
The logo for decatrish.com features a black circle containing a white silhouette of a city skyline. The text "decatrish.com" is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font across the middle of the circle.

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№05 - JAN 2021

Locally sourced news.

Our most uplifting stories from **2020**

A photograph of a man and a woman sitting on a stone bench outdoors. The man is on the left, wearing a white t-shirt and purple shorts. The woman is on the right, wearing a black t-shirt with a colorful graphic and dark pants. She has her arm around his shoulder. The background shows greenery and a stone pillar.

Good for Goodness' SAKE

7-10-2020 lolored. in gla.

5a Name of Husband or Wife, if Married, Widowed or Divorced.

6 DATE OF BIRTH (month, day and year) 1-25-1893

7 AGE Years 88 Months Days If LESS than 1 day, hrs. or min.

8 OCCUPATION (a) Trade, Profession or particular kind of work Domestic (b) General nature of Industry Business or Establishment in which employed (or employer)

9 BIRTHPLACE (State or Country) Ga.

10 NAME OF FATHER C.W. Turner.

11 BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or Country) Ga.

12 MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER Lucy Taylor.

13 BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or Country) La.

14 The above is True to the Best of My Knowledge. (Signature) Mrs W M Brooks (Address) Decatur, Ga

Filed 5-17

Registered

17 I HEREBY CERTIFY, that I last saw her alive on _____ (month, day and year) _____, 19____, and that death occurred, on the _____ (month, day and year) _____, 19____. The CAUSE OF DEATH was Acute U _____ (duration) _____ CONTRIBUTORY (Secondary) Chro _____ (duration) _____

18 Where was disease contract if not at place of death? _____

Did an operation precede death? _____

Was there an autopsy? _____

What test confirmed diagnosis _____ (Signed) _____

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On the cover: I was in downtown Decatur when I saw Lamont Simmons and Leah Miller sitting on a bench near the old courthouse. It was May 31, and the country was in turmoil over the murder of George Floyd by police May 25. The back of Leah's t-shirt read "Find Beauty in the Ugliest Days" and I thought what an appropriate message for a very tense time. By Dean Hesse.

A close-up photograph of a person's lower legs and feet. They are wearing light blue denim jeans with the hems rolled up. On their feet are tan suede Birkenstock sandals with two straps across the foot, each featuring a gold-colored buckle with the 'BIRKENSTOCK' logo. The person is standing on a yellow surface, likely the side of a vehicle, with a black metal grate visible below. The background is a solid, bright yellow color.

**WHERE
COMFORT
MEETS
COOL**

abbadabba's
cool shoes atlanta

LITTLE 5 POINTS • BUCKHEAD • EAST COBB

Finding goodness in the gloom of a dismal year



Dan Whisenhunt
Editor & Publisher

Dear readers,
I've tried to pinpoint when it happened.

Somewhere between March and December, the COVID-19 pandemic went from being a thing that was affecting us to being a thing that was a part of us. I could write a story about the city of Decatur updating a mask ordinance or DeKalb County holding another food giveaway without mentioning COVID-19, and you'd know what the story was about.

When was the first story that was about COVID-19 without explicitly mentioning it? The task of finding it is more than I'm up to right now. Maybe some archivist 100 years from now will be looking at the articles from Decaturish and will pinpoint an answer. But I know that somewhere along the way, COVID-19 went from an existential threat to our essential reality. It has fundamentally altered our existence.

It changed our relationship with science, with our governments and with each other. Voluntary mask wearing will likely continue during severe cold and flu seasons long after this is over. Zoom meetings will become the normal way that busy people hold meetings to get things done. I personally may never again leave the house without a bottle of hand sanitizer.

And yet, despite all the sickness, death and economic ruin, there were moments this year that brought out the best in us. Rather than recite the litany of woe, telling you the story you already know too well, I took this month's issue in a different direction. For our last e-edition of 2020, we decided to celebrate the best and most uplifting stories of 2020.

These aren't the biggest stories. The-

re was only one big story. A Top 10 list of our biggest stories might as well list COVID-19 as No. 1 through No. 10. They also aren't the stories that got the most clicks. If we were doing nothing but those stories, this issue would just be filled with articles about Vernon Jones.

These are the stories that were often overlooked, the pockets of brightness on a bleak landscape, the proof that despite all that's happened to us, we are still good and still have the capacity to be good.

It's something worth remembering because our faith in each other, our willingness to work toward a common goal is the only thing that will see us through to the next chapter, the one that is a reflection on this year and not a continuation of its mistakes.

I hope you'll see these stories as evidence that proactive, meaningful decency is possible and in fact more common than our worried attention spans allow us to believe. I hope you'll see in them the values that we should all share and strive toward: kindness, justice and enlightenment. I hope they are a preview of our future instead of a memory.

Let these stories light a spark within you and carry it forward into 2021.

If you take nothing else from this year, take this: good things happened in 2020. But to find them, you had to know where to look.

As always, I am privileged and humbled to be the editor of your favorite community news source. If you need help tracking down the good in 2021, we'll help you find it.

See you next year,

—Dano

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A guide to researching African American genealogy in DeKalb County

By Laurel Wilson, contributor

DeKalb County, Ga. – It's well-known that researching African American genealogy is difficult, especially when trying to break through the wall of the antebellum period.

But in many ways, researching DeKalb African Americans back to at least 1870 is very similar to researching white residents of the same time period, with some caveats. For the most part, you will look at the same types of records and you will come across many of the same issues, such as name variations, loss of records due to disaster, location name changes, and census-taker errors.

However, African American genealogy does have its own set of unique challenges, especially in DeKalb County:

- Historic records regarding African Americans have generally not been as accurate or thorough as those for white residents
- African Americans are largely excluded from published community histories
- Recorded age across documents tends to vary more for African Americans, sometimes with a 10+ year difference
- There are more inconsistencies with the place of birth and occupation listed for African Americans than white Americans
- African Americans may appear in multiple households in the same year if they worked domestically so data may conflict, and people may not be listed with family members
- Between 1870 and 1940, African Americans in the south frequently moved out of state
- Contrary to popular belief that enslaved people kept the names given to them by their enslavers, after emancipation many people changed either or both of their first and last names, making them difficult to locate before the 1870 records.

So given the challenges of this kind of work, what's the best way to go about it?

Here are some tips that will help you in your search:

- Save everything you come across and keep it all in one place.
- Source everything. You will inevitably come across inconsistencies in your research, but if you keep a good record of your sources, you will have an easier time comparing facts and analyzing the reliability of certain information.
- Use genealogy software to store and organize your findings. There are many options out there, both paid and free, and while some offer more features than others, they all have basic functions such as recording names, relationships, important dates and places, and sources. I personally use MacKiev's Family Tree Maker to manage dozens of family trees, but there are free options such as RootsMagic Essentials. Both Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org also let you save records to a web-based family tree for free.
- Record all family members, not just your direct ancestors. Because extended families often lived together, knowing the names of siblings and other family members can help you get

past blocks. If you come across people whose relationship to your ancestors you're unsure of, record their names and all information about them in a separate spreadsheet, along with where you got the information. You can add them to your tree later when you find stronger evidence.

- Pay attention to names. Look for unusual names and possible variations in spelling. People can be listed in different records using any combination of first or middle names or even nicknames. Also, be careful not to mix up juniors and seniors.
- Look for existing trees for your family on websites like Ancestry.com. Not only might you discover new ancestors, but you can reach out to possible living family members, as well. However, if you do find an existing tree, do not immediately save it to your own tree. Due to many factors, there are many inaccuracies floating around in family trees, so unless you are pretty sure of the data, use what you find as a guide and not as hard evidence.

