



INTUCKER

AUGUST 2020 | VOLUME 4 | ISSUE 8



#MASKMOVEMENT

FLATTENING THE CURVE IN TUCKER COULD BE AS SIMPLE AS WEARING A MASK

EDITOR'S NOTE



August has always been one of my favorite months. Nice warm weather makes it ideal for going to the pool or beach.

The first college football games get going by the end of the month. And, it's my birthday month!

But when I had kids, I realized another reason to love August, one more glorious than all the others combined: this is the month when the kids go back to school! I know, I feel your enthusiasm about it, too.

Unfortunately, with the pandemic going on, our August joy will be tempered a bit this year. The weather's still warm, but we're social distancing at the pool. The college football season, if it's going to happen, will likely be conference-only. My birthday's still happening, but I'll celebrate surrounded by children who are virtually learning rather than matriculating in a classroom.

On that last point, I was pleased for this issue to get to sit down with new DeKalb County School Superintendent Cheryl Watson-Harris. We got to talk about the decision to restart school virtually, as well as her vision for the school district and her thoughts on where her predecessor left things. It was a revealing conversation with a very forthright woman, and I think it's one that will be good for all DeKalb County parents to read.

So however, and wherever, you are educating your kids this school year, good luck...and happy August!

MATT HOLMES
INTUCKER EDITOR

IN THIS ISSUE



ON THE COVER

The City of Tucker is finding new and innovative ways to encourage its residents to wear a mask. Find out about the #maskmovement on page 10.



SUPERINTENDENT SWITCH

A new leader with a new vision is heading up the DeKalb County School District. Get to know Cheryl Watson-Harris in our extensive interview on page 6.



BUSINESS BOOM

Tucker is a town with some great restaurants, but you might not know about all of the good food and drink manufactured here. On page 12, take a look inside our delicious industrial corridor in the Business Boom.



FRANK TALK

A longtime Smoke Rise resident is using his retirement years to better the community he loves. Get to know our Citizen of the Month on page 9.



ASK RIP

Our Parks and Recreation Department somehow managed to get busier this summer in spite of the coronavirus pandemic. Rip looks at what was anything but a cruel summer on page 15.



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VOLUME 4, ISSUE 8

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Printed by AtlantaPrintandMail.com, Inc.

From the Mayor:

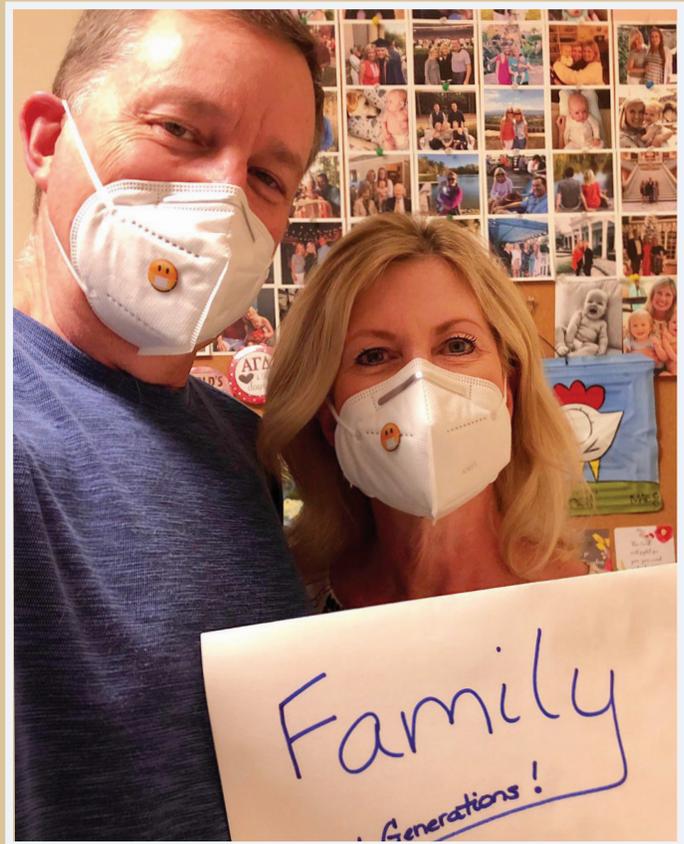
Today we find ourselves at the beginning of August. That means the new school year should be beginning, baseball should be entering the runup to the playoffs, football should be teed up, and fall weddings and festivals should be just around the corner. Instead, it seems school will be pushed back, baseball just had Opening Day, and football may or may not happen at all. Weddings that were postponed from spring or summer may have to be rearranged again, as will our other favorite fall gatherings. Are you frustrated? Just “over” the whole thing? Me too. But we have to keep going. We have to keep living, working, playing and praying.

