

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings Northeast Georgia and Friends of the Region,

I hope this quarterly finds you well amidst this year's "pollening." While the recent storms managed to knock out our power for an afternoon, they also knocked down a good bit of the yellow dust, allowing us to focus on the unmatched beauty that is Northeast Georgia in springtime. For that, we're thankful.

In this edition of our quarterly newsletter, you'll find updates on the NEGRC's activities, including putting out virtual fires at the recent Solid Waste Authority meeting (literally)! We also highlight two amazing residents committed to serving their fellow neighbors. I had the honor of helping recognize one of them at the recent DDAA/NADO conference: Ms Erin Barger, President & CEO of the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia. I first met Erin when the NEGRC was assisting with the \$9M CDBG-CV (Covid) grant to help build the new Food Bank facility. I continue to be in awe of her dedication to our Northeast Georgia neighborhood. The other local highlight, Mr David D, is a living, breathing embodiment of the value of WIOA-funded programs. We're grateful for individuals like David, who generously share personal stories proving those federal investments lead to exponential returns.



*NEGRC Executive Director,
Eva Kennedy*

In addition to WIOA, we're closely tracking Older American Act-related changes at the federal level. With the dissolution of the Administration for Community Living, it remains unclear how key senior programs will be funded and administered. As Older Americans Month approaches (May), I challenge you to connect with aging residents and their caregivers to learn about how those programs impact their lives.

Amidst uncertainty, it's heartening to see communities discussing shared interests and joint initiatives as I travel the region. From Jackson County and its nine cities convening at their roundtable event, to the synergy at the Madison County Chamber's State of the County, to Barrow County's successful SDS renewal, it's energizing to see folks coming together to tackle issues and focus on the big picture.

Collaborative efforts are resulting in tangible successes as well. I attended Elberton's recent ribbon-cutting celebrating the restoration of their oldest surviving structure, the Bailey Building. I remember Planning & Government Services assisting the City with a CDBG-RDF (Redevelopment Fund) grant to stabilize the building in 2020; it's special to see that piece of their square re-activated. (If you get a chance, ask Mayor Graves about how the City and DDA worked together to make it happen.) Speaking of CDBG, DCA offers a variety of designation programs that enhance competitiveness for funding and tax incentives. I recommend reading this quarter's article on PlanFirst to learn more.

Finally, I'll extend an invite to our Meet & Greet event in Athens on May 15th, 10:00–11:30am, featuring representatives from DCA, GEFA, our NEGRC Divisions, US Congressional staff, and more! This opportunity is intended for elected officials and local government staff in the region. For more information and to register, follow this link: <https://arcg.is/0XOWfg2>. We hope to see you there!

In the meantime, let's take care of ourselves and our neighbors.

Eva Kennedy
Executive Director



A WORK IN PROGRESS

David D is a 45-year-old man with a life and story riddled with hardship, substance abuse, mental illness, homelessness, incarceration, treatment, failure and loss, but also with success, victory, humor, willingness, a contagious sense of hope, and a deep desire to share that hope with others, using his testimony to inspire everyone he meets.

By the time ACTION, Inc., a contractor funded through the Workforce Innovative Opportunity Act (WIOA), met David, he had accumulated a string of nine felony and 27 misdemeanor charges and was voluntarily enrolled in a substance abuse recovery facility, seeking treatment for a methamphetamine addiction, subsequent to a probation violation on charges for Possession of Methamphetamine, Felony Forgery, and DUI. David was enrolled in training with Workforce Innovators of America in March 2024. He successfully completed welding training in March 2024, earning credentials in Welding, Forklift Operation, OSHA 10 Safety, CPR, AED, First Aid, and Lean Six Sigma White Belt as well as receiving a refurbished Chromebook from ACTION, Inc. for his efforts. David's dynamic personality, along with the Career Coaches' collaboration on building a professional resume and letter of support, immediately secured two job offers.

Choosing an internship at IMI in Structural Fabrication and Maintenance allowed David to use his newly earned welding skills, making \$18 per hour. He was able to move out of the recovery facility in June and into a rental home owned by his employer. David loved this job, using every opportunity to build on his developing skill set, and excelled at the work.

By September of 2024, David had sustained a back injury on the job, which led to missed work and ultimately a relapse in his substance use, resulting in a loss of the job and his home. Throughout this time, David stayed in frequent contact with Career Coaches at ACTION, who were able to provide support and encouragement as well as referrals to local resources for shelter, food, and recovery. David re-entered a treatment center in October and continued to maintain consistent contact with his Career Coaches.

