



# INTUCKER

DECEMBER 2020 | VOLUME 4 | ISSUE 12



## A NEW CHAPTER

TUCKER'S ACQUISITION OF THE OLD DEKALB COUNTY LIBRARY  
MEANS BIG THINGS FOR THE FUTURE OF DOWNTOWN

# EDITOR'S NOTE



This year isn't going down in anyone's books as one to remember. At least not fondly. Funny thing is 2020 actually started out with a lot of promise.

Do you remember that? I know, it seems like ages ago. But it's true; we were a different country then. We were different people. Now we've all gone through this unprecedented adversity; nine months of it, in fact.

As we prepare to enter a new year, and as we're still coping with all that we've been through, it's important to get some closure on 2020. We thought with this issue of *InTucker* it might be fun to look back and really trash 2020. You know, give it a proper send-off that a year like this deserves. But Tucker is nothing if not classy. So, instead, we're choosing the high road, looking ahead to 2021 and the new start that it brings.

In this issue, we're going to catch up with an old friend who's working to balance safety, while bringing joy to thousands across Tucker. Longtime Tucker High Principal James Jackson is in charge of sports for DeKalb County Schools and he sat down for an interview about the success they've seen keeping student-athletes healthy on the field this fall and the district's plans to continue that momentum into the winter and spring sports. Catch that on page 12, then make sure to check out Mayor Auman's exciting announcement on page 3. Far from your run of the mill real estate deal, this one promises to help shape the future and feel of downtown Tucker for the next generation. And if that's not enough, on page 7 we've got a feel-good letter from a resident who was helped by our CARES Act program. A little bit of money went a long way toward keeping this Tucker resident from falling into homelessness.

I hope you enjoy this issue. I hope you have a wonderful holiday season. And I hope that you are as ready as I am to turn the page and embrace the new opportunities of 2021!

**MATT HOLMES**  
INTUCKER EDITOR

# IN THIS ISSUE



### ON THE COVER

It may not look like much, but the old library on Church Street may just spark a downtown renaissance. Mayor Auman shares a vision for the future on page 3.



### GAME ON

DeKalb County Schools are working hard to ensure sports are carried out in a safe manner this academic year. On page 12, hear from the man making the tough decisions.



### BUSINESS BOOM

Haven't done your holiday shopping yet? On page 8, Angela Brooks talks with some Tucker retailers who would love to have you shop local this holiday season.



### FOR THE KIDS

She's dedicated her professional life to the betterment of Tucker's children. Meet this amazing mom, who is also our Citizen of the Month, on page 11.



### ASK RIP

And the winner is...Tucker! On page 14, Rip looks at how he and his Tucker Parks and Recreation staff cleaned up at last month's GRPA District 6 awards banquet.



# INTUCKER

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# From the Mayor:

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OF OUR DOWNTOWN



Despite all that's going on in the world right now, this is an exciting time of progress in the City of Tucker. You've seen and heard about new sidewalks downtown, along Henderson Road, on Cowan, Idlewood, Hugh Howell and elsewhere. You've seen and heard about new developments at Northlake Mall, and on the old Sears property at Mountain Industrial and Hugh Howell. And you've seen and heard about the exciting developments involving the PATH in Tucker and our plan to reactivate the old street and alley grid system in the downtown district.

I'm excited to announce one more breakthrough in our efforts to elevate our downtown as the center of the City's community life. Are you familiar with the old library on Church Street? If you've lived in Tucker more than a decade, chances are you took the kids and got your library books there at some point. If you're newer to the City, chances are you've only known it as a run down, graffiti-plagued eyesore.

In the early days of our becoming a city, we began negotiating with DeKalb County over ownership of this building. I long saw this as a critical piece of downtown real estate where we could build a municipal center, activating that whole side of downtown and connecting it with Main Street. As those negotiations moved along in fits and starts, the City acquired several properties along Lavista Road in front of the abandoned library. This gave us high visibility and easy ingress and egress for when we were able to assemble the whole tract with the old library property.