Throughout human history, people and peoples have had to deal with frustrations like this, and much, much worse. Pandemics, wars, droughts and floods, evil empires, and seemingly insurmountable human conflict and mistreatment have plagued mankind since our beginnings. The resolve to not only survive but to thrive has always come from the character and conduct of individuals. Solving problems and caring for each other is done by people much more than by governments. Our present situation and the solutions it requires are no different in that regard.

As much as we wish it were possible, none of us can solve this alone. There are individuals all over America working on pieces of the solution, from vaccines and therapies to how we can safely return to work, school and social activities, even if under anything but normal circumstances. And you have a part to play. Even if you can't understand the science or make sense of the crazy amount of (often-conflicting) data, research and political posturing, there are three pieces of guidance we can all agree on. They all depend on individuals to do the right thing:

- Keep a safe physical distance between you and people you don't live with
- Wash your hands often
- Wear a mask when you can't keep a safe distance from others

We can't postpone life. We can't cancel everything and hide in our homes forever. We have to find a way to keep going, and science is showing us how. It's clear that if we do these things as individuals, and follow some specific guidelines for certain situations in workplaces, schools and so on, we can continue to earn a living,



learn and grow, and enjoy the company of friends and family even while we wait for the big solutions that will put all this behind us.

Lots of expressions have been coined over the years to help people in a case like ours endure until a brighter day. The British are especially good at it: Keep a Stiff Upper Lip. Keep Calm and Carry on. Don't Give Up the Ship. Those mottos from crises past will serve us well today. We have to get through this without the cost of our liberties, our lives or our livelihoods. We will find our way. And we will find ourselves looking at all this in the rearview mirror. Let's behave now in a way that will make us proud then.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank Auman".

FRANK AUMAN
MAYOR

City Council Update



Mayor Auman swore in new DeKalb County Police Chief Mirtha Ramos at the City Council meeting on July 13. (Credit: tuckerga.gov)

DATES TO KNOW

August 3

Downtown Development Authority

August 10

City Council

August 18

Zoning Board of Appeals

August 19

Municipal Court

August 24

City Council

August 26

Municipal Court

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



 Nextdoor

Tucker's Mayor and City Council met twice in July, tackling several important issues. At the meeting on July 13, Council unanimously passed a millage rate. The City rate, which will remain unchanged at 0.9 mills for the upcoming fiscal year, is allocated for improvements in Tucker's Parks and Recreation Department.

At that meeting on the 13th, they also heard a presentation on a study of the Lawrenceville Highway corridor from Hugh Howell Road to Old Norcross Road, a stretch that encompasses the Cofer Crossing Shopping Center. That study, conducted by consultants from VHB, looked at traffic patterns, signal timing and pedestrian movements and included both short- and long-term recommendations for improvements.

They then voted to award a contract for sidewalk construction along Cowan

Road and Lynburn Drive. That contract was awarded to Construction 57 for \$247,660. Mayor Auman then made a handful of appointments to city boards and commissions. Those appointments were approved with no opposition.

At a special called meeting on July 20, Council voted 6-1 to move toward a Public Works referendum for the March 2021 ballot. The referendum would specifically ask voters if they want the City to take over street and sidewalk repairs from DeKalb County. The stormwater component of Public Works was not included in the vote but could be added into the ballot language at a date closer to election day.

The Mayor and City Council will meet next on Monday August 10 at 7 p.m. at the City Hall Annex (4228 First Avenue).

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

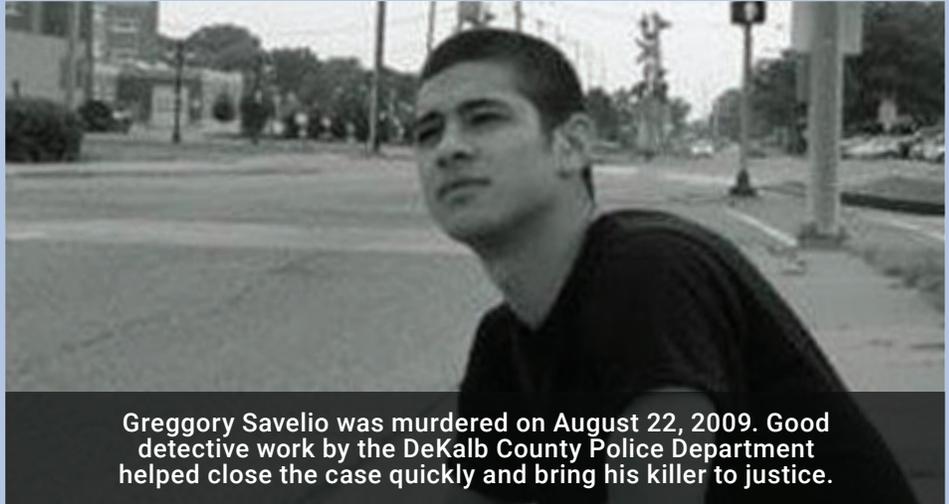


Some of the most memorable experiences

I have had in police work were from when I

was assigned to Homicide. In quite a few of those cases, the victim was committing a crime, or some other sort of poor behavior, which led to their demise. However, sometimes the victims were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Gregory Savelio was one of the latter cases. Although it didn't happen here in Tucker, this month marks 11 years since his murder, and I wanted to reflect on a case that left an indelible impact on me.

