

CELEBRATING OUR PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

# INTUCKER

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## FROM THE MAYOR

They say that time flies when you're having fun. I would add that it also flies when you're working hard.

It's hard to believe that 2017 is already over. The strides we've made this year as a City have surpassed all expectations of myself and my colleagues on the City Council. While we put in countless hours studying development plans, exploring economic development opportunities and communicating on important issues with our constituents, our staff at City Hall supported us and guided us through some really crucial issues that will have long-term impacts on Tucker. Consider that in 2017:

- we worked through the bulk of our Comprehensive Plan process
- our voters passed a SPLOST to provide \$5-6 million per year for much-needed infrastructure improvements around Tucker
- we collaborated with DeKalb County on numerous intergovernmental agreements (IGAs)
- our Community Development staff saw a 22 percent increase in the number of land use applications they processed year-over-year
- we licensed nearly 300 new businesses to operate in the City of Tucker, meaning there are now close to 1,800 businesses operating in the City, providing jobs for more than 20,000 people
- we hired our very first Director of Parks and Recreation and brought on an eight-person staff to provide a superior level of service to students and program participants at Tucker Recreation Center (read more on Page 7)

That doesn't even begin to include the accomplishments of our volunteer and civic groups. Whether it's a redesigned trail system at Henderson Park, beautification efforts by our Community Improvement Districts or our street festivals, which shattered attendance records, Tucker residents rolled up their sleeves and selflessly made our community a better place in 2017.

And there's so much more to come.

I'm looking forward to big things for Tucker in 2018. It will take a team effort from the entire community, but we are poised to make some major strides.

## DATES TO KNOW

**January 1**  
New Year's Day  
(City Hall closed)

**January 8**  
City Council Meeting &  
Swearing-In Ceremony

**January 15**  
Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Day  
(City Hall closed)

**January 22**  
City Council

**In an effort to connect with as many Tucker residents as possible, we are sending January's *InTucker* home with each student (pre-K-12th grade) in the City. We are also distributing these at senior living facilities around the City to reach our elderly citizens.**

**If you would like to receive *InTucker* each month, you can sign up on our website - [tuckerga.gov](http://tuckerga.gov).**



## CITY COUNCIL UPDATE

Tucker's Mayor and City Council held one, very busy meeting in the month of December. The meeting featured a packed agenda, including three issues requiring public hearings.

The first of the public hearings was an expected second read and vote on a rezoning for a 19-unit single family development on Saren Court. The developer asked for a deferral in order to evaluate the stream buffer impact of the project. Council decided, instead of granting the deferral, to table the matter on a 6-0 vote, meaning the issue could come back up at the City Council meeting on January 8.

The next public hearing was for a first read on a proposed 19-unit urban single family detached development at the intersection of Montreal Road East and Alcan Way. The development, planned for property adjacent to Montreal Park, is expected to go back before the City Council for a second read and vote on January 8.

The last public hearing dealt with adoption of Tucker's Comprehensive Plan. The Plan, a document that lays out long-term planning and zoning standards and is required by state law, came before Council on a first read. They voted to send the Plan for required review to the Atlanta Regional Commission and the state Department of Community Affairs. It will come back before the City Council early in the new year for final approval.

Earlier in the meeting, Council voted 6-0 to approve an annexation request by five commercial properties off East Ponce de Leon Avenue. These properties are all within the Stone Mountain Community Improvement District (CID), which covers Tucker's industrial corridor.

Council also voted 6-0 to approve a series of amendments to the City's contract with services provider CH2M. The vote will create eight new positions in the Parks and Recreation Department, three new positions for court services, as well as a Citizen Responder to be added to the Communications Department. The Citizen Responder will coordinate with residents, answering questions and connecting them to resources, as well as improving engagement with DeKalb County on roads and

*(continued on page 4)*

## TUCKER COMPANY 'REELING IN' BIG BUSINESS



Tucker is a lot of things. A beachfront community is not one of them. In fact, you would have to gas up the car and drive about four hours if you wanted to reach the ocean.