Last month, after a lot of work by our staff and our partners at the County, we bought ourselves a library. Now, this building has fallen into such disrepair (including mold and asbestos) the first step is to get it cleared off

and cleaned up. We've already begun that process, along with considering how to put the property to best use until we develop it for the long term. Take a look at the map and imagine with me the catalyst this property will be for the revitalization of that segment of our downtown. We have poured countless hours into figuring out how to improve our Main Street. And soon you'll see through our alley plan and the first leg of our PATH trail plan just how special and accessible Main Street can be. DeKalb County has contributed significant capital into Phase Two of the Tucker Streetscape along First Avenue, and we contributed about \$1 million to get it over the finish line. That project promises to extend and expand the charm of Main Street several blocks in all directions.

I'm proud of the dedicated service of your Council and city staff to keep moving us ahead during this most difficult year. When we finally put this pandemic behind us, Tucker will already be running full speed toward the future, and your downtown will be well on its way to being the hub of activity we've been envisioning. It will most certainly fulfill my vision of the kind of place where people will want to Live, Work, Play and Pray.

As we flip the calendar to 2021, we won't just be putting a difficult time behind us, we'll be opening the door to an exciting future, and I can't wait to get there with you.

**FRANK AUMAN**  
MAYOR

# City Council Update

Tucker's Mayor and City Council met twice during the month of November. The first session, which was mostly informational in nature, was held on November 9. The meeting opened with Mayor Auman delivering an update on the coronavirus pandemic. After looking at trends with the virus, the Mayor reminded Tucker residents about the social nature of the upcoming holiday season and offered good news about vaccine testing.

Council then received an update on the City's CARES Act program. Assistant City Manager John McHenry, who has been overseeing the effort, gave a briefing on the residential and small business components of the program. On the small business program, 274 businesses applied for grants from the City. Those applications were reviewed and awarded later in the month.

Council then cast a pair of votes. The first was to award a contract for traffic

signal improvements at the intersection of Brockett and Coolege Roads and U.S. 78. Council voted unanimously to grant the \$78,900 contract to Sunbelt Traffic. Next, they voted unanimously in support of a resolution to reappoint Judge Steve Nicholas as the City's Chief Judge. The reappointment will extend through January 1, 2022.

On November 23, Council held a work session to discuss a number of issues including:

- a road resurfacing list for 2021
- a policy for naming or re-naming parks in the City
- the impact of the COVID pandemic on the City's finances
- the future of a stadium at Fitzgerald Park

The next meeting of the Mayor and City Council will take place on December 14 at 7 p.m.

## DATES TO KNOW

**December 2**  
Traffic Court

**December 7**  
Downtown Development Authority

**December 9**  
Traffic Court

**December 14**  
City Council

**December 15**  
Zoning Board of Appeals

**December 16**  
Municipal Court

**December 17**  
Municipal Court

**December 24-25**  
All City buildings closed  
(Christmas observed)



On November 23, Mayor Auman, on behalf of the City Council, presented outgoing DeKalb County Commissioner Nancy Jester with a proclamation in honor of her six years of service to and partnership with the Tucker community. (Credit: tuckerga.gov)

## FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



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# 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)*



As we move into the holiday season, I have no doubt that the ongoing pandemic will continue to impact us. During normal times this is when I remind everyone of the crime spikes that always seem to accompany the holidays. When folks are out shopping for the holidays it creates more opportunities for criminals.

This year I think the main difference will be that online shopping will attract even more attention than it has in the past. The downside of this is that porch piracy will likely rise to an all-time high, as well. This month, we'll talk about some ideas to keep your Christmas presents from being a porch pirate's booty.

