



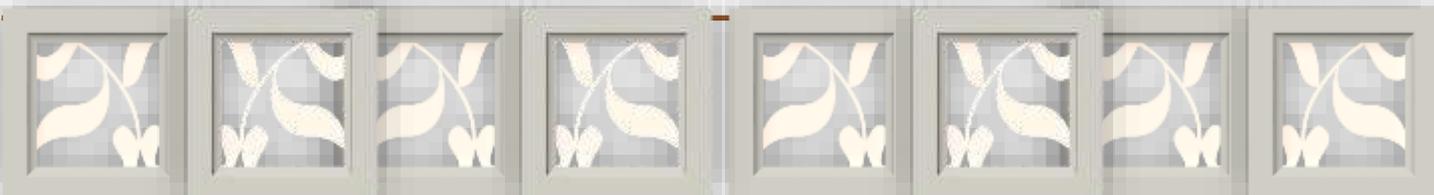
IN THE NEWS

December 2019

Parks & Recreation Programs
Frances Meadows Aquatic and Community Center
Gainesville Civic Center
Lake Lanier Olympic Center
City / County Issues
Miscellaneous

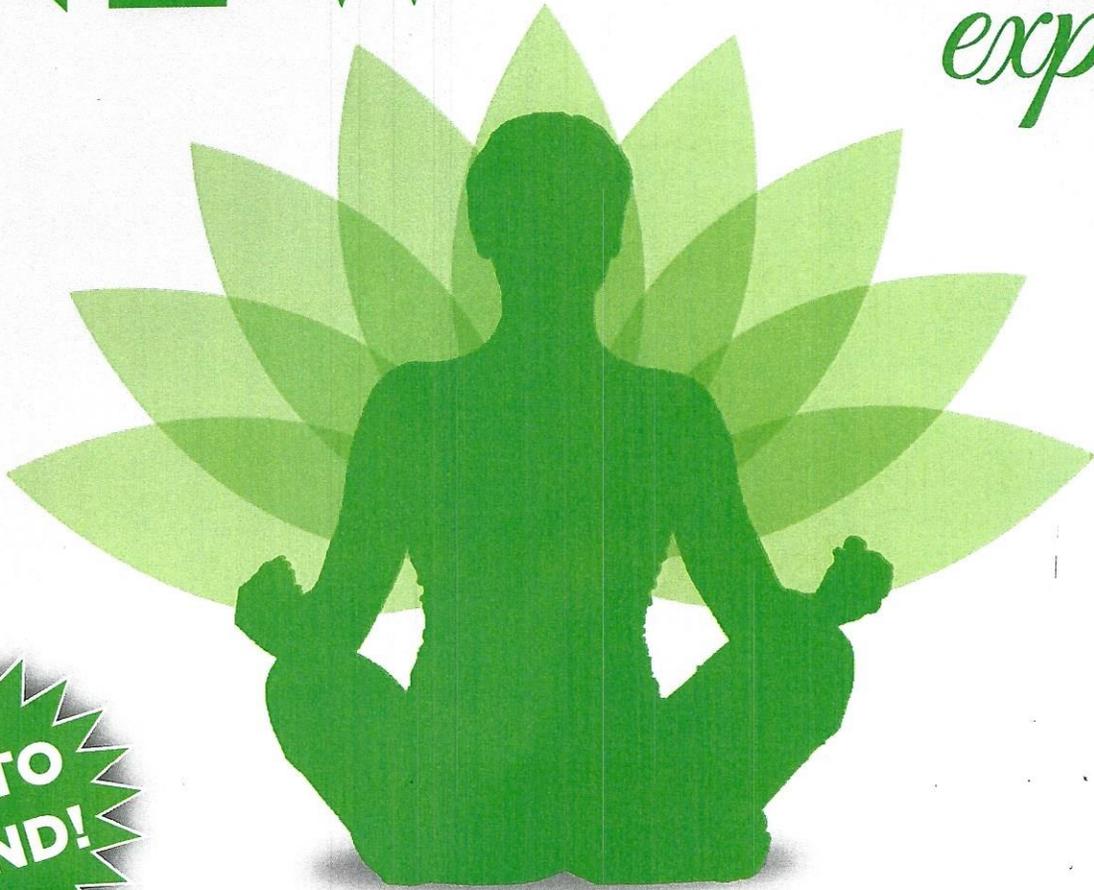


Gainesville Parks and Recreation Agency
830 Green Street
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new year
NEW YOU
expo