On Saturday August 22, 2009 we responded to the Chevron Food Mart at 2450 Candler Road. When officers arrived, they discovered Mr. Savelio suffering from a gunshot wound to his torso. He died on the way to the hospital. After interviewing the witnesses and reviewing the evidence we discovered a couple of things. Surveillance video showed the suspect run away from the incident. He ran around behind the pharmacy next door and got into a dark colored vehicle. Witnesses described a dark colored Buick LeSabre speeding away from the location. They were also able to give a partial tag. When we searched the path the suspect had taken, we found he had left behind a Class of 2008 graduation t-shirt from Columbia High School. Two days later we tracked down the Buick LeSabre. After



Gregory Savelio was murdered on August 22, 2009. Good detective work by the DeKalb County Police Department helped close the case quickly and bring his killer to justice.

interviewing the owner, his son and his son's girlfriend, we concluded that they were simply bystanders fleeing from the gunshots. Several more weeks of following leads came up empty.

I had begun to think this case was going to go unsolved until I received a phone call on October 27. An informant had claimed to have information on this case. When I interviewed her, she said the suspect was named Joseph Thomas. She knew the suspect's brother. The two had been talking about Thomas being arrested for murder in Augusta when the brother told her that he had killed someone in Atlanta, too.

I checked with the Richmond County Sheriff's office and they confirmed that Thomas was lodged there for murder. The circumstances of that crime were very similar to Gregory Savelio's. Even more, the car which Joseph Thomas was in when he was arrested was an exact match to my suspect's vehicle.

The next day I traveled to Richmond County and interviewed Joseph

Thomas. He denied having anything to do with my murder case. In fact, he gave the name of his girlfriend as an alibi.

On October 30 I interviewed Thomas' girlfriend. At first, she denied any involvement with the murder. That was until I asked her what year she had graduated Columbia High School. The t-shirt we had recovered from the crime scene was hers. She had lent it to Joseph Thomas on the day of the murder. After confronting her with this, she finally confessed. She was driving the car when Thomas had committed the murder. Thomas had intended to rob Savelio but shot him without taking a thing.

Joseph Thomas was convicted for the murder of Gregory Savelio on September 20, 2013. It was starting to look like this case was going to go cold, but all it took was one person willing to tell what they knew and the whole case fell into place. I'm glad that I could give that small bit of closure to Gregory's family.

NEW YORK STATE OF MIND

NEW DEKALB SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT BRINGS BIG IDEAS FROM THE BIG APPLE



The search for a new superintendent of DeKalb County schools was a longer process than the Board of Education might have expected. But when the dust cleared, there was one woman standing from that nationwide search. Now, the Board is banking on veteran educator Cheryl Watson-Harris being the right choice to guide the school district through its most challenging time in recent memory.

Watson-Harris spoke with *InTucker* in an extensive interview about her background, her influences, her vision for DeKalb and her efforts to lead in the time of coronavirus.

Q: It looks like you've hit the ground running here in DeKalb County. Tell us what this past month has been like.

A: I was incredibly excited, obviously, to become the new superintendent of the DeKalb County School District. I really have been waiting anxiously to meet our staff and our students and our community members. So, that has been one of my number one priorities to really make sure that I'm getting out and I'm getting to know the people that make up this beautiful school district.

It's an interesting time to become a new superintendent because I have served in a number of leadership roles and I know that your entry should be one of listening and learning and celebrating. So, I'm trying to manage that with the urgency of our times.

Q: You came in and had to make what's going to be one of the toughest decisions of your tenure just right off the bat with the virtual learning. How did you make that decision? What went into it?

A: This has been characteristic of my leadership style. I like to recognize that I'm one member of the team and I also have to ensure that there is community input. So right after that beautiful swearing in ceremony, I was kind of whisked away and

had a meeting that same day with the COVID-19 task force, which was made up of a group internally to really look at the data and help to provide a recommendation of where we would go with the opening of school. That information was triangulated with the community survey that was issued as well as informal feedback from the community, lots and lots of emails, lots and lots of phone calls. Looking at all that information and then pulling it together and considering where I'm coming from, New York City, which was really the epicenter of this pandemic. It's almost as if I have a glimpse into the future of what could happen and wanting to avoid that at all costs for DeKalb County School District.

"I can sleep at night knowing that the decision we made was really to protect our children and our staff."