So, it's ironic that one of the biggest employers in the City of Tucker is also the premiere distributor of seafood in the southeastern United States.

The headquarters of Inland Seafood is located on Montreal Circle, barely visible from I-285. Inside, around 600 workers prepare and package premium fish, lobster and other high-end food products for delivery to supermarkets and restaurants across the country. Inland President Chris Rosenberger says the company, which was founded in 1977, is right at home in Tucker.

"Inland is proud of the participation we have always had in the communities we serve," Rosenberger explains. "We are only as good as the people in our buildings and we are proud to have built our business with the locals we have been serving in Tucker for so many years."



From a City perspective, having a company as successful as Inland right in your backyard is a huge asset.

"While they may not be a household name among consumers, other companies that are looking to relocate within Metro Atlanta are impressed that Tucker is home to an industry leader like Inland Seafood," says Tucker's Economic Development Director John McHenry. "This company is focused on community engagement, sustainability and has really gone the extra mile to do business the right way. We work closely on ensuring that they continue to grow and thrive here. Their win is a City of Tucker win."

Next time you head to the supermarket to buy seafood, read the fine print: that exotic fish you're buying may have been packaged right here in Tucker, Georgia.



# ON THE BEAT WITH LT. SCHOEPPNER

The holidays are a time for happiness and celebration and I hope that is true for all of you. The holidays are also a time for reflection and remembrance.

I have seen quite a bit in my time with DeKalb P.D. I want to take a minute to tell you about a particular incident that I can't help but think about whenever this time of year comes around.

On December 31, 2010 I was working the late shift in the major felony unit. I don't remember it being particularly busy and the new year came and went without too much trouble. However, that all changed at 12:40 a.m.

Officers at Center Precinct had responded to a call at a small church on Covington Drive where a five-year-old boy had been injured. Marquel Peters was with his mother celebrating the new year at a church service, when a bullet came down through the ceiling and struck him on the top of the head. When we responded the young boy had been taken to the hospital and was still alive. All the witnesses could say was that the boy started crying out of the blue.

The following morning, I was notified that Marquel had died from his injuries. The autopsy revealed that the projectile was from a handgun. We had people provide us with tips and we even had an engineer analyze the trajectory to find out what direction the shot came from.

None of it panned out.

Being that it was New Year's Eve, there were so many people shooting into the air that we would never be able to identify them all. To make matters worse, the person who actually fired the shot probably didn't even know that they had killed someone.

I have been involved with hundreds of homicide investigations and very rarely did it ever bother me. This case is one of the few that I still think about regularly. It's usually about this time of year when I wonder about what Marquel would be up to had this tragedy not happened. This New Year's he would have been 12 years old.

I hope this story doesn't dampen anyone's holidays. It's certainly not my intention to bring anyone down.

But Marquel Peters deserves to be remembered. And in his memory, I hope you'll spread the word about how dangerous so-called "celebratory gunfire" can be.



## POLICE BLOTTER

### "SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING"

An alert neighbor contacted DeKalb Police to complain about criminal activity they had witnessed on Oak Avenue. On December 7, Sgt. Parker and his Field Investigative Team responded to the complaint and made contact with a male and a female occupying a vehicle in the driveway of a dwelling. The result of this contact was two narcotics-related arrests, the seizure of crystal meth and other drug related items and one neighbor who made the right call to turn to us for help.

### "MOTHER KNOWS BEST"

On December 10, South Precinct officers responded to a call from a concerned mother on Troutdale Drive. The complainant had located a handgun along with stolen wallets, credit cards and driver's licenses in her 16-year-old son's belongings. Although the complaint occurred 15 miles outside of Tucker, the resulting investigation led to the closure of five entering auto cases in the Tucker area.

### "SUPER SLEUTH"

On December 14, a citizen observed three males prying open a safe. After they left, this witness decided to do some detective work. He checked the area of the safe and located a passport. He then asked around and was able to locate the victim of a burglary on Hideaway Drive. When the witness described the suspects to the victim, she recognized one of them as someone she knew. This resulted in arrest warrants being signed on the suspect.

