



# INTUCKER

JANUARY 2021 | VOLUME 5 | ISSUE 1



## NORTHLAKE RENAISSANCE

WITH THE AGING MALL BEING REDEVELOPED, THE ATTENTION  
TURNS TO THE FUTURE OF NORTHLAKE

# EDITOR'S NOTE



Welcome to the fifth year of *InTucker*! That's right, your favorite source for the comings and goings in the city you love is no longer a toddler, we're in full-on

big kid mode!

I remember when we started this endeavor back in January 2017, and things looked very different than they do today. That initial issue was essentially a six-page, trifold newsletter. It had way too much print, none of the bright vibrant pictures and, well, we tried. Bless our hearts! Over time, *InTucker* has evolved into a 16-page magazine format, where we offer you the very latest on your schools, businesses, City Council and much, much more. We don't fill our pages with ads, but with more of the content that you have come to expect from the City's magazine of record.

This month's issue is no different. We're taking you behind the scenes of the new Smoke Rise Elementary School. One of the biggest questions we're hearing is "when will it be ready?" We've got the answer to that and more on page 12. Plus, we go inside Tucker's newest, most talked about restaurant, Ford's Barbecue. Why did it take several years for this new Main Street eatery to open its doors? Hear from the owners on page 11. And then there's our cover story. No other magazine is going to have the details on the long-term future of Northlake Festival Shopping Center. There are going to be big plans for that once bustling retail destination, and you can read all about it on page 8.

We're grateful for you being a loyal reader of *InTucker*. An aware and educated citizen is our favorite kind of citizen. We hope to continue to do our part to keep you in the loop on all the important things happening in our city.

**MATT HOLMES**  
INTUCKER EDITOR

# IN THIS ISSUE



### ON THE COVER

Tucker's regional power center has been a hotbed for development and redevelopment over the past couple years, and as you'll read on page 8, there's more on the way!



### FOLLOW YOUR NOSE

The pungent smell of smoked meats on Main Street? That's coming from the new Ford's BBQ. On page 11, hear from one of their owners and get the backstory on the business.



### MAKING A DIFFERENCE

He's a staple of the Tucker community and, when he's not showing off his impressive singing voice, he's giving back to various civic groups and events. Get to know our Citizen of the Month on page 14.



### CONSTRUCTION COUNTDOWN

The long-awaited Smoke Rise Elementary replacement school is coming closer to reality. On page 12, find out the very latest on the project, plus the possibility of redistricting.



### ASK RIP

Take me out to the ballgame...right here in Tucker! On page 15, Rip dishes on Tucker's new city baseball league and shares how you can get involved.



# INTUCKER

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 1

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# From the Mayor:



It's official. We've made it through 2020! Last year was one full of ups and downs, and while it would be easy to say it was more downs than ups, there were a lot of positives. We've all learned some important lessons about not taking family, friends and "normalcy" for granted. And we've all learned the importance of carrying on, and learning to work around difficulties like we've never faced before. That's certainly true for the City, and I want you to know that your City Council and staff have worked diligently throughout the pandemic to keep operations running, to keep the City thriving and to lay the groundwork for a successful future.

Pandemic or no pandemic, every organization needs a plan, and Tucker has plenty. They are what give method to what can seem like the madness of running a city. You might remember several years ago we completed a comprehensive plan called Tucker Tomorrow. It serves as the over-arching plan and our collective vision for Tucker – what it is and what it wants to become. With that in place, we developed a range of other plans over a couple of years, including a Transportation Master Plan, a Parks Master Plan, and others for Trails, Downtown and our Historic Resources. Believe it or not, those plans form the basis for our operations and our priorities. They drive our

budgets and our short- and long-term work plans. We'll be talking more about them in the new year, but you can always view all our plans on our website at <https://tuckerga.gov/plans>.

Here are a few highlights that those plans will lead to in 2021:

#### **Road resurfacing**

- We've allocated about \$4 million to repave nearly 60 of the most poorly conditioned roads in the City. We're estimating around \$2.7 million of that money will come from the SPLOST, and the balance from our general budget. This is the fourth year of our resurfacing program and the impact it's made is immeasurable.

#### **Road evaluation**

- Three years ago, we had contractors take a hi-tech look at the condition of our roads, driving every single mile of public roadway in the City of Tucker. Over time, conditions change, and some roads deteriorate faster than others. So, in 2021, you'll see us do a new inventory of our roadways, helping us to understand which are in most desperate need of resurfacing.

*(continued on page 6)*

# City Council Update

Tucker's Mayor and City Council met once during the month of December, voting on two significant transportation improvements. The first was to award a bid for construction of a sidewalk along Elmdale Drive. The second was to award a bid for an improvement to the traffic signal at Chamblee Tucker Road and Livsey Road. Both measures passed on unanimous votes.

