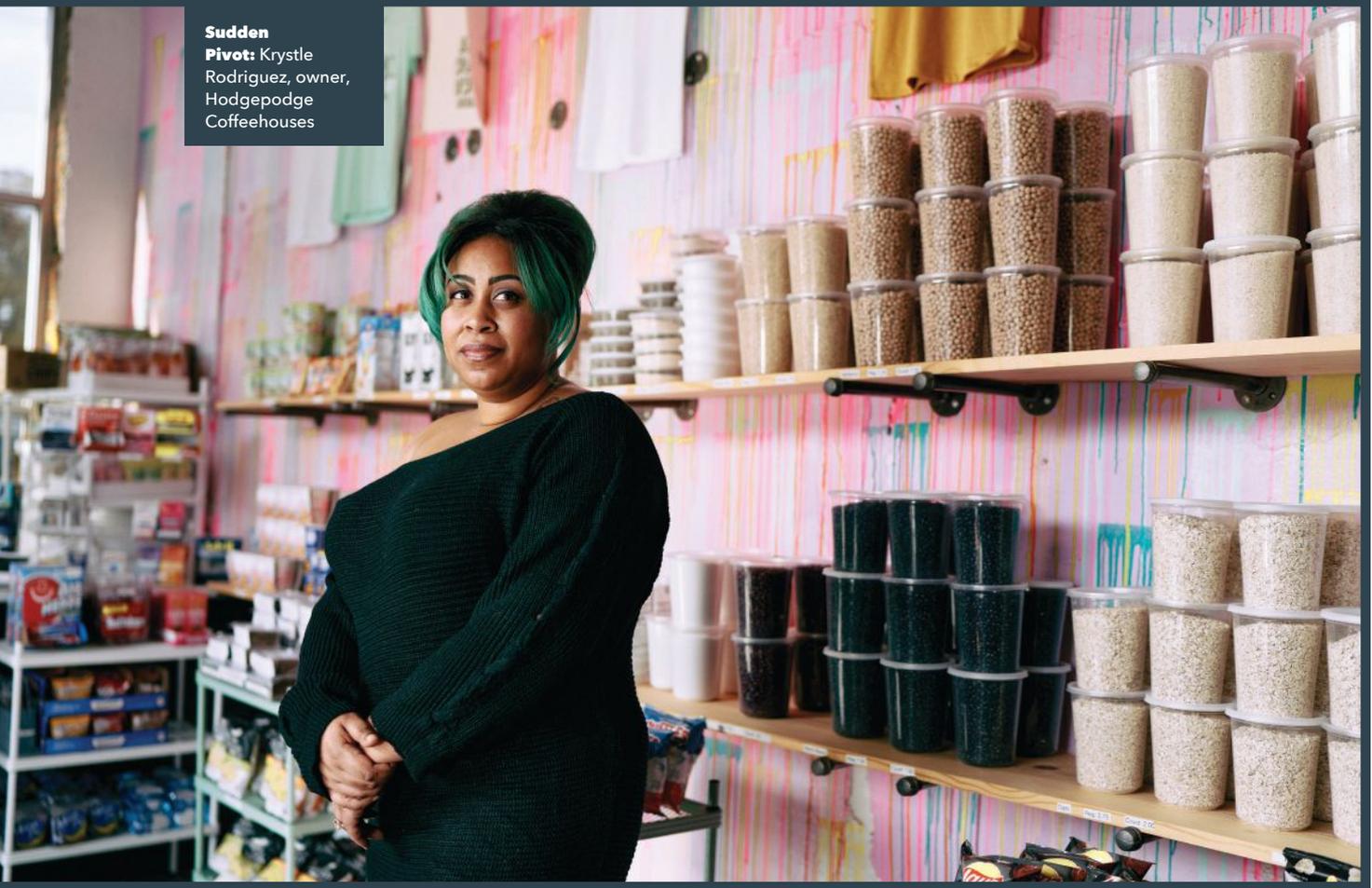
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Sudden

Pivot: Krystle Rodriguez, owner, Hodgepodge Coffeehouses



SHUTTERSTOCK

level, so people weren't overwhelmed." And it couldn't be too schoolish, since a lot of the residents did not have a positive school experience.

The new curriculum covers health, safety and life skills: things like mask-wearing, the importance of hydration, electrical appliance use, even how to use free time. The reception by the residents has been gratifying. "We want to open the world to them," Weaver says.

Carol Bowman

CEO
Learning in Color Corp.
ATLANTA

The nonprofit started by special education teacher Carol Bowman, Learning in Color Corp., has been transforming bland public classroom interiors into colorful spaces that inspire students since 2014. But when the pandemic hit, she had to change direction.

Typically, Bowman employs artists to add color to the standard institutional white walls. "So much research supports that that type of sterile environment is counterproductive to the academic and social-emotional aspects of learning," she says. A typical project might have 15 people working together in a small space.

COVID put a stop to that, but she was determined to continue her endeavors. "The arts community was really hurt in terms of a lot of artists being out of work," she says. And, as a former public school teacher, Bowman was sad for the 2020 high school graduates who were missing out on the final months of their senior year.

Her solution: Hire artists to paint colorful murals that pay tribute to the graduates – a project that can be done safely, involving fewer people. The first one adorns a wall at Atlanta Public Schools' B.E.S.T. Academy and others are in the queue.

"I thought about the seniors," she says. "I wanted to make sure the school had something in it to celebrate that class." As for the artists, she wanted to give them work, but also "the opportunity to do something where they feel like they are giving back."

Lisa Isham

Associate Superintendent
Wilkes County Schools
WASHINGTON

Her school system, like many others, was unprepared for online instruction when the pandemic brought in-person classes to an end last March, so Wilkes County Associate Superintendent Lisa Isham and her team got busy,



Celebrating Seniors:
Carol Bowman, CEO
of Learning in Color
Corp., in front of her
company's mural at
B.E.S.T. Academy

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Check-in

Opportunity: Lisa Isham, associate superintendent, Wilkes County Schools



NANTOONPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

fast. “We did the best we could. A lot of our kids were not equipped. Some of our teachers were ready; some were not.”

Thanks to a lot of planning, hard work and some grant money, technological capability has greatly improved. When the approximately 1,400-pupil system reopened in the fall, teachers were prepared, each equipped with a Google classroom set-up, “ready to go to online learning with the flip of a switch” if necessary.

But before that happened, to finish out the truncated 2019-20 school year, Wilkes established a delivery system using the school bus fleet to get food and instructional materials to students.

Even before COVID, schools were providing free breakfast and lunch to all students. To keep that going, “We ran every bus in the county – about 30,” Isham says. “We ran the reg-

ular bus routes once a week and handed out meals for the week.” They were even able to supply meals to children not enrolled in the school system. Employees would gather to pack lunches one day, then deliver them the next. “Then we got so good at it we could pack and deliver in one day.”

Administrators went along on the rides, Isham says. “We would pass out work as needed. It was a good way for us to get to check in on the kids, too. We’d get to see the little faces, and it gave us at least a weekly opportunity when we could have a check-in.”

These eight individuals represent the countless number of citizens across the state to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for their compassion, creativity and hard work to reduce the negative impacts of the pandemic. ■

Congratulations to Emory's Most Influential Georgians

Jonathan S. Lewin, MD
CEO, Emory Healthcare

Gregory L. Fenves, PhD
President, Emory University

Carlos del Rio, MD
Executive Associate Dean
Emory University School of Medicine

Rafi Ahmed, PhD
Director, Emory Vaccine Center



EMORY

WOODRUFF
HEALTH
SCIENCES
CENTER

EMORY
HEALTHCARE



Ann Cramer

GREAT CONNECTOR

BY KENNA SIMMONS

PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNIFER STALCUP

Ann Cramer's phone rings a lot. That's not surprising – her nickname could be the Great Connector. Throughout a storied career at IBM that saw her both champion and define the very idea of corporate social responsibility, an equally renowned avocation for volunteering (she chaired the volunteer force for the 1996 Olympics and has led countless nonprofit boards) and a dedication to faith dating back to her confirmation at age 12, she's brought people together.

The pleasant surprise is that she answers and usually says yes – yes to another project, to making an introduction or to providing advice. "I'll say yes all the time," she says. "Sometimes I think, why did I say yes? I should have thought about it for a minute!" And then she laughs her joyous laugh, because yes is just the way she lives.

It springs from a fiercely held mission statement she claimed during her confirmation class in the Episcopal Church in Jacksonville, Fla., as a young girl: "Really, all you're asked to do is love," she says. "I just adopted that. ... I really do believe everyone does have [love] within them. So therefore I want to be a part of a world in which every child can grow up safe, healthy, educated, connected ... and therefore employable, which means they are a contributing person in our world. So it becomes a full circle of love."

With faith as her foundation, her profession and volunteer work are how she expresses that mission. A math major, Cramer joined IBM out of college because, at the time, female students were expected to be a "nurse or teacher or receptionist, or have a ring. I didn't have the patience to be a teacher. I loved physics, not chemistry, so I didn't want to be a nurse. I couldn't sit all day to be a receptionist. And I didn't have a ring."

A job as a systems engineer at Big Blue was a perfect fit, as was a move to Atlanta in 1968. Cramer found the city open to outsiders and dove into the Junior League and St. Luke's Episcopal Church, finding volunteer opportunities with both. "The three converged in a way that created life choices that were amazing," she says. She met her husband, Jeff, on the streets of Little Five Points – where she'd slip out of her jacket and leave the office to work with runaways and hippies, she says, then go back to IBM – and the couple still lives there in a house they bought in 1972.

Cramer was tapped for the United Way campaign at IBM and

remembers stationing her infant daughter under the table at meetings, much to the bewilderment of the other attendees (all men). She kept "showing up" and minding her 5 Ps: presence, participation, professional skills, passion and philanthropy. "I'm a big serendipity and intersection person," she says, and the way these experiences came together created an "amazing path."

After some time away from IBM to raise her daughter – she still served as Junior League president, was appointed to a board by Gov. George Busbee and fielded calls from IBMers who wanted to connect with Coretta Scott King or the Carters – ser-

endipity struck again. In 1989 when Atlanta won the right to bid for the 1996 Games, the head of the Atlanta office of IBM reached across the table at a United Way meeting and asked: "Would you ever come back to work?" She said yes, and even got her same employee number back.

That launched her on a path to define and shepherd corporate social responsibility (CSR) before it was mainstream. IBM had always been charitable, Cramer says, believing that you deliver on your promise to the client, treat all people with dignity and care about the communities in which you serve. Those foundations "aligned with who I am," she says. From her position as director of corporate citizenship and corporate affairs for the Americas, she helped evolve CSR from

charitable giving to being fundamentally socially responsible.

And she's still shaping companies, organizations and individuals after retiring from IBM in 2012 and joining Coxe Curry & Associates, where she consults with nonprofits on board development, volunteer engagement, fundraising and corporate relations. Among her many recognitions are the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's first Lifetime Achievement Award for Corporate Citizenship and the Atlanta Business Chronicle's first Corporate Social Responsibility Lifetime Achievement Award.

"When I talk to people, I always ask if you've found your *ikigai*," she says, using a Japanese word that means something like "reason for being" or as Cramer defines it, "how to live your life more fully and broadly." For her, the answer came at 12 years old and has been the work of a lifetime.

"The greatest gift we give our children is roots and wings," she says. "A rootedness to know where their base function is. And then the fluidity and flexibility to fly." She's mastered both, and hopes to keep on passing them on – that's why she's still saying yes.

"I want to be a part of a world in which every child can grow up safe, healthy, educated, connected ... and therefore employable, which means they are a contributing person in our world."

James Cox Kennedy

MOVING THE NEEDLE

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN ROSE

Can you tell I'm a fan?" jokes Nancy Rigby, speaking about her boss, James "Jim" Cox Kennedy, chair of Cox Enterprises and the James M. Cox Foundation. "He's a normal guy who is modest, feels grateful and wants to help other people."

Rigby is president of the Cox Foundations, overseeing the eight Cox family philanthropies; the James M. Cox Foundation is the largest.

She notes that when Kennedy took the helm at Cox Enterprises in 1988, it was a \$1.8 billion company in annual revenue. Today, Cox Enterprises includes companies in the media, communications, automotive and healthcare industries. "It's now more than \$21 billion," she says. "He dedicated his life to building that business. And along the way, he was a championship athlete and involved in community activities. He's always been a part of important initiatives to make Atlanta and Georgia better."

Kennedy's successful business career might seem obvious considering his pedigree as grandson of former Ohio governor, presidential candidate and company founder James M. Cox. But he says he never felt pressured to enter the family business.

After graduating from the University of Denver with a business degree, he raced motocross in the U.S. and Europe. It wasn't until he was a year out of college that he thought, "This is fun, but it's not a career." He called his uncle Jim Cox in Atlanta, who offered him a job in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution's* production department.

"It was fascinating to me, understanding the factory side of producing a newspaper," says Kennedy. "I was involved when we first converted to cold type from hot metal printing."

He also proved he was there to work – on Christmas Eve, night shifts, whenever someone needed him.

"I wasn't just there for a handout," he says.

Once management realized he wasn't leaving, they moved Kennedy into positions throughout the organization – selling ads, writing headlines, even working as a reporter. He got to know the company and the community and in 1988, when his stepfather resigned, Kennedy became CEO of Cox Enterprises at age 40.

"It was a big step but one I was prepared to take and thought I might be ready for," he says. "But I'd be less than honest if I didn't say I was frightened."

A former competitive cyclist, Kennedy says fear was a good motivator.

"Whether it's training for a bicycle race or running a business, you tend to train up a good bit, so you don't mess up when you have a healthy dose of fear."

Kennedy says he was "bullish" on investing in cable television. His decisions transformed Cox Enterprises from a media company to a conglomerate. If that were all Kennedy did, that would be plenty, but his philanthropic endeavors have been just as remarkable.

In the past nine years, the James M. Cox Foundation has tripled in size through contributions that Kennedy has led from Cox Enterprises. The foundation has three primary focus areas: education, healthcare and sustainability.

Kennedy helps direct the ship, coming up with ideas, prioritizing and strategizing. Two organizations where the Cox Foundation has played a critical role are the PATH Foundation and Emory University's Woodruff Health Sciences Center.

Both Kennedy and his wife Sarah serve on the board of the PATH Foundation, which has built 300 miles of biking and walking trails in Metro Atlanta. She has led every annual campaign and he has led every capital campaign since 1995.

In 2015, the Cox Foundation gave its largest gift ever, \$25 million, to Emory's Woodruff Health Sciences Center to launch new patient-centered care models designed to improve patient experiences and outcomes, an outgrowth of his battle with prostate cancer. Kennedy was interested in getting at the "wheel-spinning," trying to find ways to help doctors, nurses and technicians do what they do more efficiently.

Researchers called it the "Kennedy Initiative," and though prostate cancer care was the initial clinical focus of the model, Emory reports that it now manages hospitals better because it has better access to real-time data.

"I talked with the head of Emory, and he said it's even helped them as they dealt with COVID," says Kennedy. "I'm proud of our involvement and that we've moved the needle."

"Whether it's training for a bicycle race or running a business, you tend to train up a good bit, so you don't mess up when you have a healthy dose of fear."



[PAST INDUCTEES]

2020

Johnny Isakson

Former U.S. Senator

2019

Michael Cassidy

Director, Emory Biomedical Catalyst

Maria SaportaFounder & Editor, *SaportaReport*Former writer & columnist, *Atlanta Business Chronicle*

2018

T. Rogers Wade

Chair, Governor's Defense Initiative

Chair, Georgia Public Policy Foundation

Philip Wilheit Sr.

