

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings Northeast Georgia and Friends of the Region,

You may notice this edition is coming out slightly later than usual. I'll use the excuse that it's just a reflection of how everything moves a bit slower during the depths of summer in the South. As the heat has weighed upon us, I've been exceedingly thankful for the beautiful lakes and rivers here in the region offering a much-needed escape. Here at the NEGRC, we're continually exploring best practices to help guide good stewardship of our natural and cultural landscape and to ensure the long-term sustainability of the region.



*NEGRC Executive Director,
Eva Kennedy*

Speaking of cultural landscapes, members of our Planning & Government Services staff recently teamed up with the University of Georgia's Center for Community Design and Preservation's FindIt! Program to survey the City of Monticello's local historic district. The approach leveraged GIS (geographic information system) tools, resulting in a fascinating intersection between future technology and the historic past. We're always excited at an opportunity to support a member government while helping students get invaluable hands-on experience. You can read more about that project in this quarterly.

No NEGRC division supports our region's students more than Workforce Development. In June, they hosted the 20th annual B.J. Smith Community Servant Award Ceremony to honor two outstanding winners for 2025. I encourage you to check out that article but fair warning: both students' resumes are incredibly intimidating (and they're just finishing High School)!

I would be remiss to end this letter without also acknowledging the wonderful work we do with our senior Northeast Georgians. Our Area Agency on Aging staff are always coming up with creative ways to engage with the community, one of which is the Memory Connections Café. Hosted monthly at the Georgia Square Mall, the café serves as a welcoming environment, offering games, education, resources, and community to those living with dementia and their caregivers. The heartwarming smiles and dedicated team of volunteers truly demonstrate the unique fellowship that initiative offers. Take a look for yourself (article with pictures inside)!

As you can tell, we did not actually slow down at all this summer... I'm thankful every day for such a great team that, in the words of Coach Smart, "stays hungry."

We very much look forward to serving you in this second half of 2025. Stay hungry, and cool.

Eva Kennedy
Executive Director

UGA CENTER FOR COMMUNITY DESIGN AND PRESERVATION (CCDP) PARTNERS WITH NEGRC TO ASSIST THE CITY OF MONTICELLO

In July, UGA's Center for Community Design and Preservation and its FindIt! program teamed up with the Planning and Government Services (PGS) Division to perform a historic resource survey for the City of Monticello's local historic district. This survey is performed periodically to maintain a local government's Certified Local Government (CLG) status with the Georgia Historic Preservation Division (HPD).

NEGRC's Historic Preservation Planner, **Jody Graichen**, and GIS Manager, **Phillip Jones**, worked with CCDP's Director, **Jennifer Lewis**, and eight graduate students from UGA's Historic Preservation Masters Program to create a new survey methodology and streamline the inventory process. The first phase started in early July and involved a re-survey and data validation of 268 properties already included in Georgia's Natural, Archaeological, and Historic Resources Geographic Information System (GNAHRGIS). The second phase will then survey additional properties within the historic district boundaries that were not included in earlier surveys. This collaboration between the City of Monticello, NEGRC, FindIt!, and UGA's Information Technology Outreach Services (ITOS) is a great example of how public resources are able to work together to achieve a high standard of product delivery to local governments and provide educational benefits to emerging professionals in our region.



PGS staff, Jody Graichen (left) with UGA's Jennifer Lewis and FindIt! summer students, at Monticello's City Hall on July 8, 2025.

PGS TALLIES BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN COUNTS ON MULTI-USE TRAILS IN THE REGION

The Planning and Government Services (PGS) Division has two bicycle and pedestrian counters deployed along multi-use trails in the region to gather data on average monthly use, one in Union Point on the Firefly Trail and one in Covington on the Cricket Frog Trail. Both trails are considered rail-trails, meaning that they were built on top of an abandoned rail line. Generally, these types of trails are built with a concrete base at a width of 12-feet. Revitalizing these abandoned lines offers a chance of revitalization for local communities in a way that provides health and outdoor recreational benefits. These trail systems aim to connect multiple communities together and are still in progress of being built according to their full concepts.

