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EXPO

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biggest customer, uses the equipment to "move money from the registers to the cash office," Goebel said.

"Most of our customers are not local, and that's hard on the business," he said. "It's expensive to travel. We have guys (based) around the country, but they still have to travel."

The chamber event "is just a way to highlight a variety of businesses, whether it's retail, health care, restaurants or a car dealer, you name it," said Kit Dunlap, chamber president and CEO.

"This is an opportunity to meet and greet and network in a short period of time."

The expo, billed as the largest trade show in Northeast Georgia, aims to highlight "the many great products and services available in Greater Hall County," an event flyer states.

In addition to exhibitors greeting people from their tables, the event also featured door prizes, drawings and giveaways. Many people arrived at the event via a free shuttle service from the civic center's lower parking lot.

An event highlight was Bob Swoszowski, the owner/operator of 13 McDonald's restaurants in Northeast Georgia, speaking at a luncheon.

He talked about how he got into the restaurant business and otherwise encouraged his audience to follow several principles to survive in business, including persevering and exercising patience.

Swoszowski also cautioned about emphasizing profit over service.

"If you provide a service, profit is going to take care of itself," he told a room of business leaders, including some of his restaurant managers.

Swoszowski said that even though his age "is closer to 80 than 70, I'm having too much fun to retire."

He urged others to pursue work they enjoy as well.

"If you don't like what you're doing, make a change," Swoszowski said. "Life can really develop for you."

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SCOTT ROGERS | The Times

More than 60 vendors set up booths inside the Gainesville Civic Center Thursday, Feb. 15, 2018 for the annual Great Hall Chamber of Commerce Business Expo. The chamber bills the event as the largest trade show in Northeast Georgia.

2-18-18

Kickball tournament raises money for March of Dimes

Photos by **LAYNE SALIBA** | The Times

Cole Bentley sits up after sliding into home plate at the Kicking it for Babies kickball tournament Saturday, Feb. 17, at the Lanier Point Athletic Complex. Rain caused muddy conditions at the tournament that raised about $900 for March of Dimes and the Children at Play Fund.

Team members gather despite rain at Lanier Point Athletic Complex

BY LAYNE SALIBA
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Above: Carter Vaverek, 47, cheers after his team scores a run. **Below:** Graceanne Payne, 4, watches from the dugout.

With a light drizzle falling from the sky, Zandrea Stephens sat in her car in the parking lot of the Lanier Point Athletic Complex, fearing she would have to postpone the event she had planned for a second time.

But about 45 minutes later, cars started pulling up and team members for the kickball tournament she had organized to raise money for March of Dimes and the Children at Play Fund began to head toward the fields.

"I'm actually amazed that this many people came out," said Stephens, an assistant division manager with Gainesville Parks and Recreation and part of the March of Dimes leadership team.

She decided to bring the two organizations she's a part of together for one day and one event to raise money and awareness for them. Through the Kicking it for Babies kickball tournament, she said she was able to raise around $900 that will be split between the two organizations.

The Children at Play Fund helps children in Hall County who can't afford to take part in activities like pee wee and youth athletics, day camps and instructional classes. Through the fund, their fees could be paid or equipment bought for them.

March of Dimes is a national nonprofit that helps mothers during pregnancy and with premature births. That's what brought Stephens to come up with the idea for a kickball tournament in the first place.

She has twins, Joshua and Caleb Gearing, that were born at 26 weeks at about 2 pounds apiece, so she has benefitted from March of Dimes and knows how much it can help other mothers.

"Not only did I experience what March of Dimes is representing, I lived it," Stephens said. "So I'm out here for that cause."

She wasn't the only one there that has benefitted from March of Dimes. Melissa Payne was there with her kickball team, Amazing Graceanne, to play in the tournament as well. Payne's daughter, Graceanne, who was given just a 5 percent chance to live, was the 2015 March of Dimes Ambassador for the area.

"I had no warning or risk factors for a premature baby," said Payne, whose daughter was born 14 weeks early at 1 pound, 12 ounces. "But when she was in the (neonatal intensive care unit), she was there for 97 days. We had a lot of very successful treatments for her. And the research that founded those treatments was funded by the March of Dimes."

And that's the reason her

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KICKBALL

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friends and family registered their team for $6 per person to play in the tournament. Other local companies that took part were Georgia Power, Brenau University, Longstreet Clinic, Publix and MP Equipment.