Later in the meeting, Council voted unanimously in support of:

- a bid award for landscaping improvements for the Tucker Streetscape program
- authorization to replace a failing HVAC unit at Tucker Recreation Center
- a contract amendment with service and staffing provider Jacobs
- a resolution to adopt the Downtown Master Plan

- a resolution to adopt the Downtown Grid Plan

Council also held a first read and public hearing on an ordinance to amend the FY '21 budget. This mid-year budget amendment will likely be voted on at the City Council meeting in January.

Before the meeting, Mayor Frank Auman signed a declaration of economic relief for local businesses. The relief extends to businesses whose revenues have been significantly reduced due to the coronavirus pandemic. They can apply for deferral of a portion of their occupational taxes ahead of the April 15 tax payment deadline.

The next meeting of the Mayor and City Council will be Monday January 11 at 7 p.m. at the new City Council Chambers at City Hall (1975 Lakeside Parkway, Suite 350).

## DATES TO KNOW

### January 1

All City buildings closed (New Year's Day)

### January 4

Downtown Development Authority

### January 6

Traffic Court

### January 11

City Council

### January 13

Traffic Court

### January 18

All City buildings closed (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)

### January 19

Zoning Board of Appeals

### January 20

Municipal Court

### January 25

City Council

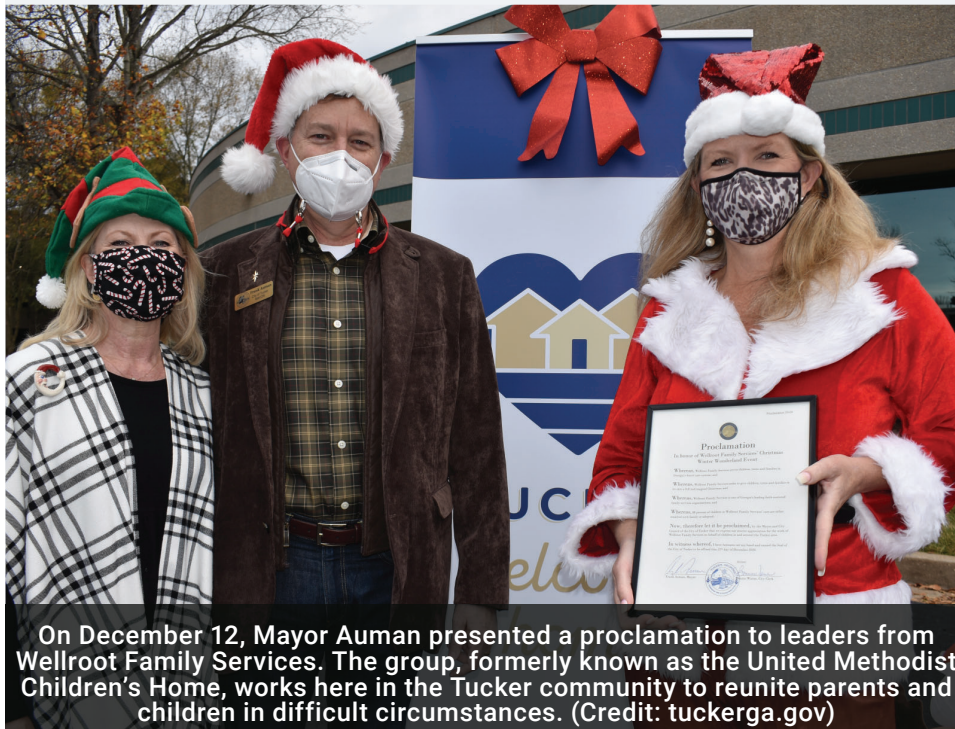
### January 29

Public Facilities Authority

## FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



nextdoor



On December 12, Mayor Auman presented a proclamation to leaders from Wellroot Family Services. The group, formerly known as the United Methodist Children's Home, works here in the Tucker community to reunite parents and children in difficult circumstances. (Credit: tuckerga.gov)

# ON THE BEAT *with Lt. Schoeppner*

*Lt. D.G. Schoeppner is Tucker's liaison to the DeKalb County Police Department and can be followed at [facebook.com/dgschoeppner](https://www.facebook.com/dgschoeppner) or emailed at [dgschoeppner@dekalbcountyga.gov](mailto:dgschoeppner@dekalbcountyga.gov)*



The Police Department and the City are constantly monitoring crime numbers. Crime numbers from year to year are the yardstick we use to measure success or failure over time. However, this year is slightly different from years past. Believe it or not this difference has nothing to do with the pandemic or any other of the social issues we have faced in 2020. This is a change in the way police agencies calculate crime numbers. These changes don't really affect crime itself, but it does have an effect on crime statistics. This month, we will talk about how crimes were reported in the past versus how they are now reported.