For those of you that don't know, a "porch pirate" is simply a criminal that steals delivered packages from the front porch of unwitting victims. The most typical scenario is that the thief will follow delivery trucks and watch for them to make stops. Sometimes thieves will just cruise through residential neighborhoods looking for targets. Knowing this, there are several ways to avoid being a victim. In no particular order these are:

- Having your package held to be picked up at the courier's counter. Most of the big delivery services (USPS, UPS and FedEx) have an option for you to have your package held at their hub. This means that it would be up to you to go to the post office or local hub to pick it up. The convenience of this tends to depend on how far you happen to live from one of these places.
- Another similar option is to have your package delivered to a locker. This is where local businesses have agreements with couriers to keep delivery lockers at their property. Two of these which I know of around Tucker are at QuikTrip and Walgreen's. There tend to be more of these locations, which increases the chance one may be near your home.
- A third option is having the package delivered to your home, but investing in some sort of security measure. "Ring" cameras tend to be the most common option, but there are others. This is probably the least secure option. A camera may act as a deterrent, but could just as easily not. Cameras also have the benefit of potentially providing an image of the suspect. This doesn't necessarily help us identify criminals, but can be useful once we have identified a suspect.

The final thought I'll leave you with is to say that none of these options is foolproof. We have plenty of reports where deliveries have been stolen from hubs and third-party lockers. The sad truth is that if someone wants your stuff badly enough, they will likely get it. Luckily for us, criminals tend to look for easy targets. The idea is to take enough precautions to make it not worth the thief's time.



# UPDATING YOU: CARES ACT SUCCESSES



We've written at length in *InTucker* about the difference we are trying to make in our Tucker community through the CARES Act. Now we can proudly report we are not trying to make a difference, a difference has been made.

The CARES Act is a federal program designed to aid individuals and businesses who were harmed financially by the coronavirus pandemic. There are several facets to the program here in the City of Tucker: rent/mortgage assistance, utility assistance, virtual learning support and small business grants. We are seeing successes on all fronts, but one story in particular resonated with your city staff.

It comes from the work being done by our partners at NETWorks Cooperative Ministries. They are teaming up with us to distribute much needed funds to hundreds of people across Tucker. It's not always money; they've held food drives and hosted people in search of job training. They've done some amazing work. But they were able to help one Tucker resident who took a little bit of financial aid and was able to avoid falling into homelessness.

Reprinted here is an excerpt from the letter of gratitude that Tucker resident sent us. We are keeping her identity a secret but thank her for sharing this powerful story.



“Congratulations! You’ve made 36 on-time mortgage payments!”

A credit bureau sent me the email the same day my employer told me the world’s COVID fears had become our reality. Current work assignments were “on-hold” for 30 days. I didn’t panic that day, or the next day, or the next week. Panic didn’t set in until 30 days became 60. Those 60 turned into 90. Unsure of what to do about my bills, I filed for unemployment. The first two checks contained the additional stimulus payment and I was able to cover one more month’s mortgage payment, but once the stimulus stopped, it would take four entire unemployment benefit checks to cover one month of mortgage.

Mortgage meant just that – nothing left for food, electricity, or even the cell phone I kept willing to ring with a job offer. The only folks who wanted to talk to me worked for my mortgage lender and their offers of assistance came with a weighty price tag: I could qualify for their COVID assistance but with my mortgage type I’d have to forfeit my fixed-rate mortgage for an adjustable-rate product.

Unsure of what to do, I cried, I prayed, I waited. While looking for jobs, I stumbled across a job-training program for COVID-displaced adult workers. Within two weeks, I was enrolled in their program and approved to begin training for a new career the Monday after Thanksgiving. With one base covered, I wasn’t sure how to keep the roof over my head, and the drop in temperature told me every day that I was in need of a blessing.

A blessing came in the form of a post card from your organization. On it was the news that housing assistance was available in my area. I didn’t know what help you offered, but a few clicks into your website I found the application for the Tucker CARES program. Unlike other organizations I’d reached out to, I received a response almost immediately. The case manager, Jenny, was polite and nonjudgmental with her inquiries into my current circumstances. She navigated what was a point of stress and uncertainty for me with admirable professionalism and care. Her correspondence was the first time I felt hope in months. Her supervisor, Holly, picked up right where she left off. Coming in to complete my paperwork literally brought me to tears. That evening was the first time I slept through the night in over three months.