President, Wilheit Packaging

2017

Hank Huckaby

Former Chancellor, University System of Georgia

**Alicia Philipp**

Former President, Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta

2016

Arthur BlankCo-founder, The Home Depot
Owner, The Atlanta Falcons**Alana Shepherd**

Co-founder, Shepherd Center

2015

Bill Bolling

Founder & Former Executive Director, Atlanta Community Food Bank

Saxby Chambliss

Former U.S. Senator



2014

John Lewis(1940-2020)
U.S. Congressman
Civil Rights Leader**Robert Shaw**Chair & CEO, Engineered Floors
Former Owner, Shaw Industries

2013

R. Charles "Charlie" Loudermilk

Founder & Chair Emeritus, Aaron's Inc.

Monica Pearson

Former News Anchor, WSB-TV

2012

Otis Brumby(1941-2012)
Publisher, *The Marietta Daily Journal & Neighbor Newspapers***Bobby Cox**Former Manager, Atlanta Braves
2014 Baseball Hall of Fame Inductee

2011

Ray Anderson(1935-2011)
Chair, Interface Inc.**David Ratcliffe**

Former CEO, Chair & President, Southern Co.

Franklin Skinner

Former CEO & Chair, BellSouth Telecommunications

2010

Dr. Joseph Lowery(1921-2020)
Minister
Civil Rights Leader**Bill Shipp**Journalist
Political Columnist

2009

Spurgeon Richardson(1941-2019)
Former President & CEO, Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau

2008

Hank AaronBaseball Legend
Founder & Owner, 755 Restaurant Corp.**Mack Mattingly**Former U.S. Senator
Former Assistant Secretary General (NATO)
Former U.S. Ambassador (Seychelles)**Carl Patton**

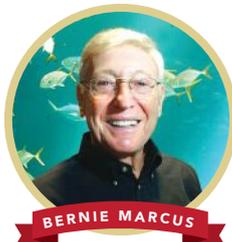
Former President, Georgia State University

Herman J. Russell(1930-2014)
Founder & Chair, H.J. Russell & Co.

2007

A.D. "Pete" Correll

Former Chair & CEO, Georgia-Pacific Corp.

**Bernie Marcus**Co-founder, The Home Depot
Philanthropist**William S. Morris III**

Founder, Chair & CEO, Morris Communications Co.

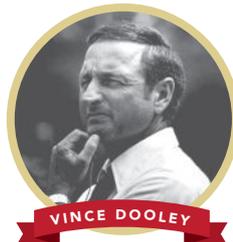
2006

James Blanchard

Former Chair & CEO, Synovus Financial Corp.

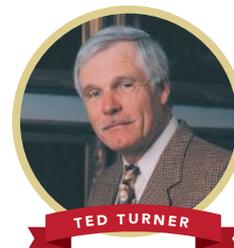
Zell Miller(1932-2018)
Senior Strategic Advisor, McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP
Governor, U.S. Senator**Betty Siegel**(1931-2020)
President, Kennesaw State University

2005

Tom CousinsFounder, Former Chair & CEO, Cousins Properties Inc.
Philanthropist**Vince Dooley**

Athletic Director Emeritus, University of Georgia

2004

Tommy Irvin(1929-2017)
Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture**Manuel Maloof**(1924-2004)
Longtime DeKalb County CEO & Commissioner**Sam Massell**Former President, Buckhead Coalition
Former Mayor, City of Atlanta**J. Mack Robinson**(1923-2014)
Businessman & Philanthropist**Ted Turner**Founder, CNN, TNT, TBS
Environmentalist & Philanthropist

2003

Griffin Bell(1918-2009)
U.S. Attorney General
U.S. Circuit Court Judge**S. Truett Cathy**(1921-2014)
Founder, Chick-fil-A
Philanthropist**Jimmy Carter**Nobel Peace Prize Winner
Former U.S. President**Rosalynn Carter**Former First Lady
Mental Health Advocate**Thomas B. Murphy**(1924-2007)
Longtime Speaker, Georgia House of Representatives**Sam Nunn**Former U.S. Senator
National Defense Authority**John C. Portman Jr.**(1924-2017)
Architect, Developer, Entrepreneur**Carl Sanders**(1925-2014)
Governor, Attorney**Dr. Louis Sullivan**Founding Dean, Morehouse School of Medicine
Former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services**Andrew Young**Former Mayor, City of Atlanta
Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations



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RISING TO THE CHALLENGE



The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy,” said Martin Luther King Jr.

His words are as applicable today as they were when he wrote them in 1963, as the world continues to face the challenges and controversies of pandemic, economic recession and political fighting.

For this, the 23rd annual listing of the 100 Most Influential Georgians, *Georgia Trend* has assembled a group of remarkable people, many of whom have risen to the challenges of the past year to help make life better for all Georgians.

In this year’s list, you’ll find CEOs, politicians, college presidents, nonprofit and economic development leaders, among others, who have inspired and spearheaded efforts to meet and beat challenges in virtually every corner of the Peach State. Some are very public figures, while others work quietly behind the scenes. All are tireless and passionate in pursuit of their vision for a better Georgia.

Selecting the most influential leaders is a daunting task and one that involves much discussion, mulling and refinement by the *Georgia Trend* staff. Our initial list typically contains many more than 100 names, and there are always last-minute changes as a result of retirements, power shifts and late-in-the-year hirings. However, we believe this year’s final group represents the best qualities of leadership, power, character and influence the state has to offer.

Along with the most influential, we’ve included a list of Notable Georgians on page 54. These are individuals who’ve also made a significant impact on residents’ lives.

Profiles of the 100 Most Influential Georgians were written by Betty Darby, Mary Ann DeMuth, Mary Anne Dunkin, Karen Kirkpatrick, Brian Lee, Michele Cohen Marill, Rebecca McCarthy, Patty Rasmussen and Randy Southerland. – *Karen Kirkpatrick*

**STACEY ABRAMS**

FOUNDER & CHAIR
Fair Fight Action
Atlanta

After she lost the race to be Georgia's first female and first Black governor, Abrams threw herself into organizing and founded Fair Fight Action, a nonprofit working against voter suppression. As one of the primary architects who helped flip the state blue in November, Abrams will be a force in national politics for years to come. – *RM*

**PAIGE ALEXANDER**

CEO
The Carter Center
Atlanta

Alexander brought two decades of world-spanning experience in government and nonprofit sectors, including senior leadership experience at the United States Agency for International Development, to The Carter Center in summer 2020. It was a homecoming for a woman who was raised in Atlanta. She serves on an elections task force formed by Georgia's secretary of state. – *BL*

**DAN AMOS**

CHAIR & CEO
Aflac Inc.
Columbus

Amos is known for his long tenure as CEO of one of the nation's largest suppliers of supplemental insurance, and for his generous support of children's cancer treatment and research. He responded to the COVID-19 crisis with a \$1-million donation to convert an unused building at Piedmont Columbus Regional Hospital to COVID care. – *MCM*

**JUANITA BARANCO**

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT & COO
Baranco Automotive Group
Atlanta

Former assistant state attorney general, Baranco co-founded Baranco Automotive Group, one of the first Black-owned car dealerships in Metro Atlanta in 1978. She has also been an advocate for improving education, serving on the DeKalb County Education Task Force, State Board of Education and Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia. – *RS*

**ED BASTIAN**

CEO
Delta Air Lines
Atlanta

Coronavirus gutted aviation in 2020, with Delta losing \$60 million daily at one point as business dropped by 95% in Q2. A \$5.4-billion federal aid package kept most employees on the job, and Bastian announced in September that Delta would avoid involuntary layoffs even after aid-related layoff moratoriums expired in October. – *BD*

**BRANDON BEACH**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
North Fulton Community
Improvement District
State Senate (R-District 21)
Alpharetta

After years directing the Greater North Fulton Chamber of Commerce, Beach became director of the North Fulton CID in 2018. Since then more than \$20 million invested in the district has generated more than \$100 million in new infrastructure. In 2013 Beach was elected to the state Senate, where he serves as Transportation Committee chair. – *RM*

**KAREN BEAVOR**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Georgia Center for Nonprofits
Atlanta

Since taking the helm in 1998, Beavor has built the center into a powerful advocate for the nonprofit community. Her biggest challenge now is helping organizations deal with funding shortfalls created by the pandemic. Next up: Launching the Center for Social Transformation, an innovation center for social impact. – *RS*

**GARY W. BLACK**

COMMISSIONER
Georgia Department of Agriculture
Commerce

Black leads Georgia's No. 1 industry sector at a tough time. Farmers have suffered over the last few years through hurricanes, trade wars and now a pandemic that has reduced revenue for 80% of them. Black has spearheaded the successful Georgia Grown marketing program to support agribusinesses and encourage buying local. – *KK*

**SARA BLAKELY**

FOUNDER & CEO
Spanx
Atlanta

Determined to give away much of her fortune, billionaire Blakely has a focus on helping women entrepreneurs. Her Spanx by Sara Blakely Foundation, named after the shapewear and activewear company she founded, gave \$5 million to that cause during the pandemic and partnered with a restaurant group to feed 2,500 workers at Children's Health-care of Atlanta. – *RM*

**RAPHAEL BOSTIC**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta
Decatur

As head of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Bostic has helped nudge the Fed to address for the first time issues of income inequality resulting from racism, calling the end of racism a moral and economic imperative. His community efforts don't end there. He's been named the 2022 Metro Atlanta Chamber chair-elect. – *RM*

**KEISHA LANCE BOTTOMS**

MAYOR
City of Atlanta
Atlanta

Bottoms confronted protests in 2020 after Atlanta police shot and killed a Black man named Rayshard Brooks. She won both praise and condemnation for her actions. She has pledged to develop \$1 billion in badly needed affordable housing. An early supporter of President-elect Joe Biden, she is credited with helping ensure his victory in Georgia. – *RS*

**PAUL BOWERS**

CHAIR & CEO
Georgia Power
Atlanta

After leading Georgia Power through the many struggles to bring Units 3 and 4 of Plant Vogtle on line, Bowers will step down once Unit 3 is fueled, which is expected in April. Over his 42-year career with Georgia Power, he also served in roles with the Metro Atlanta Chamber, the Atlanta Committee for Progress and the Woodruff Arts Center. – *RM*

**KAREN BREMER**

CEO
Georgia Restaurant Association
Atlanta

A 44-year hospitality industry veteran, Bremer and the association represent more than 18,500 food service and drinking establishments. Those businesses have been in survival mode since last spring, with the GRA lobbying for sidewalk and parking lot dining plus funding for equipment to allow outdoor eating in winter, all to get through the pandemic. – *RS*

**JULIE BROWN**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Georgia Foreign-Trade Zone
Atlanta

Brown and the Georgia Chamber-affiliated organization she leads help companies stay in Georgia and the U.S. by promoting delayed, reduced or eliminated duty payments on goods. This lowered cost of doing business also works to bring jobs to local communities, help employers remain competitive and encourage business investment. – *RS*

**KEVIN BROWN**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Piedmont Healthcare
Atlanta

After Piedmont Healthcare served 2-million-plus patients in 2019, performing over 88,368 surgeries and delivering 16,746 babies, a routine seventh year at the helm for Brown would have been busy enough. Instead he led the system's critical efforts against COVID-19 while expanding facilities in Athens and Atlanta and earning Most Wired hospital honors for the fourth time in five years. – *BL*

**CAROL BURRELL**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Northeast Georgia Health System
Gainesville

Leading a regional healthcare system during a pandemic created challenges and opportunities for Burrell – from abruptly halting elective surgeries to gradually phasing them back in; ramping up telehealth opportunities in less than a week; and, because Gainesville was an early hotspot in Georgia, supporting community messaging to stay vigilant against COVID-19. – *PR*

**ÁNGEL CABRERA**

PRESIDENT
Georgia Institute of Technology
Atlanta

Cabrera launched the School of Cybersecurity and Privacy, focusing on applied research collaborations to meet workforce needs in Georgia's growing cybersecurity industry. He has also spearheaded Georgia Tech's participation in the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, addressing some of the world's most pressing challenges, including poverty, inequality and climate change. – *PR*

**CHRIS CARR**

ATTORNEY GENERAL
State of Georgia
Dunwoody

When Brunswick law enforcement officials declined to make arrests in the shooting death of Ahmaud Arbery, Carr stepped in, asking the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate the incident. He has also created Georgia's first-ever Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit to work with statewide partners in aggressively combating buyers and traffickers. – *PR*

**DAN CATHY**

CHAIR & CEO
Chick-fil-A
Atlanta

Amid protests for racial justice, Cathy urged businesses to be "responsible capitalists." Chick-fil-A demonstrated that philosophy by giving franchise operators \$10.8 million in COVID-19 relief to support local communities and employees. Chick-fil-A ranked first in customer satisfaction for the sixth year in a row, while topping all but two restaurant chains in gross revenue. – *MCM*

**BEN CHESTNUT**

CEO & CO-FOUNDER
MailChimp
Atlanta

Describing himself as "bullish as hell," Mailchimp co-founder Chestnut is constructing a new headquarters building on the BeltLine's Eastside Trail. With 800 employees at its current location in Ponce City Market, the billion-dollar marketing company's new building will have room for 2,600 employees. The \$300-million, 300,000-square-foot building will be finished in late 2022. – *PR*

**CHRIS CLARK**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Georgia Chamber of Commerce
Peachtree City

As head of the state's leading business organization, Clark laid out 2020 legislative priorities to ensure its members would continue to prosper and grow, including support for stronger liability protections, hate crimes legislation, increased cybersecurity and data protection, greater healthcare licensure flexibility and preserving entertainment tax credits. – *PR*

**THOMAS CLARK**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
CRSA Alliance for Fort Gordon
Evans

Clark, a 32-year Army veteran, leads the effort to promote cyber-related educational and economic development activities in and around one of the nation's oldest and largest military establishments and the region's No. 1 employer. Under his leadership Fort Gordon's educational programs, including the CyberPatriot initiative aimed at generating interest in cybersecurity among K-12 students, have earned national awards. – *M.A. Dunkin*

**SHAN COOPER**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Atlanta Committee for Progress
Atlanta

After leadership roles at WestRock and Lockheed Martin, Cooper took the helm of the 40-member Atlanta Committee for Progress in 2019. The influential group of business, nonprofit and university leaders has the mayor's ear and a commitment to economic growth, inclusion and a better future for all citizens of Atlanta. – *RM*

**GRETCHEN CORBIN**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Georgia Lottery Corp.
Rome

On Corbin's watch, lottery funding that is vital to education – including the popular pre-K and HOPE Scholarship programs – rebounded sharply after the pandemic caused a temporary dip in income. In the fiscal year that ended last July, the Georgia Lottery Corp. turned a record \$1.24 billion over to the state. – *BD*



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DANAH CRAFT
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Georgia Food Bank Association
Atlanta

Before the pandemic hit, the seven food banks in the network led by Craft distributed more than 140 million pounds of food each year, serving about 156,000 people a week. Craft and her team helped the state's food banks navigate COVID-19 restrictions as demand rose by more than 40% due to the economic downturn. – *MCM*



HARDIE DAVIS JR.
MAYOR
Augusta-Richmond County
Augusta

Davis has overseen tremendous economic growth in Augusta since 2015, including a pre-pandemic unemployment rate under 4%. He was among the municipal leaders who pushed back against what they saw as Gov. Brian Kemp's premature reopening of the state during the pandemic last spring and he was one of several Georgia mayors issuing a mask mandate in July. – *BD*



DR. CARLOS DEL RIO
HUBERT PROFESSOR & CHAIR
Department of Global Health,
Rollins School of Public Health
PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE
Division of Infectious Diseases,
Emory University School of Medicine,
Emory University
Atlanta

An infectious diseases, public health and epidemiology specialist, del Rio has been a reassuring voice amidst the confusing mixed messages and outright disinformation throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Often mentioned in the same breath as NIH's Dr. Anthony Fauci, del Rio tirelessly pushed back on misinformation whether it came through the media, other medical professionals or even the president's own doctors. – *PR*



GREG DOZIER
COMMISSIONER
Technical College System of Georgia
Covington

Dozier has served the past three Georgia governors in executive capacities. This Kemp ally was tapped early in the administration to move from state CFO to the TCSG, where he oversees 22 colleges and 88 campuses. He's spearheading improved articulation and programs that blur the lines between former vocational/technical education and universities statewide. – *BD*