Since 1930, the FBI has used a system called Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) where local police agencies reported their crime statistics to the federal government. These statistics would then be used to track law enforcement progress and to measure manpower needs all over the country. A system like this is necessary because every state's laws are subtly different. Where some states have crimes like Murder in the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd degrees, Georgia has "Malice Murder", "Felony Murder", and "Manslaughter". UCR was the method which integrated these different systems together so they could be compared equally.

In 1982 the feds sponsored a study of the UCR program. The objective was to create a new system which expanded the crime categories tracked and provided more information about victims and offenders. The result of this was the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). This year the DeKalb Police Department switched over to this system.

The switch has had several obvious impacts on our crime numbers. First is that UCR only counted the most severe crime of any single incident. An example would be that if someone was murdered during a robbery. UCR would have counted that as a murder. Under the NIBRS system, it counts that as a murder and a robbery. Another impact is that crimes are now counted by victim. Where previously if three people were robbed it would be counted as a single robbery, now, under NIBRS, a separate robbery would be counted for each victim. These result in higher overall crime numbers when NIBRS stats are compared to UCR stats.

There are also other categories which include more crimes than they did previously. Under NIBRS, "Aggravated Assaults" now include crimes which UCR did not. For instance, pointing a firearm at someone is a crime called "Pointing a Pistol or Firearm". This particular crime is a misdemeanor. It is now counted as an Aggravated Assault, even though the weapon was never fired, and no one was injured. NIBRS also changes the way sexual assaults and robberies are counted. Other categories like burglaries and stolen vehicles remain unchanged.

The main takeaway from this is that 2020's crime numbers can look somewhat inflated compared to years past. To some extent, that may be correct. However, you also have to look at the big picture and know that we are also comparing apples to oranges. The good news is that once we move past this year the numbers will be more alike. We will also have the advantage of more robust statistics to analyze.

# From the Mayor:

(continued on from 3)

## Fitzgerald Park

- One of the newest additions to our Tucker parks, this is one in need of a lot of love. It also is one where we see a ton of opportunity. Our parks staff has been working with consultants on plans for a really exciting rehab of the old stadium. The \$4.9 million project will be done in three phases, but you can look forward to new lighting, scoreboard and space for about 1,500 fans. It's going to create some exciting new uses for this park.

The first two items speak to the ongoing work we're doing under our Transportation Master Plan. That plan, which was adopted by the City Council in 2019, lays out our short- and long-term priorities as a city for all modes of transportation, including the many safety improvements you've seen. The Fitzgerald Park stadium is an offshoot of our Parks Master Plan, also adopted in 2019, which looks at how best to offer our residents parks and recreation services, including the need for additional park space.

One other plan I'd like to highlight is our Trail Master Plan. You may remember the discussions – or you may have even been part of the planning process – for the Trail Master Plan back in 2018. We hired consultants to look at how best to get people moving on foot or on bike throughout our city, connecting public spaces like the schools and the library to downtown, as well as to

connect Tucker to surrounding cities and attractions. The result was an ambitious plan that will require long-term commitment to complete. Our team is working with property owners in the downtown area on a segment of path that would transform the downtown Tucker experience, and serve as a model for future trails. You should see dirt moved and have a great idea of what this project is going to look like as we move through 2021.

Above all, the biggest thing I'm looking forward to is getting us all together again. I have no idea when we'll be able to enjoy some of the traditions we cherish most, like Tucker Day or our Summer of Fun. There's just no way to know. But what I do know is that we can be doing our part right now to ensure this pandemic ends sooner rather than later. Please be diligent in wearing masks, socially distancing and doing things like frequent hand washing. This is no time to be complacent. If we can finish strong until the vaccine helps us put all this behind us once and for all, we'll be running, not walking, into a bright future.



**FRANK AUMAN**  
MAYOR



Funding has been allocated for a new stadium at Fitzgerald Park. The \$4.9 million project will be done in three phases. (Credit: tuckerga.gov)

# TUCKER 2021: THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Looking ahead to 2021, it promises to be a big year for businesses to rebound. After the record losses brought on by the COVID pandemic in 2020, a new start is exactly what business leaders are looking for. *InTucker* asked two of the City's most prominent business minds, Matthew Lee of the Tucker-Northlake Community Improvement District and Emory Morsberger of the Tucker Summit Community Improvement District, for their goals in the year ahead.



The word that comes to mind for the Tucker-Northlake CID in 2021 is "connections." Alleys, highways, and regional partnerships.

In Downtown Tucker we will continue to focus on expanding opportunities for business along the alleys, greenspace, parking, and working with the City of Tucker, the Downtown Development Authority, and business groups in areas of shared responsibility. Last year resulted in two of the best plans for Downtown Tucker ever produced, and it's time to put those plans into action.