I can’t express in words how much Holly, Jenny and NETWorks Cooperative helped me to get through this pandemic. I’d surely be facing a homeless Christmas without your help. I can honestly say your organization was the answer to my prayers (Jeremiah 29:11--“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”).

With Heartfelt Gratitude,  
A Tucker Neighbor



# BUSINESS BOOM

by John McHenry, Community and Economic Development Director



Spending our dollars in Tucker is always a great idea, but this holiday season it is especially important to take advantage of all the great restaurant and retail opportunities in our hometown.

Retailers bring in a big portion of their revenues between Thanksgiving and the end of the year, it is often this last month that makes or breaks it for businesses. We all know that 2020 has been beyond tough for our local business community, but fortunately there are many chances to keep your dollars local. Over 100 restaurants call Tucker home and a total of 3,000 businesses are licensed in the City, from major retailers to specialty shops with one-of-a-kind items. The City also boasts a huge variety of cuisines to satisfy anyone's taste – from American to Vietnamese and from drive-thru to fine dining. Many establishments offer gift cards, as well. I've highlighted just some of the great and varied establishments, but don't hesitate to explore more in Tucker while also supporting local sales tax initiatives that improve our roads and sidewalks.



When it comes to decorating for the holidays, HomeGoods in Cofer Crossing Shopping Center has an array of holiday dinnerware and home décor to celebrate with your family in the comfort and security of your home. Veronica Burkett, who lives off Midvale Road, is one of the store's enthusiastic patrons.

"I love to browse amongst the beautiful seasonal displays at HomeGoods. Each visit, I discover unique gift items to decorate my home," Burkett explains.

Anne Blair, who is a resident of Avondale Estates, finds that she shops often in Tucker this time of year.

"Over the holidays, I find great home goods and decorations at Tuesday Morning off Montreal Road, as well as the T.J. Maxx in Briarcliff Village Shopping Center," Blair explains.

On the home improvement front, Mitchell Sorrells, who lives in DeKalb County, makes a point of traveling to Tucker to go to the Handy Ace Hardware at 3969 Lawrenceville Highway.

"Over the holidays, I like to take advantage of downtime and focus on home repair, so I visit the good and friendly folks at

Handy Ace Hardware – I always leave with more projects," Sorrells admits.

There is also a range of unique gifts in Tucker. Visit Boxcar Woody ATL at 4290 Railroad Avenue to see how truck bed timber can be turned into an heirloom table. They specialize in reclaimed and specialty wood and make custom furniture, bar tops, counter tops, barn doors and mantles. If you are looking for a distinctive and environmentally conscious gift, you will want to visit their store.

Aztec Jewelers in the Briarcliff Village Shopping Center is a full-service jeweler offering custom design services and jewelry repair, including gold, diamond, and various gemstones. They also have the largest selection in the southeast of authentic North American silver and turquoise jewelry and they personally select each piece directly from the Navajo and Zuni Reservations and Hopi Mesas.

At the Tucker Meridian Shopping Center off Northlake Parkway one can satisfy the need to put your best shoe forward, as DSW goes into overdrive during the holidays.



Supervisor Zania Mann explains that, "With Black Friday and Christmas shopping, DSW will have a particularly wide array of shoes, and don't forget our purses, toys and other holiday items."



For those that need a bit of pampering, Ms. Hanna Nguyen, manager of the recently opened Trio Nails at 2316 Main Street, is looking forward to seeing many new customers over the holidays.

"We have many manicure and pedicure services, and we know clients want to make time to look their best, as well as relax in our beautiful new store," Nguyen suggests.

So, when you head out to shop, with a mask of course, don't forget to support your friends and neighbors by patronizing the Tucker business community.

*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).*

# BUSINESS OF THE MONTH

## GEORGIA GIFTS & MORE

It truly is the most wonderful time of the year for those who operate retail stores. It is also the most pressure packed, stressful and hectic time of the year for those very same people.