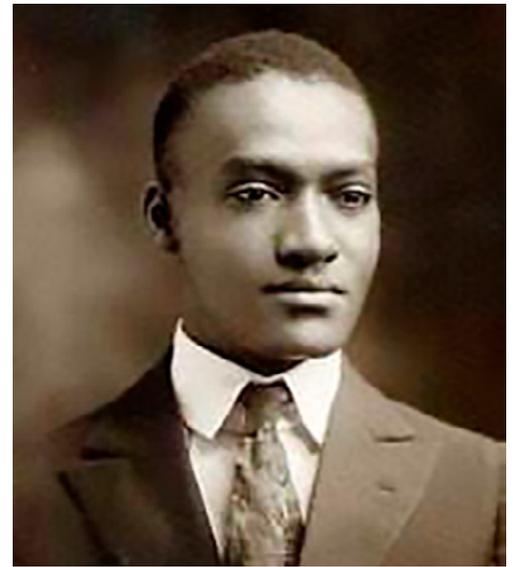
What are the best places online to research this information?

Here are my top five sources of online information:

Census: With very little exception, African Americans do not generally show up in the federal census for DeKalb County until 1870. However, in looking for ancestors between 1870 and 1940, the census is the best place to start because of the wealth of basic information it provides, including names, ages, relationships to others in the household, occupation, where someone was born, residence, and sometimes even an approximate marriage date. You can search the census online through Ancestry.com (paid) and FamilySearch.org (free). Note that the 1890 Federal Census no longer exists for most of the country, including DeKalb County, due to a 1921 fire in the nation's capital that destroyed nearly all of the records.

Death Records: Historic death records for DeKalb are primarily in the form of death certificates, the Georgia Death Index, 1919-1998, and the U.S. Social Security Death Index, 1935-2014. Actual DeKalb County death certificates are only publicly available from 1919-1942, with online access for various years through Ancestry.com (paid), FamilySearch.org, and the Georgia Archives Virtual Vault.

Death certificates are an excellent resource because of the information they can provide, for instance, specific birth and death dates, the specific location of birth and death, cause of death, last known residence, place of burial, and names and birth locations of parents. Keep in mind that the birth and family information found on death certificates is as reliable as the knowledge of the informant; it's not unusual to find only an approximate date of birth or "unknown" listed for one or both parents. Particularly when researching formerly enslaved people or those whose parents were enslaved, death certificates can help you break through brick walls by providing names, dates, and places that you may not be able to find anywhere else.



Joseph Samuel Ebster was born in Decatur in 1902 to Fannie Paschal Ebster and Rev. Donald Grant "D.G." Ebster, for whom Ebster Park and Recreation Center are named. Image courtesy of Deb Ebster.

This death certificate for Louise Kyle Turner provides us with her exact birth date (January 25, 1892), her exact death date (May 16, 1930), when and where she was buried (May 18, 1930, Decatur Cemetery) and the names of both of her parents, including her mother's maiden name. The informant is Mrs. W.H. Brooks and Louise's last place of residence, according to this, was 338 McDonald St. When we compare this information to the 1930 census, we find that her address was actually 338 McDonough, that she lived with her mother in the Brooks home, and that Violet Brooks was her aunt. So while the death certificate gives us a lot of information, comparing it to other sources gives us a more accurate and detailed picture. Image from Georgia, Deaths Index, 1914-1940, Ancestry.com.

Military Records include draft registration cards, service records, and even headstone applications, and you can find them online through Ancestry.com's paid subscription, as well as for free on FamilySearch.org. You can even order copies of records directly from the National Archives, as long as the person's discharge date was more than 62 years ago.

Military records can be a great resource, providing information such as full name, date and city of birth, current residence, the person's occupation and employer name, the name of the nearest relative and their relationship, and a physical description of the registrant.

Newspaper death and funeral notices are an incredibly valuable resource when trying to piece together families. Death notices are helpful in discovering or confirming the date and location of someone's death, and funeral notices can be a goldmine of information, listing surviving family members and where they lived at the time, the church where the funeral was held and who officiated, and location of burial. Funeral notices are especially helpful when trying to research a woman's family because you might discover her maiden name through either male siblings or surviving parents.

This funeral notice for John Edwin Tolbert gives us a good look at basic information on him and his family. We discover his father's name and address

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

in 1948, his wife's maiden name and address in 1948, the names of his brothers, and the married names of his sisters. We also learn that he died in Italy on May 18, 1944, while serving in WWII and that he was buried with a military service at Decatur Cemetery four years later. To find out more about his military service, you could cross-reference this information with his military headstone application.

Death and funeral notices for DeKalb residents can be found in the Atlanta Constitution (1868-1984), the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (1985-present), and the African American newspaper Atlanta Daily World (1931-2003). The Atlanta Constitution and Atlanta Journal-Constitution are available through the paid service Newspapers.com. Alternatively, you can access the Atlanta Constitution 1868-1984 through the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution 1985-present through some libraries. The Atlanta Daily World appears to be only available through ProQuest Historical Newspapers. ProQuest Historical Newspapers is not widely available online to the general public, but you can access it by visiting subscribing institutions in person. Both Georgia State University and Agnes Scott College will allow guests to access ProQuest on-campus computers during one-hour visits, pending availability. Please call your local institution for more information.

Marriage Licenses provide you with not only the year of a couple's marriage but also a woman's maiden name (or her name from a previous marriage). In DeKalb County, early African American marriage records were either kept in a separate book labeled "colored," or individual names might be followed with the label "col." You can find marriage certificates online through Ancestry.com (paid) or FamilySearch.org (free).

Breaking the 1870 Wall

Because very few records were kept of African Americans before the 1870 census, you might have to search for clues in the records left by white people. When trying to break past the 1870 wall for African American genealogy, you must think outside of the box. Although many enslaved people did change their names upon emancipation, some did not. In researching enslavers in DeKalb County, you might be able to find traces of the African Americans they enslaved.

The Georgia Journal, Federal Union, Southern Recorder, and Atlanta Weekly Intelligencer (which can be searched for free through Georgia Historic Newspapers) all published slavery auctions and estate sales by county, including DeKalb, where all auctions took place at the courthouse steps. While advertisements did not always list the names of the enslaved, many did, along with age. These ads can be cross-referenced with other antebellum documents found on Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org such as the 1850 and 1860 Federal Slave Schedules, which list the names of enslavers along with the sex and age of enslaved, and the 1850 and 1860 Mortality Schedule, which lists all

CERTIFICATE OF DEATH
 GEORGIA STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
 Bureau of Vital Statistics
 30-12270
 STATE FILE NUMBER

1 PLACE OF DEATH
 State—Georgia
 County—DeKalb
 City or Town—Decatur
 (If death occurred in a hospital or institution, give its NAME instead of street and number.)

2 FULL NAME
 Louise Kyles Turner
 (a) Residence—328 W. Howard St.
 (Usual place of abode, street and number)
 Length of residence in city or town where death occurred yrs. mos. ds. IF NON-RESIDENT give city or town and state of residence.

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS

3 SEX—Female
 4 Color or Race—Colored
 5 Single, Married, Widowed, or Divorced (write the word)—Married

6 DATE OF BIRTH (month, day and year)—25-1872
 7 AGE—Years—78
 Months—
 Days—

8 OCCUPATION
 (a) Trade, Profession or particular kind of work—Domestic
 (b) General nature of Industry, Business or Establishment in which employed (for employer)

9 BIRTHPLACE (State or Country)—Ga.
 10 NAME OF FATHER—C.W. Turner
 11 BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or Country)—Ga.
 12 MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER—Lucy Kyles
 13 BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or Country)—Ga.

14 The Above is True to the Best of My Knowledge.
 (Informant)
 (Address)—Mrs W. H. Brooks
 (Address)—Decatur, Ga.

15 Filed—5-17, 1930
 Registrar—J.R. Gowan

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

16 DATE OF DEATH (month, day and year)—May 16th 1930
 I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from Jan 10, 1930, to May 16th 1930 and that I last saw her alive on May 16th 1930 and that death occurred, on the date stated above at 9:30 a.m.
 The CAUSE OF DEATH was as follows:
 Acute Nephritis
 (duration) yrs. mos. ds.
 CONTRIBUTORY Chronic Nephritis
 (duration) yrs. mos. ds.
 18 When was disease contracted (if not at place of death)—Same
 Did an operation precede death? No Date of
 Was there an autopsy? No
 What test confirmed diagnosis? Clinical Findings
 (Signed)—Dr. Homer Allen, M.D.
 (Address)—Decatur, Ga.