In June, PGS staff uploaded annual data from the counter in Union Point and determined that for its first year, the Greene County portion of the Firefly Trail received approximately 9,850 users between March 2024 and June 2025. More recently, the counter located in Covington was just placed in May 2025 in collaboration with Newton Trails. From May to June, the Cricket Frog Trail received about 4,911 users. PGS is happy to see that these new facilities are being well-used by our communities and look forward to the continued progress of their build-out.



EcoCounter located alongside the Cricket Frog Trail outside downtown Covington

NEGRC WELCOMES NEW PGS STAFF MEMBER, HUGH KNAPP

The Planning and Government Services (PGS) Division has welcomed a new staff member for a Community Planner position that will focus on transportation planning

that involves public transit and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. **Hugh Knapp** is starting at the NEGRC following his graduation from the Master of Urban Planning and Design program at the University of Georgia. Hugh's passion for planning is where the applied nature of planning theory is put into physical practice. In his free time, he loves playing



tennis, reading, and traveling. We are excited to have him as part of our team! If you'd like to learn more about the types of transportation planning assistance available through our PGS Division, contact Hugh at hknapp@negrc.org or (706) 369-5650.

NEGRC Community Planner, Hugh Knapp.

2025 B.J. SMITH COMMUNITY SERVANT AWARD RECIPIENTS

The 20th B.J. Smith Community Servant Award Ceremony, hosted by the Northeast Georgia Workforce Development Board (WDB), was held on Tuesday, June 3rd in Ila, Georgia. **B.J. Smith** served in many roles as a community servant. Prior to his active board involvement in Madison County, he served as a meteorologist with the National Weather Service beginning in 1972. He was stationed at Athens Ben-Epps Airport. While with the Weather Service, he had his first experience with the local area's summer youth work experience program serving as a worksite supervisor of JTPA summer youth participants. After retiring from the weather service in 1990 he joined the Northeast Georgia Private Industry Council, the predecessor to the Northeast Georgia Workforce Investment Board, as the Madison County private sector representative. He was actively involved as a director of the board of the Madison County Chamber of Commerce and worked on the economic development committee.

Mr. Smith felt that providing people with the tools necessary to ensure their own successes was much more fruitful than providing temporary handouts. After his passing in March 2005, the Workforce Development Board wanted to honor his commitment to community service as well as his memory. The BJ Smith Community Servant Award was established in February 2006 with the first awards presented in June 2006. Including this year's winners, a total of 54 deserving youth have been awarded this scholarship in the Northeast Georgia region over the past 20 years.

The 2025 B.J. Smith Community Servant Award winners each receive a \$750 college scholarship. This year's winners are:

RASHEED HECTOR – Rasheed lives in Newton County and is a 2025 graduate of Newton College and Career Academy. Rasheed will be attending North Carolina Agriculture and Technical State University and plans on pursuing a career in Animal Science, followed by Veterinary Medicine. While in High School, Rasheed was a member of the National Honor Society and served as an officer for Future Farmers of America. Some of his accolades include All A Honor Roll, UGA Young Scholars Program Semi-Finalist, CTAE Pathway Scholar and Governor's Honors Program Semi-Finalist. Rasheed organized a group of 20 of his peers to write and deliver Valentine's Day cards to a local retirement home.

TRAVIS ALLEN - Travis is a resident of Elbert County and a 2025 graduate of Elbert County Comprehensive High School. Travis plans on attending Howard University, majoring in Biochemistry with a focus on genetics or organisms. His goal is to become a genetic engineer. Travis is active in his church, serving as usher and media coordinator. Travis has volunteered his time with the Elbert County Colon Cancer Support Group. Travis was a member of the National Honor Society and Bet Club, served as president of the Senior Class and Future Farmers of America, and was founder and president of the STEM Club. Travis played on the Varsity tennis team for 3 years and was on the Varsity track team. Travis was a Governor's Honors Program finalist, and Semi-finalist for the Gates Scholarship.