When David completed treatment, he began applying for jobs, seeking out his own opportunities, as well as exploring options sent by the Career Coaches. He regularly updated his coaches regarding interviews and applications during the 3-month process of obtaining employment.

In February 2025, David accepted a job as a Field Technician for HillPointe Real Estate Development in Athens making \$23.40/hr. He was given the keys and a promotion within two weeks of being on the job. He reports that he is "Good busy," and "Loving it!" David said he does whatever it takes to get the job done, including preparing units, handling delivery of 70 appliances for a building, installing digital and manual locks on 80 garages,

direct unit maintenance and dealing with customers, etc. Career Coaches at ACTION continue to check in with David weekly and he provides updates on his employment and continued sobriety. In David's spare time, he began serving others in the community at the local food bank and at agencies that assist the less fortunate in the area. David has started a foundation called "Overall Ministries" that provides supplies to individuals experiencing homelessness. David has this to say about his organization:

"Overall Ministries is dedicated to helping those who struggle, who are isolated, who are alone and living alone. I lived that way for a very long time. To help 'pay it forward,' Overall Ministries makes hygiene bags, we give them water, food, clothing, love, and scripture. It's just the little things that help them get through the day. I'm trying to be part of the solution, not part of the problem anymore."

David has acquired measurable skills, credentials, and employment following training, and has an anticipated positive twelve-month employment verification with all indicators pointing to continued success.

For more information, please contact the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission's Workforce Development Division/ WorkSource Northeast Georgia at (706) 369-5703.



Pictured is David D

NEGRC'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STAFF ASSIST WITH CHICO'S DISTRIBUTION CENTER CLOSING

WorkSource Georgia's Rapid Response Team and WorkSource Northeast Georgia staff have been working with the Chico's plant in Winder to ensure employees find great new jobs once the plant closes later this spring. An onsite Transition Center at the Barrow County facility was staffed on Monday and Friday afternoons

from December 15th to March 31st. The Rapid Response team also hosted a two-day job fair for Chico's employees on February 6th and 7th. An estimated 47 employers participated in the job fair, giving employers the opportunity to speak with impacted employees one-on-one. Services provided through the transition center include information on filing unemployment insurance, registering in the WorkSourceGA portal for job search assistance, retraining assistance, and resume preparation.



NEGRC WorkSource NEGA Business Services & Outreach Representative, Vickie Scotland, assisting Chico's employees at the Assistance Center ▶

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STAFF ATTEND GREENE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL CAREER FAIR

Greene County High School held their annual Career Fair on February 27th. Students from every grade level attended and learned about different opportunities available to them after graduation. Representatives from employers, technical colleges, universities and WorkSource Northeast Georgia answered questions and presented information about their programs.



Rima Sullivan, NEGRC Workforce Development Division Youth Program Director

MAY IS OLDER AMERICANS MONTH

Every May, the Department of Health & Human Services (Administration for Community Living) leads the nation's observance of Older Americans Month (OAM): a time to recognize older American's contributions, highlight aging trends, and reaffirm commitments to serving the older adults in our communities. The theme for this year's celebration is "Flip the Script on Aging." OAM will be celebrated throughout the Northeast Georgia Planning Service Area.

On May 2, 2025, Newton County Senior Services will kick the month off with its Annual Chairman/Mayor's Walk. Seniors and the community will meet at the Historic Courthouse in downtown Covington, Georgia, and walk a mile back to the Josephine B. Brown Senior Center, where there will be entertainment, vendors, and fellowship.

On May 9, 2025, the Northeast Georgia Area Agency on Aging and the local senior centers will host a Regional Senior Picnic to honor the seniors who attend the 14 senior centers in the Northeast Georgia Planning and Service Area. The OAM celebration will be at the Jackson County Agriculture Facility located at **1869 County Farm Road, Jefferson, GA 30549**. The picnic will provide an opportunity for seniors from the various centers to connect and enjoy a variety of activities. This is the first celebration since the Coronavirus Pandemic.



Newton County Senior Services Participants enjoying the Chairman/Mayor's Walk activities.



Once again we took our annual walk from the square to Turner Lake in celebration of seniors.