So, really the data is what ultimately drove our decision. Thinking of the safety of our students and our staff, first and foremost, and just knowing that we needed a little more time. I will say that the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive about the decision. Even though we recognize that our children want to be back in school and we want them back in school.

There's still some community members that are not happy with the decision, but I can sleep at night knowing that the decision we made was really to protect our children and our staff. We're going to continue to revisit this. That's what I'm so excited about our plan is that we've out [of] the gate said every month we're going to continue to revisit the numbers and when it is safe and when we have the right training and when we have the right protocols in place, we will bring everyone back. But not until it is safe for our scholars and our staff.

Q: How satisfied are you with how your predecessor has left things? How much work do you have to do right off the bat?

A: I do want to just say for my immediate predecessor, Mrs. Ramona Tyson, what an incredible person. We didn't really have as much of a transition period as one would expect. We had one week. But I will tell you that we devoted one hour every day...and she was able to share enough information with me that I have been able to hit the ground running.

Looking at student performance, looking at where some of our schools are with state accountability labels, etc., we do have some inequities. That's true all over the country. That's not just true in DeKalb, but that's what I see as my work is to make sure that we're looking at each school community and not providing the same thing to every school community, but really kind of pulling back the onion to see what is it that each school needs to be able to take it to the next level. We don't want to see a map where you have primarily green schools and yellow schools and red schools in terms of performance in such kind of obvious clusters.

We have incredible staff working all throughout the County. We want to make sure that we are looking at the right data, that we're adjusting our practices, that we're providing interventions as needed to ensure that all students are set on their pathway to success.

Q: What were some of the things you were able to do in New York that you think you may be able to bring here and implement in DeKalb County Schools?

A: There are lots of things that I've learned and done and helped to develop with other amazing leaders both in Boston and in New York. And before I answer that question, I will say there's a lot of things that New York and Boston can learn from the staff here in DeKalb County. We have some amazing leaders who are doing amazing things.

I'm working with the team already and a lot of these pieces are already in place, but to this notion of equity and an equitable approach to school improvement, we developed a comprehensive



Buses around DeKalb County will get a late start to the school year as the pandemic has students learning virtually. Superintendent Cheryl Watson-Harris says the virtual learning model will last for at least a month. (Credit: tuckerga.gov)

school support strategy. And really that allowed us to have clear metrics to determine the health of the school, whether it be by academics, building blocks for school improvement, that would be more of like your capital enhancements, and then conditions for learning. That would be more of the social emotional supports, the wraparound services, etc. A lot of those pieces exist currently. I do feel the need for us to pull it together a little bit more comprehensively so that we can look at each school and say this is how we prioritize schools for this type of work and that these are the progress monitoring checks we put in place so that we are assessing our progress towards our goals in real time. That was my legacy work in New York and definitely something I would love to see us tighten up here.

Q: How do you see the role of technology in educating our young people?

A: If I bring this back to our current situation, I believe we have some excellent schools here in DeKalb County that have a STEM and a STEAM focus and we have many teachers and buildings that I have visited that are just outstanding in terms of access to technology. I think in terms of technology and where we need to go to prepare our children for the jobs of the future that many educators, this is not just here in DeKalb, but many educators have

“My goal is to ensure that DeKalb County School District is the number one choice for families”

been reluctant or nervous to kind of enter that space. But this COVID-19 crisis has forced the teachers, educators, students and families to use instructional technology in ways that they really hadn't before. I think that that might be one silver lining from this is that education's never going to look the same after this. We're more educated. We have access to new technologies and tools

that could make us much more efficient.

In terms of maker spaces and 3D printers and engineering, robotics, coding, these are things that we want our children to be exposed to that before had really felt like an add-on or a privilege. So we have to continue to look for ways to make sure that we're looking at our curriculum and we're preparing students to, even if that's not their area of passion, that they all have access to awareness and these types of opportunities just as they do with their arithmetic and their reading because that really is what's going to be required of them in the future. So we'll continue to look at ways to increase access to technology.

Q: How do you know you've been successful?

A: In terms of how I assess if I am successful and if the district is successful is really we have to start with our strategic plan. We have a strategic plan here in [the] DeKalb County School District. Do we want to tweak it just a little bit? Do we want to tighten up in certain places? Absolutely. But we have a plan with clear identified goals and we have to ensure that the practices and the things that we're doing are working towards us meeting those goals. So, the progress monitoring, the benchmarking and regular assessment of progress towards those goals will let us know if we're successful.

Embedded in that are data points: graduation rates, student attendance, suspensions, as well as not only academic achievement, but growth. If you're an A student, we want to make sure your growth matches the other A students throughout the district and throughout the state. So, I'm very big on that, cycles of continuous improvement, you know, I never want to rest on our laurels, I always want us to be moving forward and to be sure that we're monitoring our progress in real time.