"It's a great cause Publix has supported for a long time," said Cole Bentley, an assistant store manager at Publix in Flowery Branch. "I think it's good what March of Dimes does, so a baby can be healthy and survive and live a life that's full."

As the tournament was going on, Stephens couldn't help but to sit back and watch as the games were played. She said she was "overwhelmed" and even started looking forward to next year's tournament.

"I just though let's give this a shot," Stephens said. "I thought it could be very successful, and since it was, we're looking to do it for years to come."

Photos by **LAYNE SALIBA** | The Times

Above: Zandrea Stephens welcomes teams to the Kicking it for Babies kickball tournament on Saturday, Feb. 17, at the Lanier Point Athletic Complex. **Right:** Josie Taylor, 11, kicks a ball at the tournament.

Left: Melissa Payne takes a photo with Cole Bentley at the end of a kickball game at the tournament. Payne's daughter, Graceanne, who was born 14 weeks early at 1 pound, 12 ounces, was the 2015 March of Dimes Ambassador. **Right:** Sophia Johnson, 10, kicks a ball at the tournament Saturday.

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2-25-18

From golden shores to destination

DAVID BARNES | The Times

Plans are in place to renovate the Olympic Park Boathouse on Lake Lanier into an event venue beyond athletic competition.

Plans on to convert Olympic Park into venue beyond athletics

BY NICK BOWMAN
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With the 1996 Summer Olympics more than 20 years behind it, the Lake Lanier Olympic Park is growing into something new.

Following a master plan under review by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the park on Clarks Bridge Road is to become a premiere public event space and community park on the north end of the lake. It would be a transformation for the park, which serves as an athletic venue and public park with a relatively limited indoor event space.

The Army Corps should finish its review, which began in February 2017, in the first half of this year. Work on the master plan itself started years ago among the stakeholders in the park:

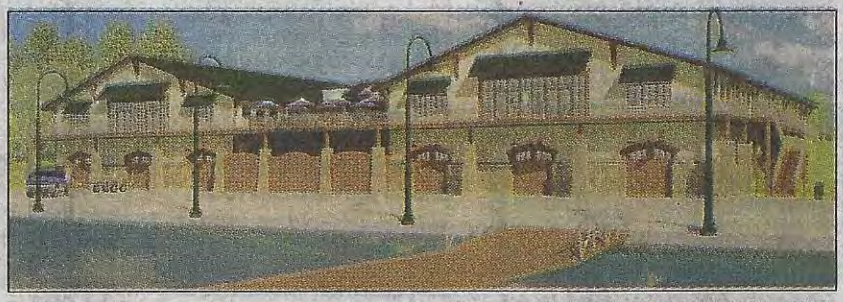

Image courtesy of Robyn Lynch | For The Times

A rendering shows a concept for the water side of the Lake Lanier Olympic Park boathouse.

The land is owned by the corps; the city of Gainesville and Hall County government own the lease for the park, and Gainesville-Hall '96 is the nonprofit that operates the park itself.

The park's current largest renters are its two clubs: the Lake Lanier Rowing Club and the Lanier Canoe and Kayak Club. Together, they occupy the bottom floor of the boathouse.

The master plan stretches across years and would require millions of

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VENUE

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dollars of investment, but it's a vision being laid out for the future of the aging Olympic venue.

"With the renovation of the boathouse, we're looking at adding a public use meeting facility with catering kitchen. That would be rental space on the lake opening up (to the lake). This would be, really, the only public event venue space on the north end of the lake," said Robyn Lynch, manager of the Olympic venue.

"We've got ample parking, and part of our master plan is to add some additional parking as well. There are limited options for large meeting space in the county, so this could really increase our economic impact to the economy."

Between Lake Lanier Islands, Gainesville Civic Center, First Baptist Church and small venues, Hall County is covered for meetings for 500 people or fewer.

The master plan for the boathouse side of the lake includes an event space large enough to hold 1,000 to 1,300 people. The space would feature expansive glass windows overlooking Lake Lanier from the park's panoramic view.

"How much time would we have to count the money to rent that space?" said Stacey Dickson, head of the Lanier Convention and Visitors Bureau and a board member of Gainesville-Hall '96. "Because there's nothing like that on the whole 800 miles of shoreline that I'm aware of that's a public space — that's not private."

A lake-dominated large event space would be both unique for the area and a major selling point to the rest of the nation and world, given Lake Lanier's huge name recognition.

"That's the brand outside of our bubble here — that's how we sell it," Dickson said. "It works."