19 Place of Burial, Cremation, or Removal Date of Burial
 Decatur Cemetery 5/18/1930
 20 UNDERTAKER—Loye Bros
 Address—P.O. Decatur

In both the 1900 and 1910 census for Decatur, Joseph W. Brooks (listed as Joe and Joseph) is married to Fort Sumter/Fort Sumpter Brooks. In looking at a marriage license from 1 June 1897, we find a J.W. Brooks married to Fort Sumter Smith. Image from Georgia, Marriage Records from Select Counties, 1828-1978, Ancestry.com

deaths in the county, including the full names and ages of enslaved African Americans. And while very few African Americans were free in antebellum DeKalb County, you can consult the DeKalb County Inferior Court Register of Free Persons of Color, 1851-1864 either online at Ancestry.com or in person at the DeKalb History Center Archives.

Finally, for five years I have done extensive genealogical research on African American families in Decatur and surrounding DeKalb County, so please do feel free to contact me to see if I might be able to fill in some gaps for you.

I wish you much success in your genealogical journeys.

Laurel Wilson is a historian and genealogist with a focus on African American heritage in Decatur and DeKalb County. She holds a master's degree in Public History from Georgia State University and has practiced genealogy for over 20 years. You can learn more about her work and contact her via Decaturhistory.com.

(This story was published February 24, 2020.)

Druid Hills High sophomore connects struggling restaurants with hungry healthcare workers

By Dan Whisenhunt

Atlanta, Ga. – Grey Cohen, a Druid Hills High sophomore, is one of the millions of students studying at home while America waits for the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

She recently overheard her uncle talking to her mom about ways to support local hospital staff and restaurants. Her mother, Dena, works at Emory. Her uncle, Shawn Janko, is in the banking industry and works with restaurants.

Their conversation gave Grey an idea. What if she could connect people looking to support restaurants and support healthcare workers?

"I thought it was an amazing cause and I really wanted to expand it and make it accessible to everyone in our community, in hopes we could really help out all the hospital workers who are on the front line of this pandemic and also support the local restaurants whose whole industry is suffering because of it," she said.

Working with her father Mark, who owns a small

design firm, they created The Meal Bridge. The idea is to get people to sign up to have meals sent from local restaurants to local hospitals. Mark said that he sees himself as Grey's employee.

"I work for Grey," he said. "Grey is the CEO."

Her mom got in touch with her contacts at the hospital to arrange to have the food delivered. And Grey suddenly found herself in charge of a fledgling organization. It's a task she must balance against her responsibilities as a stay-at-home student.

Grey said being out of school is a "big change."

"I'm at home with my sister all day," she said. "We can joke around, and get our work done. Having the meal bridge is like a second job. I'm coordinating things all day, getting emails and responding to adults who are used to this sort of thing. I'm just a high schooler and I'm trying to balance it out and find what works best for me. I'm just managing it all. It's a process."

It's a process that has paid off. The site went live Monday. They've done about six deliveries, feeding about 60 or 70 people. Using the website, people can

buy a meal for as few as five people or as many as 20 people.

Emory Hospital on Clifton Road is the only hospital Meal Bridge is working with currently and the restaurants must be vetted by the hospital, which is a process.

"We've had a lot of restaurants calling," Mark said. "We give those names to the administrator at Emory. She calls to make sure they're following CDC guidelines as far as food delivery."

But Mark and Grey want to expand to other hospitals.

Grey is looking to the future. She's never done this kind of work before, but now she can see a need for it when the coronavirus pandemic is in the rear-view mirror.

"I'm hoping after we clear the woods and this whole coronavirus thing ends, we can do more things like this," Grey said.

To sign up to send healthcare workers a meal, visit The Meal Bridge by clicking here.

(This story was published March 25, 2020.)

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The Tara Beekeepers Association has been buzzing since 1959

By Mary Margaret Stewart, contributor

PN Williams has lived in Forest Park, Ga. for 65 years now. And back in 1959, he founded Tara Beekeepers Association, which still meets in Forest Park today.

Williams worked as a mechanic for Delta Air Lines for 31 years. His love for beekeeping started as a hobby, and he eventually convinced his wife, Evelyn, to go into honey production with him.

"In today's world, you have to be careful of where you put your bees," Williams said. "I used to keep 30 and 40 hives here in Forest Park, but Forest Park started spraying for mosquitoes."

Williams moved those hives because the chemicals used to ward off mosquitoes would kill his bees. However, the death of bees is not the only thing about the chemicals that concerns that Williams. He said, "I'm firmly convinced that it's killing you and I."

A lot has changed since '59, including beekeeping. Today, the Tara Beekeepers include residents who live in the Decatur area and the group holds regular events in DeKalb County. For a list of events in the area, click here. To register for an event, email tarabeekeepers@gmail.com

As a longtime beekeeper, Williams sees it as an "entirely different world."

"It's changed drastically, and the average person doesn't have the slightest idea about what's going on," Williams said, "But our bees are our major pollinator. Every three mouthfuls of food that you consume, they are directly responsible for one and the other two indirectly."

So, what's changed? The use of chemicals has become a widespread practice to ward off bugs and protect crops from viruses, and those chemicals are killing the bees. He said some of the chemicals, such as neonicotinoid – which is commonly used on corn crops – kills beehives by impeding their ability

to get back home.

"It's serious, and nobody seems to understand," Williams said. "They just keep using chemicals and chemicals and chemicals in everything that we grow now. That's what's going on, and that's why a little organization like we are is so, so important."

Tara Beekeepers Association started out as about 20 to 30 people who met to talk about beekeeping, and it grew to over 130 people. After some group members were traveling from all over Georgia to attend these meetings, PN helped found beekeeping groups in other counties outside of Clayton County, such as Henry County and Coweta County.

Today, Tara Beekeepers has gotten smaller again. It's a tight-knit group.

As president of the association, Keif Schleifer said, "We spend as much time snacking and yakking as we do talking about bees."

Schleifer has a fascination for bees, and she sees them as a connecting force between people. Just like the bees, "we win together and we fail together," Schleifer said.

"The bees work collectively in their different castes. They have to work together. None of them are alone, and I kind of see our club as an extension of that," Schleifer said. "I think we're in this very divisive time. Here's a great example of people coming together for the common good."

Tara Beekeepers meet once a month in Forest Park, meeting for snacks, guest speakers, and exchange of expertise in beekeeping. And that expertise is something invaluable in Schleifer's eyes.

"Our club has a lot of these older beekeepers with this incredible knowledge that we're kind of losing," Schleifer said.

Looking to attend a meeting? Check out www.tarabeekeepers.org for more information.

(This story was published on February 3, 2020.)



Image provided to Decaturish

Maker community works to make personal protective equipment for healthcare workers

By Dan Whisenhunt

Atlanta, Ga. – Atlanta area maker communities are putting their craftiness to work, creating personal protective equipment for healthcare workers who need it during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are more than 200 volunteers making face shields, N95-style masks, intubation enclosures, gowns and surgical caps operating under the banner of Atlanta Beats Covid. There are other volunteers in touch with the medical community assessing the needs and making deliveries.

"Atlanta Beats Covid is a collaboration of community leaders and makers from across Georgia including Decatur Makers, Marietta Maker Station, Roswell FireLabs, Geekspace Gwinnett, and Southeast Makers Alliance, and includes makers from across Georgia," a press release from the organization says. "The group is partnering with other organizations, such as Sew Masks for Atlanta Hospitals, Atlanta Face Shields and Roadie. Decatur Makers is serving as the fiscal sponsor, collecting tax-deductible donations to support the effort."

Lee Whitcher founded the group, which has raised more than \$5,000 for the cause.

"Thanks to the strength of the maker community, we are problem-solving and creating for a purpose," Whitcher said. "We are proud to be part of this worldwide effort to help fill the need to save lives."

The group is still raising funds via AtlantaBeatsCovid.com. The site also contains information about volunteering and information for first responders and medical professionals who want to request equipment.

Financial donations will support the purchase of 3D printer filament, plastic, elastic, and other raw materials and equipment.

(This story was published on April 3, 2020.)