**FREE TO
ATTEND!**

January 8, 2020

Gainesville Civic Center

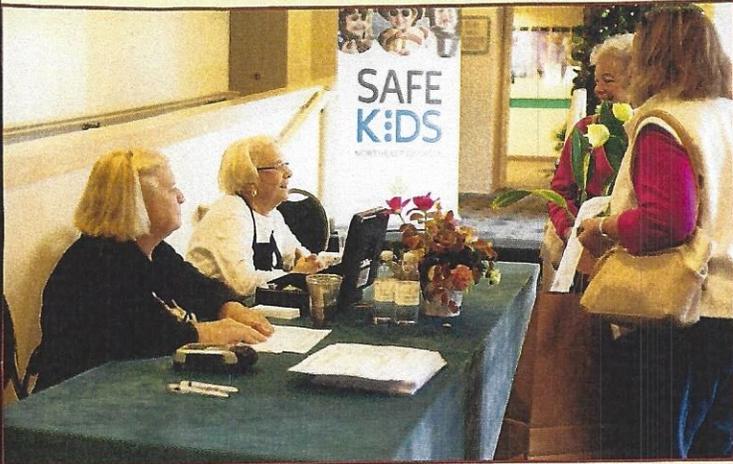
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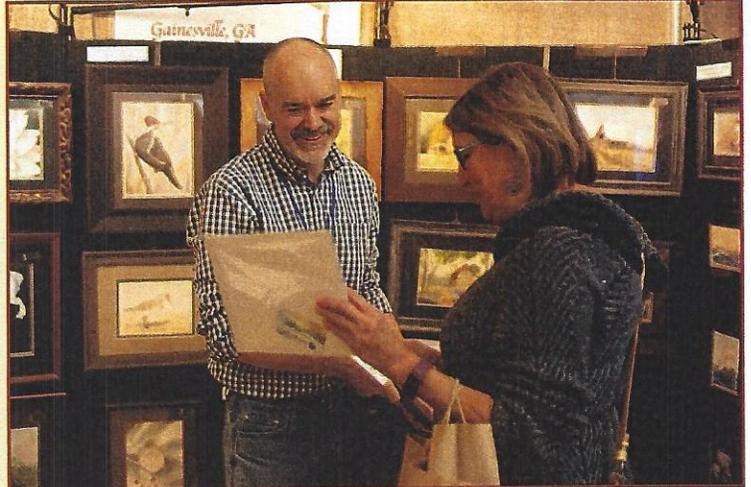
For information on becoming a vendor, please
contact Leah Nelson at 770-535-6330, or
LNelson@gainesvilletimes.com

AROUND TOWN

MARKETPLACE PREVIEW PARTY



NGHS volunteers greeting Marketplace attendees



Marketplace Preview Party attendees.



Shoppers at Marketplace

One hundred percent of proceeds for the 2019 marketplace event will benefit Safe Kids Northeast Georgia, led by Northeast Georgia Health System.

Take the plunge



Lanier's ice-cold event back for 22nd year

BY LAYNE SALIBA
lsaliba@gainesvilletimes.com

After a less-than-polar event in February, the upcoming Polar Bear Plunge is hoping to live up to its name. The 22nd edition of the New Year's Day event at the Lake Lanier Olympic Park is set for noon on New Year's Day on the boat-house side of the park.

Registration is \$30 per person or \$90 per family and includes an event T-shirt and plenty of warm food and drinks for those who pre-register.

"It seems like the last few years, I think partially because of date changes due to the lake level being all over the place and debris, it's kind of lost a little bit of its luster," said Jim O'Dell, organizer for the event and high performance and dragon boat coach with Lanier Canoe and Kayak Club. "So, this year ... we're actually going back with a theme, which we haven't done in the last few years."

This year's theme is, "Is Your Vision 20-20 for the New Year, New Decade?" O'Dell said the usual awards — best jump, best costume, youngest jumper, oldest jumper — will be given out at the Polar Bear Plunge along with a new award this year for the biggest glasses

worn while jumping.

The 2019 event was postponed and held a month later than normal because rain flooded the area and made it unsafe to jump in the water. That made for about 60-degree waters with the air temperature hovering around 50 degrees.