“We probably do in the fourth quarter (of the year) what we’ve done for all the other three quarters,” said Karen Gayle who, with her husband Daren, operates Georgia Gifts & More. “The fourth quarter drives the year-end sales and it consistently has been very strong.”

Georgia Gifts & More opened right around New Year 2019 at their first brick and mortar retail location here in Tucker. The business, which stands along Lavista Road at the gateway to downtown, has been around almost a decade thanks to strong digital marketing and an online presence. But Gayle says opening the retail location has been a game changer for her business before COVID came along.

“Interestingly enough, the retail sales did just about what our website did,” Gayle recalled. “We didn’t really know what to expect moving into retail and moving into Tucker, but we knew we wanted to be on a visible street in an area where people are coming to shop.”

Gayle began her entrepreneurial journey in 1990, operating a craft business out of her home. Over the subsequent 30 years, her career has taken several twists and turns, many dictated by the status of the economy. But for most of the past decade, she and her husband have been thriving with Georgia Gifts & More. Their shop packages and sells gift baskets full of Georgia branded apparel, as well as locally sourced foods and sundries. A big part of their business involves shipping those baskets around the holidays. Gayle readily urged her customers not to make a common Christmas mistake: procrastination.

“We ship through all of the major carriers...and their cut-off dates have been moved back a little bit,” Gayle said. “I would give people a two-week window” for domestic shipping. For international shipping, she said, the window to make sure your package arrives by December 25 has already closed.

Whether it’s Georgia grown nuts, peach scented candles or a Tucker ski cap, Georgia Gifts & More will be representing the local area this holiday season and into 2021. You can visit them at 5001 Lavista Road or online at [www.georgiagiftsandmore.com](http://www.georgiagiftsandmore.com).



# TEAM TUCKER *Spotlight*

## DANIELLE GREENE, CLERK OF COURT

### **What are your responsibilities as Clerk of Court?**

The most common job duties are preparing dockets of cases, examining legal documents submitted to the court and documenting the receipt of said documents, completing office tasks as necessary, completing accurate and timely data entry, paying attention to detail, working closely with the solicitor and judge to make sure that court runs smoothly, preparing and issuing orders of the court, and providing customer service to the public, just to name a few.

### **What does a typical court day look like?**

A typical arraignment court day would start with checking in defendants and pulling their case file. Once the case files are pulled, they are then placed in the solicitor's box so that they can grab the file to speak with each defendant about their case. Once the defendant speaks with the solicitor, I will receive the file back to either do a reset on the case, a plea in front of the judge, or a request for a bench trial/jury trial.

### **How is court different in Tucker than in other places?**

All courts run a little different, but ultimately, they have the same goal, which is to provide a fair and efficient adjudication of cases as well as provide equal protection to all to ensure due process of the law. Tucker Municipal Court has just started handling traffic court recently, so we are still working on a consistent and transparent court process. Tucker Municipal Court also has an Environmental Court, where all city code violations are heard. Some other cities/counties do not have environmental court, which makes us different.

### **What do you like most about your job?**

I get to work with some amazing people and meet new people each day. I love being able to speak with others. I let them know everyone makes mistakes and not to let this mistake define who you are, let it teach you and grow from it. Hopefully, I can make a difference in their lives after speaking with them.

### **What is the biggest challenge you face in your job?**

I would say the biggest challenge I face in my job is probably the same for any Clerk of Court at this time, which would be operating a safe, but efficient court during this pandemic.



## *Off the Wall*

### **What are your favorite colors?**

Hands down, orange and purple. I am a die-hard Clemson fan. I wear orange and purple whenever I can to support my favorite team. The only color I don't wear is red.

### **Have any hidden talents?**

I would say one of my hidden talents would be creativity. I am somewhat creative when it comes to projects and making gifts for others.

### **What do you do in your free time?**

I like to attend/watch Clemson football games, relax by the pool and spend time with friends and family.