Ultimately, and I've said this from the very beginning, my goal is to ensure that DeKalb County School District is the number one choice for families, that we have a beautiful portfolio of schools and that every family in DeKalb can find a school that they say, "this is a great match for my family and this would be my number one choice." When that happens, I know I'll be successful.



Cheryl Watson-Harris
DeKalb School Superintendent



Matt Holmes
Tucker Communications Director



YouTube

Watch the full interview complete with extras on our YouTube channel, youtube.com/cityoftucker.

CITIZEN OF THE MONTH

FRANK LUTON

Some people retire looking for rest and relaxation, sitting on a beach sipping cold beverages. Not so for Tucker resident Frank Luton. Once he retired from his management position with Bell South, he couldn't wait to dive into some meaningful projects that allowed him to give back to the community he loves. Having an entrepreneurial bent, he started his own consulting firm helping companies develop new ideas and think outside their comfort zones. One of his methods was taking groups rock climbing in the Rockies to get them out of their corporate environments.

Almost 20 years ago, when his Smoke Rise neighbors banded together to create an 18-hole golf course and country club on 175 acres of rolling hills the Cofers helped preserve for this purpose, he and his wife Barbara were there and have been steadfast supporters over the years. Frank served as President of the Smoke Rise Community Association that maintains the chimneys, mini-lending libraries and conducts other civic projects throughout Smoke Rise. Afterwards, he served as both its Past President and Board Member.

Seeing a need to preserve our past, Frank has served as the President of the Stone Mountain Historical Society and later as its Past President and Board member. And in service to our Tucker businesses from before we were a city, Frank served as an officer of the Tucker Community Association. As if that wasn't enough, he has been a Rotarian for many years having served as president of the Sandy Springs Rotary Club and as a member of the Stone Mountain Club.

He is a guest contributor to the Smoke Signal, our community paper that is delivered monthly to 2,300 Smoke Rise homes. In addition, he has just taken on the role of managing the paper's relationships with its many advertisers.

Frank has also been involved with the City of Tucker by serving on the Community Council, as well as on the current Census Complete Count Committee.

When not volunteering for these many good causes, Frank is President of his Dixie Dollar Investment Club,



and you might see him working the cash register at the Friends of the Disabled Adults and Children (FODAC) Thrift Store on Lewis Drive in Tucker.

An avid walker, Frank can be seen out and about in our community all times of the day. During these walks, he documents his surroundings in photographs that he provides for content in the Smoke Signal. Neighbors are probably unaware that on his walks, he also helps keep our community tidy by taking down illegally placed signs along our roadways or on our power poles. We are so fortunate having a neighbor like Frank!

Nomination by Susan Gilbert

CREATING A MOVEMENT

CITY OF TUCKER PUSHING RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES TO “MASK UP” DURING THE PANDEMIC

“You do not want to have this disease.”

Those are the words of Dr. Joshy Jacob, a professor of microbiology and immunology who has spent the past several months studying the coronavirus at Emory University. Jacob has said those words countless times in his role as a member of the Mayor’s Coronavirus Advisory Board here in Tucker. And they are words that Mayor Frank Auman has taken to heart.