Keif Schleifer, president of the Tara Beekeepers Association, transferring a swarm of honey bees from a tree into a hive.

Image provided to Decaturish

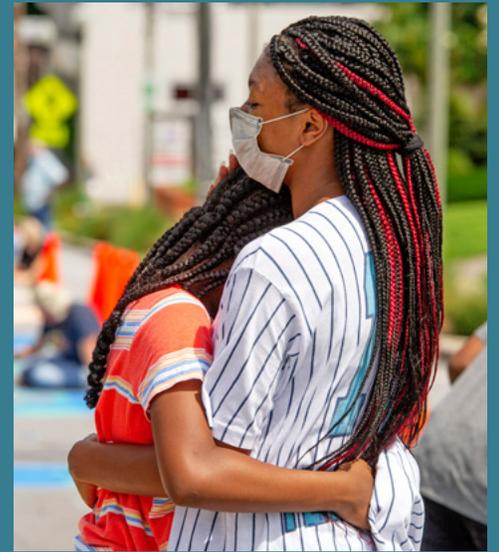


BY DEAN HESSE

DEAN'S FAVORITE PHOTOS OF 2020

It wasn't an easy task to pick just 10 images to define the year that was 2020. Things started off typical enough but soon changed dramatically. It was a roller coaster year, a dumpster fire, whatever you want to call it, but there were good things that happened as well. After much deliberation I chose the images here because I think they tell part of the story in a positive light, in big moments and small ones, of a year we want to forget but will always remember.

For more photos, visit decatrish.com.



Opposite page, top: It was May 5 and I heard there was going to be a socially distant inflatable Cinco de Mayo parade in Oakhurst. I headed on over and caught this Abbey Road-like image. It made people happy and was a nice break in the pandemic grind.

Center right: There were plenty of great photo ops when the community came together on August 22 to help paint the Black Lives Matter mural in front of Decatur High School, but I think this embrace between sisters Julia and Patricia Robinson really captures the emotion of the day.

Bottom left: A sea of people fills N. McDonough St. as they march from downtown Decatur to Oakhurst during a demonstration sponsored by the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights on June 7. It was one of several peaceful demonstrations held in the city. The number of people who came out in support of the Black Lives Matter movement in spite of the pandemic was inspiring.

Bottom right: With high school graduation ceremonies canceled, Decatur's kids got creative with car parades through their neighborhoods to celebrate. It surely wasn't what they expected graduation would be, but they adapted. May 28.

This page, top right: The Mead Road Mardi Gras on Feb. 8 wasn't as big as usual because of the threat of snow, but it went on none the less and was as always, a joy filled affair. The next month we would be in the midst of a global pandemic.

Right: On March 22, I came across Madison Duncan 'self-isolating' on a porch in Oakhurst. She was taking the situation in stride with a smile on her face.

Bottom left: June 18 was a historic night in Decatur. That's the night the Confederate monument finally came down. I arrived around 10 p.m. just as lowboys loaded with cranes were turning onto E. Ponce De Leon Ave. It wasn't publicized but word got out regardless and a small crowd watched and cheered and toasted with champagne as the obelisk and its base were removed and hauled away.

Bottom right: On June 5, Emory University medical students organized a "White Coats for Black Lives" demonstration. Similar events took place nationwide. The school's quadrangle was filled with doctors, nurses, students, and other medical workers, including Dr. Karen Effinger with raised fist, who took a knee in silence for 8 minutes and 46 seconds in memory of George Floyd.



First Baptist Church of Decatur kicked out of local baptist association over LGBTQ views

By Dan Whisenhunt

Decatur, Ga. – First Baptist Church of Decatur recently learned that the Atlanta Metro Baptist Association expelled the church from its ranks over its decision to appoint gay, lesbian and transgender members to church leadership positions.

Jimmy Baughcum, Executive Director with the Atlanta Metro Baptist Association, declined to comment on the matter but noted that the church hadn't sent a representative to the association's meetings in two years.

First Baptist Senior Pastor David Jordan said claims that the church hasn't participated in two years are a "total smokescreen" for the real reason the church has been expelled.

"There are plenty of churches who don't affiliate at all, and they don't kick them out," Jordan said.

Jordan said the church does receive its nonprofit status through the Metro Baptist Association, but will now obtain it via the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia, a more moderate group. Jordan noted that First Baptist Church of Decatur was one of the earliest members of the Metro Baptist Association and joined in 1910. The association is comprised of a network of Baptist churches helping each other with various needs, like assisting people moving in from faraway places or providing other Baptist churches with extra supplies. He said some groups like Metro Baptist Association have become more conservative of late, hardening their rules about who could or could not participate in them.

He said in May the Metro Baptist Association updated its bylaws to be specific about same-sex marriage and other LGBTQ issues.

"The fact our church a few years back ordained a gay deacon, it put us on the radar screen," Jordan said.

That deacon, Theron Clark-Stuart, also married his husband, David, at the church in 2015. It was one of the largest wedding ceremonies ever held there. He no longer actively serves as a deacon — deacons have three-year rotations — but is on the finance committee, teaches Sunday school and sings in the praise and worship band where his husband plays trombone. He's also an ordained Baptist minister and pastored for 18 years before coming out as gay.

"And I grew up in a minister's home," he said. "I'm a preacher's kid."

He said he always backs an organization's rights to set their own standards and guidelines if they don't receive government funding.

"That said, it's not very Christlike," Clark-Stuart said of the Metro Baptist Association's decision. "We are called not to be Baptists, we are called not to be Lutherans or Presbyterians, we're called to be Christians, and Christian means little Christ. If you want to be like Christ, you really need to love everybody and that means include and affirm everybody."

Clark-Stuart added, "It's a fairly evangelical group, and the evangelical movement is shrinking rapidly. The southern Baptists are shrinking because of their inability to love people who are not just like them."

He said the decision of the Metro Baptist Association "saddens me."

"I'm disappointed that they would exclude people that certainly Jesus would never exclude," Clark-Stuart said. "I'm saddened because people are so afraid of growing in their faith. Fear causes us to exclude people. It causes us to alienate and put barriers between ourselves and others. Fear drives out love. That's what I see happening and it's sad because I have a strong Baptist heritage and I'm proud I grew up a Baptist. I'm sad they did this. I still love them. They're still my brothers and I still love them. I have biological brothers who haven't spoken to me since I came out 20 years ago, but I still love them."

Pastor Jordan has largely taken the expulsion in stride. It isn't the first time the liberal-leaning Decatur congregation has gotten crosswise with more conservative Baptists. In 2009, the Georgia Baptist Convention severed its 148-year affiliation with the church after it named a woman — Julie Pennington-Russell — as its pastor, according to the Associated Baptist Press. Jordan said after the initial pushback from more conservative members over naming a gay deacon, "The church just moved on or moved forward."

"Since then we've had more gay deacons," Jordan said. "We have a transgender deacon. I've done same-sex weddings. I've been pretty clear about our stance."

Jordan said prior to the announcement from the Metro Baptist Association, two leaders with the group — including Baughcum — met with him at his office to convince him to make the church conform with the group's bylaws. Jordan says he was politely told if the church didn't conform to the group's bylaws, the church could either withdraw from the group or the group would vote the church out.

"And I said, 'Well, this is not our issue, it's your issue,'" Jordan recalled.

The meeting occurred in November. Baughcum sent a letter to Jordan dated Jan. 31 announcing the church of the group's decision.

During a Sunday sermon, Jordan used the letter he received from Baughcum as a talking point. The message?

"How can we be the light of the world?"

"We're trying to let the light of the world shine, but people do things to make us feel ashamed and try to put us down," Jordan said, recalling his sermon.

But he got a round of applause from the congregation when he told them what he told Baughcum at the end of their November meeting.

"Would you do me a favor?" Jordan asked Baughcum. "When your churches exclude people who you say are 'misaligned' biblically, please send them our way and we will welcome them with open arms."

(This story was published February 10, 2020.)

YOU CAN BUY THIS DECATUR RESTAURANT, BUT YOU CAN'T HAVE THE PHO KING NAME

By Dan Whisenhunt

Decatur, Ga. — The Pho King restaurant in downtown Decatur is for sale, but if you buy it you can't keep the Pho King name.