In the Northlake District the focus will remain transportation. As a regional activity center, it's a great area for companies to relocate, with more affordable leases than intown, and a fraction of the traffic challenges. To that end, we're partnering with the City of Tucker and DeKalb County on a transportation plan to ensure access into the Northlake District remains aligned for regional success.

This includes preparing for the I-285 Eastside Express Lanes Project and its impact on Northlake Parkway, Lavista Road, and Lawrenceville Highway. While express lane construction is still a few years away, we want every commercial property owner in the district positioned for success, and that requires planning.

We'll also be working with MARTA, the Georgia Department of Transportation, the Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority, and cities and CIDs from Fulton to Cobb to ensure Tucker has the best connections possible with our neighbors.

It's a big year. We have a good team, a solid board of directors, and excellent partners. 2021 should be a great ride.

Matthew Lee  
Executive Director, Tucker-Northlake CID

As we move forward into 2021, the Tucker Summit CID will continue to work with the City of Tucker to help with its development and growth. Our Freight Cluster Plan has identified numerous improvement projects along the Mountain Industrial Boulevard, Lawrenceville Highway, Sarr Parkway, Hugh Howell Road and East Ponce de Leon Avenue corridors that will ease rush hour congestion and increase traffic safety within our district.

In addition to roadway improvements, we have partnered with the City of Tucker Urban Redevelopment Agency to apply for a State Opportunity Zone designation through the CDBG Revitalization Area Strategy. A State Opportunity Zone designation would help bring economic growth and redevelopment to our community by providing employers a \$17,500 tax credit for every two or more jobs created over five years and by providing better access to redevelopment grants and loan funding through Tax Increment Financing to attract new businesses to the region.

Tucker Summit CID is proud of its members and business owners who were thrown many curveballs in 2020 and managed to thrive during the COVID-19 pandemic. TSCID is equally proud of the City of Tucker's quick action with CARES Act funding to help small businesses in our community survive during these challenging times. We look forward to continuing to prosper with new businesses entering the district and current businesses expanding. I wholeheartedly believe that it is our partnerships and relationships that makes Tucker so incredible!

Happy New Year!

Emory Morsberger  
President, Tucker Summit CID

# BUSINESS BOOM

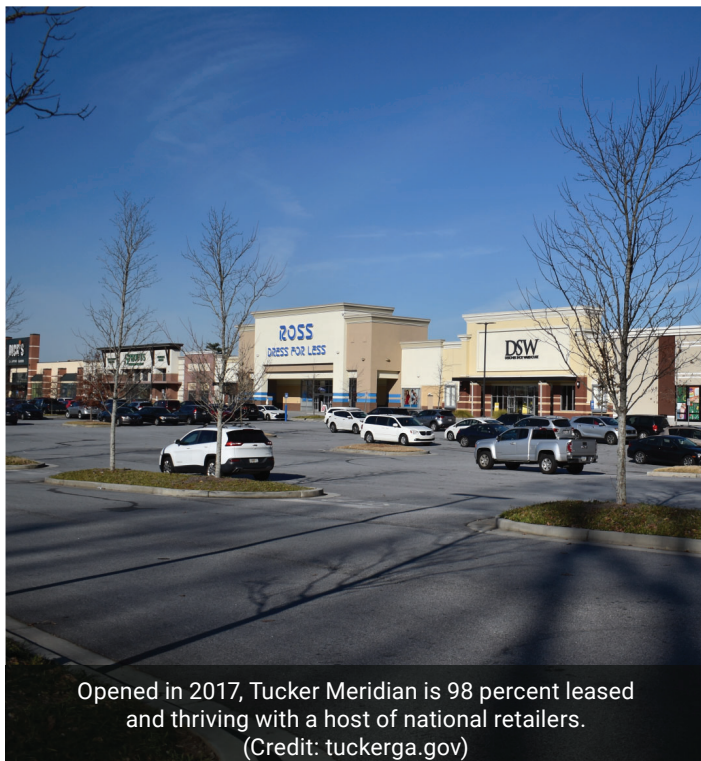
by John McHenry, Community and Economic Development Director



Despite COVID and a challenged economy, the Northlake area is continuing to grow and evolve with exciting projects underway, on the horizon or being contemplated.

Let's start with what is already on the ground with the Tucker Meridian Shopping Center that opened at Northlake Parkway and Lavista Road in 2017 and now boasts a 98 percent occupancy rate. This busy shopping center showcases a variety of casual eateries, service providers, and retailers including nationally branded companies such as Dick's Sporting Goods, Hobby Lobby, Hollywood Feed, Jimmy John's, Ross Dress for Less, and Sprouts Farmers Market, as well as the family-owned VIP Nails and Spa.