Last year, the Olympic Park generated an estimated $4.6 million in economic activity in Hall County, according to Lynch. With the ICF Dragon Boat World Championships coming to Lake Lanier this fall, the venue is expected to generate more than $10 million around the county.

In a report to the Gainesville City Council earlier this month, Lynch said that the hotels in Gainesville and in the county are booked solid during the September championships. By itself, the USA team in the championships rented an entire Gainesville hotel for the event.

Photos by DAVID BARNES | The Times

Equipment is seen (above and below) Saturday inside the Olympic Park Boathouse on Lake Lanier in Gainesville.

The earliest renovations could begin is after the September championships. In March, Gainesville-Hall '96 will launch a feasibility study to determine where the millions of dollars needed to fund the renovations could be raised — between public money, private donations and investment.

And it's not just the boathouse that's been targeted for major investment.

"We want to demolish and do new restrooms on the park side, which will be open to the public when they're using the park," Lynch said. "We also have, in the master plan, three new public park pavilions, some walking trails that run along the inlet that we have as part of our property, some sun shade areas in the plaza for spectators when they're here for events."

Some small changes to the vision of the park are already taking place. In 2018, it will be host to three live concerts, a music festival and a triathlon in addition to its regularly scheduled athletic events.

And those athletic events — collegiate rowing competitions and the meetings and competitions of the clubs that operate in the boathouse — will remain a central part of the boathouse and the park.

"I think logistically we can work it out easily," said Jason Peck, president of the Lanier Canoe and Kayak Club. "If us and the rowing club coordinate together the days that that one space needs to be rented to the public, we can share the other side of the boathouse."

Unless both groups continue to expand their memberships, in the short-term neither should be displaced, Peck said.

And in the long term, bringing in more revenue from more public involvement in the park will create a lasting legacy at the park.

"If we truly leveraged our Olympic legacy, we could see development and longevity for multiple generations," Dickson said.

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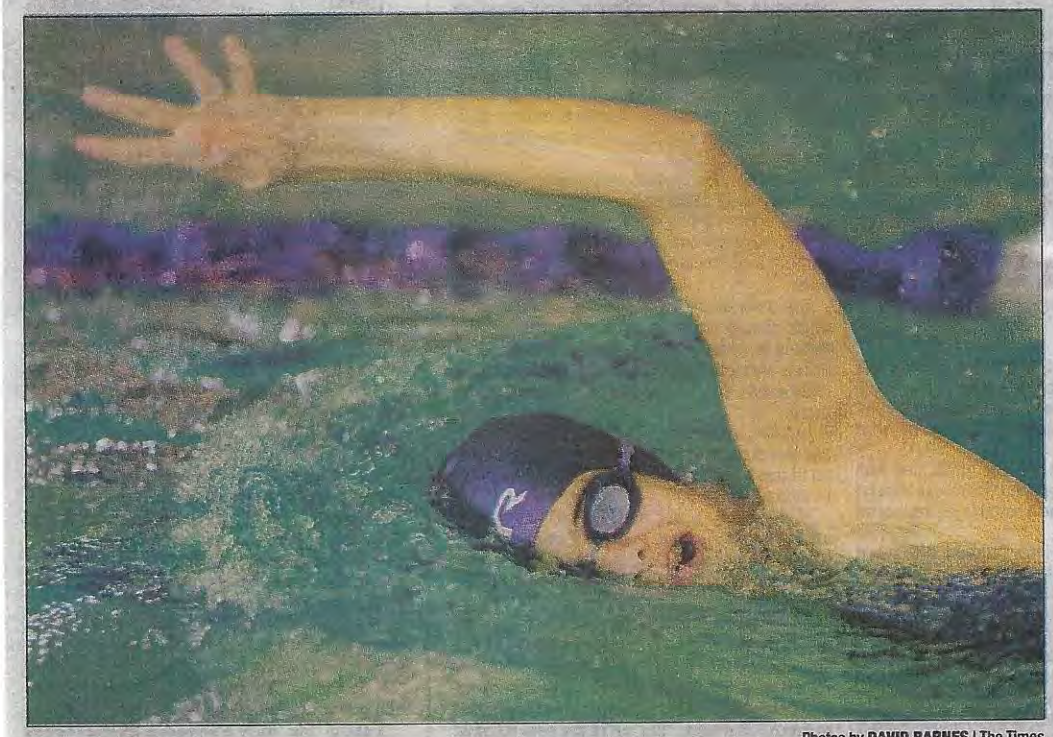
Swimmers get Olympic inspiration



Photos by DAVID BARNES | The Times

A swimmer practices drills during a Fitter & Faster Swim Tour clinic at Frances Meadows Aquatic Center in Gainesville, on Saturday, Feb. 24. Olympic medalist and three-time Olympic coach Brett Hawke and Olympian Shane Ryan taught swimmers several drills that work on speed and racing strategy.

