

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings Northeast Georgia and Friends of the Region,

This letter marks my fourth and final of 2025! Northeast Georgia is basking with Fall energy with festivals and markets popping up across the region to usher in the holiday season. We also find ourselves in the midst of Conference Season and NEGRC staff have been doing everything from presenting and attending to leading immersive workshops. We're honored to have young professionals and leaders of their field as the face of our organization. You can read about some of their presentations in this newsletter and check out our LinkedIn page for a wonderful video from the Southeastern Association of Area Agencies on Aging (SE4A) Conference about our local Memory Café.



NEGRC Executive Director,
Eva Kennedy

Fall is also the season for award announcements! Four communities in Northeast Georgia received Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) awards this year: Greene County (Senior Center), Madison County (water system improvements), the City of Monroe (multi-infrastructure improvements), and the City of Social Circle (sewer improvements). The City of Comer was recently awarded Appalachian Regional Commission funding for their wastewater treatment plant. In addition, two Northeast Georgia communities received prestigious PlanFirst designations: the City of Covington and Oconee County. Congratulations to those communities and to **Mark Beaty** and the PGS team who have secured \$3M for our local governments in the last few months!

The last of my seasonal metaphors is that Fall beckons in change. As our region's green landscape transforms into yellows, oranges, purples, and reds, change is definitely a theme around these parts. We recently issued an invitation to bid for remodel of our main office building and are hopeful that project will start around the first of the year. In September, our Workforce Development Director and NEGRC staff member of over 43 years, **Carol Cofer**, celebrated her retirement. And, later that month, we welcomed our new Director of Workforce Development, **Amy Jones**, to our organization! Amy has both a private-sector and Regional Commission background and brings an exciting energy to the team. You can read more about her in this edition of the *Update*. We're looking forward to seeing what creative approaches she brings to Northeast Georgia.

I hope you enjoy the articles in this quarterly. As we continue out 2025, let's make an effort to share in knowledge and experience, celebrate each other's successes, and see opportunity in change.

Eva Kennedy
Executive Director



AMY JONES WELCOMED AS NEW WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Amy Jones joined the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission as Workforce Development Director in September 2025. Prior to this role, she served as the Business Services Manager for the Southern Georgia Regional Commission, a position she helped establish in January 2017. During her tenure, she led the region's sector strategy initiatives across 18 counties, with a strong focus on healthcare. She launched and coordinated an annual event that brings together more than 240 employers, educators, and community partners to collaborate on strengthening regional workforce pathways.

Amy also managed multiple Dislocated Worker grants and implemented On-the-Job Training programs that supported over 170 participants across more than 10 employers.

Before her public service career, Amy owned and operated a business for 15 years and served on the Workforce Development Board as a private sector representative. Her entrepreneurial background gives her a unique perspective as an employer advocate, enhancing her ability to implement programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

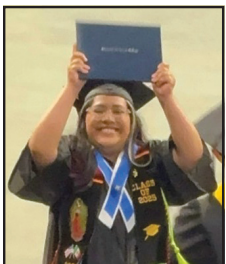
Amy holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Western Governors University. She also serves as Secretary for Care Pax & Friends, a nonprofit dedicated to providing care packages for women beginning breast cancer treatment.

She and her husband, Jason, live in Madison County. They enjoy attending sporting events (Go Chiefs!), spending time with their children and granddaughter, staying active, and exploring antique shops.

Workforce Development Director, Amy Jones



SUCCESS STORY SPOTLIGHT: REYNA MARTINEZ

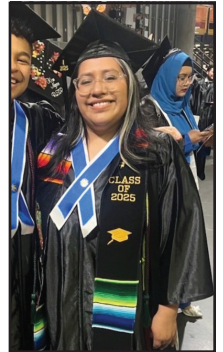


"WIOA has truly had a life-changing impact on me. Before starting the Radiologic Technology program at Gwinnett Technical College, I worked three jobs just to save for tuition—but it still wasn't enough. I didn't qualify for federal aid and had limited scholarship access.

WIOA stepped in when I needed help the most. Their support allowed me to stay in school, focus on my education, and relieve the financial stress that nearly derailed my dreams. Thanks to WIOA, I paid off tuition, had food during clinicals, and could afford gas to get there.

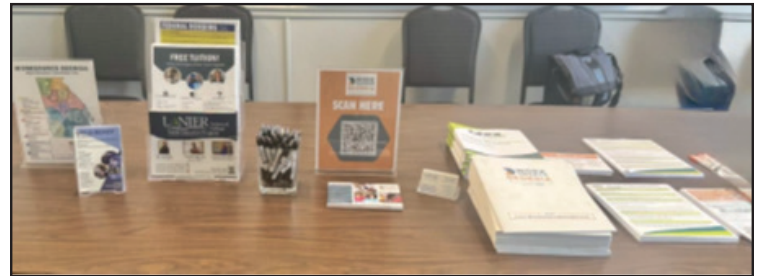
Today, I'm proud to be a registered Radiologic Technologist at Piedmont Atlanta Hospital and continuing my education through Emory University's MRI program. I'm forever grateful for WIOA and my counselor, Ms. Bracewell, whose encouragement made all the difference."

