

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings Fellow Northeast Georgians and Friends of the Region,

As Athens quiets for the summer, our Workforce Division is bustling with staff onboarding students and teachers in summer work experience and externship programs. Through these opportunities, participants gain invaluable, hands-on experience working with local businesses and industries. In turn, they then share that knowledge with their peers, students, and parents. Check out the Workforce articles herein to learn more about those two programs.

This time of year is also a time for celebration as we take a moment to recognize outstanding individuals in our Northeast Georgia community. The annual Northeast Georgia Senior Picnic was a success with over 300 folks from around the region taking part in the festivities. The Workforce Division recognized two outstanding young Northeast Georgians this Spring through college scholarships awarded at the annual B J Smith Community Servant awards. To round out the festivities, the NEGRC Council held its annual awards ceremony in May, recognizing long-time regional workforce champion and recently retired Workforce Development Division Director, **Carol Cofer**, through the 2026 Robert L. and Betty Williford Distinguished Northeast Georgian award. **Sharyn Dickerson**, Watkinsville City Manager, received the 2026 Local Government Administrator of the Year award in recognition of her dedication, integrity, and extensive list of accomplishments since becoming the City's inaugural City Manager in 2019. As if that wasn't enough excitement, **Mayor Ferrelle** (City of Winterville, NEGRC Council Vice-Chair) graciously presented the NEGRC with a key to the city, recognizing Historic Preservation Planner, **Jody Graichen**, for her role in the rehabilitation of Winterville's historic Blacksmith Shop into the Firefly Farmstop. (You can learn more about this quarter's events and Winterville's project, including how they leveraged DCA funding for a public-nonprofit partnership, in this issue.)

Speaking of local resources, Elbert, Madison, and Oglethorpe have teamed up with six other Counties in the upper Savannah River Basin in an effort to approach water quality and supply in a strategic manner. Through recently awarded Georgia Environmental Protection Division Seed Grant funding, the Northeast Georgia, Georgia Mountains, and Central Savannah River Area Regional Commissions will collaborate to support this new "Georgia Upper Savannah Partnership" in developing a strategic plan and defining the Partnership's composition and purpose. I encourage you to read the Seed Grant article in this quarterly to learn more about that blossoming interjurisdictional collaboration.

We hope to share an exciting update regarding our building remodel in the next edition. Until then, let's continue to strive toward the goals of our more perfect union: justice, domestic tranquility, the common defense, general welfare, and securing the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

Happy Semiquincentennial,

Eva Kennedy
Executive Director



*NEGRC Executive Director,
Eva Kennedy*



NEGRC ANNUAL AWARDS HONOR OUTSTANDING NORTHEAST GEORGIANS

Each year, the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission recognizes outstanding members of the community through two major awards:

The “Robert L. and Betty Williford Distinguished Northeast Georgian” award is given to a person who has made a difference in the quality of life in the region and served as a leader for regional cooperation. The award is named after the late Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Williford who were themselves strong supporters of regionalism throughout their lives.

The “Local Government Administrator of the Year” award honors exemplary service to a local government in the region and is presented to a city or county manager, clerk, or other staff member who reflects the spirit of public service and dedication.

Congratulations to **Carol Cofer**, the 2026 Distinguished Northeast Georgian, and to our 2026 Local Administrator of the Year, **Sharyn Dickerson** (City of Watkinsville)!



NEGRC's Robert L. and Betty Williford Distinguished Northeast Georgian of the Year, Carol Cofer (center left), with NEGRC Vice-Chair, Dodd Ferrelle (right), Executive Director, Eva Kennedy (center right), and Awards Committee Chair, Terry Lawler (left)



2026 NEGRC Awardees Sharyn Dickerson (left) and Carol Cofer (right)



NEGRC's 2026 Administrator of the Year, Sharyn Dickerson (center), with NEGRC Vice-Chair, Dodd Ferrelle (left), and Executive Director, Eva Kennedy (right)

WELCOME TO THE NEGRC, VALYNCIA TRIMIER

We are thrilled to welcome **Valyncia Trimier** to the NEGRC Area Agency on Aging Team as our new AAA Fiscal Specialist. With a strong background in accounting processing and a passion for data, Valyncia will work closely with community leaders and local aging service providers. She is dedicated to ensuring that all our aging services programs operate with accurate and timely processing.