## CATCHING UP: TUCKER'S 'FLIP OR FLOP' FAMILY



One of the most talked about events of 2017 in Tucker was the arrival of *Flip or Flop Atlanta*. Social media exploded on September 21 when HGTV's hit home improvement show aired an episode that had been filmed on Idlewood Road.

Christine Merridith was one of the many who caught that episode, although she did so from a unique perspective: Merridith was watching from inside the *Flip or Flop* house.

"It just blew me away that they took that and turned it into such a beautiful home," the mother of three recalls. "What they did is amazing."

Merridith, her husband Reggie and their three kids had been living just outside of Tucker and looking to move back. They were house hunting one day when she passed by the recently remodeled home across from Idlewood Elementary School.

"I stopped and Googled it and I called the [realtor] and said, 'I want this house,'" she recalls. "Just seeing the pictures, I knew I wanted this house and I told him, 'whatever we have to do, let's make this happen.'"

Anyone who saw the episode knows Merridith went well over the asking price to get the home. Looking back, she says there are absolutely no regrets.

"I was willing to pay top dollar for it," she explains. "I had looked at

other houses in the area and this one...it really was almost like it was a brand-new house because everything had been totally redone. When I talked with my husband about what I wanted in a house, this was it."

Last March, the family of five was just settling into their new home when tragedy struck: Reggie Merridith, the beloved husband and father, was killed. Christine faced a new, frightening reality as a widow and a single mom. It was at that point the Tucker faith community stepped in.

The Merridiths had been attending Rehoboth Baptist Church for more than a decade. Pastor Troy Bush and the Rehoboth family saw some of their own in crisis and stepped up.

"We loved them, we walked with them and we helped them meet their needs," Bush says. "As followers of Jesus Christ, we understand that He calls us to be devoted to one another and to live generously."

"We just love our church," Christine says. "I couldn't have made it without them. They just embraced us and really carried us through that."

The family keeps Reggie's memory alive in many ways, most visibly by displaying his photograph around their new home. Christine says the way this house is designed actually has helped her to become closer to her kids following their loss.

"[It's] the open floor plan," she explains. "You can be (cooking dinner) in the kitchen and still be with the family in the family room watching TV."

As they've grown closer as a family, Christine says they've embraced Tucker and Tucker has embraced them right back.

"I love being in Tucker and this is where I plan to stay."

The Merridiths went through some of life's biggest ups and downs in 2017. With their church family and their community behind them – and with a home that they absolutely love – they're hoping that 2018 is a different journey.

## CITY COUNCIL UPDATE (continued from page 2)

drainage, transportation, watershed management, police and fire.

Council then heard discussion of a contract for afterschool services at the Tucker Recreation Center. They voted 6-0 to enter into a contract with the YMCA's Wade Walker facility to provide services, including transportation for students. This will be an important step for the City assuming responsibility of the Rec Center on January 1.

On the real estate front, Council voted 6-0 to purchase the land at 4448 Lawrenceville Highway. That parcel is adjacent to Tucker Nature Preserve and would enable to City to add to its park space.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Mayor and Council members thanked Councilwoman Honey Van De Kreke for her service. After decades of leadership in the Tucker community, including serving the residents of District One as their representative on the inaugural City Council, December's meeting was the last Council meeting for Mrs. Van De Kreke.

The next scheduled meeting will take place on January 8 at 7 p.m. It will be preceded at 6 o'clock by a reception for the newly-elected Mayor and Post One City Council members. Both events are open to the public.

# TEAM TUCKER SPOTLIGHT

Maricela Perdomo - Code Enforcement Manager

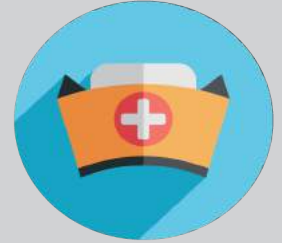


## OFF THE WALL

**What is your favorite food?** Anything Asian

**What are your hobbies?** I enjoy hiking and walking, which gives me the opportunity to enjoy nature.

**If you were not a Code Enforcement official, what would your career be?** Nursing



**Are you a warm weather person or cold weather person?** I enjoy the warm weather, but like the feel of changing seasons.