This year, things might be much of the same, but state climatologist said it's hard to tell.

"Right now, we're in this pattern of pretty good temperature swings," Murphy said. "That being said, we are settling down a little bit this week and the next, maybe the next seven to 10 days, with some cooler temperatures."

Whether that carries through the New Year or not, the water temperatures are what can be surprising.

"Once you get down about a foot or so, it will take your breath away," O'Dell said.

The delayed 2019 event only brought out 17 participants — a much lower number than the 40 who had pre-registered and the 50 that participated the year before. This year, O'Dell is hoping to be back to a long list of names ready to take the plunge. So far, 11 have registered.

"For many people, it's just that chal-

lenge of starting the year trying something absolutely nuts and brand new," he said.

The event serves as a fundraiser for LCKC and supports the club's events throughout the year, and this year in particular is important.

"As we head into qualifiers for the Tokyo Olympics, we actually have some athletes who have a pretty decent shot of going to qualifying events and making an impact," O'Dell said. "And we'll be hosting both the Canadian Olympic Trials and the U.S. National Team Trials in the spring."

George Wangemann's name has been a constant on the list of jumpers and club supporters over the years. Without fail, no matter the weather or date of the event, the 68-year-old is there to take the plunge. He's jumped 19 times, so this year will be somewhat of an anniversary for him as he jumps in the water for his 20th year in a row.

He said he'd seen it back in 1974 on Lake Michigan when he was visiting his hometown and thought they should do it on Lake Lanier, too. More than two decades later, the event made its way to Gainesville.

"I've often thought that this is a good way to gauge my health," Wangemann

Polar Bear Plunge

When: Noon, New Year's Day;
Check-in and on-site registration
at 10:45 a.m.

Where: Lake Lanier Olympic
Park, 3105 Clarks Bridge Road,
Gainesville

How much: \$30 per person
or \$90 for family of four

More info: www.lckc.org/polar-bear-plunge

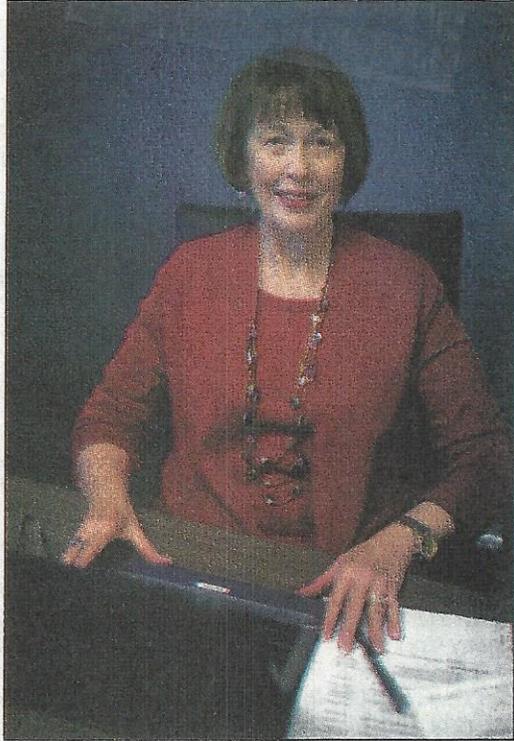
said, laughing.

He only missed the first two years of the event because he said it wasn't open to the public. A few years later, when he could finally participate, he remembers it being one of the coldest.

"Back then we had a most jumps contest and I had 40 jumps," he said. "We actually had to shove the ice away and it was snowing that day. It was about 26 degrees if I remember correctly, and the water temperature was probably about 39 or 40 degrees, so it was good and cold."

If you're looking for tips from a veteran, Wangemann said he wears short sleeve shirts to work when it's cold out and takes cold showers every now and then, "but that's the best you can do and I don't think that helps all that much."

"There is no trick," he added. "You just have to do it. You have to get your courage up, grit your teeth and just jump in."



SCOTT ROGERS | The Times

Gainesville City Council member Ruth Bruner is retiring after 16 years serving on the Council. She was first elected in 2003 and was mayor from 2010 to 2011. She also served on the Gainesville City Schools Board of Education from 1991 to 2000.