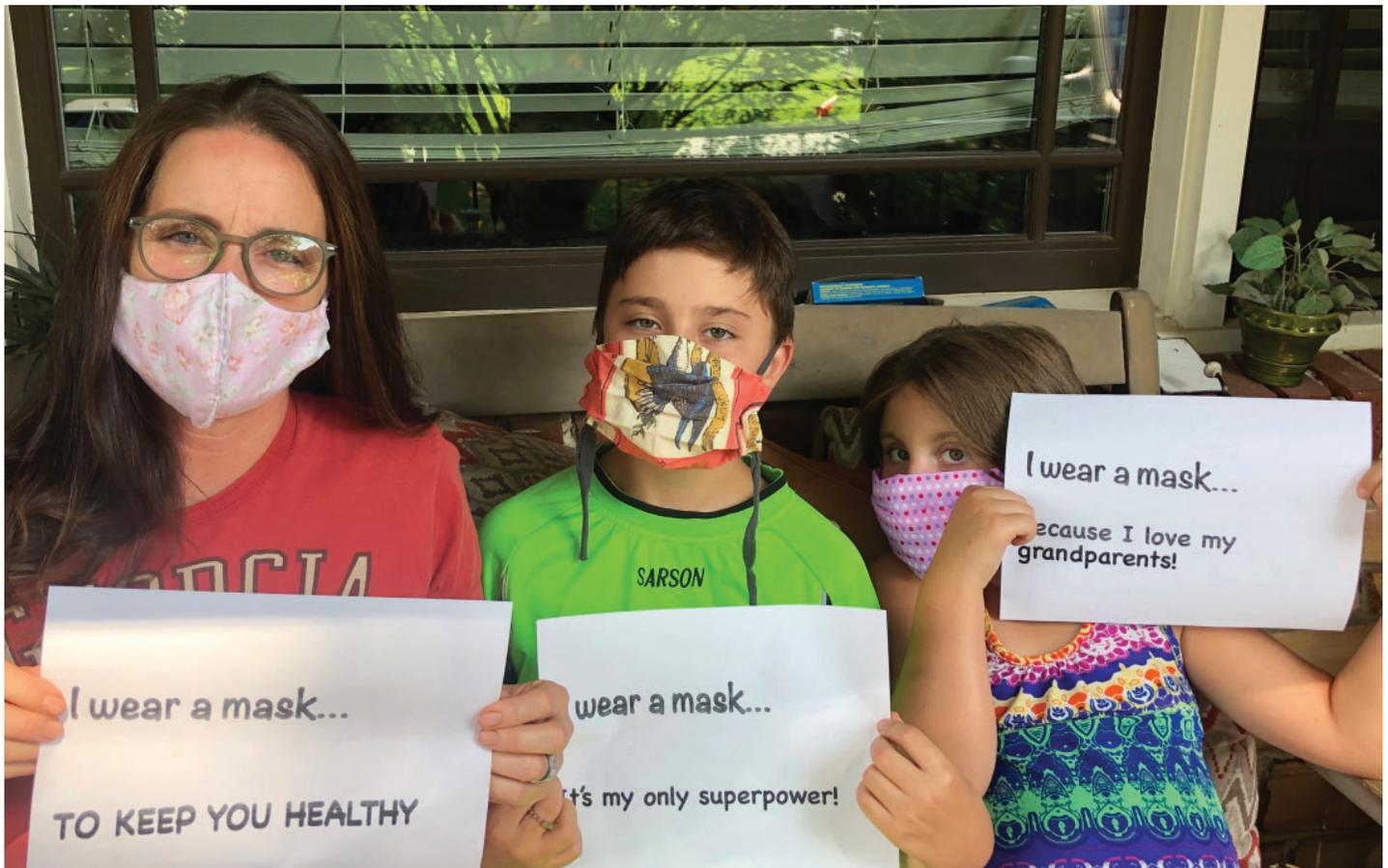
At the Mayor’s urging, the City Communications Department launched a public information campaign last month to encourage all Tucker residents and business owners to wear masks in public.

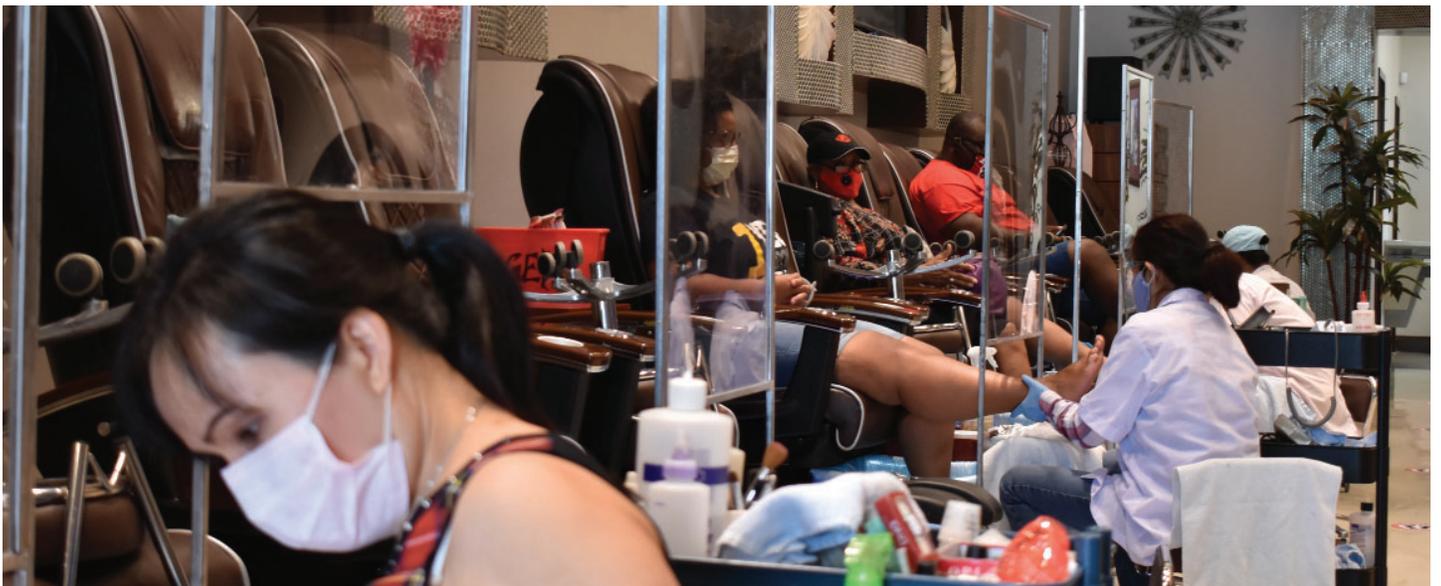
Dubbing it the “Mask Movement”, the message has been spread via social media, billboards and now here in print. The effort is designed to meet the Mayor’s goal of having “more people wearing more masks more of the time” to flatten the curve during this pandemic.