That's the Pho King deal.

Broker Steven Josovitz with The Shumacher Group contacted Decaturish with the Pho King news. He said the Pho King restaurant, located at 319 West Ponce de Leon Ave., is listed for \$99,500. For that, you get the Pho King furniture, fixtures, and kitchen equipment. Josovitz said the Pho King kitchen equipment is a selling point.

"It's a state of the art kitchen with two exhaust hoods," he said. "One is 10 feet and

one is 8 feet. Most restaurants have one hood."

And if you think the Pho King kitchen equipment is nifty, you should check out the Pho King lease, Josovitz said. Sure it's \$12,500 a month, but that's all-in, meaning the landlord takes care of tax and property maintenance costs. Plus, the Pho King lease has nine years left and has a 5-year option to renew.

"That's really big," Josovitz "That's the first question buyers ask me."

They also have a beer and wine license. To see the Pho King listing, [click here](#).

(This story was published on July 30, 2020.)



TWO SISTERS TURN SIBLING BANTER INTO AWARD-WINNING PODCAST WITH SIS & TELL

By Ellie Ritter, contributor

Decatur, Ga. – For sisters Amanda Goldstein Marks and Alison Goldstein Lebovitz, weekly phone conversations have turned from mere chit-chat into an acclaimed podcast called “Sis & Tell.”

The duo began their podcast nearly three years ago in May 2017. Amanda, a Decatur resident and comedian, and Alison, a national speaker and television host who lives in Chattanooga, decided to begin the podcast during a funny phone call between them.

“Amanda and I were having one of our daily or weekly conversations, and I said ‘wow, this conversation is so funny that we could make it a podcast,’ Alison said. “I think literally three to four days later, we actually made it into a podcast.”

Right away, the sisters decided on a name, secured a web domain, bought \$30 pairs of headsets – from which they say they’ve since upgraded – and downloaded a program to record their calls. From there, they were “up and running,” Alison said.

According to Amanda, the sisters never formally assigned roles to each other. Instead, they just figured out what tasks needed to be completed and fell into roles naturally. Alison records and edits the show, and Amanda does the “back-end” work, along with marketing and promotion.

“[Alison] kind of went to the left, I kind of went to the right, and we came back and had done things that we both needed to do,” Amanda said.

“And literally every week, [Amanda sends] me the suggested title, and every week I re-write it,” Alison said.

“The rule of thumb is put in as much alliteration as possible, and then it’ll be approved on the first try,” Amanda said. “Alison loves alliteration.”

As the sisters began their podcast, they had to face inevitable challenges, they said. Most of the challenges were technical: they began by using the platform Squarespace, but it didn’t have the right capacity, so they switched to a different podcast hosting website. Recording can occasionally be tricky, since the sisters live in different cities, and issues can pop up with their WiFi or headsets.

Another challenge, although more forgiving, is Amanda’s dogs, who bark so much that Alison says she “could make an entire blooper reel of it.”

“Alison and I are very positive people, maybe always wearing rose-colored glasses, so to speak, so I don’t see it as challenges but little hiccups along the way that we always fix,” Amanda said.

The sisters have been able to avoid many challenges because of their simple approach to podcasting.

“Most challenges, if you look at the podcasting world, are about who’s going to listen to this, who are we going to appeal to, who’s our target audience, and what are we going talk about, which wasn’t really a challenge for us because our mantra is true: ‘a whole lotta talk about a whole lotta nothing,’” Alison said. “We never pre-plan our conversations. Anytime we didn’t get as many downloads or got anecdotal feedback that it didn’t work, we just pivoted and we did something different.”

This simple approach, and the ability to keep conversations authentic, is what sets their podcast apart. Alison sums up their podcast in two words: light and legit. By being genuine, the sisters can make listeners feel more connected to the conversations.

“We really want people to feel like they’re listening in on a conversation we’re having,” Amanda said. “We don’t think about it as, ‘oh, is this podcast-quality conversation?’ We’re really just chit-chatting. My favorite comment that we get from our listeners is that they feel like they’re really a part of our family, and they feel like they’re a sister, and we love that.”

Another rewarding part of podcasting – aside from “the fame, the fortune, the awards,” as Alison joked – is that the sisters get to set aside time to talk to one another.

“This sounds so cheesy, but I love that there’s a guaranteed time that I get to hop on the phone every week and I’m getting this full attention from my big sister,” Amanda said.

“And I love that in just 30 minutes I can appease my baby sister by giving her my dedicated attention,” Alison said.

As a comedian, Amanda said that seeing the amount of people who download the podcast and the amount of social interaction that comes with podcasting has been rewarding, especially when listeners reach out to say a specific



Amanda Goldstein Marks and Alison Goldstein Lebovitz host a podcast called ‘Sis & Tell’. Photo provided to Decaturish

story resonated with them. Alison agrees and has found that their podcast has a far broader reach than they expected.

“People recognize us and say, ‘oh my gosh, I listen to your podcast,’ and we don’t know those people,” she said. “It’s cool because when we look at our stats and our demographics, people in Washington State or New Jersey are listening. It’s pretty exciting to know that whatever we’re talking about has relevance to people beyond our immediate scope.”

The sisters release half-hour episodes every Friday on most platforms, including Apple Podcasts, Google Play and Spotify. Decatur FM also rebroadcasts Sis & Tell every day at 10 a.m. and 10 p.m., the sisters said. Sis & Tell has been featured in Forbes online, was voted “Best Podcast” finalist for Creative Loafing’s Best of Atlanta 2018 and won Reader’s Choice for “Best Podcast” for Creative Loafing’s Best of Atlanta 2017.

Additionally, in celebration of their third podcasting anniversary, the sisters plan to have a tentative in-person party for fans on Thursday, June 25th at Highland Inn & Ballroom Lounge. More information will be released as the coronavirus pandemic plays out, the sisters said.

Go here to listen to their podcast and find more information.

(This story was published April 15, 2020.)

As Black Lives Matter movement grows, Juneteenth has a renewed significance for African Americans

By Crystal Jarvis, contributor

Avondale Estates, Ga. — On June 19, 1865, the last enslaved African Americans received word that they were free, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed into law.

That day has since come to be known as Juneteenth, a celebration that has taken on renewed significance this year.

To commemorate Juneteenth — also known as Freedom Day and Jubilee Day — many Black families throughout DeKalb County will fire up the grill, join marches and protests, or attend events this weekend.

As the Black Lives Matter Movement gains wider acceptance, it has given hope to many Black communities across the nation. Younger generations of Black people now see the holiday in a new light.

“I know a lot of my friends are basically canceling the Fourth of July and instead, they are celebrating Juneteenth,” said NiSheena Smith, an organizer of Avondale Estates’ Defend Black Lives event that will commemorate Juneteenth on Friday. “They are saying this is our Freedom Day.”

Smith, who was recently appointed to the Avondale Estates’ Alliance for Racial Justice group, said to commemorate Juneteenth on Friday a “small, yet powerful protest” will be held in Avondale Estates to “tell Black people that we are listening to them, and we’re doing everything we can to fight systemic racism.”

The protest, which will begin at 3 p.m., will be held at The ArtLot, located at 70 North Avondale Road, Avondale Estates, GA. The event is intended to raise awareness about the essential need for communities in Georgia to reform policing, end racist policies within local, state and federal government and invest in Black communities. The event will include speakers, activities for children in attendance and stories to educate adults and children alike on the importance of Juneteenth and why it is celebrated within Black communities. There will also be a voter registration drive.

“We want to hold this event to show that Black people weren’t just slaves,” Smith said. “That’s not where our history begins or ends.”

Stella Jones, Chair of the Economic Development Committee of The NAACP DeKalb County Branch 5192, said it’s important for everyone to understand the significance of Juneteenth and why it’s a monumental day for Black communities.

“A lot of people are not celebrating Fourth of July because it wasn’t for us,” she said. “We are focused on the Black Out event from July 1 to July 7. For the whole week we are encouraging people not to spend money, and if they do, spend money with Black businesses only.”