Bruner ready to pass torch after 16 years

BY MEGAN REED
mreed@gainesvilletimes.com

After 16 years on the Gainesville City Council, Ruth Bruner is retiring, but she said she is looking forward to seeing progress in years to come.

"This is really a bittersweet time for me, because I really, in a lot of ways, hate to go off the Council," Bruner said. "... I just really felt like it was time for somebody else to come in. At 16 years, it's been a long time."

Juli Clay, assistant vice president of executive programs at Brenau University, will be filling Bruner's seat and is set to be sworn in Jan. 7.

Bruner was first elected in 2003 and was mayor from 2010 to 2011. She also served on the Gainesville City Schools Board of Education from 1991 to 2000.

Bruner's father and brother served in the South Carolina State Senate, so she said she grew up around the issues and became interested in government. That inspired her to run for office, along with encouragement from her friend Emily "Sissy" Lawson, a former mayor and council member who had appointed Bruner to the school board. At the time, school board members were appointed by city officials.

"I've always been really interested in politics and just loved the community and decided I wanted to serve. I didn't really have any issue or agenda," Bruner said.

The South Carolina native moved to Gainesville in 1974. Her husband Robert is a dentist, and they moved to the area after learning about a need for more dentists in the city.

They have now lived in Gainesville for 45 years, and Bruner said she has found the community to be welcoming.

"We have found the people to be very warm. There's a lot of volunteerism in Gainesville. People are willing to give their time and their money. They're just very involved in the community in all kinds of different ways," she said. "I also like the proximity to the mountains and to Atlanta and to the lake. It's a great location. I like the size of Gainesville. We're not too big. We still have a small-town feel, and that we're not so close to Atlanta that we become sort of subsumed."

While she likes the small-town environment in Gainesville, she said she has seen the city change over the years.

"When we first moved here, there were hardly any restaurants, fast food or anything like that. There were a couple," she said. "Thompson Bridge Road was two-lane, and there wasn't all the infilling of development like there is now."

Bruner said some highlights of her time on the Council include spending time with fellow council members — "I've gotten close with the people on the Council. I'll miss them," she said — and meeting officials from other cities through the Georgia

BRUNER

■ Continued from 10

Municipal Association. The Frances Meadows Aquatic Center, which opened in 2008, was also exciting for her, she said.

She said she also anticipates seeing growth in midtown and downtown, fueled by the Gainesville Renaissance development on the square and a multi-use project on the midtown end of the Jesse Jewell Parkway pedestrian bridge and the former Hall County Jail lot off Main Street. The city is selling the former jail site and the land near the bridge to an Atlanta developer.

"I think that's really going to change the face of Gainesville ... which will make the whole downtown and midtown area look different and be more populated, and that will bring in more services for the people that live downtown," she said.

Starting those developments will hopefully inspire others to build, she said.

"I think it's going to be a domino effect and people will start filling in and living downtown more, and there will be more to do downtown," she said.

The lot at Jesse Jewell Parkway and West Academy Street, currently home to Engine 209, also has potential, Bruner said. The city is considering relocating the train so the property can

be developed.

"We would love to be able to move the train to midtown and develop that whole block right there. I think that's a great spot for, hopefully, some housing or maybe a small grocery store," she said.

The city took over Lake Lanier Olympic Park earlier this year and has plans for renovations at the property that can help it accommodate larger events. Bruner said she anticipates seeing that come to fruition.

"We have some really great plans to make that a regional attraction for meetings, weddings and conferences. It's just going to be so much better than what's out there," Bruner said. "I'm really proud of the way we've taken on the Olympic Park as the city, and we have plans to stabilize it and make it better."

She said she has enjoyed her time on the Council but wants to retire and allow for new leadership.

"I'm really excited, even though I won't be on the Council, to see all that. I'll still be here, and I'll still be enthusiastic and involved and looking at everything that is going to be happening," she said.

She said she plans to spend time with family, continue teaching bridge lessons and stay in tune with city government. Bruner is retired from a career as a social worker and owner of a nursing agency.

'Stand in solidarity'

Anti-bullying group backs mom arrested over video

BY KELSEY PODO
kpodo@gainesvilletimes.com

Concerned mothers packed into the conference room Thursday night at Gainesville's Newtown Florist Club to raise their voices in support of Cirea Oliver, who was charged this week with making terroristic threats after posting a video railing against Gainesville

Middle School on Facebook.