Reyna Martinez



RAPID RESPONSE IN ACTION

On October 21, NEGRC Business Services Outreach Representative, **Vickie Scotland**, and Business Services Contractor, **Sid Jessup**, joined our workforce partners at Baker & Taylor in Commerce to meet with approximately 60 of the 289 employees impacted by upcoming layoffs. Together, we shared information on training opportunities, career services, and resources available through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to help them take their next step with confidence. While we were unable to meet with everyone, we are here to help.



If you've been affected by a recent layoff and are interested in career training, reach out to Vickie at vscotland@negrc.org. WorkSource Northeast Georgia Rapid Response teams work quickly to connect affected employees with reemployment and training support — ensuring that transitions are met with resources, not roadblocks.



We appreciate all our community partners for their collaboration in supporting Georgia's workforce during times of change.

NEGRC's Business Services Contractor, Sid Jessup and Business Services Outreach Representative, Vicki Scotland

SE4A ANNUAL CONFERENCE A SUCCESS

The Annual Conference of the Southeastern Association of Area Agencies on Aging was held September 14th – 17th at the Hyatt Regency Savannah. The Association works on behalf of Area Agencies on Aging and older persons in nine Southeastern states, including the state of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. Attendees from Northeast Georgia included Aging Advisory Council Member **Janice Knight**, and Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Staff Members **Michele Kelley**, **Megan Vogt**, **Bridgenette Blandenburg**, **Katrina Ogbe**, **Toshia Lewis** and **Yvonne Moon**.

The Conference theme was “Wellness on My Mind” and included workshops on brain health, healthy habits, elder justice, purpose and the future. The Opening Session featured a presentation on The Power of Purpose by bestselling author and dynamic inspirational speaker, **Davin Salvagno**. Monday morning featured a presentation on Hopeful New Approaches to Elder Justice by author and founder of DOJ’s Elder Justice Initiative, **MT Connolly**. The Tuesday general session included a panel featuring **Sandy Markwood**, USAGing; **Abby Cox**, Advancing States; **Robert Blancato**, NANASP and Elder Justice Coalition; moderated by **MaryLea Boatright Quinn**, GA Division of Aging Services. **Katrina Ogbe**, NEGA AAA Dementia Care Specialist and **Lynn Joyner**, Heart of GA Altamaha AAA Dementia Care Specialist conducted a workshop on Creating Dementia Friendly Communities: A Local Focus on Memory Cafes on Tuesday afternoon. The conference provided opportunities for enhanced learning, colleague collaboration and innovative approaches to challenges facing the Aging Network.



From left to right: Abby Cox (Advancing States), MaryLea Boatwright Quinn (GA DAS) Sandy Markwood (USAGing) and Robert Blancato (NANASP & EJC)



Lynn Joyner (HOGARC) and Katrina Ogbe (NEGA).

TOURING GEORGIA TECH’S ADVANCED MANUFACTURING PILOT FACILITY (AMPF)

In September, economic development professionals from Northeast Georgia toured the Advanced Manufacturing Pilot Facility (AMPF) on Georgia Tech’s campus in Midtown Atlanta. The AMPF is a 20,000 square foot reconfigurable research and development high bay manufacturing facility supporting industrial, academic, and government stakeholders that also serves as a teaching laboratory. AMPF is a resource and key partner for SBIR/STTR (seed fund) development. Recently, Georgia Tech and the AMPF facility are supporting a statewide initiative that combines artificial intelligence and manufacturing innovations with transformational workforce and outreach programs.

This artificial intelligence in manufacturing (AIM) initiative is what brought our stakeholders to the table. GA-AIM is coming to the end of a multi-year process, where Georgia Tech’s Center for Economic Development and Research (CEDR) have been working with Regional Commissions to analyze existing economic conditions to create implementation strategies specific to AI deployment in the manufacturing sector. The initiative is funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce through the Economic Development Administration (EDA).

Opportunities are available for local governments and public schools to partner with the Georgia Tech Manufacturing Institute to advance manufacturing pathways for students. For more information on this or on the GA-AIM initiative, contact **Mark Beatty**, Director of Planning and Government Services, at mbeatty@negrc.org.



From left to right: Eva Kennedy (NEGRC), Belinda Vogel (Georgia Tech), Jami Cash (Choose Walton), Tony Rogers (Jasper County), Dessa Morris (Choose Walton), and Mark Beatty (NEGRC).



Research equipment at the Advanced Manufacturing Pilot Facility (AMPF) used to train AI programs in metal fabrication processes.

COMER RECEIVES \$1 MILLION IN GRANT FUNDS

The City of Comer has been awarded \$1 million in grant funds by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). Grant funds will be used to improve the City's existing wastewater treatment facility. The facility has served the community for decades and now requires updates to maintain their ability to comply with modern treatment standards. The improvement project includes upgrades to the facility's equipment and electrical infrastructure.