GEOFF DUNCAN
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
State of Georgia
Atlanta

The first-term lieutenant governor and Georgia House veteran pledged to take a salary cut as the state coped with a virus-driven budget crunch. He also led a task force of political, business and academic leaders that resulted in the Partnership for Inclusive Innovation, which is designed to make Georgia a technology leader and extend technology infrastructure across the state. – *BD*



JIM DURRETT
PRESIDENT
Buckhead Coalition
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Buckhead Community Improvement District
Atlanta

Durrett had some big shoes to fill when he succeeded founding Buckhead Coalition President Sam Massell, who retired in 2020. By also heading the Buckhead CID, Durrett is bringing together several local organizations including Livable Buckhead and the Buckhead Business Association to create a more integrated approach for community growth and development. – *RS*



CHUCK EATON
CHAIR
Public Service Commission
Atlanta

Eaton became PSC chair in January 2020, the fourth time fellow commissioners selected him for that post since he was first elected to the PSC in 2006. A former real estate agent, Eaton obtained a law degree in 2012 as a way to better understand legal aspects of the work. The PSC regulates utilities that provide electricity, natural gas and telecommunications. – *MCM*



TOM FANNING
CHAIR, PRESIDENT & CEO
Southern Co.
Atlanta

Fanning not only heads an energy company with 9 million customers, he's also helping lead the fight against cyberattacks that could impact national security. His work in cybersecurity has been recognized by the U.S. Senate with an appointment to the Cyberspace Solarium Commission, a group developing a protection strategy for cyberspace interests. – *M.A. Dunkin*

**MARTIN FLANAGAN**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Invesco
Atlanta

The pandemic has underscored Invesco's mission to help customers and communities "get more out of life." In Flanagan's 15th year at the helm, the investment company released a Corporate Social Responsibility Report that detailed investments in the company's people, declines in greenhouse emissions and support for more than 117 charity organizations, including Greater Atlanta COVID-19 relief. – *BL*

**KELLY GIRTZ**

MAYOR
Athens-Clarke County
Athens

Girtz brought an educator's eye and A-plus effort to Athens-Clarke County in 2019. His second year in office saw him navigate complex pandemic and Confederate statue issues, but he also proposed staff raises and property tax rate deductions despite the backdrop of budget cuts across the state. – *BL*

**JERRY GONZALEZ**

CEO
Georgia Association of
Latino Elected Officials
Atlanta

As founder and leader of GALEO, Gonzalez works to engage the Latino community in the political process by promoting voting registration, voting rights, civic engagement and leadership building. Result: There are more than 240,000 Latinx voters – up from 10,000 in 2003 and more than 160,000 Latinx people voted in the November election. – *RS*

**STEVE GOOCH**

MAJORITY WHIP (R-DISTRICT 51)
Georgia Senate
Dahlonega

Gooch cemented his seat during the November rollercoaster election by winning 85% of the vote. He has made expansion of broadband access for all Georgians a priority during his time in the state Senate. This year, he says his legislative priority is putting a stop to attacks on police. – *KK*

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**KEVIN GREINER**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Gas South
Atlanta

Greiner has headed up the gas-marketing firm since its 2006 inception, and last year led the acquisition of Florida-based Infinite Energy, which will grow Gas South's annual revenue to some \$1 billion. The company helps children in need by donating 5% of profits. The service culture he's built complements his focus on employee well-being. The result: productivity improvement. – *M.A. DeMuth*

**LARRY HANSON**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Georgia Municipal Association
Atlanta

Hanson knows public service; he also knows serving public servants, supporting Georgia's 538 cities through the GMA's lobbying, training and technical consulting efforts. The Leadership Georgia graduate is managing the creation of Georgia City Solutions, a nonprofit subsidiary designed to fund initiatives that advance the state's municipalities. – *BL*

**JOHN HAUPERT**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Grady Health System
Atlanta

Hauptert successfully led Georgia's largest hospital as an influx of COVID-19 patients had the facility operating at full capacity – 105% some days. This followed a flood that took out 220 inpatient beds last year. Grady has not only weathered the pandemic, but has restored its beds to full capacity. – *RS*

**CLYDE HIGGS**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Atlanta BeltLine Inc.
Atlanta

For the first time, three segments of the BeltLine are under construction at the same time: the Southside Trail-West, Northeast Trail-Central and Westside BeltLine Connector Trail. Through a partnership with MARTA, preliminary work began to extend the Atlanta Streetcar from downtown to the BeltLine. Higgs also promotes healthier BeltLine communities through economic development and affordable housing. – *MCM*

**DOUG HOOKER**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Atlanta Regional Commission
Atlanta

Everything from long-range traffic planning to arts and culture in the ARC's 10-county, 70-plus-city area lands on Hooker's plate. He brings a Georgia Tech engineering background and an Emory MBA to the task. A musician and composer in his private life, he helps develop young musicians as an Atlanta Music Project board member. – *BD*

**DONNA HYLAND**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Children's Healthcare of Atlanta
Atlanta

In more than three decades at CHOA – 12 of them at the helm – Hyland has guided the pediatric health system's growth and rise to prominence. A new 1.5-million-square-foot hospital under construction will modernize and expand clinical care, and include a specialized infectious disease unit. A new health sciences building will provide space for pediatric research. – *MCM*

**VAN JOHNSON II**

MAYOR
City of Savannah
Savannah

Savannah's 67th mayor, Johnson has demonstrated leadership both locally and nationally, guiding his city through the COVID pandemic, which flared just two months after his swearing in, with the earliest mask mandate in the state. He's also the first person from Savannah to serve as chair of the Advisory Board of the National League of Cities. – *M.A. Dunkin*

**JAN JONES**

SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE
(R-DISTRICT 47)
Georgia House of Representatives
Milton

Speaker pro tem since 2010, Jones is the highest-ranking woman in the state legislature. Among her achievements are securing the incorporation of the recently created town of Milton, an affluent, rural-flavored slice of the suburbs in Fulton County established in 2006. Jones easily won re-election to the House from her North Fulton district. – *BD*

You are the light in dark times.

To all the frontline workers and first responders, thank you for the bravery and resilience you bring to work with you every day, for your tireless devotion to a safer, healthier Georgia, and for showing us all what it truly means to be a hero. We couldn't weather this storm without you.

JAMES W. - LINEMAN | Atlanta, GA

**BROOKS KEEL**

PRESIDENT
Augusta University
CHAIR
AU Medical Associates
Augusta

Augusta University didn't so much pivot as leap forward during the pandemic, starting in April when its dental college repurposed 3-D printers to produce much-needed COVID testing swabs. Enrollment at AU increased by 3.1% despite the pandemic, including a significant dual enrollment increase as high school students took college classes. – PR

**BRIAN KEMP**

GOVERNOR
State of Georgia
Athens

Kemp won praise and condemnation for being one of the last governors to impose a statewide stay-at-home order in the pandemic's early days and one of the first to reopen. When COVID-19 presented the need for \$150 million in state budget cuts, Kemp fought to preserve pay raises for teachers. – PR

**KATIE KIRKPATRICK**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce
Atlanta

Kirkpatrick's promotion in 2020 from chief policy officer brings her public policy experience and more than a decade at the chamber to the city's leading business group. Over the years, she has been the architect of initiatives strengthening higher education and workforce development and battling legislation that could have damaged the state's business-friendly reputation. – RS

**DR. JONATHAN LEWIN**

PRESIDENT, CEO & CHAIR
Emory Healthcare
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Woodruff Health Sciences Center
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
FOR HEALTH AFFAIRS
Emory University
Atlanta

Leading Georgia's largest healthcare system took on greater urgency during the pandemic as Lewin completed his fifth year at the organization's helm. Emory Healthcare's research, with a consortium of other institutions, helped establish a national standard of care for COVID-19. Other Emory honors: A Southeast Chapter Emmy for *Your Fantastic Mind*, a project with Georgia Public Broadcasting. – BD

**MILTON J. LITTLE JR.**

PRESIDENT & CEO
United Way of Greater Atlanta
Atlanta

In his 14th year of leading United Way's efforts to bring together people and resources to drive sustainable social change, Little has expanded the Child Well-Being Impact Fund to more than 200 programs in 13 metro counties. The Greater Atlanta COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, co-managed by the UWGA, will have made about \$24 million in grants to nonprofits by the end of 2020. – BL

**GRIFF LYNCH**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Georgia Ports Authority
Savannah

Georgia's approximately 100 miles of coastline drive a powerful statewide economic engine via the deepwater ports in Savannah and Brunswick. Under Lynch's aggressive capital improvement program, the ports set a tonnage record in FY2020 despite the pandemic and an international trade war. Meanwhile, the harbor-deepening project is nearing completion. – BD

**JAY MARKWALTER**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Georgia Association of Convention
& Visitors Bureaus
Augusta

With a career in tourism that stretches back to 1999, Markwalter promotes an industry that is a \$66.3-billion economic engine and supports more than 478,000 jobs. Tourism and hospitality were sorely tested by the pandemic and resulting state shutdown and will face ongoing challenges even after the pandemic ends. – RS

**CHRIS MARKWOOD**

PRESIDENT
Columbus State University
Columbus

Columbus State reached record enrollment in the fall of 2020, despite the pandemic. The strong numbers may stem in part from Markwood's emphasis on creativity and innovation at the university. Columbus State urges students, faculty and staff to be "creative to the core," a spirit that has helped the school navigate the challenges of COVID-19. – MCM



NICK MASINO
PRESIDENT & CEO
Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce
Duluth

Given that Gwinnett’s population is larger than four states and the District of Columbia, business growth in the county is a big deal. Masino, a former Suwanee mayor, knows economic development inside and out, having served at the chamber since 2007. A new Amazon facility in South Gwinnett looks to spur even more growth, including 1,000 jobs, 100 homes and a new hotel. – *BL*



SHARON MASON
PRESIDENT & CEO
Cobb Chamber of Commerce
Marietta

The dynamic Mason won a contract extension in 2020 and will head the influential chamber until 2023. Since taking the helm in 2018, she has moved the organization into a new building, expanded programming, launched the international council and workforce target industry councils, as well as generated record membership growth. – *RM*



RUSSELL MCMURRY
COMMISSIONER
Georgia Department of Transportation
Buford

Professional engineer McMurry’s agency – with its 4,000 employees and \$3.7-billion budget – is overseeing numerous transformational projects around the state, including new toll lanes along Georgia 400, from I-285 to the North Springs Marta Station, and along the top end of I-285. McMurry is active in numerous transportation agencies and engineering education groups. – *RM*



HAROLD MELTON
CHIEF JUSTICE
Supreme Court of Georgia
Atlanta

Melton, a Republican appointee in 2005 who has since won reelection, has been chief justice since 2018. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, he issued a statewide judicial emergency order in May and extended it in November, allowing courts to determine how to safely hold limited in-person proceedings and expand the use of virtual proceedings. – *BD*

The CSRA Alliance for Fort Gordon – Fort Gordon Cyber District



The CSRA Alliance for Fort Gordon’s strength results from its amazing board of directors and collaboration with its partners. We salute Dr. Tom Clark for being named for the third straight year to the list of Most Influential Georgians.

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**CRAIG MENEAR**

CHAIR & CEO
The Home Depot
Atlanta

Menear's focus on The Home Depot's digital business paid off this year. When retail stores closed due to the pandemic, online ordering surged. In the second fiscal quarter, ending Aug. 2, net sales hit \$38 billion – a record high for quarterly revenue. Profits rose by 25% to \$4.33 billion, exceeding expectations. – *MCM*

**BUTCH MILLER**

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE
(R-DISTRICT 49)
Georgia Senate
Gainesville

Miller ran unopposed for his Gainesville seat last year. The car dealer has been in the Senate since 2010 and served as president pro tem since 2018. He presided over the Senate during the 2020 session that was split due to COVID-19 but still saw the passage of hate crimes legislation and steep cuts to the state budget. – *KK*

**JERALD MITCHELL**

PRESIDENT & CEO
The Greater Columbus Georgia
Chamber of Commerce
Columbus

Last year, Mitchell made history by becoming the first Black leader of the chamber. Previously, as head of economic development for the Atlanta BeltLine, he helped secure new funding relationships for the organization. In his new job, he'll help develop and shape Columbus' unique identity and the face it presents to the world. – *RS*

**FELICIA MOORE**

PRESIDENT
Atlanta City Council
Atlanta

Moore called for reforms on the use of force but did not support reduced funding for the Atlanta Police Department as the city joined protests linked to the Black Lives Matter movement following the killing of Rayshard Brooks by police in June. Those protests were the most tumultuous days to date in Moore's 30-year political career. – *BD*

**KATHERINE MOORE**

PRESIDENT
Georgia Conservancy
Atlanta

Moore became the conservancy's president last fall after serving as vice president of programs and director of sustainable growth. She has led the most successful fundraisers in the organization's history and has grown membership as well. Under her leadership, the nonprofit will continue its advocacy and fieldwork aimed at protecting and preserving the state's environmental resources. – *RS*

**JERE MOREHEAD**

PRESIDENT
University of Georgia
Athens

Under Morehead, UGA completed its biggest capital campaign, raising \$1.45 billion. He launched an Innovation District initiative to create the campus of the future, where students and faculty will partner with industry. He also led a 41% increase in research spending to keep the university in the nation's top five for research-based products reaching the marketplace. – *RS*

**BYUNG J. "BJAY" PAK**

U.S. ATTORNEY
Northern District of Georgia
Lilburn

Sworn in as Georgia's first Asian-American U.S. attorney in 2017, Pak's office prosecuted more than 336 federal firearms cases in fiscal year 2020, specifically focusing on domestic violence offenses. His office handled numerous human trafficking and sexual exploitation cases, including prosecuting a serial sex offender sentenced to 25 years for operating an online child pornography chat group. – *PR*

**JEFFREY PARKER**

CEO & GENERAL MANAGER
MARTA
Atlanta

With more than 30 years' experience in private and public sector industries, Parker is leading MARTA's largest investment in transit enhancements and expansion in four decades. The \$2.7-billion More MARTA Atlanta will improve connectivity and mobility, while fostering economic development across its service area. – *RS*

**DAVID PERDUE**

SENATOR
U.S. Senate
St. Simons

Perdue, who has served in the Senate since 2015, is now in a runoff for his seat with Democrat Jon Ossoff. A staunch supporter of President Donald Trump, Perdue joined Sen. Kelly Loeffler in calling for the resignation of Georgia's secretary of state over unfounded allegations of widespread voter fraud, following the November elections. – *KK*

**TYLER PERRY**

PRODUCER, DIRECTOR, ACTOR,
WRITER, PHILANTHROPIST, FOUNDER
Tyler Perry Studios
Atlanta

In 2019, Perry made history by opening the largest privately owned motion picture studio in the U.S. He is also the first Black owner of a major studio. In 2020, he made history again when he became one of the first filmmakers to safely resume work amid the COVID-19 pandemic by creating Camp Quarantine on his studio lot. – *M.A. Dunkin*

**ROBERT QUATTROCCHI**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Northside Hospital
Atlanta

Quattrocchi is overseeing a \$57 million expansion of the emergency room of Northside Hospital Gwinnett, formerly Gwinnett Medical Center, and the construction of medical auxiliary buildings near the Mall of Georgia. From its first Sandy Springs hospital, the health system today has 250 locations across the state. – *RM*

**JAMES QUINCEY**

CHAIR & CEO
The Coca-Cola Co.
Atlanta

British-born Quincey heads Georgia's most iconic company, but even Coke was not immune to COVID. Among the moves he led this fall: cutting the company's product brands by about half to focus on the more profitable ones and speeding up plans to offer hard seltzers. One of the 200 casualties: Tab, the corporation's original diet offering. – *BD*

**“Equity is a way,
not a what.”**

– Nathaniel Q. Smith, Jr.