Starting in 2006, her career began as a Patient Finance Coordinator at Community Health Network in Indianapolis, IN. She quickly advanced into Supply Chain Management. In this role, she served as Project Management Coordinator for Orthoepic Implants, where she successfully managed surgical inventory and healthcare projects. She learned the system quickly, which led to a promotion as a Surgery Buyer. There, she took on the responsibility of working directly with vendors to set up and manage contracts while working alongside Accounts Payable to reconcile invoices. Her academic training equipped her with the analytical skills to uncover critical gaps in accounting records. By identifying these flaws, she developed and executed a solution that protected essential funding. She participated in the Community Health Network 360 Volunteer Program by volunteering her time with Habitat for Humanity, local food banks, and the preparation of one million meals for the kids in Africa. After working seventeen years for the Orthopedic Implants and Cancer Center, Valyncia decided to move back to her hometown of Toccoa, Georgia in 2023.

Once back in Georgia, she agreed to help a relative take care of her elderly mother. In 2024, she accepted a position with the Stephens County Hospital as an ER Registration Representative, where she facilitated patient intake and managed insurance verification for emergency services.

In her current role at the NEGRC, she is dedicated to optimizing invoice cycles and reimbursement tracking to ensure accurate, on-time financial operations. She is enthusiastic about process improvements for the submission of purchase orders and invoices. Valyncia is a proud mother of two girls and six grandchildren. She loves to cook, read, enjoys traveling and volunteers at the Stephens County Senior Center.

will become Older Americans.



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

MAY IS OLDER AMERICANS MONTH

Every May, the 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 was, Champion Your Health. OAM was celebrated throughout the Northeast Georgia Planning Service Area.

On May 1, 2026, Newton County Senior Services kicked the month off with its Annual Chairman/Mayor's Walk. Seniors and the community met at the Historic Courthouse in downtown Covington, Georgia, and walked a mile back to the Josephine B. Brown Senior Center in which there was entertainment, vendors, and good fellowship.



Also, on May 1, 2026, Jasper County Senior Center hosted a Barbecue Fundraiser to raise money for the center but also to serve the community. The fundraiser was opened to the community, and several community members did not know the center existed and were educated on Jasper County Senior Center and services available for senior citizens; including learning about Northeast Georgia Area Agency on Aging (AAA).



To end the month, on May 29, 2026, the Northeast Georgia Area Agency on Aging and the local senior centers hosted a Regional Senior Picnic to honor the seniors that attend the senior center. The celebration was held at the Jackson County Agriculture Facility. The picnic provided an opportunity for seniors from the various centers to connect and fellowship, enjoy a variety of activities, and obtained resources from local community agencies.



Pictures from the 2026 Senior Picnic

OAM provides opportunities to celebrate and highlight those that have shaped the way and to plan for those that

DISCOVER THE POWER OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY BENEFITS FOR MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

EASE

If you are interested in making energy efficiency improvements in a multifamily property serving income qualified residents, the EASE Multifamily Program may be able to help at no cost.

Property owners or managers must apply on behalf of the property, and income eligibility must be verified before work can begin. Once eligibility is confirmed, the EASE team works with approved contractors to identify and install appropriate energy saving improvements.

You could qualify for one or more of these energy saving upgrades:

- Sealing heating and air ducts
- Service central heating and Air (HVAC)
- Improve insulation
- Smart, Wi-Fi thermostats
- Air purifiers and power strips
- Water saving devices

Visit the Multifamily Interest Application to get started: Georgia Power: 2020-2028 Multifamily Leads - Home

HEIP

If you're planning on upgrading your multifamily building with energy efficient improvements, enjoy significant rebates when you participate in Georgia Power's Multifamily Home Energy Improvement Program (HEIP). Rebates available:

- \$500 per unit per year for qualifying improvements
- 75 for a Home Energy Assessment completed by a multifamily Program Contractor

How the program works:

1. Complete the Multifamily Interest Application [multifamilyleads.programprocessing.com] to be connected with a Program Account Manager.
2. To qualify for rebates, a multifamily Program Contractor will conduct a Home Energy Assessment on a sample of your property's units to determine the best energy efficiency improvements for your budget and work with you to develop a plan that meets the minimum annual energy (kWh) savings.