### **What shows are you currently streaming?**

"Chicago P.D.", "Chicago Med", "Chicago Fire", "Station 19", "S.W.A.T.", "Seal Team", "For Life" and "All American".

### **What is the best book you've ever read?**

I am not a huge book reader, but I would have to say one of the best book series that I have read would be the "Twilight" series.

# CITIZEN OF THE MONTH

# MARTI COLEMAN

It is my honor to nominate Marti Coleman as the Tucker Citizen of the Month.

Marti is first and foremost, a wife and mother. Married to Craig in August of 1998, they have two children, Sadie and Joseph. She is constantly working to make sure her family is involved in church, work/school and extra-curricular activities. Professionally, Marti is the Director of the Weekday Preschool program at Tucker First United Methodist Church, where she has been employed for the past six years. Prior to the Weekday Preschool Program Marti successfully ran an in-home childcare center for 10 years. Originally from Perry, Georgia, Marti earned her BBA in Accounting at Georgia College & State University.

Outside her work, Marti is extremely involved in her church and the Tucker community. For the church Marti has volunteered in many different leadership roles for the Christmas at Tucker production, the prior Dinner Theatre program, Vacation Bible School, Children's and Youth Choirs, and Youth Fellowship. She has also been a member of the Sanctuary Bells and the Discovery Sunday school class.

Marti has also served in many different roles in our community including PTA at Midvale Elementary, Tucker Middle School and Tucker High School, Boy Scout Troop 129, Gwinnett Young Singers, the Tucker High golf team, Tucker High swim team, helped with Taste of Tucker, Tucker Day, NETWorks, and more!

Marti and her family are a huge asset to Tucker.

*Nomination by Mimi Sanders*



# PLAY BALL! DEKALB SCHOOLS TAKING PRECAUTIONS TO ENSURE SAFE SPORTS SEASONS

Tens of thousands of students and parents across the DeKalb County School District have nearly completed their fall semester of virtual learning. That means hundreds of Zoom calls, virtual projects, tech help and messages to teachers. Needless to say, it's been a stressful time for all parties involved.

One of the bright spots amid the malaise has been sports. While safety concerns have brought out some naysayers, it is undeniable that sports have been an escape of sorts from the realities of the pandemic. On a large scale, we've seen a World Series, The Masters, college and professional football all enjoy varying levels of success this fall. Here locally, high school sports have presented a way for young people to get out, get some exercise and keep the competitive juices flowing.

"I know coaches want to win state championships and players do and parents and communities [do]," said DeKalb County Executive Director of Athletics James Jackson, "but I think that we win every day that we play a game and that we have practice."

Jackson, who coached track and football, as well as served as Tucker High School's principal until 2017, said it took some finagling to get fall sports going. As with the fall, winter sports are going to be delayed in starting, DeKalb Superintendent Cheryl Watson-Harris announced last month. She cited the rate of COVID cases rising in recent weeks. It was a disappointing trend considering

that in October the cases had dropped to levels where the school district was almost ready to send teachers back to their classrooms.

"We're just trying to see how the numbers are going," Jackson said, crediting Watson-Harris for her decisive leadership since taking over during the pandemic. "The numbers in DeKalb...it's getting pretty bad right now with the [case] spikes and we want to make sure we put our kids in the best position where it's safe."

When looking at extracurricular activities like sports, there are challenges in starting a new season. From a practical perspective, Jackson said, they've operated at 10 percent fan capacity for football games. But for winter sports, which are played indoors, there may not be fans allowed at all.

"All the sports were challenging because the safety of the student athletes and the coaches come first," Jackson explained. "We don't test like the NFL or colleges, so we had to really rely on the students to be up-front [and] honest with the questionnaires and also with the temp checks."

As fall sports are wrapping up and winter sports are about to get started, legions of baseball, soccer and track parents are wondering about the future of spring sports. These are groups that had their seasons abruptly cut short in 2020 and want to get back out on the field in 2021.