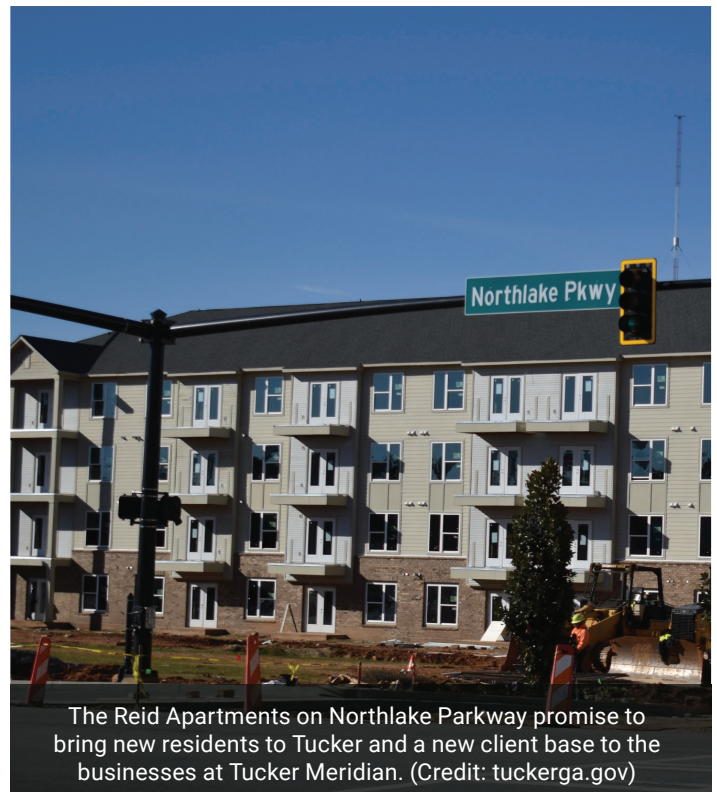
"I'm very pleased with what I'm seeing in Northlake," said Calvin Stephenson, broker and property manager for the Tucker Meridian Center. "We love the location in terms of proximity to the Perimeter, and we're excited about the apartments opening up across the street. Everything that we pitched to our tenants about Tucker is true – it's a great city for businesses."



Opened in 2017, Tucker Meridian is 98 percent leased and thriving with a host of national retailers. (Credit: tuckerga.gov)

Nearby, Northlake Senior Apartments is fully leased. Opened in spring 2019, the 90-unit building is for seniors age 62 and older with both market-rate rentals and subsidized units. This provides an affordable opportunity for our local seniors to remain in Tucker without the hassle of yard work.

"It's just a real nice place in a good area with my Target right across the street," said two year resident Barbara Gibbons.



The Reid Apartments on Northlake Parkway promise to bring new residents to Tucker and a new client base to the businesses at Tucker Meridian. (Credit: tuckerga.gov)

Slated to open this month, The Reid apartments will feature a range of studio to three-bedroom apartments. There are three buildings with 245 units in total and amenities including a swimming pool, fire pit, social lounge, and the local landmark Old Hickory House is next door.

Moving to Northlake Parkway inside the Perimeter, but just outside of our city limits, a Tru by Hilton is under construction and scheduled to open in June 2021. The 96-room hotel is one of the newer brands under the Hilton umbrella and will be the first hotel built in the Northlake area in more than 20 years.

The Briarcliff Village Shopping Center and Briarcliff Lavista are long standing mainstays of the community with an anchor tenant of Publix and various retail and restaurants including Panera Bread, Michaels and Blue Ribbon Grill.



“Regency is proud to be a part of the Northlake neighborhood,” said Andre Koleszar, Senior Vice President with Regency Centers. “The Briarcliff centers are terrific assets for us and our merchants are performing well, despite the challenges faced this year. This is a testament to the strength of this community, and we’re excited to welcome Burlington Coat Factory in 2021.”

“I’m grateful for our commercial property owners and thrilled to see them reap the benefits of the CID’s projects and its commitment to a connected and vibrant Northlake District,” added Tucker-Northlake Community Improvement District (CID) Executive Director Matthew Lee. “The State of Georgia, MARTA, GDOT and others understand Northlake’s significance as a regional activity center. We’re part of their planning processes and it’s exciting to see the transportation, transit, and regional trail projects being developed that will keep Northlake connected in all directions.”

The centerpiece of this area is the Northlake Mall which is undergoing a transformation with construction underway for Emory Healthcare as a centralized location for about 1,600 of its employees. Scheduled to open in January 2022, the 200,000 SF renovation is just a start for further redevelopment at this location.

Tony Ruggeri, a partner with Texas-based ATR Corinth Partners, noted that Emory’s presence will quickly inject the area with more life.

“It’s a winning formula to support retail and restaurants which has worked for us in previous mall redevelopments,” he said.

Just to the south, Northlake Festival Shopping Center could also be in the offing for major changes. In a competitive process, Atlanta’s Urban Land Institute (ULI) Center for Leadership program chose the Festival as a living case study to evaluate the property for redevelopment options. The 30+ year-old, 367,000 SF center is famously recognizable by the 662-foot tower that rises from the middle of the parking lot.