Pictures from the 2019 Senior Picnic

Northeast Georgia WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Performance Outcomes [July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024]

Adult	
2nd Quarter Employment Rate	77.8%
4th Quarter Employment Rate	74.9%
Median Earnings Per Quarter	\$7,757+
Credential Attainment	78%
Measurable Skills Gain	64.7%+

Dislocated Worker	
2nd Quarter Employment Rate	60%
4th Quarter Employment Rate	86.7%+
Median Earnings Per Quarter	\$11,042+
Credential Attainment	60%
Measurable Skills Gain	66.7%+

Youth	
2nd Quarter Employment Rate	86.1%+
4th Quarter Employment Rate	85.9%
Credential Attainment	81.5%+
Median Earnings	\$5,188+
Measurable Skills Gain	76.3%+

Overall Program Performance*	
Adult	104.2%
Dislocated Worker	104.7%
Youth	114%

*Overall Program Performance calculated by averaging the individual indicators for each program
 + Exceeded negotiated percent
 Source: TCSG Office of Workforce Development, Annual report submitted by USDOL

Northeast Georgia WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

THE YEAR IN REVIEW July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

Number served through Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Formula Funds

	# Served	\$ Spent
Adult	359	\$1,644,253
Youth	291	\$1,048,467
Dislocated Worker	111*	\$611,446
Total	761	\$3,304,166

* Includes QUEST grant

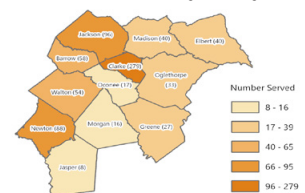
Number served by county

County	Adult	Youth	Dislocated Worker	Total	Employers
Barrow	29	23	6	58	12
Clarke	127	104	48	279	57
Elbert	12	28	0	40	7
Greene	8	17	2	27	3
Jackson	52	17	27	96	20
Jasper	2	6	0	8	2
Madison	23	13	4	40	3
Morgan	5	11	0	16	2
Newton	46	28	14	88	2
Oconee	11	6	0	17	12
Oglethorpe	13	18	2	33	1
Walton	31	20	3	54	6
Other [in-state]	0	0	5	5	81**
Other [out of state]					25***
Total	359	291	111	761	233

** Number of employers in other counties in Georgia hiring WIOA trainees

*** Number of employers in other states hiring WIOA trainees

Number Served by County



Targeted Populations Programming

ACTION Inc.'s Special Populations/ Special Targeted Group Program is entitled **Achieving Career Excellence (ACE)**. The primary targeted populations include Veterans, individuals receiving SNAP benefits, Offenders (returning citizens), Older Workers and individuals in recovery. ACE provides an array of services including occupational skills training, career coaching, financial budgeting, mentoring, extensive **one-on-one** case management, essential employment, and soft/life skills training to help individuals complete their training program, secure and maintain sustainable full-time employment.

ACE focuses on occupational skills training programs that will be completed in ten weeks or less and that offer participants an opportunity to complete stackable credentials. ACE partners with Lanier Technical College, Georgia Piedmont Technical College, Workforce Innovators of America, Potter's House, Athens-Clarke County Department of Corrections, and Newton County Department of Corrections along with other approved technical colleges and private training providers for

the delivery of occupational skills training. The training programs lead to industry-recognized credentials including the high-demand career field of welding/joining technology, forklift operation, OSHA 10, CPR/First Aid, Lean Six Sigma White Belt and CDL (Commercial Driver's License).

Upon completion of training, ACE Career Coaches serve as both a Mentor and Advocate and build upon the strong relationships of trust developed with each participant while in training. Career Coaches contact each participant, at a minimum, at least once a month during the one-year follow-up period and will continue to provide resources for financial assistance, employment leads and assistance, and other services needed to ensure long-term employment and success.

From July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2024, a total of **147** participants were enrolled with **143** participants receiving an occupational skills certificate. Twelve months after exiting the program, **101** participants were still employed in unsubsidized employment. Funding for this program is provided through a WIOA competitively procured bid.



Prepared by
NEGRC Workforce Development Division
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[March 2025]

NEGRC AT THE GEORGIA PLANNING ASSOCIATION (GPA) SPRING CONFERENCE

The **Georgia Planning Association (GPA)** is a registered non-profit and an official Chapter of the **American Planning Association (APA)**. GPA provides leadership to plan and build vibrant communities throughout Georgia; advocate support for sound planning; and provide its members with tools, services, and support that advance the art and science of planning.