**How did you get started in Code Enforcement?** I set a goal for myself to obtain a job working for local government. In 2006, I achieved that goal and began working as a Building Permit Technician for the City of Punta Gorda, Florida. Later that year, and due to the fact that I wanted to be more involved with talented people on issues that really mattered to the community, I transferred to another position as a Code Compliance Officer and later became the Chief Compliance Officer and then Supervisor.

**Why is Code Enforcement important to a community?** Code Enforcement is vital to our community because it is a reflection of the City and its standards. When you travel around from community to community, it is evident, even by someone with an untrained eye, which communities do not have a Code Enforcement Department in place. Code Enforcement is essential because it helps maintain your property values, reduces crime and helps to sustain healthy living conditions for residents and businesses of the municipality.

**What are some of the challenges of your job?** You never see a child saying that they want to be a Code Enforcement Officer when they grow up. Code Enforcement can be very demanding and it is often misunderstood. Because of this, some people believe that we are out to get them and are not always willing to cooperate.

**What do you find most rewarding about your job?** There is nothing more rewarding than to see how the work we do has an effect on the community and how our daily efforts make a positive difference.

**What do you like best about Tucker?** It's a thriving little city with a close-knit community.

## COMMUNITY CORNER

### 1/15 - MLK Day of Service at Henderson Park

9 a.m. - 12 p.m., Henderson Park (Livsey side)

Friends of Henderson Park are looking for volunteers for their MLK Give-An-Hour Workday. They will be mulching the playground, as well as making improvements to the newly redesigned hiking trails. Work gloves are a good idea, sturdy shoes are a must!

### 1/25 & 28 - Main Street Theatre Dinner

Jan. 25 @ 7 p.m., Jan. 28 @ 6 p.m., 3701 Lawrenceville Highway  
Main Street Theatre and local Tucker favorite Shorty's Neighborhood Eatery come together to bring you a Murder Mystery Dinner! Dine on a delectable three-course meal and be entertained as an evening of intrigue, comedy and suspense unfolds. Tickets (\$65 per person for admission and meal) available at [tuckertheatre.com](http://tuckertheatre.com).



# TUCKER COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

## BUSINESS OF THE MONTH KELLER KNAPP REAL ESTATE

As the real estate industry has bounced back over the past few years, there's been a strong resurgence in home values in the City of Tucker. No one's more aware of that than Weslee Knapp.

"I invest, personally, in areas that are on the way up and Tucker is a rising sun," he explains.

Knapp is a real estate veteran in Metro Atlanta and when he and his Keller Knapp team decided to open an office on Tucker's Main Street, they had plenty of reasons to do so.

"You see quality developments in good locations do really well and, as a result, when you look at this location in Tucker, Tucker is viable for the next decade to really prosper," Knapp says.

The firm, which specializes in both residential and commercial realty, has 100 people on staff, with varying backgrounds and levels of expertise. Knapp says the agents at his Tucker office are well-equipped to handle any questions that come their way, but if they ever need guidance on an issue, help is simply a phone call away.



"We say 'how can we improve our community? How can we get the right type of investors? How can we get the right type of homebuyers? How can we get people to invest in our community that are going to make this community better?'" Knapp asks. "That's what we do everyday and we are good at it."

Keller Knapp Real Estate is located at 2344 Main Street. You can find them online at [kellerknapprealty.com](http://kellerknapprealty.com).

## CITIZEN OF THE MONTH BARBARA BROWNLEE O'CONNOR

*Nomination written by Noelle Monferdini*

"What is Tucker without the heartfelt hello, without the warmness of friendship, without an open welcome to all neighbors near and far to fellowship?"

"Tucker is the home of many individuals that shine from within and share this absolute love of our community and the people in it. There is one extraordinary lady that brightly shines with all of these values and more. She is a community champion of sorts, continually building bridges between the noticeable gaps in the fabric of our city. From the moment of introduction, she invites you in and treats you like a dear friend and keeps you as close as family.