“We are excited the Tucker project at Northlake Festival was selected by the ULI Center for Leadership class for this year’s program and are excited to hear what our real estate industry experts propose,” said Marc Brambrut, Senior Vice President of Development at Portman Residential and Chair of ULI’s Center for Leadership Technical Assistance Program. “This site speaks to the untapped potential at Northlake, and we’re excited to crack this open and be a catalyst partner in a reimagined Northlake.”

Setting any bias aside, I would challenge you to find a regional power center anywhere in metro Atlanta with the type of potential that we have in Northlake. The future is certainly bright!

*If you are a business owner who would like to receive periodic emails from the City about important updates and relevant business information, send your email address to [abrooks@tuckerga.gov](mailto:abrooks@tuckerga.gov).*



# TEAM TUCKER *Spotlight*

## DAVID ZEH, GIS ANALYST

### What is GIS?

Geographic Information Systems is data visualized in a geographic theme. GIS software allows the user to manage and analyze data sets and the results are produced in maps, apps and reporting.

### Why is GIS important to a city like Tucker?

With GIS support, the city has access to up-to-date and reliable information along with professional services. By maintaining the applications and data, departments within the City can operate efficiently; thus, providing a high level of customer service to internal staff and the general public.

### What do you do daily?

I design and maintain the GIS applications for the City, provide customer service with a smile and participate on city-led projects.

### What was your background before coming to Tucker?

Before I came onboard with Tucker, I had worked in the telecommunications field utilizing GIS to conduct a site suitability analysis. I also worked for a private engineering firm providing GIS support for highway projects, aviation projects, and supporting a local municipal client with their stormwater and sanitary sewer systems.

### What kinds of hi-tech programs or gadgets do you get to employ in your work?

ESRI software, apps, web mapping, GPS devices. I also utilize the low-tech options, such as my trusty field notebook complete with a leather-bound cover and compass!



## Off the Wall

### What is your go-to Tucker lunch spot?

There are so many, but I have the Tucker Open for Business App to help me decide where to go!

### How many pets do you have?

I have one African Grey Parrot, his name is "Gandalf", and two English Budgies, whose names are "Latitude" and "Longitude". I also have an aquarium with four fish: a black moor goldfish named "Hershey", a common white goldfish named "Pearl", two barb fish named "Jock" and "Cousteau", and two snails, "Speedy" and "Tiger" a.k.a. "Team Clean".

### Would you rather watch the sunrise or sunset?

I like watching both. A sunrise represents the start of a new day, energy, and possibilities. Sunsets are a way to tell us to slow down, unwind, and spend time with your family and friends.

### What is your guilty pleasure?

Binge watching "The Office", "Parks and Recreation", "Downton Abbey", anything from the "Star Wars" franchise and anything from the "Star Trek" franchise. I am Team Dwight for his idiosyncrasies, Ron Swanson for his love of bacon and eggs, Tom Branson because he was an outsider looking in, Boba Fett especially in the Mandalorian and Captain Janeway is my favorite captain!

### What inspires you in life?

My wife with her steadfast abilities to overcome any challenge with grace and dignity. My family and all of those years of support and encouragement that kept me going.

# BUSINESS OF THE MONTH

## FORD'S BARBEQUE

For most people, a honeymoon is a pleasant experience; a chance to bond and make memories with a new husband or wife. But Justin Bradford describes the honeymoon he and his wife took as life-changing. It was on that honeymoon in Texas that Bradford discovered all the possibilities of Southern-style barbecue. And he's brought that experience to Tucker's Main Street as the co-owner and pitmaster of Ford's BBQ.

"We try to do everything Southern," Bradford said, sitting in a booth of his new restaurant. "Southern barbecue [with] a Texas twist. Whether that's Alabama white sauce or Carolina vinegar sauce, Texas style ribs, brisket, turkey, stuff like that....We try to encompass the best of barbecue from everywhere."

Ford's BBQ is maybe the most anticipated restaurant in Tucker history. Originally rumored for a 2018 opening in the building which formerly housed the Roly Poly sandwich shop, Ford's met several delays followed by a global pandemic. When they finally opened last month, customers were able to follow their noses to barbecue nirvana.

"We cook almost all day long," Bradford explained. "There's somebody here cooking most hours of the day and night and we just burn straight oak and a little bit of pecan wood with it so you will smell it across Main Street."

Ford's is the latest opening of what's been a Main Street restaurant renaissance. Since the beginning of 2019, eateries, breweries and a coffee shop have all opened in Tucker's downtown and all are thriving. For Bradford, it's the building of something special in a place he considers special.