The biggest effort so far was a video produced by the City featuring several local children wearing masks and stating reasons why wearing a mask can make life better for everyone. Each of the kids is a rising fifth-grader, leading Mayor Auman to walk on camera and cleverly ask “are you smarter than a fifth grader?”

While more of that type of outreach is coming, the City continues to work to put masks in the hands of those who need them most. In late July, the City’s Economic Development team distributed 1,200 masks to eight Tucker restaurants. Unlike previous mask distributions, these masks are not for the restaurant employees, but for patrons who come in and may not have a mask to wear. A much larger mask distribution effort is in the offing for August and in the months ahead.

It will be a long road to emerge from this pandemic, but Tucker is banking on doing its part through getting everyone involved in the #maskmovement.





BUSINESS BOOM

by John McHenry, Community and Economic Development Director



What many may not know as they crisscross city roads is that there is a great deal of food

made and distributed right out of the City of Tucker. From fresh bread to fortune cookies to Mountain Dew, they are all part of the national food manufacturing and distribution that is found in our backyard. During the pandemic, there has been an obvious stress on these businesses as they step up and meet all new safety requirements.

The PepsiCo Operations plant at 166 Rock Mountain Boulevard always starts with a "Safety First" mindset and now have put additional actions in place including advanced Personal Protective Equipment, intensive cleaning and sanitation throughout the facility, elimination of large group meetings to ensure social distancing management, and stringent health and wellness protocols to ensure that any COVID-19 contact or potential contact is properly managed to minimize spread of the virus. Still, the plant has remained 100 percent fully operational since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and even increased staffing to support increased business demand.

"This has been a tough time because employee and product safety is our number one priority, but we have leveraged our local trade and community networks to share best practices and problem solve issues including collaboration with the Tucker Summit Community Improvement District, the DeKalb Chamber, the Georgia Beverage Association, the Georgia Food Industry Association and the Georgia Association of Convenience Stores," said Plant Manager Skip Vaughn. "We'll come out of this stronger and safer."

Further south is Dai Sing Noodles at 5430 East Ponce de Leon Avenue, which produces fortune cookies, egg roll skins, wonton skins and Lo Mein noodles. This 20-year-old company is the largest producer of fortune cookies in the



southeast and, as their products are sold to restaurants, they have seen a drastic decrease in sales. President Sam Kok is taking the long view, as he loves his convenient location in Tucker.

"I grew up in a family that owned Chinese restaurants, but this is a niche commodity supported by my other businesses currently," Kok explained. "I'm looking to good fortune and a full return to eating out."

Further to the east is Thermo Pac, which provides ready to eat meal products including peanut butter, salsa, and jelly in a cup or pouch. They have experienced a record-breaking year with large contracts from the United States Department of Agriculture for school lunches. Like other food manufacturers, they have included mandatory practices of temperature taking, mask wearing, distance separation, hair nets, smocks, and hand and shoe sanitizers. They are continuing to increase their workforce and are currently looking for mechanics and operation technicians.

"Tucker has good public transit access, and we have a very stable work force with employees that have been with the company for many years," said Director of Operations Victor Ortega. "We're vigilant on addressing safety precautions during this pandemic but see a bright future here in Tucker."

So wherever you're dining, and whatever cuisine it might be, know that some of that food may have been created and packaged right here in Tucker.

BUSINESS OF THE MONTH

HOT BETTY'S

The newest restaurant on Tucker's Main Street is getting as much buzz for its name as it is for the food.

"Everybody asks me if I'm Betty," says Shea Powell, the restaurant's owner.

In reality, the restaurant is named after Powell's grandmother, whose name was Betty, but was never actually referred to as "Hot Betty". Powell opened the restaurant this summer with business partner Wes McNeil. Together, they say this was a concept that was several years in the making.

"I moved to Tucker in 2016 and it was my goal to open a breakfast spot," McNeil, who doubles as the restaurant's executive chef, says.

"We definitely want to make this a staple here in Tucker," Powell adds.

Powell is a true multitasker, juggling six children with running a construction company and a nonprofit. And she's looking to get even busier, with plans to expand Hot Betty's hours to include dinner service.

"I never thought I was going to end up in the restaurant business," Powell says. "I don't know what the hell I was thinking."