Former Olympians conduct youth clinic at Aquatic Center

BY LAYNE SALIBA
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Shane Ryan and Brett Hawke wanted to get back to the roots of swimming. That's why the two Olympic swimmers were at Frances Meadows Aquatic and Community Center on Saturday, Feb. 24, teaching kids about competitive swimming.

Ryan and Hawke were invited in by the Fitter & Faster Swim Tour, an organization that holds clinics like Saturday's all over the country, letting youngsters learn from accomplished swimmers.

"For us, it's like coming back to our roots and where it all started," Hawke said. "And seeing the excitement from young kids, just dreaming to be an Olympic athlete."

That's the goal of some of the swimmers at the clinic. During the two sessions, swimmers from all across Georgia and some from out of state got advice from Ryan and Hawke on becoming better sprint swimmers.

It was an especially exciting time for Will Crumpton, a sophomore at North Hall High who said Auburn University is his dream school. Since Hawke is the head swim coach at Auburn, Crumpton knew he wanted to be at the clinic.

Above: Swimmers watch as Olympian Shane Ryan demonstrates a drill. **Below:** Swimmers listen to instruction.

"This is really cool," said Crumpton, who swims for Lanier Aquatics, a Gainesville swim team. "I just want to refine my techniques, learn some different dives, turns and things like that."

Hawke knows the impact he can have on younger students. Though he's used to coaching college students, he

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Left: Olympian Shane Ryan talks with swimmers during a Fitter & Faster Swim Tour clinic at Frances Meadows Aquatic Center in Gainesville, on Saturday, Feb. 24. **Right:** Swimmers and their parents check in to the event. **Below:** Olympic medalist and three-time Olympic coach Brett Hawke, left, and Ryan, right, speak to attendees. The two instructors taught swimmers several drills that work on speed and racing strategy.

Photos by **DAVID BARNES** | The Times

SWIM

■ Continued from 1C

said he likes talking to youngsters because "they're like sponges" listening to his advice and instruction.

"We always hope they pick up new skills and techniques out here," Hawke said. "But really, just getting an opportunity to listen to Olympians and hear their stories really gears them up."

Hawke competed in the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, and the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece. He then went on to coach at Olympics in Beijing, London and Rio de Janeiro.

Ryan recently graduated from Penn State University after taking time off to live in Ireland, for whom he competed in the 2016 Games in Rio.

"When I was growing up I didn't have someone coming over," Ryan said. "I didn't get to go to clinics or anything like that. So now, since I'm here and they're coming here, I want to give that option because why not help younger people? Why not help the younger guys? If I was them, I would have loved it."

The clinic was made possible by Lanier Aquatics' associate head coach. Crystal Tavares. She met some of the people from Fitter & Faster when she was at an American Swimming Coaches Association convention in September and thought a clinic would draw well in North Georgia.

"I've always wanted to run a clinic, and now that we're at this facility, we can," Tavares said.

She was happy with the number of swimmers who took part. Hawke was, too, and said "swimming is the best sport in the world, so we're trying to keep these kids in it."

That's a big part of why he traveled to Gainesville for the clinic.

"Just reigniting passion," Hawke said. "Because it can get monotonous and boring just doing the same old stuff. But doing something new, something they haven't done before is exciting for me and for them. And then I hope they continue with swimming beyond their high school years, into college."

'When I was growing up I didn't have someone coming over. I didn't get to go to clinics or anything like that. So now, since I'm here and they're coming here, I want to give that option because why not help younger people? Why not help the younger guys? If I was them, I would have loved it.'

Shane Ryan, 2016 Olympic swimmer

2/25/18

Desota Park set to close for 3-4 months for renovations

Desota Park in the Newtown neighborhood of Gainesville will close for three to four months starting Tuesday, Feb. 27, for renovations.

Located at 1142 Desota St., the park is getting new tennis and basketball courts and fencing, plus landscaping improvements.

"We appreciate the public's understanding as improvements are made to our parks system," Gainesville parks spokeswoman Julie Butler Colombini wrote in a Monday news release.

For more information on the renovations, call 770-531-2680.

2/27/18

Compiled by Clark Leonard