3. Install improvements like increased insulation, duct & air sealing, and upgrades for HVAC and water heating.
4. Feel the difference right away – more comfort and lower bills for your tenants. Plus, you'll receive your Program rebates within 6-8 weeks after you project is approved.

For more information about the HEIP Multifamily Program, visit georgiapower.com/multifamilyimprovements.

SOUTHERN CRESCENT TECHNICAL COLLEGE WORKFORCE SUMMIT

The Southern Crescent Technical College (SCTC) hosted a successful 2026 Workforce Summit that brought together workforce and economic development professionals committed to strengthening partnerships and expanding opportunities within our communities. **Amy Jones**, Workforce Development Director, proudly served as a panelist, sharing valuable insight on WIOA services, workforce initiatives, and strategies that support career growth and economic advancement.

The summit also brought together leaders, educators, and community partners dedicated to building a stronger workforce for the future. Thank you to everyone who participated and contributed to such meaningful discussions.



Left to Right; Henry Chalot, Jr. Atlanta Regional Commission Business Services Manager, Amy Jones, NEGRC Workforce Development Director, Stephanie Matthews, Three Rivers Regional Commission Workforce Director, Richard Andrews, Southern Crescent Technical College VP of Economic Development, and Moderator Justin Haight, Metro Atlanta Chamber Sr. Director of Talent Partnerships

NEGRC AWARDED GEORGIA EPD WATER PLANNING SEED GRANT FOR NEW WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP

The NEGRC has been awarded a \$67,000 Water Planning Seed Grant from the Georgia Environmental Protection

Division (EPD) to create a strategic plan for the new Georgia Upper Savannah (GUS) Partnership over the next two years. Upon request from the group of nine participating Counties, the NEGRC is serving as Seed Grant project lead, with those Counties (including Elbert, Madison, and Oglethorpe from Northeast Georgia), two other regional commissions (Georgia Mountains RC and Central Savannah River Area RC), and four non-profit organizations (the Savannah Riverkeeper, the Broad River Watershed Association, Save the Broad, and the Lake Hartwell Association) as project partners.

The EPD Seed Grant will help kickstart the GUS Partnership through the development of a strategic plan and definition of the new Partnership's composition and purpose. The group will explore existing models of success, including the 18-county Northwest Georgia Regional Water Resources Partnership, established in 2001. The process will also include an evaluation of local water management data, identification of priorities and next steps, and education around regional and state water planning. The NEGRC, GMRC, CSRA-RC, and the Savannah Riverkeeper will assist with developing the strategic plan, shaping the GUS Partnership, and GIS data inventory and assessment.

The overarching intent is to provide a framework for future conversations, planning, and grant funding to support collaborative water management within the upper Savannah River Basin in Georgia. The NEGRC is looking forward to working together with the GUS partners on this new initiative!

GEORGIA TRUST NAMES 2026 "PLACES IN PERIL"

The NEGRC's Resource Management Plan identifies significant natural and cultural "Regionally Important Resources" to guide local governments, state agencies, and conservation groups toward appropriate protection and management measures. We are currently reevaluating the list of resources and updating the document accordingly. Two sites being evaluated are the Salem Campground in Newton County and Hard Labor Creek State Park in Morgan County.