The group of mothers call themselves Parents Rebuilding the Village. Kelly Williams, a member of the organization, said they formed it because of their concerns about bullying in the school district.

Oliver says in the video that she made it in response to her son being bullied.

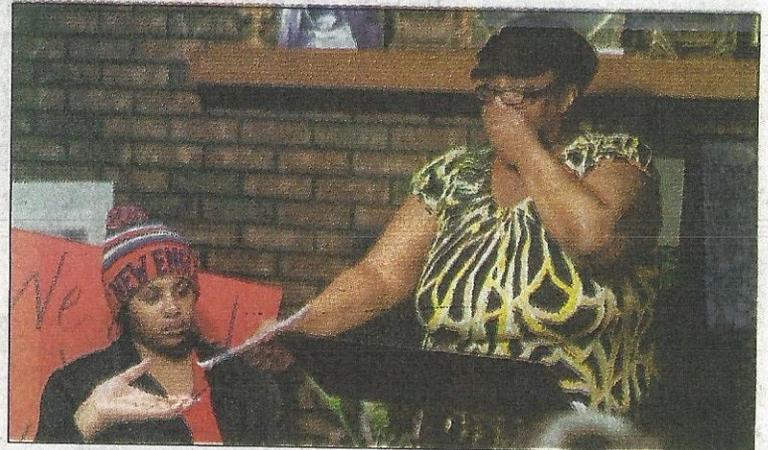
Williams said the group wants to

make sure their children receive a quality education, and they are committed to helping "rebuild this village."

Williams stated the purpose of the meeting, loud and clear.

"We stand in solidarity today in support of ... Oliver, whose son was the target of continuous bullying," Williams said. "We want to ensure

■ Please see **SUPPORT, 5A**



SCOTT ROGERS | The Times
Kimberly Ruffin gets emotional while speaking Thursday, Dec. 19, during a Newtown Florist Club meeting.

12-20-19

SUPPORT

■ Continued from 1A

that she and her son receive the support and have the resources she has so desperately cried for."

Williams followed with a warning to parents.

"No matter how distressed you are, you cannot and must not make threats intended to harm another person on Facebook or any other social media," Williams said. "It is a criminal offense and you will be arrested."

Oliver's video was posted about 12:30 p.m. Monday.

"It wasn't too long after that that our officers were informed of this video that went live, where she does make threats," Gainesville Police Cpl. Jessica Van said.

Van said comments in the video were "insinuating that she was going to shoot multiple people at the school." In the video, which was obtained by The Times, Oliver says she has voiced her concerns to teachers and the principal "numerous times."

Oliver's mom, Kimberly Ruffin also spoke on behalf of her daughter. Ruffin thanked the organization for supporting Oliver.

"She didn't know she had this much love in Gainesville," she said.

Ruffin said she felt as though her grandson's problem was swept under the rug by the school system.

She said Oliver did all she could to help her son, including contacting the school on multiple occasions and finding him a counselor, psychiatrist and mentor. But, nothing stopped the bullying.

"We did the steps that



SCOTT ROGERS | The Times

Kelly Williams speaks during a Newtown Florist Club meeting Thursday, Dec. 19, to discuss the incident involving Cirea Oliver.

we're supposed to do, but it still kept happening the eight hours he was at school," Ruffin said. "... What are we supposed to do? I'm sorry to say, it (Gainesville City Schools) ain't doing the job for me and my grandson."

Earlier this week, Superintendent Jeremy Williams said the school cannot speak to specific student situations, but the district uses established procedures for bullying.

"Our focus is ensuring supports are available to students if needed," Williams said. "We encourage our students and staff to inform appropriate personnel when the potential for services arise."

But Willie Mitchell, a member of Gainesville's school board who attended the meeting, was more blunt.

"I do feel as a school board member that the school system dropped the ball on this one," Mitchell said.

He gave the group of moth-

ers some suggestions for shining light on Oliver's situation and dealing with bullying.

He encouraged them to look over the district's bullying policies, then come before the school board. Mitchell told the group to let the board know that they dropped the ball and explain what they can do to improve the situation.

He also advised them to gather proof showing that Oliver contacted teachers and Gainesville Middle's principal on multiple occasions.