"Whether she is hosting one of her many neighborhood community dinners, National Night Out events or a very well-decorated Christmas gathering, her goal is to bring the community together and strengthen our relationships to build a long-lasting bond. There is never a time that is too late, too long or too difficult for her utmost attention as she continually goes above and beyond to help out in any way she can. It is my honor and privilege to know her and call her a friend.

"May I introduce our Citizen Spotlight, Mrs. Barbara Brownlee O'Connor."



# “ASK RIP” ANSWERS YOUR PARKS QUESTIONS

Each month, I use this space as an opportunity to answer your questions about the new Parks and Recreation Department for the City of Tucker. I get individual questions everyday and, rather than just answer them for one person, I like to get that information out to as many people as I can across the entire community.

Lately, I've received a lot of questions about Tucker Recreation Center. It makes sense: this is the first of the parks assets we're taking over from DeKalb County and we begin operations there on January 2. So, I thought that in this month's *Ask Rip*, I would take the chance to update everyone on the exciting things coming to the Rec Center.

First, let me tell you this is a busy time for our staff. As your Parks and Rec Director, I've hired eight new staff members, who are being asked to hit the ground running. These talented professionals will oversee management, programs and student activities at the Rec Center. Some of them just started the week of Christmas, so there is sure to be a learning curve. Make sure to stop in, introduce yourself and make them feel welcome!

Secondly, we assume responsibility of the Rec Center with a definite set of priorities.

Those include:

- **Ensuring safety of participants in our programs**

I have worked in this space for 22 years in various municipalities. From my experience, I can identify areas where safety measures can be improved at Tucker Rec. I guarantee you the things that need fixing can and will be done quickly.

- **Building and maintaining relationships**

We need to establish a connection with our participants – both kids and parents. We want parents to be engaged through volunteer opportunities and for them to feel comfortable offering any feedback they have for management of the Rec Center.

- **Cleaning and organizing the space**

Tucker Rec is a big place. We are going through systematically, trying to figure out what we have in storage. Is it something we need to run the facility or is it something that's been sitting in a closet for years gathering dust? A perfect example: there is a closet in the gymnastics area that we can't even open. It's locked up with no key. We don't know what's inside, but we sure plan to find out and put that space to good use.

- **Reestablishing the after-school program through coordination with existing groups**

There are so many activities happening at Tucker Rec. From dance to karate to pottery, why can't we introduce some of these skills to our students? I've always found that children thrive in a well-rounded environment and that's what we intend to create.

- **Building maintenance**

Friends of Tucker Rec have already planned to do some much-needed painting on January 15. In addition, we are looking to fix and secure our windows, address our HVAC issues and work on any other infrastructure needs that may exist at the Rec Center.

This is such an exciting – and hectic – time. I invite you to visit Tucker Rec, whether you're a frequent program participant or you haven't been in the building for years. I promise you'll see a noticeable difference in the level of service and care from Day One.



***Rip Robertson is the first Parks and Recreation Director for the City of Tucker. He takes the job with years of experience in Parks and Rec, as well as Public Works. Rip is a former Military Intelligence Analyst for the U.S. Army and is active with the Army Reserve.***



friends of  
**TUCKER REC CENTER**

**MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY  
AT TUCKER REC CENTER**  
January 15, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

**Join us for our 4th annual Day of  
Service in honor of Dr. King!**  
more info at [tuckerrec.org](http://tuckerrec.org)



# TUCKERGA.GOV

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## TUCKER SNOW DAY!

On December 8, the City of Tucker was hit with a rare December snow event. We solicited your best Tucker snow pics to feature in this issue of *InTucker*. Congratulations to our skilled shutterbugs!



Submitted by Beth Leeper



Submitted by Linda Thames



Submitted by Charla Halverson



Submitted by Ginnie Campbell



Submitted by Zulma Luna



Submitted by Ellen Stillwell



Submitted by Ellen Stillwell



Submitted by Susan Willis



Submitted by Mandy Finch



**PLEASE DELIVER TO:**