"People know that this is kind of a destination," he explained. "They can come down to Main Street every night for dinner, have Local 7 one night, maybe Village Burger one night, come to Ford's one night, Hot Betty's for breakfast and lunch. So, it's good that it's a destination."

Ford's BBQ is located at 2337 Main Street. You can visit them online at [www.fords-bbq.com](http://www.fords-bbq.com).



# SMOKE RISE ELEMENTARY PROJECT REMAINS ON SCHEDULE

## SCHOOL SET TO OPEN TO STUDENTS FOR 2021-'22 ACADEMIC YEAR

With the scientific community coalescing around the notion that in-person learning is, in fact, the best and safest option for children, students across the DeKalb County School District are headed back to class later this month. It's a relief to many parents, who had been concerned about their children's mental health. For the students themselves, it's a chance to learn in a traditional environment surrounded in a socially distant fashion by their peers; a marked change from the last two semesters of schooling.

But for one Tucker Cluster school, the excitement will be tempered until the new school year in August.

"We're ready!" declared Smoke Rise Elementary Principal Pamela McCloud.

McCloud, her faculty and her students return this month to a lame duck building. They'll finish out the 2020-'21 school year, and then move into the newest, most state-of-the-art school building in DeKalb County. The new Smoke Rise Elementary School will be situated along

Hugh Howell Road at the entrance to the Smoke Rise community. The project, which remains on schedule for an August completion, will more than double the student capacity at the school.

"It looks like a high school, but it's an elementary school," McCloud said. "We're moving from the 400 [students] to the 900, but that just means more little bodies, more little minds and more children to love."

DeKalb Regional Superintendent Trenton Arnold oversees the Tucker Cluster schools, among others in the district, and has had an eye on this project from its inception. He said that, while a new school building is an exciting prospect, it won't alter the nature of what McCloud and her staff have built at Smoke Rise.

"You move into a new house, but it doesn't change who you are as a family...and Smoke Rise is a family," Arnold said.

One of the big conversation points around the district has been the idea of redistricting. With several new



elementary schools being built, parents are wondering what it means for attendance lines, especially in those schools that are currently overcrowded. Both Arnold and Tucker's School Board representative Allyson Gevertz have discussed the reality of redistricting in the past, but Arnold now says the idea is on hold as DeKalb Schools have ordered a districtwide comprehensive master plan.

"What the district had done in the past when it came to redistricting was sort of piecemeal it by clusters," Arnold explained. "What we've realized through our current data trends and enrollment numbers, there are parts of the district that have schools that are well over 100 percent instructional capacity and, in some instances, that requires not just a singular look at a school or a cluster, but perhaps a holistic look at the entire district. This comprehensive master plan is going to take a look at student enrollment data, its trends, its special programming that we have across the district, its available spaces, all elements to make recommendations to the district on what any sort of redistricting, attendance lines and so forth would look like."

It's a process Arnold said would take a year to complete, meaning any redistricting would be more than a year down the road.

McCloud and her staff aren't concerning themselves with long-term concepts like redistricting. Instead, they're focused on a spring semester of reconnecting with students and preparing for the big move this summer.

"'It's about time' is what we're hearing," she shared. "From the stakeholders, from the students...there's excitement in the air. We cannot wait to get into the new building....We are so ready to get into the new classrooms, to start some great teaching and learning. The teachers are excited about it.

"It'll boost the morale of being in a new space, a new building. The old building is great, as well. We've got a lot of band-aids on it to keep it going, but in this new space it just provides an environment...a space where our boys and girls can expand, grow, learn."

For a school that has seen significant increases in test scores and other standardized measures in the past few years, this new building will be another bit of momentum for McCloud and her staff to seize on as they continue to raise the bar at Smoke Rise.

# Tucker Cluster

## Updates & News

### IMPORTANT DATES

#### January 1

Last Day of Winter Break

#### January 11

Board of Education Meeting

#### January 13-18

No classes (Professional development/holiday)

#### January 19

In-person learning begins for select grades

#### January 25

In-person learning begins for all grades

## BRAG SHEET

### IDLEWOOD ELEMENTARY

- Idlewood was all about giving back in the month of December. In addition to honoring its teachers with a staff drive-thru holiday party, the school organized a Meals on Wheels drive for 25 Idlewood families in need. Idlewood was also the beneficiary of a coat drive held at Tucker Brewing Company.

### MIDVALE ELEMENTARY

- Students at Midvale and their families are excited about participating in the school's first-ever virtual STEM Challenge. The challenge was issued by Dr. Dougherty via video, encouraging families to use just two types of materials to construct their best attempt at a freestanding tower. Additional STEM challenges will take place in coming months.

- Midvale students can borrow books from the school's library! Students have the ability to reserve specific titles and pick them up curbside on designated days each week. The program has been a great way to get books into the hands of students during this virtual learning time.