On Thursday, March 13, NEGRC Senior Community Planner, **Carol Flaute**, presented at the GPA Spring Conference alongside **Steffney Thompson** from the University of Georgia School of Law. Their presentation focused on the role of local governments in wetland protection following the 2023 *Sackett vs. Environmental Protection Agency* decision. This legal decision altered the federal regulatory role in wetlands protection, originally stemming from the Clean Water Act of 1972. The decision narrowed the definition of what is considered "waters of the United States" (WOTUS) to being relatively permanent, standing or continuously flowing bodies of water known as streams, oceans, rivers, and lakes. In the new ruling, jurisdictional wetlands must have continuous surface connection to a WOTUS with no clear demarcation between the WOTUS and wetland. This greatly reduces the number of protected wetlands by no longer including noncontiguous, intermittent wetlands, thereby placing more of the responsibility on states or local governments.

There are several regulatory and non-regulatory methods to offset the impacts of the Sackett decision. **To learn more about these methods or how to access relevant resources, please contact Carol Flaute at (706) 369-5650 or cflaute@negrc.org.**



NEGRC Senior Community Planner, Carol Flaute, presenting at the GPA Spring Conference in Gainesville, Georgia on March

PGS ATTENDS UGA COLLEGE OF ENVIRONMENT + DESIGN CAREER FAIR

The Planning & Government Services (PGS) division hosted a table at the UGA College of Environment and Design's Career Fair on February 19th. The Fair catered to students and employers within the fields of Planning, Landscape Architecture, and Historic Preservation. NEGRC were one of few government/501c-3 organizations who attended and staff were able to talk with over a dozen students who were interested in learning more about what type of work Regional Commissions do across the state.

PGS currently has a Community Planner position available, offering a good opportunity for those students preparing to graduate to work in the region. The job announcements can be found on our website at: <https://negrc.org/careers/>.



PGS staff, Mark Beatty (left) and Adi'a Smith (right), tabling at the UGA CED Career Fair on February 19, 2025.

REVAMP PHASE 5

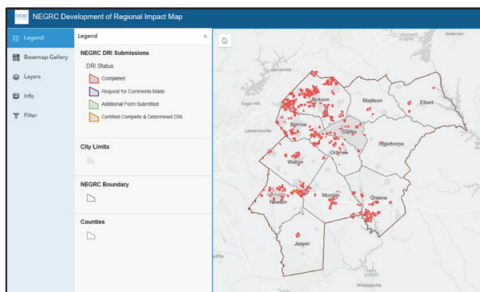
In February, the PGS team began Phase 5 of its partnership with the **Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT)** on the **Roadway Element Validation and Mapping Program (REVAMP)**. This nationally recognized program utilizes the GIS expertise of Georgia's Regional Commissions to collect valuable roadway element data across all 125,000 miles of public roadway in the state. In this new phase, staff will collect the location of guardrails, rumble strips, right turn channelization, and median crossover left turn lanes.

Established in 2016 as the MAP-21 Program, this program is a unique partnership between the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions, GDOT, and the Carl Vinson Institute of Government. It was originally established in response to new federal data reporting requirements, but due to its success has been expanded. At the end of Phase 5, nearly 30 unique transportation data elements, including roadway ownership, crosswalks, curb ramps, and bicycle lanes will have been collected.

All data elements that have been collected in previous phases are available for free to our local governments. **Please contact Phillip Jones, GIS Manager, at pjones@negrc.org if you would like access to this data.**

DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL IMPACT (DRI) ONLINE MAP

A new resource is available on the NEGRC website that allows users to visualize the history of **Developments of Regional Impact (DRI)** reviews across the 12 counties. Regional Commissions are tasked with performing these Regional Impact reviews when development proposals meet a certain threshold determined by land use type. These rules and thresholds are defined by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs through the Georgia Planning Act. The reviews provide a mechanism for surrounding local governments, other regional entities, and state agencies to comment on the potential impacts of a development. The intent is to improve local-, regional-, and state-level communication regarding new growth to maximize positive benefits while minimizing adverse effects.



The Northeast Georgia interactive Development of Regional Impact map is now available as part of the NEGRC's GIS App Gallery

The NEGRC's new online tool will allow users to visualize, through satellite imagery, which development proposals have been completed and will allow access to our archive of DRI reports.

You may access the online DRI map from the NEGRC's GIS app gallery at: <https://negrc.org/planning-government-services/gis-mapping/>.