The Appalachian Regional Commission is a funding agency and an economic development partnership entity of the federal government and 13 state governments focusing on 423 counties across the Appalachian Region. ARC's mission is to innovate, partner and invest to build community capacity and strengthen economic growth in Appalachia to help the region achieve socioeconomic parity with the nation. The NEGRC is a partnering agency, or Local Development District (LDD), that extends technical support in grant writing and administration to local governments and non-profits in the area for ARC funds. This funding is available to our 4 northernmost counties, and their municipalities, in Barrow, Elbert, Jackson, and Madison County. For questions or requests for assistance, contact the **PGS Division** at pgsassist@negrc.org or (706) 369-5650.

Congratulations to the City of Comer!

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING IN THE REGION

A comprehensive plan is a guide for growth and development within a community. It serves as an important tool that can bring different representative groups together on a range of issues, including infrastructure and services. This October brings the conclusion of 2025 comprehensive plan updates for four communities in our region, developed with assistance from NEGRC's Planning and Government Services Division: Jackson County, the City of Commerce, the City of Hoschton, and the City of Woodville.

A comprehensive plan represents a community's vision, so public input is a very important part of the planning process. For every comprehensive plan update process that we lead, NEGRC conducts a community survey, holds two public hearings, and meets with a steering committee selected by the local government to represent the community. Additional public participation opportunities, such as Town Halls or Open Houses, are tailored to meet the needs of each jurisdiction. Public engagement in the planning process was high in Jackson County, thanks to the efforts of City and County staff to get the word out about public participation opportunities. For example, Jackson County's online community survey was taken by over 1,400 people! Greater representation leads to a better understanding of needs and therefore a more useful plan.



NEGRC's Mark Beatty and Phillip Jones lead a public hearing for Hoschton's 2025 comprehensive plan update.



Members of the public meet with staff from NEGRC and Jackson County during an open house in Nicholson.

2025 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG) AWARDS

NEGRC's Planning and Government Services Division partnered with Greene County and Madison County to apply for two Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) of \$1,000,000 each. Recently, in August, the Department of Community Affairs announced grant awards to both local governments!

Greene County will use the funds to expand its Senior Center, which is currently at full capacity. The additional space will allow the Senior Center to host more seniors and provide additional activities and meal services. The expansion will support Greene County's growing senior community, which is the fifth largest in Georgia.

Madison County will use grant funding for water infrastructure improvements. The County will expand its water main to serve the residents of the Northwood Circle neighborhood, who currently rely on a private well struggling with silted water and low flow. This expansion will provide current and future residents with reliable access to water and increased fire protection.

NEGRC PRESENTS AT GEORGIA DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

In August, NEGRC's Historic Preservation Planner **Jody Graichen** spoke at a day-long historic preservation training offered at the Georgia Downtown Association's annual conference in Gainesville. Coordinated by the Department of Community Affairs' Historic Preservation Division, the training focused on continuing education for local historic preservation commissioners and featured topics such as how to conduct historic resource surveys, best practices for maintaining historic building materials, and historic preservation commission basics. Jody's presentation focused on how Regional Commissions can assist historic preservation commissions.



Historic Preservation Planner Jody Graichen speaking during her session at the Georgia Downtown Association Annual Conference at Gainesville's Historic City Hall.

Our region of 66 local governments is home to 44 local historic districts, each stewarded by community volunteers serving as historic preservation commissioners. While architectural or preservation expertise is ideal, it is far from the norm, and training opportunities like this are critical to keeping commission design review on track and consistent. If your local historic preservation commission is in need of any assistance, Jody can be reached at jgraichen@negrc.org.

HONOR THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OLDER AMERICANS ACT

For 60 years (July 14, 1965-2025), the Older Americans Act (OAA) has connected older adults and their caregivers to services that help older adults age with health, dignity and independence in their homes and communities-where they want to be! With the rapid growth of America's population, one in five Americans are projected to be 65 or older by 2030. It is essential that Congress make wise investments in the OAA that serves every community in the country.

Why is the OAA Important? The OAA...

- Enables aging well at home and in the community where people want to be.
- Prevents the need for more expensive long-term care or avoidable health care costs.
- Supports family caregivers
- Reflects community needs
- Protects vulnerable older adults

What is Available Through the OAA?

The OAA funds a wide range of aging services across five core areas, with state and local flexibility built into the Act to reflect the needs of that area's older adults and caregivers.



For further information on OAA Services, please contact the Northeast Georgia Area Agency on Aging at **706-583-2546**.

Update

REGIONAL MEETINGS

November

5th-7th

GARC Conference

St. Simons Island

19th

11:00 a.m.

UOBWA

Bear Creek WTF

21st

Noon

NEGRC Council

Trumps Catering

No Meetings in December

*We wish each of you a safe and happy
Holiday Season!*

NEGRC Council and Staff