The Partnership for Southern Equity is an Atlanta-based nonprofit that advances policies and institutional actions that promote racial equity and shared prosperity for all in the growth of metropolitan Atlanta and the American South. Through forums, research, and organizing efforts, PSE brings together the regional community to lift up and encourage just, sustainable, and civic practices for balanced growth and opportunity.

We congratulate Nathaniel Q. Smith, Jr., Founder and Chief Equity Officer of the Partnership for Southern Equity, on being named to Georgia Trend's Most Influential Georgians.

Onward towards equity!

Partnership for Southern Equity
TOGETHER WE PROSPER

Learn more about how you can support an equitable future today at www.psequity.org

**BRAD RAFFENSPERGER**

SECRETARY OF STATE
State of Georgia
Johns Creek

After Georgia's near-disastrous June primary, Raffensperger helped shepherd an uneventful general election with unprecedented numbers of absentee ballots, then followed that up by overseeing a hand-counted audit of all 5-million-plus votes. The Republican stood firm despite attacks from his own party, as he defended Georgia's voting process that saw the state go blue. – *PR*

**DAVID RALSTON**

SPEAKER (R-DISTRICT 7)
Georgia House of Representatives
Blue Ridge

This year's legislative session stopped and re-started due to the pandemic, but Ralston still was able to push forward a major bipartisan effort. Legislators overwhelmingly passed a hate crimes bill, adding penalties for crimes motivated by race, religion, sexual orientation, gender or disability. Georgia was one of only four states without a hate crimes bill. – *MCM*

**CHELSEA RATHBURN**

POET LAUREATE
State of Georgia
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
AND CREATIVE WRITING
Mercer University
Macon

Poet and professor, Rathburn received critical acclaim for her 2019 *Still Life with Mother and Knife*, a collection of poems about motherhood, childhood and the female body. Described by NPR critic Craig Teicher as "unrelentingly intense and inward," the book won the 2020 Eric Hoffer Book Award for Poetry, which recognizes small, academic and independent presses. – *PR*

**DR. ROBERT REDFIELD**

DIRECTOR
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Atlanta

The embattled CDC head endured a year when COVID raged and politicians ranted about the agency's pandemic response. Scientists fretted as the CDC caved to White House pressure to revise guidelines and vacillated on coronavirus testing and mask wearing. As cold weather loomed and COVID cases skyrocketed, Redfield warned against even small indoor gatherings. – *KK*

**VALERIE MONTGOMERY RICE**

PRESIDENT & DEAN
Morehouse School of Medicine
Atlanta

Rice is the sixth president and first woman to lead the Morehouse School of Medicine. With its emphasis on health equity, the school recently received a \$40-million grant – the largest single federal contribution in the historically Black medical school's 45-year history – to fight COVID-19 in racially diverse, rural and socially vulnerable communities. – *M.A. Dunkin*

**DAVID ROSS**

PRESIDENT & CEO
The Task Force for Global Health
Decatur

Ross has long embraced the role of informatics in combating disease outbreaks. So it's no surprise that The Task Force is supporting a COVID-19 health information campaign and digital tools for contact tracing. It also launched the Global Health Crisis Coordination Center, with the CDC Foundation and private and public partners, to donate protective gear and convene experts. – *MCM*

**MICHAEL RUSSELL SR.**

CEO
H.J. Russell & Co.
Atlanta

Russell's company received the 2020 GoBeyondProfit Champion Award, given by Georgia business leaders to firms exhibiting a generous company culture through the deployment of resources for community empowerment. In 2019 in historic Castleberry Hill, the Russell family launched the Russell Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship, which is devoted to empowering Black entrepreneurs and business owners. – *BL*

**CANDICE SAUNDERS**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Wellstar Health System
Kennesaw

Along with other cost-cutting measures, Saunders made the tough call to temporarily furlough more than 1,000 employees in May due to decreased patient volumes systemwide during the pandemic. In July, she opened the new Emergency Department at Wellstar Kennestone Hospital, a 263,000-square-foot facility with the capability to treat 220,000 patients annually. – *PR*



JOHN SELDEN
GENERAL MANAGER
Hartsfield-Jackson
Atlanta International
Airport
Atlanta

Seldon spent 2020 leading the world's busiest airport through unprecedented times. Air travel plummeted due to COVID, revenues fell as concessionaires shut down and parking fees and rent paid by airlines evaporated. As travelers start to come back, the airport is charting a course to recovery while continuing work on its 20-year, \$6-billion master plan. – *RS*



DAVID SHAFER
CHAIR
Georgia Republican
Party
Atlanta

Shafer cast Georgia's delegate votes nominating Donald Trump in the roll call of the Republican National Convention and guided election strategy in the state, focusing on grassroots efforts and an army of volunteers. Shafer, who was previously president pro tem of the state Senate, helped build Georgia's Republican Party framework in the early 1990s. – *MCM*



IVAN SHAMMIAS
GENERAL MANAGER
& GENERAL SALES
MANAGER
Telemundo Atlanta
Atlanta

Shammias represents the growing economic power of the Hispanic community in Georgia through his work at Telemundo Atlanta, a Spanish-language media company. There he oversees advertising sales, local programming, local news, marketing and community affairs initiatives. The Georgia State University grad serves as chair of Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. – *BD*



SUSAN SHOWS
PRESIDENT
Georgia Research Alliance
Atlanta

For two decades, Shows has played an integral role with the GRA, shaping its nationally recognized, university-based venture development program. Prior to her appointment as president in September, she had served as senior vice president since 2008, in charge of GRA's \$649-million portfolio of investment in talent and technology at Georgia's leading research universities. – *M.A. Dunkin*

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**NATHANIEL SMITH**

FOUNDER & CHIEF EQUITY OFFICER
Partnership for Southern Equity
Atlanta

Smith founded Partnership for Southern Equity in 2008 on the concept of together we prosper, which is achieved through equitable development, health and energy equity, and economic inclusion. Through its Just Growth Circle, \$70,000 in grants were extended to six community partners based on their commitment to equitable development, including protecting against displacement and healing environmental injustice. – *BL*

**T. DALLAS SMITH**

FOUNDER & CEO
T. Dallas Smith & Co.
Atlanta

Founded by Smith in 2006, the nation's largest Black-owned commercial real estate firm focused on tenant and buyer representation recently completed its largest deal ever: helping Microsoft Corp. lease 523,000 square feet of corporate space for a new location at Atlantic Station in Atlanta. The move is expected to create 1,500 new jobs. – *M.A. Dunkin*

**SCOTT STEINER**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Phoebe Putney Health System
Albany

Steiner has been the anchor in the COVID-19 storm that engulfed Dougherty County in March 2020 after a series of funerals turned into super-spreader events. He moved from Dallas to Albany in March 2019 to oversee the nonprofit healthcare system with 4,300 employees who serve 500,000 people in Southwest Georgia. – *RM*

**KESSEL STELLING**

CHAIR & CEO
Synovus
Columbus

During a busy 2020, Stelling led Synovus to make a \$1-million contribution to the UNCF (United Negro College Fund) to establish the Synovus/Calvin Smyre Scholarship Fund. By May 5 the company also had processed and approved around 18,000 Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans totaling \$2.9 billion. – *M.A. Dunkin*

**MARIA THACKER-GOETHE**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Georgia Bio
Atlanta

Under Thacker-Goethe's leadership, Georgia Bio cultivates a high-growth life sciences sector vital by many measures, including the nearly 200,000 jobs and approximately \$22-billion impact for Georgia. She not only brings 13-plus years of nonprofit management to the role, but also the vision and experience from her concurrent leadership roles at the Georgia BioEd Institute and Global Health Alliance. – *BL*

**DAVID THOMAS**

PRESIDENT
Morehouse College
Atlanta

Amid a national reckoning on race, Thomas urged Morehouse students to channel their energy into non-violent social action. Record-breaking fundraising bolstered the college, as Morehouse received the largest gift in the school's 153-year history. Netflix CEO Reed Hastings and his wife Patty Quillin donated \$40 million to its Student Success Program, which helps students graduate debt-free. – *MCM*

**LEE THOMAS**

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
Georgia Film, Music &
Digital Entertainment Office
Atlanta

With her strong background in film and location-specialist experience, Thomas was perfect for the star role in growing Georgia's movie industry, which despite the pandemic ranked No.1 nationally and infused \$2.2 billion into the state economy in fiscal year 2020. Expect an even bigger set in 2021 as filming ramps back up. – *BL*

**MICHAEL L. THURMOND**

CEO
DeKalb County
Decatur

Thurmond, elected in 2016, has spent his years in office tackling major issues starting with restoring confidence in the way DeKalb is managed. In addition, the county is addressing long-standing sewer woes that have plagued it for years with a \$265-million loan from the EPA. And, DeKalb implemented a Nurse Navigator Program that aims to improve ambulance response and hospital wait times. – *BL*



TRIP TOLLISON

PRESIDENT & CEO
Savannah Economic Development Authority
Savannah

In 2020, under Tollison’s leadership, SEDA announced the Savannah Technology Workforce Incentive that offers up to \$2,000 in moving expenses to tech workers relocating to Savannah as well as cash grants toward office rental and other incentives for firms creating and retaining high-technology jobs in the Savannah area. – *M.A. Dunkin*



CAROL TOMÉ

CEO
UPS
Atlanta

Formerly CFO of The Home Depot, Tomé joined UPS in June as its first female CEO and began making changes, trimming the workforce through buyouts to management employees. She’s also looking for ways to automate facilities to drive productivity. Quarterly financial reports in July showed that UPS hired nearly 40,000 people to keep up with orders that surged during the pandemic. – *PR*



CHRIS TOMLINSON

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
State Road and Tollway Authority
Georgia Regional Transportation Authority
Atlanta-region Transit Link Authority
Atlanta

Tomlinson leads three agencies that collectively work to make it easier to get around Metro Atlanta. They run the Peach Pass program, Xpress buses and the transit authority for 13 metro counties. The most recent regional transit plan includes 245 proposed projects and seeks to increase access to transit. – *MCM*



DR. KATHLEEN TOOMEY

COMMISSIONER
Georgia Department of Public Health
Atlanta

Years of experience in state public health and at the CDC garnered Toomey respect on both sides of the aisle. But she nevertheless had to walk a political tightrope while overseeing statewide response to an epidemic that had infected more than 404,000 Georgians and killed over 8,600 state residents by Thanksgiving. – *BD*

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**WILLIAM UNDERWOOD**

PRESIDENT
Mercer University
Macon

Since his appointment in 2006, Underwood has pushed one of Georgia's oldest private universities toward dynamic growth – in students, academic programs, sports, research, facilities and financial gifts. Enrollment has increased 22% and Mercer has launched medical school campuses in Savannah and Columbus. Under his leadership, the university is helping revitalize a two-mile area near its Macon campus. – *M.A. Dunkin*

**KYLE WAIDE**

PRESIDENT & CEO
Atlanta Community Food Bank
Atlanta

Five years into leading the food bank, Waide directs the distribution of nearly 75 million pounds of food and grocery products annually to hungry Georgians in 29 counties. In the face of COVID-19 challenges, ACFB opened its first direct-to-families Community Food Center in Stone Mountain and launched a program to get food to families that missed school meals. – *BL*

**NIKEMA WILLIAMS**

CONGRESSWOMAN
(D-DISTRICT 5)
U.S. House of Representatives

CHAIR
Georgia Democratic Party
Atlanta

Williams was elected in 2020 to fill some big shoes in the 5th Congressional District, John Lewis' district. In her new position she plans to focus on affordable, quality child care, Medicare for all and voting rights. She has served in the State Senate and worked for Planned Parenthood Southeast and the National Domestic Workers Alliance. – *KK*

**VINCE WILLIAMS**

MAYOR
Union City
PRESIDENT
Georgia Municipal Association
Union City

Williams has been mayor of Union City in South Fulton County since 2013. In 2020, he added president of the Georgia Municipal Association to his bio. He is widely credited with a surge of economic growth in Union City, from the conversion of a run-down mall into Atlanta Metro Studios to redevelopment of the city's business district. – *KK*

**DAVE WILLS**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ACCG
Atlanta

As leader of the ACCG, Georgia's county-promotion organization, Wills supports local control in the COVID-19 response, urging counties to act based on advice from community public health and emergency management experts. ACCG provides resources to county officials, including a model resolution and ordinance on face mask requirements. – *MCM*

**PAT WILSON**

COMMISSIONER
Georgia Department
of Economic Development
Atlanta

In his position since 2016, Wilson has continued to bring business to the state even during the pandemic. In the summer, German company GEDIA announced an \$85-million plant in Whitfield County to make electric vehicle parts. During August, Georgia had more than \$642 million in investments and attracted 4,062 jobs, a testament to Wilson's well-regarded economic development efforts. – *RM*

**RICHARD WOODS**

SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT
Georgia Department of Education
Tifton

2020 saw Woods having to retool education across the state as districts deal with distance learning, connectivity and nutrition since the pandemic began in March. In October, he released his "roadmap" for reimagining education after the pandemic, which includes a focus on the whole child, less focus on standardized tests and flexibility in teaching. – *RM*

**STEVE WRIGLEY**

CHANCELLOR
University System of Georgia
Atlanta

During the pandemic, Wrigley made the decision that the 26 USG institutions would offer some in-person classes for the 2020 fall semester. Recognizing the increase in mental health issues that have gone along with COVID-19, the USG significantly expanded services for students, even as enrollment reached a record 341,485 students in the fall. – *RM*

GeorgiaTrend

2021 ★ 100 MOST INFLUENTIAL GEORGIANS

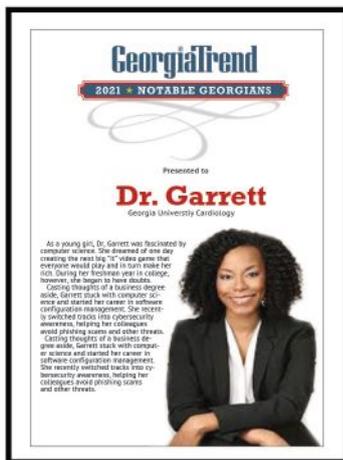
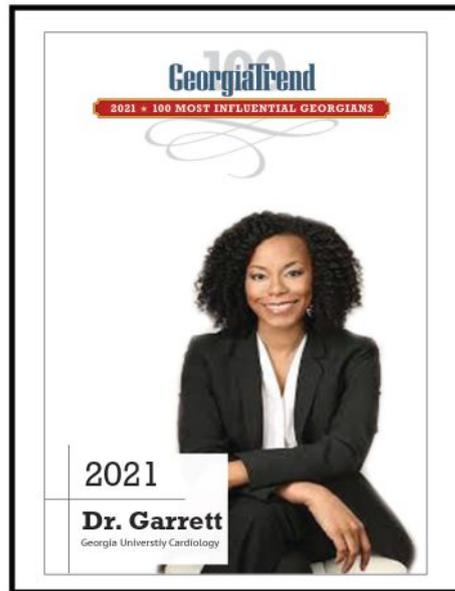
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Georgia Historical Society
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DAVID MOODY

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Contractors of Georgia

Founder & CEO

C.D. Moody
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CRAIG NEWTON

Mayor
City of Norcross
Norcross

BEE NGUYEN

**State Representative
(D-89)**
Georgia House of
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Goodwill of
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SUE PARR

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Manufacturing MAGNET

Manufacturing is hitting its stride in Georgia. Nearly every week announcements surface about new or expanding facilities, many of them big, recognizable names. In aerospace, Gulfstream Aerospace Corp, Lockheed Martin Aeronautics and Pratt & Whitney top a roster of about 800 companies. When it comes to floor coverings, Georgia has heavyweights Shaw Industries Group, Mohawk Industries and Milliken & Co. Automotive giants are here, too, including Kia Motors Manufacturing Georgia and Yamaha Motor Manufacturing Corp. Joining them are auto parts suppliers, including newcomers SK Innovation and GEDIA Automotive Group, which will make electric vehicle components.