### SMOKE RISE ELEMENTARY

- The school's Golden Gear Robotics season has begun with a bang! Club members met for the first time virtually in November, unveiling a brand-new robot simulator from Wonder Workshop. They then entered a virtual Wonder Workshop global competition in December.

# CITIZEN OF THE MONTH

# CHARLTON ALLEN



It is difficult to believe that one man has made such a difference for Tucker. In the 24+ years I have known him, his willingness to participate and enthusiasm on each project has smoothed the way forward.

Charlton served on the Executive Board of Tucker Civic Association. This was in the early days when Tucker needed citizens to help shape its future. In 2000, he moved on to help form the MainStreet Tucker Alliance (MTA) to establish a downtown core. When MTA assumed hosting Tucker Day, Charlton was and is today the co-chair. In 2012 a group of concerned stakeholders wanted to form a Tucker Community Improvement District; Charlton again stepped up to guide the group to get the CID formed correctly to benefit the district. When citizens began to discuss cityhood for Tucker, they needed guidance and again Charlton supported the group with guidance. His law practice is also a member of the Tucker Business Association, which is the only group that doesn't require anything of him except annual dues!

Anyone who knows Charlton knows he loves to sing and will do so with no provocation. He is a tenor and has been called on to sing with the Atlanta Opera when they needed singers to complete the chorus. Indeed, he sings at St. Andrews in the Men's Chorus and solos during worship services.

I am personally grateful that he decided to become an attorney. Charlton has given legal expertise to all these volunteer groups and kept them from making innocent missteps along the way. All this while working on behalf of his clients with family, corporate and criminal law.

Charlton, his wife Jenny, and daughter Stephanie live in Tucker. He has demonstrated his love and appreciation of Tucker over the years and asked for nothing in return. What good fortune the Allens decided Tucker is home!

*Nomination by Honey Van De Kreke*

# “ASK RIP”

## Answers Your Park Questions

*Rip Robertson is the Parks and Recreation Director for the City of Tucker. He brings to the job years of experience in Parks and Rec, as well as Public Works.*



One of the hallmarks of a strong Parks and Recreation program is its youth sports leagues. Here in Tucker, we have two of metro Atlanta’s most storied leagues in TYSA and Tucker Football League. But, while we’re glad to have those great leagues call Tucker home, those aren’t what I’m talking about when I talk about measuring the strength of our city Parks and Rec Department.

Since Tucker assumed responsibility for its Parks and Recreation assets from DeKalb County three years ago, we have actively sought to host our own city sports leagues. In 2019 we offered youth basketball for the very first time. While enrollment was relatively low, we had enough young men and women sign up to field two basketball teams. They competed against established teams from cities like Doraville and Hapeville. While we took our lumps against these seasoned players, our youngsters learned a lot about the game and did Tucker proud.

This year we more than doubled our signups for our winter basketball league. Unfortunately, because of COVID, we had to shift to a 3-on-3 format rather than

the traditional 5-on-5. But excitement is high and, with practices already underway, I’m seeing a lot of potential in these kids.

So, what’s next after basketball? I’ve long wanted to start a City of Tucker baseball league. Thanks to our Mayor and City Council, we have been able to make a series of improvements to the fields at Fitzgerald Park and Kelley Cofer Park, including the major investment of brand-new fencing. So with our fields looking great and baseball being more socially distant than just about any other sport, what better time to go ahead and jump right in?

If you go to our website at [www.tuckerga.gov/parks](http://www.tuckerga.gov/parks), you’ll find registration information for our very first city baseball league. Our athletes will have games and practices just like any other league; the biggest difference is they’ll play with the Tucker name emblazoned across their uniforms. That’s really something special.

I’ve seen baseball really flourish in other Parks and Rec operations and I know it can – and will – be successful here. Even if you don’t have a kid playing in our league, I hope to see you out at the ballfields this spring root, root, rooting for the home team!



# TUCKERGA.GOV

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# TUCKER *Community Corner*



**1/7 - Tucker Community Action Team**  
**10-11 a.m., via Zoom**

TCAT is made up of active Tucker citizens with a goal to share information and increase awareness. All meetings are virtual. More information can be found on [facebook.com/tuckercommunityactionteam](https://facebook.com/tuckercommunityactionteam).

**1/14 – Tucker Civic Association Board Meeting**  
**7-9 p.m., via Zoom**

TCA is a non-profit volunteer organization of residents and business owners local to Tucker. All meetings are virtual. All information and links can be found at [tuckercivic.org](https://tuckercivic.org).

**1/21 – Friends of Tucker Parks Board Meeting**  
**5:30–7:30 p.m., via Zoom**

Friends of Tucker Parks is the umbrella group for all the Friends groups for our Tucker Parks. Tune in and find out how YOU can help our parks. More information can be found at [tuckerparks.org](https://tuckerparks.org).