To commemorate Juneteenth, on Saturday, The NAACP DeKalb County Branch plans to hold a virtual Juneteenth Celebration. The event will include a fashion show, storytime



A re-enactment of a ceremonial procession by Flat Rock community members to the Flat Rock Cemetery. Photo provided to Decaturish

for children and an educational program.

The Flat Rock Archives and the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance in Stonecrest have joined forces to also host a virtual Juneteenth event. The organizations are offering a tour of the Historic Flat Rock Cemetery located in Flat Rock—one of the oldest African American communities in Georgia. The tour will offer heartfelt stories of triumph from the small community that began after T. A. Bryant Sr., bought 45 acres of land from a white landowner for \$600. He later sold parcels to other African Americans. Out of this, a resilient Black community was born and thrived.

Tours of this nature are usually given in person. However, in-person tours have been canceled until the threat of the COVID-19 outbreak declines.

Revonda Cosby, the Executive Director of the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance, which manages the national heritage area that includes the Flat Rock community, said the virtual event is providing an even bigger opportunity than imagined.

“This means the world can now be a part of this tour,” she said. “The importance of spending time in a slave cemetery gives you a great point of reference. It tells us so many stories about slavery and segregation and we realize that in death for them — there was freedom.”

Slave cemeteries became sacred to Black people. It was one of the few places they could call their own and was rarely disturbed by outsiders during mass burnings and riots. They developed rituals to honor their loved ones and created special markings on unmarked graves so that they will know who the graves

belonged to, Cosby said.

“The markers in that cemetery date back to 1835,” Cosby said. “Slaves, former slaves, Native Americans and African American veterans of the Civil War and both World War I and World War II are some of the people who were laid to rest in the cemetery.”

Across the Nation, major corporations, including Nike, Target and Google, will recognize Juneteenth as a paid holiday for their employees beginning this year.

Jones said the NAACP DeKalb County Branch is working tirelessly to have Juneteenth recognized as a paid holiday in Georgia.

“We are pushing for the state of Georgia to make it a holiday,” she said. “To get the day off like the Fourth of July.”

Since some people are choosing to celebrate Juneteenth as their Fourth of July, Smith wants to make sure that people understand that celebrating Juneteenth is not meant to disrespect the Fourth of July in any way — but to commemorate the day when Black people were freed.

“Black people were not free on July 4, 1776,” she said. “We were not even citizens at that time. On June 19, 1865 — that’s when slaves were free. I’m not being disrespectful to your culture but I’m going to celebrate mine. That’s why Irish people celebrate St. Patrick’s Day or other cultures celebrate special days within their culture. We should be allowed to celebrate things within our own culture without being scrutinized.”

(This story was published June 18, 2020.)

LIVING WALLS SPREADS POSITIVITY THROUGH ART DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

By Zoe Seiler, contributor

Atlanta, Ga. — During the coronavirus pandemic, many people have found themselves quarantined at home with little social interaction and missing their friends and loved ones. A local art nonprofit, Living Walls, partnered with artists in Atlanta to spread positivity and provide a sense of solidarity to the community.

Living Walls worked with The Spanx by Sara Blakely Foundation to create a mural that uplifts the community and spreads positivity, kindness and encouragement.

The Spanx by Sara Blakely Foundation supports women and helps them through education, entrepreneurship and the arts, according to the foundation's website.

Living Walls enlisted the talents of local artist Sarah Neuburger to create the mural, which was finished on June 14. It features a quote from Sara Blakely, founder of Spanx, that says "humans can be quarantined but the human spirit cannot be contained."

"The Spanx by Sara Blakely Foundation's mural highlights perseverance, the human spirit, and our community who spreads positivity, kindness, and encouragement all around us," a Living Walls press release says.

It also features a woman with a red backpack which represents Blakely and the foundation. When Blakely started Spanx she wore a red backpack "believing it would help change the course of her start-up," the Spanx Foundation website says. The red backpack is a symbol of women's potential and inner strength.

Located at the intersection of Ponce de Leon and North Highland Avenue, the mural showcases a variety of essential workers from farmers to grocery store employees to healthcare and sanitation workers.

"To those sewing masks to the neighbors clapping at shift changes. And to those delivering goods and teaching children while working full-time, we see you," Neuburger wrote on Instagram.

Neuburger wanted to show the ways people connected with each other through this time and also honor essential workers.

"For me, it was about honoring them and the work that they have done," she said. "I also hoped that as a mural it will be visible a year or two from now and as this moment passes, that we continue to honor those people."

She added that frontline workers have often been called heroes but she thinks that not all of them signed up for that or necessarily had a choice to show up for people in this way during a pandemic.

"I hope that the nature of the mural continues to remind us to support these individuals in the months and years ahead as well and be aware of their safety needs," Neuburger said. "We wanted to put a positive message out [about] the ways that we've come together and the way we're connected to each other."

Living Walls worked to spread positivity earlier this spring when the organization collaborated with 30 local artists for its Signs of Solidarity project. The project aimed to spread messages of hope and show people they are not alone during the pandemic.

"We just wanted to let the community know that we're all in this together after what happened with COVID-19," said Ivan Solis, communications director for Living Walls.

Many businesses and nonprofits have been affected, people are without jobs and artists have had projects canceled, Solis said.

"We wanted to do something to uplift the community," Solis said.

"We created the slogan saying 'quarantine together' so that people who were feeling alone during these times of uncertainty [know] that we're all in this together."

Living Walls paid all 30 artists to create signs that they hung outside of their homes, businesses or were displayed as a digital billboard to show solidarity to those greatly affected by the pandemic.

The organization was able to pay the participating artists and Solis said Living Walls created the project to support local artists and help them through the pandemic.

Artist Elizabeth Lang created a sign in April that says "you are essential" which was displayed at Wild Oats and Billy Goats in Decatur. The sign was displayed at the store, where Lang sells her artwork, for a few weeks in April when the city was shut down.

"At that moment, I felt like the one message I wanted to send out was that your life is important. That's why we're doing [quarantine]," Lang said. "You are an essential part of this community."

She created the sign to show a sense of community in a time where that was lacking and people may have felt emotionally and physically drained.

"I don't even know that we all realized before this year how much community meant. Being away from each other has been a different kind of sadness or lack of energy almost," Lang said.

She also empathized with those who were isolated at the time when the state was shut down.

"I wanted something that said you're doing this because your life is important, somebody cares about you and you're not only staying home for yourself but also for others. It's kind of the community feeling that we're all important," Lang said.

The sign was also a message to each individual reading the sign.

"But you in particular, whoever you are reading the sign, I wanted that person to know how valuable their life is and why we have to suffer through a period of isolation," Lang said.

She wanted to display a message that people could connect to and be reminded that, "I'm important. I may not be as validated with that in mind right now because I'm not seeing my friends every day and feeling that value," Lang said.

(This story was published on June 30, 2020.)



Atlanta artist Elizabeth Lang worked with Living Walls during the Signs of Solidarity project in April. Her sign was displayed at Wild Oats and Billy Goats in Decatur. It served as a reminder that everyone's life is important and everyone is essential to the community. Photo submitted by Elizabeth Lang.