Georgia is a national leader in the advanced manufacturing of machinery, electrical equipment and fabricated metal products, outpacing overall U.S. manufacturing in 10-year gross domestic product growth. The state has more than 9,400 manufacturing operations accounting for a \$61.1 billion pre-pandemic output, according to the Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD). Our manufacturing workforce had grown to 270,000 before COVID-19 hit the state.

Why has Georgia become such a makers' mecca when other parts of the country were losing manufacturing jobs long before COVID? The answer is a perfect storm of positive factors.

"Georgia is a fabulous place for manufacturers," says Jim Reed, president of YKK Corp. of America, which makes zippers, fasteners and architectural products

Georgia's unique combination of benefits is attracting more makers – and convincing those that are here to stay and expand.

at several locations throughout the state. "First of all, the people that we have available to us – our workforce

BY MARY ANN DEMUTH
Photograph by Daemon Baizan



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Phenomenal Local Workforce: Gunnar Kleveland, president and CEO of Textron Specialized Vehicles

– are great. On top of that you’ve got strong logistical capabilities [including] the highways, the port and the airport. Local governments, with whom we’re very close, and state government are very friendly and pro-business. Those are a unique combination of benefits.”

Gunnar Kleveland, president and CEO of Textron Specialized Vehicles, makers of E-Z-GO golf cars in Augusta, agrees and adds, “The state has been able to bring some big names here – IKEA, Caterpillar, even Starbucks here in Augusta. That pops when people see names like that coming to a state. But at the same time, you have companies like us that have been here for many years, performing well and saying that we will stay here in Georgia because it’s a good place to do business. It all comes together as one good package.”

For Hurst Boiler and Welding Co., which builds and manufactures steam and hot water boiler systems in Thomas County, tax incentives demonstrate the

business for seven years in a row [now eight], that’s not something you can dismiss when you’re looking at a place to locate a company.”

Talent and Training

Access to a skilled workforce is among manufacturers’ top priorities and by all accounts the state is working hard to attract and train those workers. Through its 22 colleges and dual enrollment programs with high schools throughout the state, the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) offers 600 programs, many geared toward manufacturing skills, and a 99% job placement rate. TCSG’s internationally acclaimed Quick Start delivers customized training free of charge to existing, expanding and new businesses that qualify. Each TCSG college partners with local companies to make sure workers are prepared with the training they need now and in the future.

“When you hear Georgia’s No. 1 for business for seven years in a row [now eight], that’s just not something you can dismiss when you’re looking at a place to locate a company.”

– REGINA MADDOX, executive director of Next Generation Manufacturing

state’s business-friendly climate. “There was the Georgia job tax credits and the Georgia port tax credit,” says Jeff Hurst, vice president of marketing and son of the company’s founder. “We try to ship as much as we can through the Georgia ports and retain the tax credits. That’s one of the main incentives we’ve taken advantage of. And, we’ve found a good workforce in the three counties we mainly pull from, which are Thomas, Colquitt and Brooks counties.”

“One can easily talk about taxes and infrastructure and the regulations, and all of these things are important,” says Sara Irvani, CEO of Buford-based shoe manufacturer Okabashi. “But I think it’s a culture, an ecosystem that makes all the difference and Georgia has an incredibly strong one.”

To these attributes, Regina Maddox, executive director of state trade association Next Generation Manufacturing, adds, “When you hear Georgia’s No. 1 for

“Our technical college system is really a point of pride,” says GDECD Deputy Commissioner of Global Commerce Scott McMurray. “Jobs for folks coming out of school represent hope for them. We love to see the schools get together in partnership with the manufacturers in those local communities.” He says that often companies donate equipment to the technical colleges so students can train on what they would actually be using in a job.

“I’ve run factories internationally and around the U.S.,” says Kleveland, “and the workforce that we have here and in Georgia is just phenomenal. We have a strong partnership with Augusta Technical College. It’s important to have access to people that are local and want to stay local that can support us here.”

He says Textron Specialized Vehicles, which employs more than 1,350 in Richmond County and builds around 100,000 golf cars every year, has benefited from

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Georgia Quick Start. But the program he's most excited about is RPM – Reaching Potential Through Manufacturing – with Richmond County Schools. Students considered most at risk of failing to earn a diploma are brought into the program to finish high school as they work on Textron products. More than 200 have graduated and 70 of those continue to work at the company. “Bringing them through the program and making them successful is just incredible,” he says.

“You really have to show companies that you have the talent available for them to start, and that as they grow, [the talent pipeline] will grow with them,” says McMurray.

Protecting the Planet

A number of Georgia's manufacturing businesses are focused on making their operations and products more sustainable and pursuing renewable energy solutions. These include the state's floor



World-class Products: Scott McMurray, GDEcD deputy commissioner of global commerce

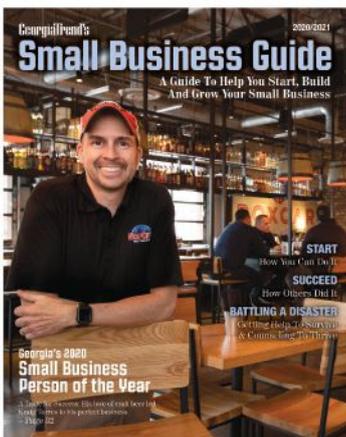
covering titans, which are meeting published sustainability goals; the growing presence of electric vehicle-component companies; and producers that serve alternative energy markets.

Since 1967, Hurst Boiler has been manufacturing boilers for the energy generation process. Global customers run the gamut from oil and gas power companies to businesses like distilleries that use wood, biomass, solid waste and hybrid fuel. Lumber mills in the southern part of the state and wood pellet producers are some of the companies that rely on Hurst Boiler's biomass unit to burn wood as an alternative to fossil fuels. Hurst says biomass is an “upbeat trend” the company is pursuing to help customers reduce carbon, emissions and operating and fuel costs.

In addition, Hurst Boiler builds systems that burn fuel such as agave waste generated by tequila distillers in Mexico. “Their electricity is intermittent,” says Hurst, “so they use the agave waste [from]

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the distilled tequila to burn as their fuel in their boiler system. The boiler turns a turbine system to produce their electricity and they do their distilling with it. This way, they keep their electricity running all the time.”

“You can be a good steward of the planet by the products you put out,” says YKK’s Reed. He says YKK has recently finalized a 2050 plan that calls for reducing carbon dioxide emissions by half in the next 10 years along with requiring the company’s indirect supply chain to reduce CO2 emissions by 30%. By 2050, he says, YKK will be carbon neutral.

“The apparel industries [are] in this major shift toward the circular economy,” he says. “That will allow us to rethink all of our products, what they’re made of, what’s their lifecycle. How do you use them? How can we make them recyclable, repairable and make them of different materials?”

Okabashi’s three brands of comfort shoes have been sustainably made since



No. 1 for Business: Regina Maddox, executive director of Next Generation Manufacturing

the business began in 1984, says Irvani. The 100,000-square-foot facility employs 200 and produces just under 2 million pairs of shoes a year through a closed-loop manufacturing process. The shoes are made from recyclable material and customers can return their old shoes to the company for a 15% discount on their next purchase.

“We talk about Okabashi being sustainably made in the USA,” she says, “and we have seen an incredible resurgence in the appreciation of U.S.-made products by our customers.”

Coronavirus Consequences

The pandemic’s global disruption has caused many companies to think about the advantages of U.S. manufacturing and supply chains. “We’re finding more and more companies looking to bring manufacturing either back from overseas or to expand what they have here,” says GDEC’s McMurray, “and to look more



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“We’re finding more and more companies looking to bring manufacturing either back from overseas or to expand what they have here, and to look more locally for suppliers that will reduce their risk of having long global supply chains.”

– SCOTT MCMURRAY, deputy commissioner of global commerce, GDEcD

locally for suppliers that will reduce their risk of having long global supply chains.”

After the COVID-related statewide shutdown last spring, McMurray says Georgia’s manufacturers learned how to operate safely and have since ramped up production to pre-pandemic levels. As a result, he says the state had a great start to the fiscal year that began on July 1.

Okabashi is one of the companies that was back to full production by the fall.

“The pandemic has highlighted the importance of local manufacturing,” says Irvani. “We were able to respond in a matter of days and weeks when our partners were looking for products, not months. We also use a local supplier base ourselves and so our supplier base was able

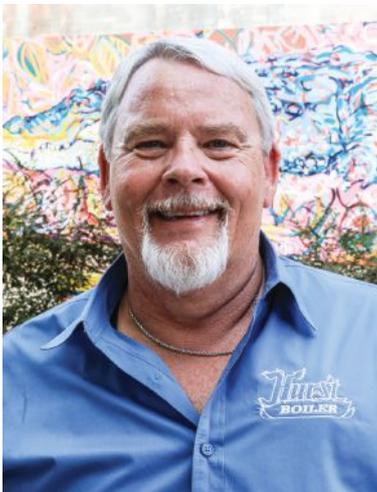
to be as agile as we were to really work in harmony. We were very grateful that we did not experience any major supply chain shift.”

Some manufacturers like YKK, with customers that include the U.S. Department of Defense and Homeland Security as well as those in healthcare industries, were considered essential and remained open despite the ongoing pandemic. Providing zippers and fasteners for hazmat suits, trim for disposable protective gowns and components for suits that are airtight, watertight and chemical- and fire-resistant, YKK had to respond to high demand. Reed says the company’s airtight, watertight zippers were also critical in maintaining the negative pressure needed for temporary isolation chambers used for COVID-19 patients. Responding to a national shortage of elastic last year, YKK was able to provide the stretchy stuff to companies that pivoted to making face masks.

In addition, YKK’s rivets were used to repair about 1,400 N95 masks – which were in short supply nationwide – for the Lawrenceburg, Ky., Department of Health. After the repair, the health department was able to put them to use.

Beyond healthcare, the pandemic created an unexpected boon for many fitness and outdoor products, including those related to golf. Textron was surprised by the increased interest in golf cars and recreational vehicles. “The demand for golf did not subside, because people can be outside and [they can] socially distance,” says Kleveland. “We struggled to keep up with that demand and it’s been a good challenge. We went through the whole process from a shutdown to a slow startup to full capacity, and supply chain is still an issue.”

Maddox says the pandemic spurred innovation among manufacturers. “We have all these great good-news stories about the additions of new lines of production and the pivoting that [manufacturers] have handled so well,” she says.



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

Georgia Made: Clockwise from top left, Jeff Hurst, vice president of marketing at Hurst Boiler and Welding Co., a Hurst welder at work and one of the company’s boilers

IN THE MARCH 2021 EDITION

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Strong Business Ecosystem: Sara Irvani, CEO of Okabashi

“Companies that innovated did really well and they’ll continue to do so.”

Pride in Production

Before the coronavirus upended businesses and life, GDEcD launched its Georgia Made initiative in February to recognize and support manufacturers across the state. It’s a certification program for products that are at least 50% manufactured in Georgia, excluding food and agricultural items. Similar in concept to the state Department of Agriculture’s Georgia Grown program, Georgia Made aims to convey quality and pride and provide resources to assist participating businesses. Those that complete GDEcD’s certification process will be able to display the Georgia Made logo on their products.

“We know when we talk with international companies, a product having a

made-in-the-USA label on it is a real symbol around the world of quality. And so we’re trying to do the same thing here in Georgia,” McMurray says. “Our manufacturers here produce world-class products and we would like for the Georgia Made logo to have that same level of recognition within the United States and around the world.”

He says the program will also help participating companies connect with centers of innovation and educational institutions around the state. “If they’ve got an issue with how to produce a product or they’re looking for a better way to build something, the cutting-edge research our educational institutions are involved in will give them a way to connect to that,” he says.

GDEcD’s international trade division is also on hand to help Georgia Made participants find export markets abroad,

which is what the organization did for Hurst Boiler. “We’d like to think of it as a full-spectrum resource for these companies, bringing everything we have possible to the table to help them grow and succeed,” McMurray adds.

Along with Hurst Boiler, YKK was one of the first companies to sign up for the Georgia Made program, which had about 20 participants at the end of 2020.

“I think it behooves all of us to promote Georgia as a manufacturing center,” says Reed. “Detroit gained a lot as a brand when it became the center of the auto industry. Silicon Valley gained a lot as a brand as the center of technology. Georgia will benefit with the Georgia Made program as [we] continue to highlight what already exists, so more people will come. The more successful manufacturing is in Georgia, the better for the communities.” ■

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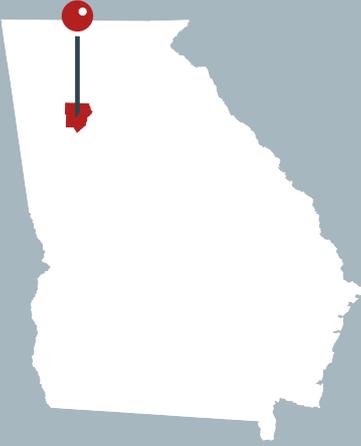


Focused on Recovery:
Sharon Mason, Cobb Chamber president and CEO

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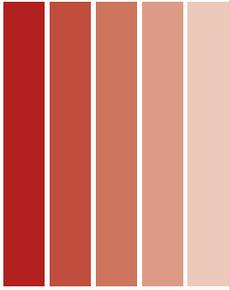
Healthcare, parks and tourism

[By Haisten Willis]

Like almost everyone else, Cobb County’s leaders are entering a new year they hope will be dramatically different and smoother than the one that preceded it. Nonetheless, the county has done its best to keep the local economy pumping as the world looks to reduce the COVID-19 threat in 2021.

Last January, the Cobb Chamber of Commerce celebrated its move to impressive new digs on the 10th floor of a tower overlooking Truist Park and The Battery, providing views as far away as Kennesaw Mountain and the Atlanta airport. The chamber vacated its new home just two months later due to COVID, but began moving back in over the summer and has been working to resuscitate Cobb business ever since.

“We’re going to keep focusing on recovery,” says Chamber President and CEO Sharon Mason. “We know this is continuing, and our role at the chamber has never been



SNAPSHOT



POPULATION

(2019 estimate)

County	760,141
Marietta	60,867

PER CAPITA INCOME

(2018)

County	\$38,268
Georgia	\$29,523

UNEMPLOYMENT

(October 2020)

County	3.9%
Georgia	4.5%

TOP EMPLOYERS

- Brand Energy and Infrastructure Services
- Lockheed Martin
- Publix Supermarkets
- The Home Depot
- Wellstar Health System

SOURCES

- + U.S. Census Bureau
- + Georgia Department of Labor
- + Cobb Chamber of Commerce



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Creating a Destination: Mike Plant, president and CEO of the Braves Development Co., at Truist Stadium

more needed for advancing the economy and stimulating the economy.”

The chamber’s new headquarters offers views right into the stadium, it’s brimming with local artwork and many of its features are even sponsored by local businesses. For example, Kaiser Permanente sponsors the hand sanitizer, while Superior Plumbing sponsors the bathrooms.

As the virus marched on, the chamber stayed busy distributing \$40 million in grants from the federal CARES Act. In total, more than 3,000 small businesses received relief grants to help pay and hire employees or meet expenses like rent and utilities.

“A lot of businesses have told me this is saving their company,” says Mason. “Without these grants, they would have had to completely shut down.”

The chamber also helped draft reopening guidelines used by businesses across Cobb, and helped organize a system that has distributed more than 18,000 meals to local residents since May.

Just across the street, the Atlanta Braves wrapped up their fourth season at the stadium now known as Truist Park, winning the National League Division Series and playing in the National League Championship Series. While stadium access was severely limited, the team offered watch parties at the park for the playoff games in Texas, with up to 3,000

fans spreading out on blankets in the outfield and seated in the stands.

Cumberland Growth

Outside the stadium, The Battery saw an increase in foot traffic after the state’s COVID shutdown ended. The Coca-Cola Roxy resumed its shows, and the Park



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Welcoming Visitors: Aloft Atlanta Hotel at The Battery

Bench dueling piano bar began offering another live music option right down the street.