(Credit: Gaiter Sports)





# Tucker Cluster

## Updates & News

### IMPORTANT DATES

**December 7**  
DeKalb County Board of Education Meeting

**December 21-January 1**  
Winter Break

## BRAG SHEET

### BROCKETT ELEMENTARY

- After 12 months of work, Brockett is now officially recognized by IB World Organization as an IB Candidate School. Brockett's application was approved last month. You can read more about Brockett's IB quest in the June 2020 issue of *InTucker*.

### LIVSEY ELEMENTARY

- Livsey held Virtual STEM Day on November 3. Students were immersed in STEM lessons for the day and then students and parents were all invited to participate in a family STEM activity to create and post Rube Goldberg machines to the school's Flipgrid website.

### TUCKER HIGH

- On October 21, the National Honor Society welcomed their class of 2020-'21 to a new journey of achievements. They inducted around 40 new students into the program. Eligible students have maintained a 3.7 grade point average during their years in high school. This year's ceremony was conducted via Zoom.

"We're starting to put together plans for spring 2021," Jackson acknowledged. "We've got the schedules almost done. We're looking at the same safety protocols that we've done with fall and also winter sports and we're looking at [COVID] numbers. Hopefully, we can get some relief. Hopefully, this virus can recede a little bit going into the springtime of the year. We're just taking it one day at a time, step by step, and developing as many safety protocols as we can for the student-athletes and the coaches."

***"We've had times when we've had to cancel games. We had times when we've had to stop practicing because of COVID tests, but we're doing the best we can under the situation."***

While the main priority has to be safety, school leaders are wrestling with the same dilemma, whether it's sending students back to class or allowing them to play sports. Jackson and his team at the district office know that a lot rides on the decisions they're having to make and they're not making those decisions lightly.

"Just to get the young people on the field, the chance to maybe get a scholarship," he explained. "Maybe to get that release because you look at the mental health picture and there's a lot of kids who are suffering from depression because they can't go to school, then they can't play sports. This is an outlet for them."

It's an outlet that could have consequences. DeKalb County and school districts across Georgia have had to cancel games and halt practices because of COVID fears. But as they continue forward, they're banking on the advice of medical experts, hoping that the precautions being taken can help avoid the spread. It's a calculated risk aimed at helping these young men and women, to use Jackson's words, celebrate a win every day.

# “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.



The holiday season is one of my favorite times of the year. Take Thanksgiving, for example.

You combine food, football and family; what could be better? Of course, family is the most important part of that equation. I was blessed this year to spend the holiday with my beautiful wife, daughter and granddaughter and I could not have asked for more.

I have a family at work, too. I am part of the most talented Parks and Recreation team in the State of Georgia and if you read this column often, you know that I like to brag on them when I have the chance. This past month, my team brought home a myriad of awards from the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association's District 6 banquet. District 6 covers about 30 city and county operations from DeKalb County in the north, south to Perry and east to Wilkes County. I want to congratulate Jason Collins, Ray Rollins and Joe Stewart for their outstanding accomplishments.

Jason won the award for Park Operations Professional of the Year. What that means is that your Tucker parks are maintained, litter is collected and improvements are made because of the hard work of Jason and the team he oversees. Ray was named Young Professional of the Year. If you don't know, Ray is responsible for everything that happens inside

of our Tucker Recreation Center. The classes, the programs, the summer camps; Ray has his hands on all of it. Joe was tabbed as the Athletics and Aquatics Professional of the Year. His work in establishing our basketball, golf and pickleball leagues has been outstanding.

We also won awards for Special Event of the Year (Sip and Stroll) and Agency of the Year. Oh, and I was humbled to receive the award for Distinguished Professional of the Year. Believe me when I say, recreation professionals are a hardworking bunch and to win this award, especially in light of all the hurdles we've had to overcome, I'm very, very proud.