Although she's new to the food service game, Powell's restaurant has already created plenty of buzz here in Tucker and around the metro area. One look at Tucker Town Talk shows that people far and wide have already given Hot Betty's a try and are happy with what they've tasted.

"We're starting to get regulars," Powell explains. "People will come in once or twice a week."

When you come, McNeil says to try the chicken and waffles, which are a bestseller. Powell says her favorite dish is the crab and avocado salad.

Hot Betty's Breakfast Bar is open for dine-in or carryout at 2316 Main Street. You can find them online at www.hotbettystucker.com.



TEAM TUCKER *Spotlight*

JOSEPH BLACKWELL, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

What is your background in Information Technology?

I have always been interested in computers and technology. It was only a hobby of mine until several years ago when I joined InterDev, where I was part of the Commercial Services division. Then I was given the opportunity to join the Tucker team, which has been a great experience!

What are your day-to-day responsibilities on the job?

I keep our IT systems updated and secure, keeping up with new trends in the industry, and resolving any technology related issues. And Zoom meetings...oh, the Zoom meetings!

What was your role in Tucker's move to a new City Hall?

My role in the move was quite involved! I worked with our security and A/V vendors to create an overall plan for the new building and did my part to implement that plan. Setup all the computer systems for the staff, overhauled our printing system and installed all the needed IT infrastructure. There is still a list of things to do, and I can already see improvements we can make as we grow.

What are the advantages and downsides to being the office IT guy?

There are many advantages. I get to steer our technology choices in a direction that makes sense for the City. I get to work with some fancy equipment, but I'm still waiting to get my hands on that GIS drone. And of course, everyone loves the IT guy...I think?

There is only one real disadvantage: pressure! This is an always on, 24/7 job.

How do you keep track of the changing trends and technologies in your field?

When I have free time, I have a few websites I use to keep up on tech news and trends or watch videos from large tech conferences. But lately I've been listening to podcasts in the car. It's a constant moving target. Going forward, I think video meetings and working remotely will be more popular, even after the world gets back to normal. Which will be just another thing to keep up with.



Off the Wall

What do you do in your free time?

Two of my favorite things are movies and gaming, so it's always a toss-up between the two. Due to the lack of live sports since COVID hit I've been trying out iRacing. I have a decent steering wheel and I have been enjoying it even though I'm really not that good. I also have a backlog of sci-fi audiobooks I need to get through.

What is your favorite animal?

Dogs, no question. I've always had a dog since I was a kid. Right now, I have a Great Dane at home and he is awesome. He is a huge dog, so taking him for a walk is always entertaining because people see him and stop in place. But he's also the most gentle dog I've ever encountered; the worst he would do to you is drool on your shoulder.

What is your favorite sport?

Football! College football to be precise. Fall Saturdays I watch as many games as I can, all day long. My man cave has six screens so I can watch multiples at once. I grew up in Alabama, so I've been a Crimson Tide fan as far back as I can remember. Roll Tide!

“ASK RIP”

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.



These past few months the pandemic has presented many challenges and opportunities for our Parks and Recreation Department. When I talk about challenges, I'm talking about having to cancel so many of our great community activities. Our recreation

center, typically a hub of activity for people of all ages and interests, has been shuttered for months. Similarly, our playgrounds and tennis courts were closed for a time. It's been really difficult for us as a staff, as we are accustomed to the spring and summer being prime time for Parks and Recreation fun.

But amidst the challenges, we've been able to do a lot of innovative things. By now you know about our "Stay Away Series" and summer programming offerings. You might not know about the work of our summer intern. Jackson Gibbs is a senior at Young Harris College studying Outdoor Leadership. We've never had an intern here at the Tucker Parks and Recreation Department and

Jackson has certainly made the most of his time with us so far. Last month he initiated the "Family Camping Series" where he organized a guided hike, campfire cookout and family campout. It doesn't matter that the events were successful – they were – but what strikes me is the initiative that this young man took in making the most of his summer internship. What an asset to our parks program and our city!

I also want to note how well everyone has handled our summer pool season. Because of COVID, we devised a reservation system for our pools to ensure that people would be socially distant while still enjoying some summertime recreation. When you consider that we traditionally just show up at the pool, present our pass, and go on in, it's complicated to have to go online and schedule your visit ahead of time. But that's exactly what hundreds of you have done at Kelley Cofer and Smoke Rise Pools. We appreciate you taking the extra step, taking extra precautions and coming out to have a great time. I want to promise you that we are looking just as forward as you are to getting things back to normal next summer.



Masks and plastic sneeze guards are among the many safety measures taken this summer at Tucker's public swimming pools. (Credit: tuckerga.gov)



TUCKER *Community Corner*



Dozens of people entered their best Tucker snapshots in the City's photography contest this summer. The winning photos, shown above, will be displayed throughout Tucker's new City Hall.