The area also welcomed a second hotel, Aloft Atlanta at The Battery, to complement the existing Omni hotel.

“We realized quickly that because of the destination we created, we probably could have built another 200 rooms at the Omni,” says Mike Plant, president and CEO of the Braves Development Company. “Once we finalized the deal with thyssenkrupp, which will bring upwards of 10,000 visitors a year, we realized we can bring in another hotel.”

“Upward” has multiple meanings when it comes to thyssenkrupp. The German conglomerate is constructing the North American headquarters for its elevator division, which at 420 feet will be Cobb’s tallest building upon completion later this year. The headquarters will employ more than 1,000 when it fully opens, with an average salary exceeding \$100,000. Topping the tower will be



Resilient Industry: Holly Quinlan, president and CEO of Cobb Travel and Tourism

space that can be rented for events.

One of the biggest events to ever hit Cobb County will arrive at Truist Park in July when the 2021 Major League Baseball All-Star Game is scheduled. The halo impact on the county’s economy is expected to be tremendous.

“The All-Star Game is a global impact event,” says Plant. “There will be tens of thousands of people here for FanFest at the Cobb Galleria Centre for 10 days. The game will showcase The Battery and everything that’s a part of it to a global audience.”

Walk across two pedestrian bridges from The Battery and you arrive at Cumberland Mall, still thriving after nearly 50 years in business. But the mall’s stakeholders aren’t taking this success for granted – instead they’re actively working to transform it into a mixed-use development with apartments and hotels, a fire station and a transit terminal.

What is now a sea of asphalt parking on the mall’s east side is slated to



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Stepped-up Care: Mary Chatman, executive vice president of Wellstar Health System and president of Kennestone and Windy Hill Hospitals

become more than 300 apartments, two office towers, potentially a hotel, a parking deck, fire station, 10-bay bus terminal and retail, totaling nearly \$150 million in development.

“The project will be transformational for the mall, but it’s also really good for the community,” says former Cobb County Commissioner Bob Ott, who helped lead the project before retiring from the commission in December. “The county gets a needed fire station, and I think the transit options that will become viable with a true transit hub make the area a true destination.”

The project will be built in phases, with the apartments coming online first.

“This is the next step in continuing the mall’s success,” Ott says. “You’re taking a classical mall setting and turning it into a mixed-use development.”

Expanding Horizons

In July, Wellstar Health System celebrated the opening of the new emergency department at Wellstar Kennestone Hospital in Marietta.

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The ED has the capacity to handle 220,000 patients annually, which has been tremendously helpful during the pandemic.

The new facility also has three different entrances, making it easier to separate those who are COVID-19 positive. At 263,000 square feet, Kennestone’s emergency department is larger than many hospitals.

“During the pandemic, the new emergency department has proven to be a very important part of the care model for Cobb County,” says Mary Chatman, executive vice president of Wellstar Health System and president of Kennestone and Windy Hill Hospitals. “People want to be able to seek care, but they also want to have confidence that the care is administered safely.”

Chatman says that some patients who delayed seeing a doctor last spring for fear of the pandemic started coming in during the fall, many of them sicker for the delay. But with 11 hospitals, Wellstar and its staff have stepped up to care for all who enter its facilities – as well as some who opt to stay home. Before the pandemic, Wellstar was conducting around 100 virtual patient visits per week, system-wide. Now that number has risen to 2,800 per week.

Wellstar has also been a site for coronavirus



Focal Point: Powder Springs Mayor Al Thurman at Thurman Springs Park

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Attracting More People: Mayor Tommy Allegood in downtown Acworth

antibody testing, and Chatman says conversations about administering a vaccine started months ago.

“There are lots of things to work out and figure out related to a vaccine,” Chatman

says. “But because Wellstar is large, comprehensive and we pride ourselves about being on the cutting edge, when new things happen our leaders and clinicians are sought to be on the front end of that planning.”

One less-dire side effect of COVID-19 has been a vast increase in people enjoying the outdoors. For Powder Springs, another option to do so opened in late September with the debut of Thurman Springs Park.

The park is located in downtown as part of a planned transformation of the area. It’s named for Powder Springs Mayor Al Thurman, the first Black mayor in Cobb County.

“We decided we needed to create density downtown, and to do that we were in need of a focal point,” says Thurman. “The city council decided that the park would be our centerpiece and that we’d develop around that.”

The naming came as a surprise for Thurman.

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The City of Smyrna is home to 56,640 residents. Since 2000, Smyrna’s population has more than doubled. This growth is expected to continue and by 2023, Smyrna is expected to be home to over 60,000 residents. The median household income in the city is \$61,347 and the average household income is \$87,265. The median home value in Smyrna is \$245,303 and the average home value in Smyrna is currently \$283,860.

The median age in Smyrna is 35.3 years old and 21 percent of residents are between 20 and 34 years of age. Thirty-two percent of residents are between the ages of 35 and 54.

Education attainment is a strength in Smyrna as well with 91.3 percent of Smyrna residents holding a high school diploma or higher and 52.2 percent holding a bachelor’s degree or higher. With over half of Smyrna adults having earned a four-year college degree, Smyrna has a 14 points higher college graduation rate than the rest of Metro Atlanta.

Smyrna is also home to a diverse range of businesses and organizations including bioresearch, wholesale trade, technology, health care, food processing and distribution, and light manufacturing.

Smyrna’s bond rating from Standard & Poor’s is AAA, the highest rating possible, and Moody’s is Aa1.

“Our staff suggested the park be named Thurman Springs Park, and a couple of weeks later it was on the agenda and the council voted it in,” says Thurman. “I wasn’t expecting that. I kind of stayed away from [the naming process], but God is really good.”

Another well-known destination in Cobb is Acworth, which bills itself as The Lake City. Acworth celebrated the opening of a 44,000-square-foot community center in April 2019, including a 7,000-square-foot banquet hall, administrative offices and an activity center with a gymnasium, walking track and exercise room. According to Neely Motiejunas, who manages the community center, it hosted a number of weddings, annual meetings, conferences, seminars and dances, among other activities, in the year before the pandemic hit.



CONTRIBUTED

Looking Forward: Kim Watt, Acworth tourism director

“The community center has become an economic development partner for us,” says Acworth Mayor Tommy Allegeed. “It has brought in different types of events that bring in people who shop downtown and support our local businesses. People are coming to Acworth that never would have come before.”

Kim Watt, Acworth’s tourism director, says the city looks forward to hosting a full slate of events again in 2021, including an Easter Egg hunt, Pizza, Pints & Pigskins and Pops at Logan Farm Park. The city also continues its investment in sidewalks and trails to further the outdoor fun, such as a planned trail that will completely encircle the lake.

Trying Tourism

Locals may find it hard to believe, but tourism is Cobb County’s largest industry.

It employs over 35,000 and generates more than \$3 billion in economic impact annually.

“While tourism has been hit harder than a lot of other industries, it’s resilient and tougher,” says Holly Quinlan, president and CEO of Cobb Travel and Tourism. “We’ll all come out of it on the other side.”

Both Six Flags theme parks in Cobb – Six Flags Over Georgia and White Water – reopened in summer, and Quinlan says they’ve set an example for other parks to follow, working with health experts and employing methods like cashless transactions to ensure the safety of visitors.

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Tourism is ramping back up as visitors travel from shorter distances of less than 100 miles, and Quinlan added that youth sports tournaments mostly kept going strong.

In August, Cobb Travel and Tourism launched its “Hello Again” campaign, which provides itineraries for activities that can be done alone, in small groups or around more people.

“The campaign is centered around the idea of saying hello again,” Quinlan says. “It’s about welcoming people where they are. Some are comfortable in a small group, and others are comfortable going to Six Flags. It’s about letting people know we have something for them no matter what their comfort level is.”

The Cobb Galleria Centre is also a tourism draw, bringing convention visitors from across the southeast. For the second year running, the Galleria was named a top convention center by *Exhibitor* magazine.



Safe and Walkable: Michele Swann, general manager and CEO of the Cobb-Marietta Coliseum & Exhibit Authority

“The Galleria is a safe and walkable destination,” says Michele Swann, general manager and CEO of the Cobb-Marietta Coliseum & Exhibit Authority, which includes Cobb Galleria Centre, Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre and ArtsBridge Foundation. “Our amenities are extraordinary, with The Battery, Truist Park and Cumberland Mall all within walking distance. We have a tremendous sales staff and a diverse hotel package, so we’re extremely proud that we got that award for the second year in a row.”

Swann has been with the Galleria since 1995, and she’s looking forward to an even brighter future for the convention space, Galleria mall and Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre.

“We’re going to keep doing what we’ve been doing in terms of service,” says Swann. “It has worked well in the past and we think it’ll work in the future.”

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LOCAL FLAVOR

Showcasing Artifacts:

Christa McCay,
collections manager at
the Marietta Museum
of History



DAVE DAWSON

Telling Stories

THE MARIETTA MUSEUM OF HISTORY doesn't just document history, it *is* history. Situated next to the train tracks by the Marietta Square, it's located in Kenesaw House, which dates to 1845. The building spent much of its life as a hotel before becoming home to the museum in 1996.

The museum reopened from coronavirus lockdown on June 16 and has been going strong ever since, though Christa McCay, the museum's collections manager and a 16-year employee, says attendance is down as much as 70%. Recent exhibits focused on history that too often goes overlooked.

The first, *The Man with the Camera: Photographs by Raymond T. Burford*, detailed the life's work of a Black photographer who documented Marietta's African-American history during the mid-20th century. It featured photos from the 1940s through the 1960s, most of which were loaned to the museum from local families.

"Our goal at the museum is to have more diversity and inclusion, not only in our exhibits but in our collections as well," says McCay. "We love to tell stories, but we weren't telling the whole narrative, the whole story. We want to make sure that from now on we're focusing on collecting more of the history of people of color."

Another exhibit highlighted the fight for women's suffrage, and how the battle was waged both locally and nationally, through a selection of posters curated by the Smithsonian Institution to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment that gave women the right to vote.

A current exhibit, *Made by Her Hands: The Beauty, Warmth and Stories of Local Quilting*, features quilts made by local Marietta and Cobb County women. Not only are the quilts displayed, the stories of the women who made them are shared as well. The quilts will remain on display until the end of March.

Also in 2021, the museum's Diverse Cobb initiative is planning to create an oral history of domestic workers, preserving their stories for future generations.

Between 10% and 15% of the museum's 35,000-plus artifacts are on display at any given time, with the rest housed on the building's third floor. Before the pandemic, about 60% of visitors hailed from outside the Metro Atlanta area.

"Usually people are here for a good hour or so," says McCay.

McCay also leads tours of the Marietta City Cemetery, which dates to the 1830s, sharing the stories of its notable inhabitants. Among them are Charles Dobbins, namesake of Dobbins Air Reserve Base, and Alexander Stephens Clay, the only U.S. senator born and raised in Cobb County.

For McCay, getting to tell stories and interact with the public is what makes the Marietta Museum of History such a special place to be.

"The best part is when somebody comes in with an artifact related to Marietta or Cobb County and they don't know what it is," she says. "I can look it up, and often within an hour I can figure it out. That's the best day for me." – *Haisten Willis* ■



Bursts of Giving: Karen Beavor,
Georgia Center for Nonprofits
president and CEO

THE TOUGH **ASK**

Just over a month ago, more than 40,000 participants laced up their running shoes and headed out for the *AJC* Peachtree Road Race, an Atlanta tradition dating back to 1970. But the 2020 version of the 10K – like a lot of things from 2020 – was a little bit different than before.

For one, the race started on Thanksgiving Day, rather than the usual Fourth of July. And there wasn't a starting line, at least not officially. There wasn't a defined route, either. For the first time in its 51-year history, the Peachtree Road Race went virtual, letting participants from around the world run their own race on whatever route they chose, wherever they were, tracked through a smartphone app loaded with signature race details.

It was a decision guided as much by necessity as by safety, says Atlanta Track Club Executive Director Rich Kenah. The Atlanta Track Club, which organizes the race each year, is a nonprofit. Its mission is to help Atlanta's children and adults lead healthier lives through walking and running. And the race, imperiled by a pandemic that prohibits large gatherings, is the nonprofit's largest fundraising event, raising through registration fees the bulk of the money the organization needs to deliver its programming throughout the year.

"We've seen a significant decrease in our annual revenues, and it remains to be seen where we're going to land," Kenah says. "We did pivot and move the Peachtree to a virtual event, and that will allow us to deliver something that is authentic, albeit virtual, and keep the organization intact so that we can plan for the 52nd running of the Peachtree in 2021."

Creating a virtual experience of something inherently physical like the Peachtree Road Race is just one example of the moves Georgia's nonprofits have had to make to stay afloat over the past 10 months. Without the typical large, in-person events and facing donor apprehension – and sometimes inability – to give during uncertain times, organizations have relied on creative shifts, refined approaches and a sharp focus on their mission.

How are Georgia's nonprofits raising money during the pandemic?

BY ANNA BENTLEY

**Photograph by
JENNIFER STALCUP**

Individual Differences

In June, the Georgia Center for Nonprofits (GCN) conducted a statewide survey of 520 of its member organizations to gauge COVID-19 impacts and 2021 projections. Results show a sector that's quickly adapting to challenges in funding and demand, with impacts – and their severity – depending on a nonprofit's size and mission.

GCN survey data show that 90% of nonprofits in the state reported reductions in revenue, with smaller nonprofits reporting more significant funding reductions – as much as 50% in some cases. Eighty-four percent of survey respondents were confident they could weather the situation,

yet only 23% expressed a positive fundraising outlook for the next 12 months.

Why the discrepancy? It's likely tied to mission.

"We've had these bursts of giving, particularly to organizations that are on what we call the 'front lines' in health, community clinics, or food and rent assistance," says Karen Beavor, GCN's president and CEO. "Certainly, people have stepped up and given to those."

The Macon Volunteer Clinic, a medical clinic providing free primary medical, dental and eye care to Bibb County's uninsured working adults, found itself facing unexpected pandemic-related operating

costs early last year. The mostly grant-funded clinic moved quickly to identify and apply for COVID-19 relief grant funds offered by community organizations to cover these expenses.

Nearly \$30,000 in funds from the Healthcare Georgia Foundation, Community Foundation of Central Georgia and United Way of Central Georgia helped the clinic stand up its new telemedicine service and prepare to safely treat patients in person throughout the pandemic by building mask reserves and installing new HVAC filtration units, for example.

"As far as fundraising goes, I don't think we have been as challenged as many nonprofits have been," says Cathy Loyd, the clinic's chief development officer. "We have stayed very aggressive with our fundraising from minute one, but also health-care is an essential service. It is probably going to be easier for essential service charities to raise funds in these times than it is for the arts or things that people do not see as essential.

"If they are not in essential services, I just think the challenge is going to be there," she continues. "I know that's a tough ask."

Telling the Story

Nonprofits not on the "front lines" – such as arts and civic organizations, educational nonprofits, environmental groups, museums and more – have had to strengthen messaging around how the work they do impacts their communities. This requires effective storytelling that humanizes the work, grounding its impacts in tangible ways that donors can recognize, appreciate and feel compelled to support.

At Step Up Savannah, a nonprofit that works to reduce poverty in the Savannah region through workforce development programs, financial education programs and policy reform advocacy in areas like affordable housing and predatory lending, it's called for reflection to simplify and amplify the organization's mission.

"In the midst of a pandemic, it's been hard for us to think about our work differently, in that we've been doing it for 15 years," says Alicia Johnson, the organization's executive director. "This required us to pivot and to figure out meaningful ways for us to draw connections for people about why this work is still important, why it still needs to be done and why it



Defining Value: Alicia Johnson, executive director of Step Up Savannah

CONTRIBUTED



MAT TODOMPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

Aggressive Fundraising: Cathy Loyd, chief development officer of Macon Volunteer Clinic

still needs to be underwritten by all those sectors of the community, whether it's business, local community members, social services and so on."