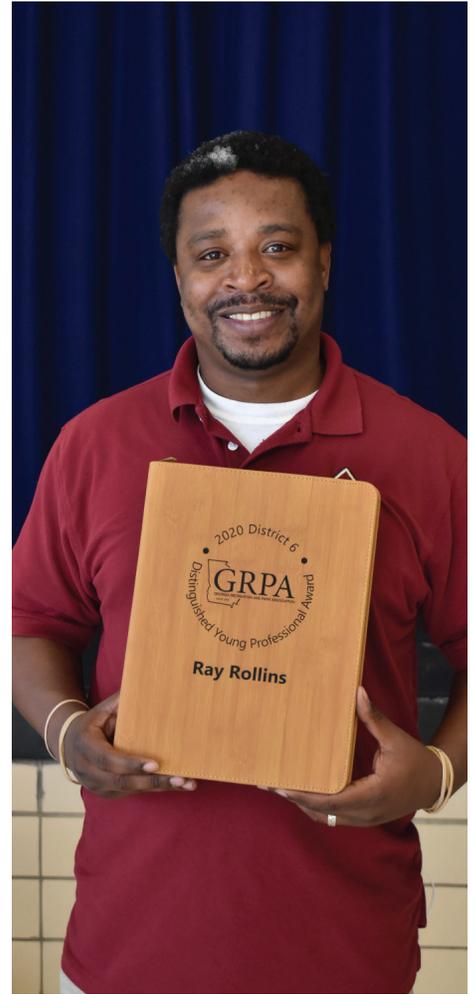
On the whole, these six awards are huge accomplishments and I can assure you they are magnified considering they happened largely during the coronavirus pandemic.

I also want to update you on some improvements we've made in our parks. There is a brand-new walkway at the pollinator garden in Tucker Nature Preserve. We've completed work on a boardwalk along the trail at Kelley Cofer Park. There is a new roof on the Peach Pit at Kelley Cofer Park. And, of course, we've put the finishing touches on the new solar roof at Tucker Recreation Center. Any of these projects would merit a column on their own, but they don't give me that much space in *InTucker*. So I'll invite you to go to [www.youtube.com/CityofTucker](http://www.youtube.com/CityofTucker), where I've put together a video tour showcasing some of these improvements.

Also, a special thanks to all who came out on November 20 for our ribbon cutting to celebrate the improvements at Peters Park. I wrote at length about this last month, but the new playground and amenities at this park were truly the result of collaboration and partnership between the City and its neighbors in the Peters Park community. I am excited to see increased use and enjoyment of this park in the months to come.

Lastly, we are gearing up for a very uncertain winter. It is our job to provide the community with recreation options, but it is our most important job to provide those safely. That's why we're going to offer a modified basketball league this winter. Your son or daughter can sign up through December 4 but understand this will not look like what we did last year. Again, caution is the key word. We have had tremendous success with the open pickleball play at Tucker Recreation Center. People are able to sign up online and play with protocols in place to ensure we're not spreading the virus. Pickleball has been one of our biggest successes to date. When you talk about recreational sports on the rise, this is as hot a sport as there is. It is my hope that pickleball will give people a safe outlet to get some exercise during what promises to be a challenging winter.

Thank you for your continued support and we'll see you in 2021!



Rip Robertson and City Manager Tami Hanlin accept the award for Agency of the Year (top left), Ray Rollins accepts the award for Young Professional of the Year (top right), and dozens of community members show up for the ribbon cutting of the newly renovated Peters Park on November 20 (bottom).

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## TUCKER *Community Corner*



**11/30 – 12/18 - Toys for Tots**  
**Hours vary, 4898 Lavista Road**

How can you put a smile on a child's face this Christmas? Drop off new, unwrapped toys for children in need at Tucker Recreation Center and help spread some joy this holiday season.

**12/7 – NETWorks Good Neighbor Food Drive**  
**Hours vary, 4898 Lavista Road**

Be a good neighbor and help NETWorks Cooperative Ministries serve those in our community in need. Shelf stable foods are the biggest need.

**12/11 – Red Cross Blood Drive**  
**3–7 p.m., 4898 Lavista Road**

Give the gift of life this holiday season and donate blood! These events are always popular, so make sure to sign up at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org).