HAZARDS OF LITHIUM-ION BATTERIES IN THE WASTE STREAM

The improper disposal of batteries, especially lithium-ion batteries, poses serious risks, including fires. Each year, solid waste facilities across the country experience fires caused by batteries thrown into household trash or recycling bins. When crushed or punctured, lithium-ion batteries can ignite, endangering waste-collection workers and causing extensive damage to equipment and facilities. Even smaller, non-lithium batteries contain materials that can be harmful if not disposed of properly.

Solutions do exist within the region for proper recycling of lithium-ion batteries, such as the **Center for Hard to Recycle Materials (CHaRM)** in Athens-Clarke County. However, there are two aspects of the issue that could be improved upon: (1) public education of the issue and (2) a comprehensive strategy for the region's private waste haulers for handling an emergency in the event of a battery fire.

To start tackling both, the NEGRC hosted the Athens-Clarke County Fire Department and Solid Waste Department at the quarterly meeting for the Northeast Georgia Solid Waste Management Authority (held on February 12th). Participants discussed the safety hazards of lithium-ion batteries in the waste stream, how to address the issue through local policies, and how to approach fire safety in the event of a fire. **For more information about what your community could do to combat the issue, please contact the Planning & Government Services division at (706) 741-0565 or pgsassist@negrc.org.**



NEGRSWMA Member, Suki Janssen, learning proper usage of a fire extinguisher by putting out a virtual fire during a safety training at the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission on February 12, 2025.

NORTHEAST GEORGIA LEADER RECOGNIZED AT THE NADO / DDAA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

On March 9th, the Development District Association of Appalachia awarded **Erin Barger** with the **Donald R. Meyers Humanitarian Award**. Erin has been an active, regional community member since assuming her role as President & CEO of the **Food Bank of Northeast Georgia** (FBNEG). This award was presented, "In recognition of her outstanding leadership and unwavering dedication to ending food insecurity in Northeast Georgia. Since assuming leadership of the Food Bank three years ago, Erin has expanded its capacity to distribute approximately 13 million pounds of food annually across the region. Her compassion, empathy, and commitment to collaboration have significantly increased the reach and impact of hunger relief efforts. Her tireless work embodies the spirit of humanitarianism, making a profound difference in the lives of those in need."

The FBNEG serves 15 counties across the Northeast Georgia and Georgia Mountains regions. Two facilities, a main distribution center in Athens-Clarke County and another smaller facility in the City of Clayton, work together to provide cold and dry storage for the organization. Within the FBNEG service area, it is estimated that over 68,000 residents are considered food insecure, a term used by the United States Department of Agriculture to define residents who experience limitations to food access. The FBNEG partners with dozens of organizations to assist with the logistics of food delivery and has a goal to make Northeast Georgia functionally food secure. They truly are an essential non-profit to our region's resiliency. The NEGRC are proud to have Erin and her team as part of our community.



Appalachian Regional Commission Federal Co-Chair, Gayle Manchin, presented the Donald R. Meyers Humanity Award to Food Bank of Northeast Georgia President & CEO, Erin Barger, during the Development District Association of Appalachia Awards Dinner in Arlington, VA (March 9th, 2025).

GEORGIA DCA PLANFIRST APPLICATIONS DUE MAY 15TH

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs PlanFirst program recognizes communities that demonstrate exemplary implementation of their Local Comprehensive Plan. Any eligible community with a strong history of public involvement, active implementation, and progress toward goals can apply. The three-year program provides benefits, such as the ability to apply to CDBG funding annually during the designation period, bonus points on DCA grant programs, and hands-on assistance from DCA staff to help implement work program activities.

The 2025 PlanFirst application is due May 15th and can be accessed on DCA's website: <https://dca.georgia.gov/community-assistance/coordinated-planning/local-planning/planfirst>.



Update

REGIONAL MEETINGS

April

16 th	1:30 pm	Aging Advisory Council	NEGRC
17 th	Noon	NEGRC Council Meeting	Trumps Catering

May

13 th	8:30 am	Northeast Georgia WDB	NEGRC
14 th	1:00 pm	Solid Waste Authority	NEGRC
15 th	Noon	NEGRC Council Meeting	Trumps Catering
26 th	Closed	Memorial Day Holiday	
28 th	9:00 am	UOBWA Meeting	NEGRC

June

12 th	Noon	NEGRC Council Meeting	Trumps Catering
19 th	Closed	Juneteenth Holiday	