The nonprofit used its annual meeting, held virtually in late October, to define its importance in the community, juxtaposing statistics about the level of poverty in Chatham County with the tangible impact its programs have had, like the number of program graduates and percentage who found meaningful employment after graduation.

Video testimonials from graduates of the organization's Chatham Apprentice Program and Neighborhood Leadership Academy helped to further ground Step Up Savannah's work and its impact on the community – a message the nonprofit hoped would resonate with viewers when it reached out for corporate sponsorships and donations later.

"We went to great lengths to humanize

the work," Johnson says. "Our No. 1 aim is to demonstrate the importance of this work and how valuable it is to the community."

Maintaining the Magic

In mid-March, as the coronavirus started to take hold, leaders at Atlanta's Center for Puppetry Arts made two bold moves: They briefly shifted their focus from fundraising to staying in touch with their audiences, and they started streaming free performances and learning programs to viewers around the world.

Children and adults alike needed to escape into something that would bring them joy, says Beth Schiavo, the center's executive director. The center wanted to be their "outlet that felt normal and that felt safe," she says.

From March to June, more than 200,000 unique visitors across 88 countries virtu-

ally attended the center's performances, workshops and tours. While its programming clearly resonated with people, the free programming didn't help the organization in terms of raising money.

"We're highly reliant on performance revenue, which we couldn't do anymore," Schiavo says. "So we've put a lot of effort into our museum experience and creating events that can be online events or that can be safe, in-person events with limited people. We're running about 25 to 30% of our normal capacity, but it does allow us to stay engaged with our fans and to introduce new audiences to what we do at the center that got to know us during that free programming time."

Those big spring engagement numbers gave the center something unique to offer to potential corporate donors: specific experiential opportunities, Schiavo says, such as sponsorships of special in-person events.

For example, Kotter International, a consulting firm, sponsored October's in-person Monster Mash event. "Kotter International has never sponsored anything at the center before," she says, "and has not been a corporate donor before, but was excited about the opportunity to bring joy to families onsite at the center and agreed to be a sponsor of that event.

"Rather than have some of the conversations we have around big corporate donations that are more general in nature, we're trying to really appeal to potential donors on how they can get involved in bringing this joy to families," she says.

And selling safe in-person experiences lets the center adjust its fundraising strategy without tinkering too much with what makes the center unique, she says.

"The hardest part of that is you don't want to mess with the programming and the content, the art," she says. "You don't want to mess with the magic, but how do you manage the business a little differently going forward? You have to keep that magic, or else why are you still around?"

The team at the Atlanta Track Club found themselves asking similar questions

as coronavirus cases spiked last summer. They weighed different options for holding a safe, in-person event but kept coming back to the same question: What makes the Peachtree Road Race the Peachtree Road Race?

"We ultimately came to the conclusion that we could deliver something ... in per-

sonal events, to create an app that would deliver a virtual race experience that was as close to the in-person race as possible.

The app included race traditions like an opening greeting from Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms as well as a blessing from the Rev. Samuel Candler, dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip, as racers

"People need to think broadly about what nonprofits mean to their lives. We live our lives in nonprofits, and you may not really consider that, but you do."

– Karen Beavor, president and CEO, Georgia Center for Nonprofits

son that was safe, but it would be so far from what the normal Peachtree is that it wouldn't be the Peachtree. It would be something different, a different event," Kenah says. "For an event that is 50 years old, we thought it more important to lean into the things that people know and love about the Peachtree."

So, they sent the coveted Peachtree Road Race T-shirt back to the printer to add a nod to the year's special circumstances on the back. And they partnered with Haku, a technology platform for vir-

reached the one-mile mark – "Jesus Junction" on the official course.

"There are tens of thousands of people who have been doing the Peachtree for years, if not decades, and we heard time and time again from those folks that they wanted to find a way to keep that tradition and that streak alive," Kenah says. "We want them to enjoy this as best they can with the understanding that we're going to come back as strong as ever once the coronavirus is behind us."

After COVID-19

It's true: One day, the coronavirus will be behind us. But what will our communities look like then if we do not support the nonprofits that serve them now?

"The community is going to recover. We're not always going to have this, and are we not going to want our arts institutions [after the pandemic]? Are we not going to want to go to community theater? Are we not going to want to have a jazz performance? Are we not going to want to go to the symphony?" asks Beavor. "People need to think broadly about what nonprofits mean to their lives. We live our lives in nonprofits, and you may not really consider that, but you do."

Nonprofits are also taking this time to ask themselves what they will look like after the pandemic. Many have delivered services virtually out of necessity for the past 10 months. It's a change that will stick for both the Macon Volunteer Clinic and Step Up Savannah that have seen how this technology gives them a level of access to their communities they didn't have before.

In addition to how they deliver services, nonprofits are rethinking how they deliver



Bringing Joy: Beth Schiavo, executive director of the Center for Puppetry Arts, with the Dormouse

their messages. The Atlanta Track Club hired a new director of development and community relations in late September to better diversify revenue streams and more clearly communicate the club's story and mission.

The Center for Puppetry Arts is thinking critically about who it reaches, identifying strategies to target more underserved communities and incorporate more diverse voices into its programming. The goal is to become a more inclusive organization that better represents the community it serves, says Schiavo.

Overall, it's a time for intentional, sustained efforts to "really dial down and have some laser focus around what we do and who we are," says Johnson. And sometimes, that means just getting through the hard times.

"The thing that keeps me laser sharp is being a good steward of whatever we have and determining that resiliency is not necessarily about coming out leagues ahead of your peers. Resiliency, sometimes, is about just coming out intact and whole and counting that as a major success," she says. "To live to fight another day is going to be a huge success coming out of this." ■



STEVIE SCHAEFER

Keeping the Peachtree Road Race Tradition Alive: Rich Kenah, Atlanta Track Club executive director

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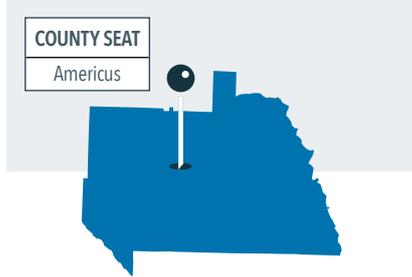
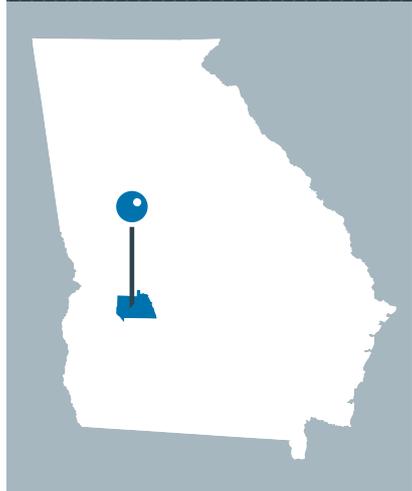


TODD STONE

Untapped Potential:
Susan Warner, left, project manager of the Sumter County Development Authority, and Rusty Warner, executive director

SUMTER COUNTY

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 **RUSTY WARNER**
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Looking Ahead

New investments, community improvements and education

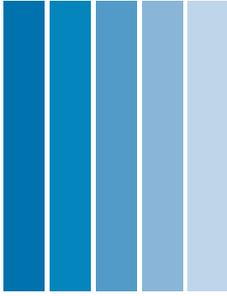
[By K.K. Snyder]

Like the rest of the world, Sumter County was relieved to put 2020 behind it, though the fourth quarter did bring some announcements to cheer about. And while many of the issues from last year remain, Sumter leaders are looking straight ahead.

In late 2019 the county hired the husband and wife team of Rusty and Susan Warner, he as executive director of the Sumter County Development Authority, and she as project manager, also overseeing public relations, marketing and accounting for the authority. The couple has worked similar roles in other areas following years together in real estate, she says.

“Susan basically does all the real work, and I just sit around and kiss babies and smile,” he jokes. “We make a pretty good team, and we only fight about 100 times a day.”

The Warners can’t say enough about the cooperation they receive from the development authority board and the enthusiasm the county has overall. Rusty Warner sees



SNAPSHOT



POPULATION

(2019 estimate)

County	29,524
Americus	15,309

PER CAPITA INCOME

(2018)

County	\$20,191
Georgia	\$29,523

UNEMPLOYMENT

(October 2020)

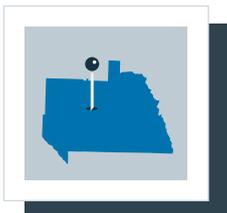
County	5.6%
Georgia	4.5%

TOP EMPLOYERS

- Eaton Cooper Lighting
- Georgia Southwestern State University
- Magnolia Manor
- Phoebe Putney Health System
- South Georgia Technical College

SOURCES

- + U.S. Census Bureau
- + Georgia Department of Labor
- + Sumter County Development Authority



TODD STONE

Fast-moving Projects: Americus Mayor Barry Blount

great untapped potential for the county, some of which is already coming to fruition.

The two helped orchestrate several big announcements last fall including the arrival of TLC Associates, an inbound and outbound call center bringing 1,000 jobs to the area. TLC opened its center Nov. 1 at the Ted Baldwin Business and Technology Park. The facility will serve as both a local call center and as a centralized office for TLC’s other projects around the country.

“The Industrial Drive building was already perfectly built as a call center with raised flooring, open areas and technology areas, and backup systems,” says Rusty Warner. “They are an absolute fit for our community and our building.”

Also committing during the fourth quarter was BandD Foods, investing \$15 million and creating an initial 100 jobs with more promised, he says. A supplier of frozen meat products, BandD established its new production facility and management offices at the former Glover Building, already well equipped with refrigeration and dock doors.

Earlier in 2020, Southern Wholesale Glass made a multimillion-dollar investment to expand its facility by 20,000 square feet, including a truck and parts shop, and create 60 new jobs ranging from high-tech to maintenance. The company manufactures made-to-order, insulated glass for residential and commercial projects.

repaving of Lamar Street – the west-east corridor through Americus – taking it from three lanes to two and adding about 50 angled parking spots on the south side of the street.

“That will hopefully be a benefit to our restaurants and retail shops downtown. It’s really changed the whole dynamics



CONTRIBUTED

Rounding the Corner: Caijuan Willis, Main Street director at Downtown Americus

Downtown Living

Americus Mayor Barry Blount says many planned projects moved forward last year despite the pandemic, including the



CONTRIBUTED

Successful Events: Downtown Americus Program Coordinator Haley Hanniford

and aesthetics of driving through downtown Americus now,” he says.

Also downtown is the Allison Building, originally built in the early 1900s and located across from the Windsor Hotel. It currently houses retail on the bottom floor and now the second and third floors are being converted to upscale apartments, says Blount. Demolition began in fall of 2020 and by mid-2021 there will be 12 new residential units downtown, something that is in high demand in Americus.

“We’re looking forward to that. People who have downtown lofts now always have a waiting list for them, and this will give us more inventory, so we’re certainly excited about that,” he says.

Qaijuan Willis, Main Street director at Downtown Americus, seconds that. He’s optimistic that local businesses have rounded the corner following pandemic challenges. Main Street was able to reallocate more than \$15,000 to provide COVID relief grants to 14 local businesses.

Downtown Americus continues moving forward with projects in its Renaissance Strategic Vision and Plan. Also known as RSVP, the planning process and resulting document are facilitated by the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government. Included in the Americus plan are a downtown streetscape project that will add curb extensions for pedestrian safety, plus tree plantings and new sidewalks for a more walkable environment.

Downtown Americus Program Coordinator Haley Hanniford says that while they

were unable to host the popular Hot Glass Cold Beer craft beer event in April, they did sell out their pre-pandemic Women’s Wine and Chocolate Walk 2020 in February and enjoyed a successful new event, the Food Truck Festival, in October. They also extended Lenny’s Farmers Market into the fall to meet growing demand and they continue to add vendors.

A Brighter Tomorrow

Partnering with local leaders, Phoebe Sumter Medical Center has championed making Americus and Sumter County a healthier place to live by establishing community gardens, says Blount. It’s part of the hospital’s work to target three of the most serious local problems: unhealthy eating and food deserts, colorectal cancer and suicide. The effort also aims to bring down the high rate of diabetes and high blood pressure among residents, he says.

“We know one of the causes is unhealthy diet,” Blount says. “A lot of folks that live in our community don’t have ready access to fresh vegetables.” A garden at Brookdale Park on the northwest side of Americus that opened in November is the first of many planned throughout the county.

Public safety was recognized when the Americus Police Department – already state certified – received national accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). Of the 628 law enforcement agencies across Georgia, only 56 are accredited by CALEA, according to Maya Mitchell, CALEA communications and organizational development manager.

Now in his 27th year as executive director of Sumter County Parks and Recreation, Tim Estes says funds from the 2013 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) along with funding from the SPLOST passed in 2019 will be used to develop an addition to the football/soccer complex, adding a third field early this year. A lighted, covered amphitheater will be constructed adjacent to a new concrete walking path encircling all three fields.

“You’re getting a third field but also a community gathering place where we can do concerts, movies in the park, Relay for Life and other big community gatherings,” says Estes of the \$550,000 project.

Continued on page 88



TODD STONE

Gathering Place: Tim Estes, executive director, Sumter County Parks and Recreation



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- *GA Southwestern State University & South GA Technical College*
- *New Phoebe Sumter hospital*
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SUMTER COUNTY



TODDSTONE

Pushing Through the Pandemic: Ivy Oliver, executive director of the One Sumter Economic Development Foundation

Continued from page 85

About \$350,000 in SPLOST funding will be used to replace the 1960s-era Rucker Street swimming pool and bathhouse, bringing the facility up to current regulations, he says. Another \$300,000 will be spent on playground renovations countywide, with the bulk of the funds used for semi-permanent, low-maintenance surfacing on playgrounds that meets current national standards.

Top of Their Game

Like all schools, South Georgia Technical College altered its delivery of instruction for students because of the pandemic. The coronavirus also halted the streak of record enrollment it experienced each semester for the past five years.

“We’re reinventing ourselves like everyone else,” says President John Watford. “It’s a challenge and an opportunity because we’re one of the heaviest occupational instruction hands-on training among technical colleges, with most of the students here for programs like welding, diesel and aviation maintenance.

“We were able to supplement with online instruction during the height of the crisis, but now we’re learning how to deliver hands-on training in a lab at a given moment, with safety as a priority,” he says. “We’re meeting that challenge and putting people to work.”

Construction on a \$1.6 million building that will offer commercial truck-driving instruction, plus a skills field is scheduled for completion in late spring. A five-acre pad will be resurfaced and re-leveled for the skills field and the facility will house truck-driving simulators.

“It’s one of the HOPE High-Demand Career Initiatives programs, and there are a lot of jobs for truck drivers and a lot of students wanting



CONTRIBUTED

Challenges and Opportunities: South Georgia Technical College President John Watford

truck driving,” Watford says. “It’s one of our strongest programs as far as growth right now. Because of COVID safety requirements and space, we’re training as many as we can process. It’s a great field to get into; the sky’s the limit with earnings potential.”

Interest in post-secondary education is also strong at Georgia Southwestern State University. President Neal Weaver reports that despite the pandemic, enrollment was up about 7.5% overall last fall.

“We saw about a 17% increase in our freshman class and graduate programs are up about 15%. We saw a nice improvement in a lot of different areas that certainly leads us to believe it’s not strictly a COVID-related change,” he says. The education and business master’s programs saw the biggest increases, he adds.

Enrollment is solid for the long-term care management program launched in 2019, which combines business,



DAVID PARKS PHOTOGRAPHY

Enrollment Increases: Neal Weaver, president, Georgia Southwestern State University

nursing and caregiving. “Obviously, with the aging population in our region and across the country, folks that know how to provide long-term care are in high demand, so those graduates are doing really well,” Weaver says.

Partnerships with Magnolia Manor, Phoebe Putney Health System and the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving make the program unique. “There’s not another school in the country that has that combination of assets,” he says. “We put together a program that helps graduates see the issue from such a variety of perspectives.”