In February, both sites were included on another list, the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation's "Places in Peril." Salem Campground faces heavy development pressures and Hard Labor Creek SP is a highly used public space with structures in need of repair. The Georgia Trust specifically noted that Hard Labor Creek SP's Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) camp structures were noted for their deterioration; the park was built in 1934 by the CCC. Inclusion on both the NEGRC

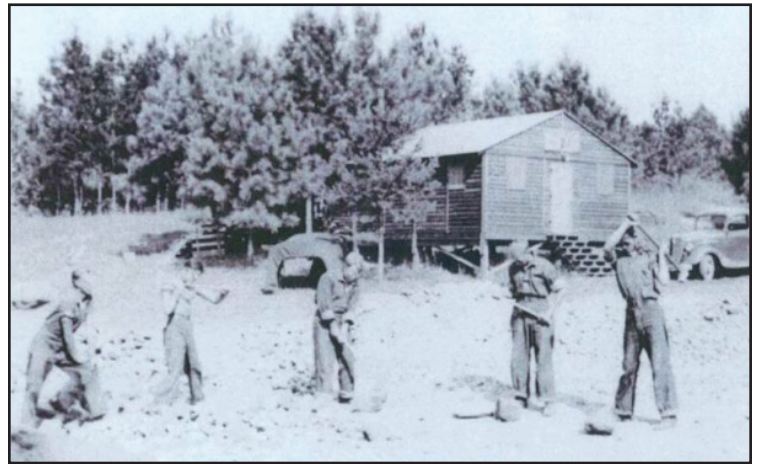
and Georgia Trust's lists underscores the need to prioritize planning for the future of these resources.

The NEGRC recognizes Regionally Important Resources for their cultural contributions and big-picture significance, and we appreciate the Places in Peril list for bringing awareness to vulnerable historic sites. Both lists are working toward prioritization and education. With the right people and ideas in place, there is great potential for positive outcomes for these Regionally Important Resources.

Learn more about both lists here:

<https://negrc.org/planning-government-services/community-economic-development/>

<https://www.georgiatruster.org/our-programs/places-in-peril/>



Hard Labor Creek Recreational Demonstration Area was built by the Civilian Conservation Corp in 1934 on land purchased by the National Park Service. Photo courtesy of visitmadisonga.com



Salem Campground was documented as part of the Historic American Building Survey in 1936. Photo courtesy Library of Congress

GRANTS AWARDS ADDRESS BLIGHT IN COVINGTON & WINTERVILLE

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Redevelopment Fund (RDF) awards are granted through the Georgia Department of Community Affairs with the objective of eliminating slum and blight. Redevelopment Funds are a set-aside of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) CDBG program. The NEGRC has been involved in two recent RDF projects:

The City of Covington received an award of \$1 million CDBG-RDF funds to rehabilitate the 14,000 sq. ft. historic Conyers Street Gymnasium for future use as a community center. This much-loved building is a product of the Works Progress Administration, a New Deal-era stimulus program designed to invest locally and provide employment opportunities. The Conyers Street Gym hosted concerts, graduations and athletic events for 80 years, but needs a new roof and asbestos/lead paint remediation to be usable for the next generation of Covington residents.

In another part of our region, the City of Winterville has finished rehabilitation of its historic Blacksmith Shop, funded with a \$398,500 CDBG-RDF grant. The project followed the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation* and was awarded an Outstanding Preservation Award by Historic Athens. The formerly blighted building is now home to the Firefly Farmstop, operated by the nonprofit Marigold Collective, and is dedicated to working with local farmers and those experiencing food insecurity. Visit <https://marigoldcollectivewinterville.com/> to learn more.

In recognition of the NEGRC and DCA's support throughout the Blacksmith Shop's rehabilitation, Winterville Mayor Dodd Ferrelle presented NEGRC Historic Preservation Planner, Jody Graichen, and DCA Region 5 Rep, Beth Eavenson, with keys to the city. Both projects showcase the importance of place and historic rehabilitation in community, and the end results will benefit each city for years to come.



Conyers Street Gym, 1146 E. Conyers St., Covington



Winterville Blacksmith Shop, 100 Marigold Lane, Winterville, before...