'Some prize that will be' – The COVID-19 pandemic, told through haiku

By Dan Whisenhunt

Decaturish asked the HaikuMom group to share their haikus inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic. Here's what they had to say:

Parents work from home
Kids watch frozen two all day
Into the unknown

It is so quiet
Oakhurst Elementary
Playground is empty

Social distancing
Neighbors drink outside
I'm six feet away
– **Amanda Styles**

I miss my mailman
I wave to him from the door
But it's not the same

At this time last week
I cursed daylight savings time
Oh, young grasshopper
– **Meagan Mehlhop Berardi**

What'll we do today?
Same thing we did yesterday.
Yes, homeschool is on.
– **Kelly Cooke Brock**

A haiku a day
Will keep the doctor away
And washing your hands!
– **Kelly Walsh**

Sure, conference calls. Work.
But baking, board games, horseplay!
Dog happy. Us too.
– **Tanya Comer Frazee**

It is so true that,
Introverts shall inherit
The earth that is left

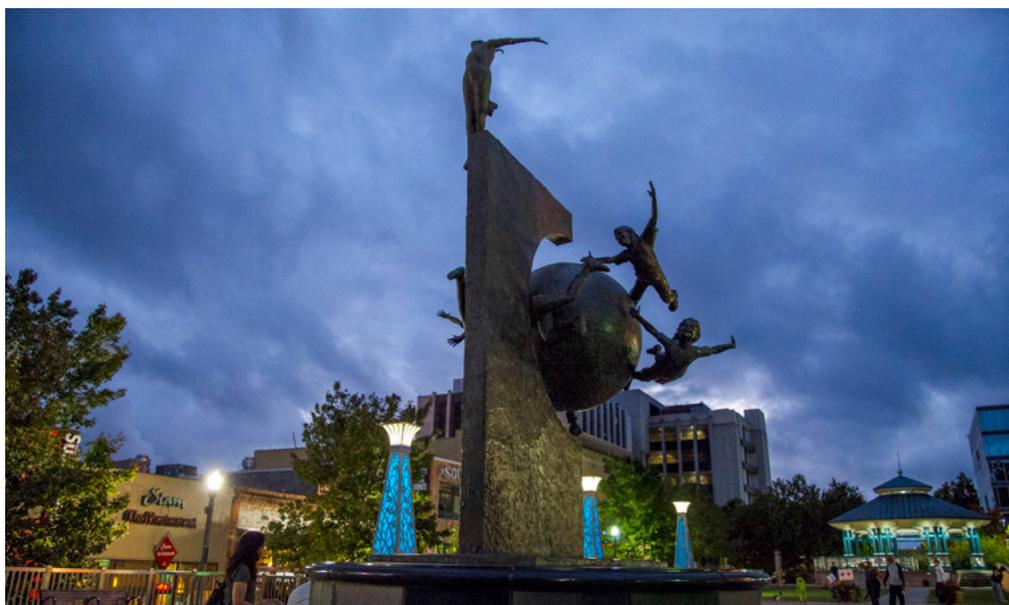
After extroverts
Destroy it completely
Some prize that will be

My pantry runneth,
Over into the kitchen,
Who will cook all this.
– **Zoë Gangemi Barracano**

Seen in a movie,
crowds of people seem strange now.
It's the new normal.

Courtesies in store:
I'll wait by the condiments.
Thanks for berth to pass.
– **Sharon Butler Kaivani**

Today, we must learn.
At home w/ith our family.
We will get through this.
– **Molly Weaver Patterson**



The MARTA Plaza in downtown Decatur. Photo by Dean Hesse

Strutting in Publix
N-95 strapped tight. Stay-
ing Alive" on Muzak.

People coughing like ...
Allergies! Not 'rona!
Like they took the swab.

Stockpiling fail.
Seventeen cans of baked beans
One roll of tp.
– **Susan Carroll**

Go forth, Decatur
Parking spaces finally
And yet, stay in car
– **Jill Lenz**

Afternoon recess
Mandatory for us all
Just don't cough or sneeze

Last run to the store
I've said at least four times
Still need Oreos
– **Sue Joyce**

Unprecedented
Situation is Fluid
Flatten the curve, y'all
– **Stacie Spychalski Buckley**

Anyone need food
I purchased entire Kroger
Baking aisle in Hall

The Covid Virus
Be certain to stay away
From people you like

Rationing eggs here
This is no time for muscle
We need to bake guys

Incessant group calls
Kids friends think I am him
Ring, ring, ring, ring, ring

Fragrant and singing
Spring tempts me with her bounty
Ripe with her poison

Feeling Lil Jealous
Of people with OCD
This is your world now
– **Jami Sue Becker**

Social distancing
Means lots of togetherness
For an introvert.

Bracing for the worst.
So sad for those who will lose
Jobs, businesses, lives.
– **Beth Kelhoffer**

Scary pandemic
Paid leave, books, family time
Introvert heaven

"Stole" TP from work
Twelve sold out stores in three days
Thank God I have boys
– **Sara Van Deventer Williams**

So appreciate
The grocery workers now
Front lines, no glory.
– **Katie Burkholder Brady**

(This story was published on March 23, 2020.)



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Atlanta's Science and Nature Experience

Letters
to the
editor

Dear Decaturish

Dear Decaturish,

At the Decatur 2030 affordable housing panel, participants were broken into breakout groups to answer the city's most pressing questions: are Decatur citizens willing to undergo a change in favor of affordable housing? Who do Decaturites want to live in our 4.5-mile city, if not its rapidly homogenizing, highly wealthy, increasingly white makeup?

Entering the breakout room, I dreamed of a compassionate conversation on equity and progress. Instead, reality hit me like a splash of cold

water. The truth is: if you are not rich, Decatur does not want you here.

I listened as neighbors laughed and agreed with a local landlord's take that "asking for affordable housing" was akin to "asking for free ice cream." The troubles of city workers and restaurant employees who commute for hours to a town they cannot afford were dismissed as irrelevant because 'people are happy to make the commute' and 'they can always just live in Belvedere Park.' (Belvedere residents – you probably already knew what Decatur residents thought of you.) The

only sympathetic thoughts were turned to local teachers, whom the group decided should have "some place" to live. Maybe a hole in the ground?

Exiting our Zoom-discussion, I thought of my family: almost entirely teachers and trade workers. Groups of people Decatur apparently has no desire to house within its borders. And I decided: Decatur, I love you. But perhaps I am better off somewhere that would love me and my family back.

With an ache in my heart,

— Will Styles

GEORGE ON GEORGIA

Why we vote

BY GEORGE CHIDI, CONTRIBUTOR

I met John Lewis three times. As I sit here thinking about what this horrible year has claimed, I wish it had been more. I had excuses to try to be where he was; I'm a high-and-mighty journalist or whatever that means in our digitally-discombobulated world these days. Surely, I could have crafted a rationale.

I wish he were here. Because I would have asked him about the people talking about sitting out the election in January.

The voices out there on both the right and the left, filled with righteous indignation and fertilizer, keep belching raw sewage into the political pool.

On the left, I give you Tamara Johnson-Shealey if you'll have her. Take her, please. A perennial candidate, she ran for the U.S. Senate — one of the long list of candidates we had to wade through to get to Warnock or Loeffler or someone more sensible than her — on a platform calling for reparations for the American descendants of slavery.

Now, reasonable people can disagree about whether such a thing makes sense or who should benefit, or what it might look like in practice. Reasonable people, in fact, disagree strongly about such things. Hell, reasonable people who believe reparations are justifiable disagree strongly about such things.

Reasonable people do not suggest, because Rev. Raphael Warnock chooses not to adopt the American Descendants of Slavery [ADOS] position on reparations, that Black people (specifically non-immigrant Black people, because that matters apparently) should boycott the runoff. She's arguing that Black voters should demonstrate their political power by withholding the vote. She's made this argument before when she lost a state senate runoff to someone who could actually win an election. No one listened to her then, either.

Johnson-Shealey placed sixth in the U.S. Senate race last month with 2.2 percent of the vote and more than 100,000 voters and I don't know any of them. I have to wonder how many of them actually knew her. But hey: she raised \$50,000 and got other people to pay for a trip to Chicago out of it.

She's an edge case, I suppose, when compared to the agitation on the far right. There, we have white nationalists taking to the steps of the Georgia capitol, calling for a boycott of a "rigged" runoff election. And yes, they were actually white nationalists, Proud Boys and followers of Nick Fuentes' "groyper" movement, and cannot be mistaken for anything else. The fellow in one viral video runs a white nationalist blog called Red Elephants out of California. (L. Lin Wood, Trumpist and mediocre attorney, is also calling for a boycott and is quite local, but I sense his connection to those guys is tangential at best.)

They're saying that the election is rigged and that neither Kelly Loeffler nor David Perdue are willing to ... well, you know, violate the Constitution ... to give God-Emperor Trump a second term. So, screw 'em. Republicans should be reminded that they will lose elections if they fail to pay homage to the fringes of their party, especially in close races.

See a theme here?