The university recently completed a \$1.2 million indoor practice facility for baseball and softball and reopened the Academic Center for Excellence following a \$3.4 million renovation. A \$3.5 million renovation of Florrie Chappell Gymnasium is currently underway and scheduled for completion this year.

On the Horizon

Carolyn Wright, president of the Sumter County Chamber of Commerce, had to cancel



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Phoebe Sumter, a 76-bed hospital in Americus and one of three hospitals in the Phoebe system, is the centerpiece of its 40-acre medical campus providing quality care in specialties ranging from orthopaedics and cardiology to obstetrics and bariatrics. Additionally, three medical buildings – the Oncology & Surgery Center, the Women’s Health & Family Center, and the Wellness & Education Center – house exceptional teams of healthcare providers and state-of-the-art technology.

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Together, we’re creating a healthier future and a better Southwest Georgia.



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plans last year to celebrate the chamber's 100 years of service to the community. Instead, the board worked to develop a strategic plan for the next three to five years, targeting challenges in the community and areas where it can make a difference.

"Not knowing what our next year is going to hold for our members, we have some great plans going forward," she says. "We'll be doing things a little differently, like hosting webinars and workshops online.

"The chamber kept most of its members this last year. Even if they were temporarily closed, they kept their membership," she says. "We just want to help them grow, get the doors back open. I think going forward with our new plans for 2021, working closely with the Georgia Chamber, and using some of the resources and workshops available will help."

Ivy Oliver, executive director of the One Sumter Economic Development



CONTRIBUTED

Strategic Planning: Carolyn Wright, president of the Sumter County Chamber of Commerce

Foundation, saw the launch in 2020 of the organization's second five-year strategic plan dubbed GROW 2024.

"We kept some items from the last plan, and we're capitalizing now on those former plans," says Oliver. "We launched a campaign effort earlier this year but were slowed down by the pandemic. We decided to keep pushing through rather than putting a pause on it, and even with the pandemic we were able to raise \$1.5 million for Grow 2024."

Part of the initial One Sumter plan, Sumter's Ignite College and Career Academy was constructed on the new high school campus across from South Georgia Technical College, says Oliver. Don Gilman was hired as CEO last July, and Ignite will welcome its first students in August.

In spite of COVID setbacks, Sumter County is busy preparing to achieve its potential as it benefits from a solid foundation.

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LOCAL FLAVOR

Back in Business:
Sumter County's SAM
Shortline Railroad



CONTRIBUTED

Tracking History

A VINTAGE JOURNEY THROUGH SUMTER COUNTY is once again chugging down the tracks, as the Historic SAM Shortline Railroad is back in business with reduced capacity and new safety precautions after a pandemic-forced shutdown. The 1949 engine pulls vintage cars retrofitted with modern amenities, including air conditioning. Various excursions include the Sumter Explorer, departing from Georgia Veterans State Park in Cordele and rambling through Leslie to Americus and then to Plains, with stops in each town.

The SAM line – named for its 1880s route through Savannah, Americus and Montgomery – began life in 1884 as the Americus, Preston & Lumpkin (AP&L) Railroad. It was the only privately financed railroad in Georgia history, established by Americus banker and lawyer Samuel H. Hawkins. And it plays a big part in Americus history.

Before rail lines made their way there, Americus was a small courthouse town incorporated in 1832. But when the South Western Railroad (later named the Central of Georgia Railway) arrived in 1854 it set off a population boom. In the ten years between 1850 and 1860 the number of people in the little town increased twentyfold.

If the South Western brought a boom to Sumter County, it was Hawkins' line that garnered attention. Americus native Charles Crisp, who has deep knowledge of the county's history, explains.

"Americus was booming at that time, so there was a lot of development. Just like now, it was a rich agricultural area. But because of having the railroad there, it was also a big trade point for a number of counties," says Crisp, adding that Americus was the biggest town in Southwestern Georgia at that time. "There was a lot of farm trade and some small manufacturing, bankers, merchants and a number of whole-

salers here; it was a regional trade center."

With a station built about every 10 miles along Hawkins' line, many towns sprung up across Southwest Georgia, most notably Cordele – named for Hawkins' wife, Cordelia – and Plains.

But soon Americus and the rest of the country would fall on hard times with a nationwide recession beginning in 1893, he says. "There was a lot of fallout from that," particularly for businesses that carried a lot of debt. That included the SAM Shortline, which Hawkins was forced to relinquish. "But the railroad had already been built, so there were long-term economic benefits," Crisp says.

Hawkins' reimagined railroad is still providing economic benefits with its regular excursions and holiday-themed trips drawing tourists to the old stops along the way. Hawkins was honored in 2019 with the dedication of an historical marker at the SAM Shortline train depot on South Jackson Street in Americus, home of the original station.

Get your tickets or learn more about the railroad at samshortline.com. – *K.K. Snyder* 📷



Jeffrey Humphreys is Director of the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia's Terry College of Business.

 terry.uga.edu

Continued Recovery

The COVID-19 recession was brief but steep and did a lot of damage to Georgia's economy. The peak-to-trough drop in employment was 11%, worse than the 8% drop caused by the Great Recession. But, unlike the Great Recession, the COVID-19 recession did less damage to the state's economy than to the U.S. economy: The nation lost 14% of its jobs.

Assuming we avoid another widespread lockdown of the population and shutdown of businesses, Georgia's economic recovery will continue with the main drivers being consumer spending, the booming housing market and Federal Reserve policies. Full economic recovery will arrive sooner here than in the U.S. due to factors including:

- Build out of projects in the economic development pipeline.
- Competitive state-level economic development incentives that will help refill the economic development pipeline.
- More leverage than most states from the housing boom.
- More leverage than most states from the upturn in vehicle sales, given our large vehicle and vehicle parts manufacturing industry.
- Good prospects for the many large military bases.
- Fewer daunting fiscal challenges for state and local governments than those in many other states.
- A faster-growing population than the nation's due mainly to strong in-migration from other states.

If an effective vaccine is available and widely administered by mid-year, Georgia's GDP will increase by 4% in 2021. Georgia's labor market will improve, too. The number of jobs will rise by 1.5% this year, with most of the gains coming in the second half. The prospects for personal income growth are not as good and mostly reflect the wind down of the massive federal stimulus programs that provided payments to individuals last year.

In the wake of the pandemic, job growth will be different than it was before the crisis. Businesses and industries hit hardest by COVID-19, including bars, restaurants, hospitality, tourism, movie theatres, live entertainment, air transportation, high-contact personal services and the sharing economy, will initially post the fastest growth, but the high percentage gains reflect rebounds off very depressed levels.

In contrast, logistics, distribution, warehousing, professional and business services, IT, FinTech, education and health services will recover relatively quickly, posting solid job growth this year. In addition, positive job growth will occur in manufacturing, financial activities, transportation and utilities, but full recovery may take a couple of years.

Due to the strong housing market, homebuilders will be hiring aggressively, but poor prospects for commercial real estate mean that nonresidential construction firms will layoff workers. Retail sales will be strong, but retail jobs will continue to be lost as market shares shift

to less labor-intensive channels. State and local government jobs will also be lost.

Economic development success will strongly support Georgia's recovery. Despite COVID-19, Georgia's economic developers landed more projects. This success reflects many factors that make Georgia a great state in which to do business, as well as an extremely competitive team of economic development professionals.

The outlook for manufacturing is positive. The main driver of growth in manufacturing production will be recovering demand for manufactured goods. Due to factory shutdowns in the first half of 2020 there's also need to produce more to restock stores and warehouses. In addition, Georgia saw many manufacturing economic development projects announced in 2020 and those projects will continue to come on line.

The buildout of headquarters projects will help power the state's current and future economic growth. Thirty companies on the 2020 Fortune 1000 list are headquartered in Atlanta, up four companies from 2019.

**“
The COVID-19 recession
did less damage to the
state's economy than to
the U.S. economy.
”**

IT and FinTech companies received a boost from the COVID-19 crisis as people adopted new technologies, including mobile banking and touchless payment systems. This, in turn, dramatically increased the need for cybersecurity and put Georgia's cybersecurity industry on higher short- and long-term growth trajectories. Indeed, the digital transformation of many industries, ranging from healthcare to education to mobile banking, was an existing trend that the pandemic accelerated.

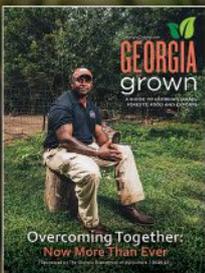
The prospects for Georgia's large transportation and logistics industry are very good. Another positive factor is the abundance of logistics and distribution projects in Georgia's economic development pipeline. Major infrastructure investments at the Port of Savannah also bode very well for the industry.

While this year will be a mixed bag in terms of recovery, Georgia's many advantages will enable the state's economy to outperform the nation's. ■■



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Kerwin Swint is Director of the School of Government and International Affairs and Professor of Political Science at Kennesaw State University.

Looking Into the Future

I think we're all very happy that 2020 is over. May 2021 be a much happier and more positive year! Without question, 2020 left some permanent marks on Georgia and the nation.

Politically speaking, the Peach State is entering a new era, that of a purple state. Beginning now, the intersecting worlds of politics, business and media in Georgia will be dominated by this emerging reality.

The fact that Georgia is now a swing state in national elections will no doubt change the political environment and alter how the state is viewed around the country. Looming over the next one to two years in state politics will be two contrasting and competing figures: Gov. Brian Kemp, and on the other side of the political crevice, Stacey Abrams, his expected opponent for governor in 2022. There are other political players in the mix of course, but these two will dominate the political landscape for the foreseeable future.

We don't have to wait long for these new political realities to emerge. The 2021 session of the Georgia General Assembly is immensely important, coming in a non-election year. It may be the last opportunity to pass significant legislation on a number of items before the crucial 2022 elections.

Another development is that the Democrats have new leadership: Rep. James Beverly of Macon is the new House minority leader and Sen. Gloria Butler of Stone Mountain is the new Democratic leader in the state Senate. On the Republican side, Speaker David Ralston of Blue Ridge is poised to once again dominate the House, in spite of internal challenges and rivalries. And the ever-popular Sen. Butch Miller will return as Senate president pro tem.

The Republicans will be in the driver's seat for the next round of redistricting of state legislative and U.S. House seats. This is true in most states in the country, and it's important because it will set the table for which seats will be competitive in the 2022 elections and beyond. Nationally and in Georgia, Democrats had hoped to win enough seats to gain control, but that didn't come close to happening. In fact, the only state legislative chamber that flipped was in New Hampshire, which went to the Republicans. With a new round of redistricting staring them in the face, the failure to pick up seats in the U.S. House and in state legislatures is a great source of disappointment to the Democratic Party. However, as the Atlanta suburbs continue to grow and become more diverse, and more accommodating to Democrats, it will become harder and harder for the majority party to draw districts guaranteed to reelect Republicans. The Democrats learned this painful lesson 20 years ago when the shoe was on the other foot.

Here are some things I will be looking for in the months ahead. Will

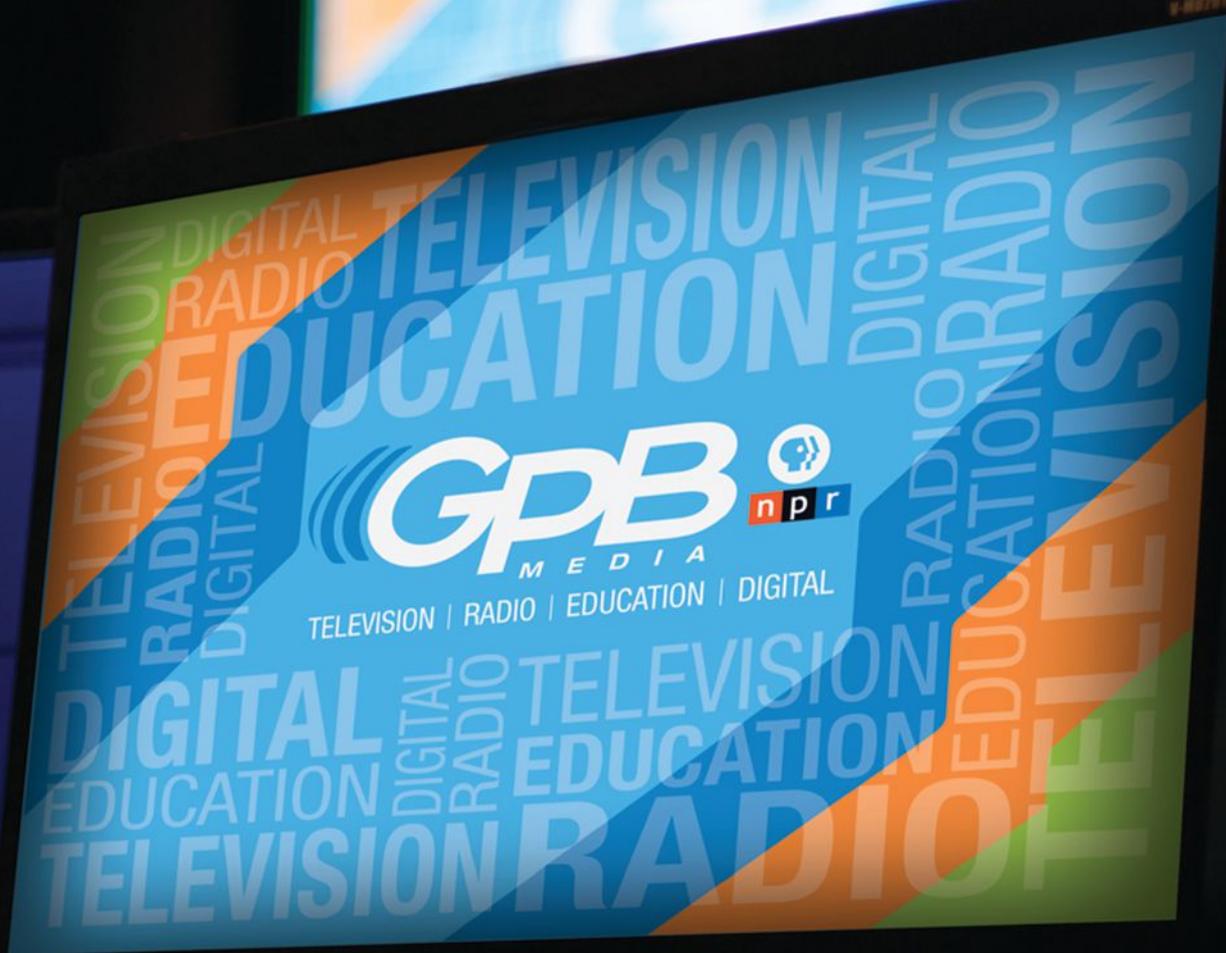
there be any further changes in voting and elections in Georgia? Since 2018, there have been a number of changes in voter registration and ballot access – changes that most Republicans believe have helped Democratic candidates. But it's a fact that Georgia set records for voter turnout and participation in two statewide elections in a row, 2018 and 2020.

So what will become of the inflammatory charges of voter suppression? This has been the hallmark of Stacey Abrams' fame in America. But can she continue to run on voter suppression when there is little to no evidence to support it?

And what role will Donald Trump and his supporters play in Georgia politics? November and December got pretty ugly between the Trump administration and state Republican officials in Georgia. Will there continue to be divisions and recriminations, or will Republicans in the Peach State unify and move forward in lockstep toward 2022? We'll all be watching.

“
Looming over the next one to two years in state politics will be two contrasting and competing figures: Gov. Brian Kemp, and on the other side of the political crevice, Stacey Abrams, his expected opponent for governor in 2022.
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On a personal note, this will be my final “At Issue” column for *Georgia Trend* magazine. It's been a great three years and I've certainly enjoyed reaching out to *Georgia Trend* readers across the state and talking politics. I greatly appreciate the opportunity afforded me by the *Georgia Trend* team. Unfortunately there simply aren't enough hours in the day to do everything one would like to accomplish. My best to you all, and God bless. ■■



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