"I think this is a great beginning," Mitchell said. "Rose (The Rev. Johnson) knows I've always said that the only way that we're going to get our fair share in the school system is not by this person that you elected to be on the board, but by the community and us working together to make that happen. I applaud y'all for doing this. You've got all the support that I can give you."

Parents Rebuilding the Village will have a community meeting about school bullying and discipline with superintendent Williams and a panel of community leaders at 6 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 30, at the Fair Street Neighborhood Center.

If parents want to discuss the problems they're having with their school system, the organization encourages them to call Newtown Florist Club's office at 770-718-1343 or email newtown193@gmail.com

12-20-19

Gainesville building pond along Midtown Greenway

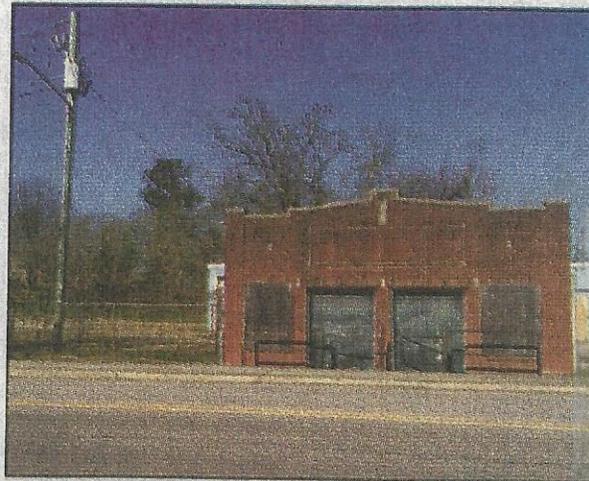
BY MEGAN REED
mreed@
gainesvilletimes.com

Gainesville Water Resources is building a new stormwater pond near the Midtown Greenway that will help with water quality along Flat Creek and serve as a feature along the greenway.

The Gainesville City Council voted Tuesday to acquire the 0.4-acre property at 422 Banks St. from Liberty Utilities, which no longer uses the property. The city is paying \$95,000 for the land, which is near the Public Safety Complex and along the Midtown Greenway.

Water Resources Director Linda MacGregor said the property is on the upper end of Flat Creek, and the pond will filter stormwater.

"It used to be just that ponds were for water quantity, so all they did was provide a place for the water to flow down, and they were usually



MEGAN REED | The Times

Gainesville will be acquiring a property on Banks Street near the Midtown Greenway for a stormwater pond to be built in 2020.

ugly. Some of them were even totally (made of) concrete," MacGregor said. "... Now, the design of ponds has a natural element to it that filters the stormwater."

The pond is still being designed but will include some plants around the top and sand underneath it for filtration.

"If you drove by it when it's complete, you wouldn't say, 'that's doing water quality.' You would just say they planted some nice plants there," MacGregor said.

Construction on the pond is set to begin in the summer and should take about nine months, MacGregor said.

12-19-19

• The American Red Cross Gainesville Community upcoming Blood Drives are Tuesday, December 17 and Friday, December 27 (9:00am – 3:00pm) at Gainesville Parks & Rec's Martha Hope Cabin, 528 Prior Street in Gainesville. The Red Cross has a CRITICAL NEED for blood products, and your donation can impact up to 3 patients in need. Appointments: 1-800-REDCROSS or visit redcrossblood.org (locate the "find a drive" in the upper right corner & enter GVILLECOM).

12-19-19

City staff approves \$2.95M in funding for downtown square project, park

BY MEGAN REED

mreed@gainesvilletimes.com

The development on the "fourth side of the square" in Gainesville could be getting \$2.95 million in tax allocation district funding, if the Gainesville City Council approves it Jan. 7.

The funding was approved by the city's TAD committee Friday, and the council will have the final vote.

Gainesville Renaissance, set to break ground in spring 2020, will have 15,000 square feet of restaurant and retail space on the first floor, 15,000 square feet of office space on the second floor and eight condominiums on the third floor. The \$22.4 million project is due to be finished around August 2021.

The development is a collaboration between developer Fred Roddy, Doug Ivester and The Melvin Douglas and Victoria Kay Ivester Foundation. Ivester is from the New Holland area of Gainesville and is a former Coca-Cola chairman.