...and after



Beth Eavenson (DCA) receiving a key to the City of Winterville from Mayor Dodd Ferrelle



NEGRC Historic Preservation Planner, Jody Graichen receiving a key to the City of Winterville from Mayor Dodd Ferrelle

CPR/AED TRAINING ENHANCES STAFF PREPAREDNESS

Several members of the NEGRC staff participated in a CPR/AED training led by Candace Amos, Senior Health and Financial Wellness Consultant for the Georgia Municipal Association, reinforcing our commitment to workplace safety and emergency preparedness. The session held on April 28 provided hands-on instruction and valuable guidance on how to confidently respond in critical situations.

Staff learned essential lifesaving techniques, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), proper use of an automated external defibrillator (AED), and best practices for handling medical emergencies. The interactive format allowed participants to practice skills in real time and ask questions relevant to their roles.

This training ensures our staff are better equipped to respond quickly and effectively in an emergency, helping create a safer environment for employees, clients, and our community. We appreciate Candace and GMA for delivering an informative and engaging session and thank all staff who participated!



Charles Palmer, Toshia Lewis and Courtenay Covington practicing their CPR skills



NEGRC staff watching an instructional video with Candace Amos (top center).

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: WHERE EDUCATION MEETS INDUSTRY

This summer, educators from Clarke and Walton Counties participated in the Teacher Externship Program, a five-day professional learning experience that places teachers in local businesses and industries to gain firsthand knowledge of workplace practices, skills, and high-demand career opportunities. By immersing themselves in these career fields, educators strengthened partnerships with community employers and discovered meaningful ways to connect classroom instruction to real-world applications. At the conclusion of the program, participants shared what they learned through classroom-ready projects and lesson resources designed to help students explore career pathways, develop workforce skills, and see the relevance of their learning beyond the classroom.



Walton County Teachers



Clarke County Teachers

SUMMER JOBS – LIFELONG SKILLS

The WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) and ACTION, Inc. Summer Work Experience program offers students and young adults meaningful, paid summer employment opportunities that build career readiness skills.

This summer, we are serving approximately 62 students across 39 worksites within our 12-county service area. Through hands-on experience with local employers, participants develop essential workplace competencies, strengthen their understanding of career pathways, and gain exposure to high-demand industries that support their long-term employment goals. Here's a peek at some of our students at their assigned worksites.



Commerce Student



Jefferson Student



Walton County Student

ANNUAL BJ SMITH AWARDS

The B.J. Smith Award is named in honor of **B.J. Smith**, a longtime Madison County leader and community servant. He is remembered for his dedication to workforce development, youth opportunities, and helping individuals build pathways toward long-term success in education and careers.

The award continues his legacy by recognizing students for their hard work, commitment, and achievement as they pursue their educational and career goals.

We are excited to share that two students have been selected as scholarship recipients this year. Each student will receive a \$750 scholarship to assist with college expenses for Fall 2026.

Nine applications were submitted through the In-School Youth Program across our 12-county service area.

Scholarship Recipients:

Souli Chavez

Commerce High School – Jackson County
Career Coach: Audra Collins

Sevariah Johnson

Apalachee High School – Barrow County
Career Coach: Liz Long

Congratulations to our recipients! We look forward to seeing all they accomplish in their future endeavors.



Update

REGIONAL MEETINGS

July

22 nd	8:00 a.m.	UOBWA–Eng/Ops Committee	Oconee Administrative Building
22 nd	8:30 a.m.	UOBWA–Executive Committee	Oconee Administrative Building
22 nd	9:00 a.m.	UOBWA–TPE Committee	Oconee Administrative Building
22 nd	10:00 a.m.	UOBWA	Oconee Administrative Building

August

11 th	8:30 a.m.	Workforce Development Board	Athens Career Center
12 th	1:00 p.m.	Solid Waste Authority	ACCG Solid Waste Department
19 th	1:30 p.m.	Aging Advisory Council	Greene County BOC
20 th	Noon	NEGRC Council	Trumps Catering

September

9 th	9:00 a.m.	UOBWA TPE Committee	Oconee Administrative Building
9 th	9:30 a.m.	UOBWA Eng/Ops Committee	Oconee Administrative Building
17 th	Noon	NEGRC Council	Trumps Catering
23 rd	10:00 a.m.	UOBWA Meeting	Oconee Administrative Building