These scholarships are presented to WIOA students currently enrolled in the WIOA In-School Youth program within the 12-county region. The scholarships will assist with books, fees, tuition and related expenses during the recipient's freshman year of college. These scholarships will be coordinated with other financial assistance the student may qualify for.

For further information on the WIOA In-school Youth Program, please contact **Rima Sullivan**, NEGRC/ WIOA Youth Program Coordinator, **706-369-5703**.



Pictured with Mrs. Gladys Smith are Travis Allen and Rasheed Hector

SUMMER 2025 WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT (WIOA) YOUTH SUMMER WORK EXPERIENCE

63 youth from the WIOA/ACTION High School Youth Program participated in the Summer 2025 Work Experience program. There were a total of 45 worksites in the NEGA 12 county area, which included non-profit agencies, local government worksites, and some private sector businesses. Students were able to explore their career interests by working at sites such as the Athens Dental Associates, Graham Law Firm in Madison County, Calhoun Realty Group in Oconee County and Quiet Oaks in Oglethorpe County. New worksites this summer included Presbyterian Village in Oconee County, Oglethorpe ENT, and Jackson-McWhorter Funeral Home. The Work Experience activity operated for a 5-week period. Participants worked up to 30 hours per week for the 5-week period and were paid \$9.00-\$10.00 per hour. During the school year, these students participated in Job Readiness training workshops and were able to apply what they learned during the Work Experience program.

For further information on the Youth Services offered by the NEGRC Workforce Development Division, please contact **Rima Sullivan**, Youth Program Manager, **706-369-5703**.



Krysten and Britany at Oglethorpe ENT.

Regional Commission – Area Agency on Aging. Memory Connections has been unshakable with the volunteers, **Laura Joost, Robin Dill, Emory Griffith, Marianne Silman, J'Dawn Elliot, Shakena Colbert-Smith, Isis Browner, Betty Beachy, Savalas Colbert, and Taffi Moore**. We have been joined by **Erin Wynn** from Athens Community Council on Aging, **Mattee Barkdoll** from Piedmont Sixty Plus, **Stacey Childers** from Beyond Dementia and the BONDS Coalition, **Mary Grider** who was the former UGA Health & Nutritionist, and **Megan Hulan** from Oxford College of Emory University.

Each month, attendees enjoy two hours of engaging activities, social connection, and educational opportunities in a safe and welcoming environment. Highlights include balloon volleyball, crafts, brain games, and guest speakers from the University of Georgia's Music Therapy, Horticulture, and SNAP-Ed programs. Local partners like YWCO Silver Sneakers and Cofer's Home and Garden have also provided interactive sessions focused on wellness and creativity.



Caregivers report feeling uplifted by the sense of community and the joy it brings to their loved ones. Memory Connections continue to grow as a model of compassionate, community-centered dementia support.

MEMORY CONNECTIONS CAFÉ BRINGS COMMUNITY AND JOY TO NE GEORGIA REGIONAL SENIORS

Clarke County's Georgia Square Mall has become home to a heartwarming new initiative: Memory Connections ("Connecting Memories, Connecting Lives"), a monthly memory café designed for individuals living with dementia or cognitive impairment and their caregivers. Launched in October 2024, the program is led by **Katrina Ogbe**, Dementia Care Specialist with the Northeast Georgia



Memory Connections is supported by generous contributions from businesses such as **Publix, Papa Johns, Benson's Bakery, Kroger, Panera Bread, 3M, Nothing Bundt Cakes, WOW Outreach, Prior Law Firm (Elder Law), 101 Mobility Georgia** and the local author, **Robin Dill**.

The program also partners with the bi-monthly Senior Day at the Mall for seniors within the region. This event expands opportunities to connect with many community resources provided by senior service providers while engaged in a social and interactive event filled with fun.



Update

REGIONAL MEETINGS

August

12 th	8:30 am	Northeast Georgia WDB	NEGRC
21 st	Noon	NEGRC Council	Trumps Catering

September

18 th	Noon	NEGRC Council	Trumps Catering
24 th	9:00 am	UOBWA	NEGRC