Roddy had requested about \$3.35 million in TAD funding from the city at a Dec. 3 TAD committee meeting, but the committee decided to table the request to have more time to



Rendering courtesy Gainesville City Council

The Gainesville Renaissance project is designed to have 15,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space on the ground floor, 15,000 square feet of office space on the second floor and eight condominiums on the third floor.

consider it. City staff had first recommended that the full request be approved, but after discussion with developers decided to offer \$2.95 million in funding and some assistance with building a "pocket park" at the development.

Under the agreement, the city and the developers will each be

responsible for paying at least \$150,000 toward the pocket park, which will be a small gathering space between Gainesville Renaissance and the Hall County Courthouse, leading from the downtown square to Roosevelt Square. If the park ends up costing more than \$300,000 to build, the city will make up the differ-

ence. The city will also have final approval over the pocket park design.

Roddy said at Friday's meeting that the budget for the pocket park has not been finalized.

"We want it to be first-class through there and something that everybody is happy with and the city is happy with," Roddy said.

The \$2.95 million in TAD funding would be paid over a 13-year period, beginning when the certificate of occupancy for the building is issued.

Tax allocation districts allow developers and property owners to use property tax payments toward improvements on a property. Participating properties are taxed at the rate established in the TAD's base year, which is 2006 for Gainesville's midtown TAD that includes the square.

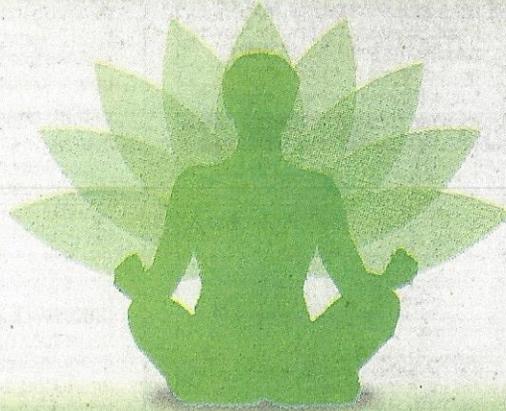
As the value of that property increases, what would normally be a higher amount paid in property taxes goes into the TAD fund for an agreed upon period of time. Developers apply to participate and if approved can use increments from the fund for property improvements, usually over a period of three to 15 years, depending on the size of the investment.

12-22-19

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NEW YOU
expo

January 8, 2020
Gainesville Civic Center
10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

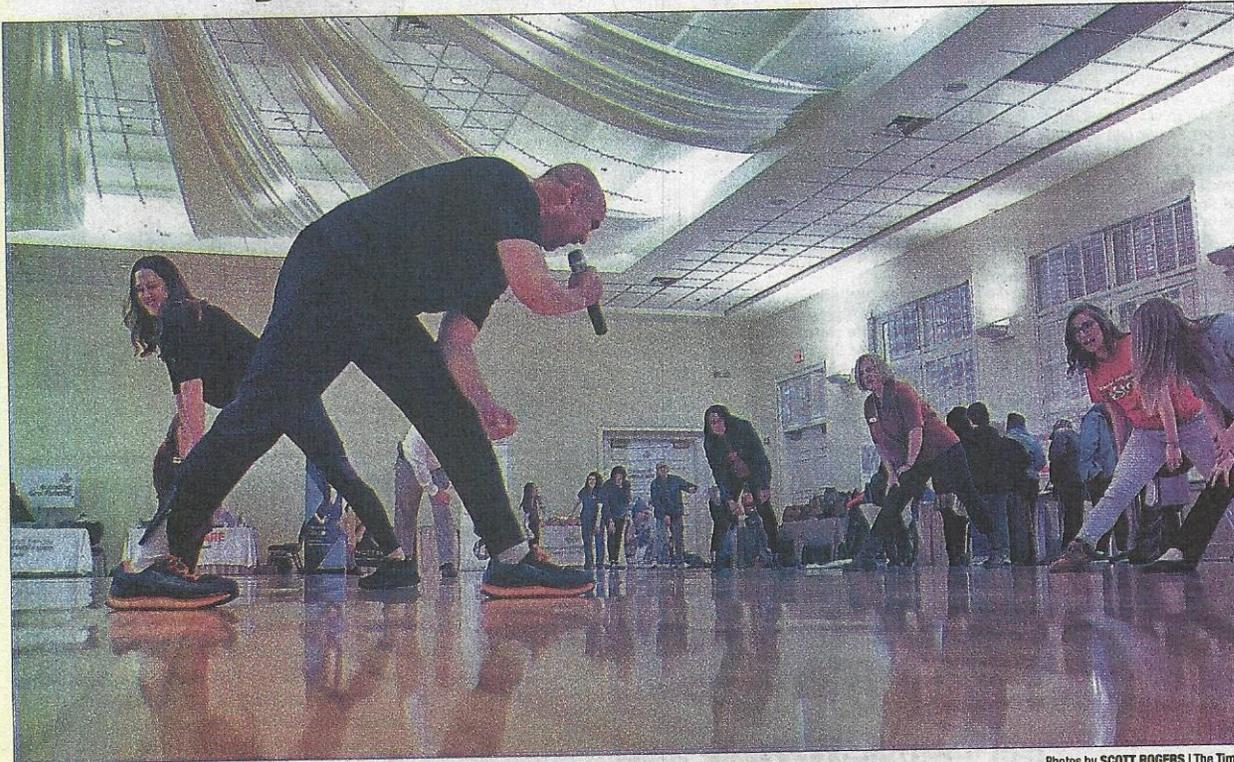


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12-26-19

What's your New Year's resolution?



Photos by SCOTT ROGERS | The Times

Personal trainers Chris Foeste and Tommie Griffith, left, lead vendors in warmup stretches Friday, Jan. 18, at the New Year New You Expo at Gainesville Civic Center.

Get advice to prepare for a healthy 2020 at New Year New You Expo

BY LAYNE SALIBA
lsaliba@gainesvilletimes.com

After last year's success, the New Year New You Expo is coming back.

The event, put on by Metro Market Media Events, hopes to match you with the health and lifestyle experts you need. The expo is scheduled 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 8, at the Gainesville Civic Center. Admission is free.

"In addition to starting the new year by offering healthy tips and trends, we kick off a six-week healthy lifestyle challenge," said Leah Nelson, director of revenue at The Times. "This event will be lots of fun with demonstrations and great information."

Nelson said the final details are being worked out, but they're hoping to start things off with tai chi at the event and then have group yoga and stretching every 30 minutes after that.

While you're not doing yoga or tai chi, you'll have the chance to talk to many vendors who are there to help you get fit, stay healthy and eliminate stress in the new year.

Some of the vendors that will be on site are the Northeast Georgia Health System, A Helping Hand Home Care, Insurance Source, Berner, The Allergy, Asthma and Sinus Center, The Joint Chiropractic, The Spa on Green Street, Northeast Georgia Diagnostic Clinic, Humane Society of Northeast Georgia, The Wellness Loft and Your CBD Store.

If you'd like to add your business to the list, you can contact Nelson at 770-535-6330 or email her at lnelson@gainesvilletimes.com.

At last year's event, The Humane Society gave people alternative ideas when it



Habitat for Humanity of Hall County's Christine Osasu and Kristin Moroz, right, take part in warmups Friday, Jan. 18, at the opening of the New Year New You expo at the Gainesville Civic Center.

New Year New You Expo

When: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 8

Where: Gainesville Civic Center, 830 Green St. NE, Gainesville

How much: Free

More info: gainesvilletimes.com/nyny2020

comes to exercising. Instead of going to the gym, volunteering at the Humane Society is a

good option.

"Come volunteer because it's a good workout as well," Sam Threadgill, development director at the Humane Society, said at last year's event. "In our adoption center, some stay for one day and some stay for a year. A majority of our donations goes toward taking care of those animals."

The health system was at last year's event too, helping people learn their options for

weight loss through surgery.

"It's very misunderstood in the community because people think it's an aesthetic kind of thing," Giselle Cram Ortiz, dietitian with the Northeast Georgia Health System, said at the event. "But it really isn't. It's a lifesaver kind of surgery."

The health system will be there again this year for screenings.

Reporter Kelsey Podo contributed to this article.

Vendors

- Northeast Georgia Health System
- A Helping Hand Home Care
- Insurance Source
- Berner
- The Allergy, Asthma and Sinus Center
- The Joint Chiropractic
- The Spa on Green Street
- Northeast Georgia Diagnostic Clinic
- Humane Society of Northeast Georgia
- The Wellness Loft
- Your CBD Store
- ... and more