John Lewis was about participation.

"The right to vote is precious. Almost sacred," he would say, over and over again. "People fought for it. Bled for it. Died for it."

Lewis didn't say the right to vote for people I like. He wouldn't have been making snide jokes hoping that the far-right took calls to boycott seriously. He wanted an honest accounting of the public will. All of it. Everyone.

This was his great gift to us. And that's because he knew what the alternative would look like, and feel like. It would feel like a truncheon to the skull.

Because that's the alternative to voting. That's

what happens when people give up on the Democratic process. Voting is what we do so that we don't settle political arguments in the street. Democracy is an agreement to fight with ballots, not bullets.

The phrase "the bullet or the ballot" comes from a speech made by Malcolm X just before the passage of the Voting Rights Act, in which he specifically called out U.S. Sen. Richard Russell of Georgia for leading a filibuster against the bill. Malcolm X, too, called for Black voters to withhold their votes ... unless those votes would be decisive. Likening a vote to a bullet, he said people should not shoot unless they could hit their target. But he also said — correctly, I believe — that democracy fails when it can't solve human rights problems with a ballot, and that the alternative is a bloody revolution.

We saw a piece of that in the street this summer. People saw their political leaders fail to address abusive policing, even in places with overwhelming Democratic and Black majorities. The ballot failed.

That's what a call to boycott is about. The death threats against legislators we're seeing in social media? The far-right protesters with rifles before our capitols? All part of the same line; "Democracy has failed you. Abandon the vote and get ready to fight."

As long as State Sen. Elena Parent has to manage doxxing while people are threatening her life, I am not going to make febrile jokes about a call to boycott the election, even if we're talking about the 2 percent fringe on either side of the ledger. I view it as a prelude to political violence that — given the conditions — should be rejected in the strongest possible terms.

If we are going to celebrate Lewis' legacy, we should be worthy of him.

Vote.

— George Chidi is a political columnist and public policy advocate. He also writes for *The Intercept*. (This piece was published on December 9, 2020.)

The truth is I am racist, and I should feel uncomfortable

BY HANS UTZ, CONTRIBUTOR

The truth is I am a racist.

I am going to let that sit there for a minute and be uncomfortable about it.

I want to be angry, to performatively rend my clothes, to rage and weep at the injustices my Black friends face every day. I want to virtue signal and condemn insufficiently woke people. I want to convince everyone everywhere of how I am an ally and how I'm "one of the good ones".

But that's all bullshit. That's smokescreen. That isn't helpful.

The truth is I get angry when I see the news or the social media posts. That's like 1% of my time. Most of the time I'm in a white bubble where I don't have to think about it, and I so don't.

I don't mean to be this way. I wish I could wave a magic wand to fix things.

But that's also bullshit. If *my* kids were being killed, I'd have burned down civilization by now. So why is this different?

The truth is I am a racist.

It does not matter that I do not mean to be. It does not matter that the overriding weight of my culture teaches me, seduces me, defaults me to be this way. It doesn't matter that I don't do "the bad things", like kneeling on a man's neck until he is dead with a smirk on my face. I have never cornered a man with my car and then shot him dead with a shotgun while one of my buddies filmed it. But my silence apologizes for and makes space for that behavior whether or not I mean it to. I am complicit.

In recent weeks in Decatur we have several examples of young white men behaving extremely poorly, **using privilege to intimidate a Black man**, or using their voice to **record a grotesque video** that threatens all Black people.

That the men on the porch were not thinking about race is precisely why it was racist – only two white men could possibly engage in an activity that utterly oblivious to the racial overtones.

That the young man in the video meant to mock racists, rather than emulate them, is precisely why it was also racist. Only a white person would fail to understand how the poison of that language causes damage whenever a white person wields it, regardless of intent.

But I am in no position to condemn these white families for the actions of these young men. It is inescapably true that but for the grace of God that could have been my family.

I have not always had the hard conversations with my kids. I worry that they won't understand how a white woman's false hysteria in calling the cops on a peaceful Black man in Central Park is exactly equivalent to threatening his life. It is in fact nothing short of attempted murder. But I want my kids to trust police officers, and I want my kids to be comfortable.

The price of that is that they will also grow up to be racist. I could try to teach them the platitudes I was taught: I don't see color. Everyone is equal.

But that is teaching them to look away. That is teaching them that avoiding their discomfort is more important than respecting the life of a Black person. That galls me more than my discomfort. That realization sickens me, and I'm sickened because I recognize how complicit I am in it.

Enough. The truth is I am a racist.

The truth is I am determined to be anti-racist. I will mess up, because I don't know how to do it and I am learning. I will be ok with messing up, because trying to be better is better than quietly continuing to be racist.

I invite you to join me. It is far past time we live with a little discomfort. The following list is just the tip of the iceberg of what is out there to help on your journey, but it is a great place to start.

Hans Utz has lived in and around Atlanta for 25 years and formerly served as the Deputy COO of the City of Atlanta. He writes about local and national politics for Decaturish. He and his family currently reside in Decatur.

(This piece was published on June 5, 2020.)

If you are wondering how to have the conversation with your kids, here are a couple of great resources:

- [Ten Tips For Teaching And Talking To Kids About Race](#)
- [Raising White Kids](#)
- [Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?](#)

If you are interested in learning more, or engaging with your discomfort, here are some great places to start:

- [So You Want To Talk About Race?](#)
- [White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People To Talk About Racism](#)
- [Twelve Tips For White Dudes, By A White Dude](#)
- [The Root](#)

And if you think nothing was ever handed to you on a platter and this whole concept of white privilege makes you deeply angry, I understand that also. I was too. I invite you to explore it:

- [Explaining White Privilege To A Broke White Person](#)



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MEET COOKING AND BAKING CONNOISSEUR KELSEY DELESHAW, LOCAL TEENAGE ENTREPRENEUR

BY MARY MARGARET STEWART

Decatur, Ga. — Decatur resident Kelsey Deleshaw is 16 years old, and ever since she can remember, she's always been into cooking and baking.

"When I was like really, really little, my mom had an out-of-the-house cake business, so I kind of grew up in the kitchen," Deleshaw said. "I always liked to play restaurant when I was a lot younger. I would create menus for my family, and it would have stuff like pimiento cheese sandwiches or maybe like peanut butter and jelly – basic stuff like that. I had a little toy cash register, and now it's kind of funny. It's like the real thing."

By the real thing, she means her baking business. After posting on Facebook to see if Decaturites would be interested in ordering some baked goods, her business quickly took off.

Kelsey has a long menu of items for sale, including four different types of cakes, four different types of cupcakes, and three different types of macarons. Her macarons, carrot cake, tres leches cake, and croissants have been her most popular items – and when she says popular, she means it.

"Right away, after I posted on Facebook, I got, like, 20 emails in the first 30 minutes. And I was like, 'Oh my gosh.' I didn't really know how to handle it all," Deleshaw said. "So, my mom answers the emails, and she sorts out the pickup and delivery, and I do all of the baking. Basically, I wake up early in the morning and just bake all day. Tomorrow is the only day off that I have."

For perspective, Deleshaw said that croissants take a full 24 hours to make. For these orders, she works for about half of the day in the afternoon and then wakes up in the morning to freshly bake them and run them off to her customers.

Decatur resident Becky Vinson saw Deleshaw's post on Facebook and ordered 20 macarons for her and her husband, which are her "absolute favorite treat."

"I think it was fabulous. She delivered them to my front door, and she texted me the exact timing. I just thought it was perfection," Vinson said. "And the packaging is the cutest little pink bag – they were in a white box with a clear top with a ribbon. The whole thing was just fantastic."

For Deleshaw, she sees her baking business in Decatur as an opportunity to further her future.

"I'd like to have a coffee shop and a restaurant when I'm older, so this is actually helping me gain more experience for that," Deleshaw said. "It's showing me how things run, which is pretty cool."

Experience is definitely something she has already at 16 years old.

Deleshaw made it to the final round of the Food Network's Kid Barbeque Championship at 13. She's served as the brand ambassador for



Kelsey Deleshaw. Photo provided to Decaturish.

Avocados from Mexico, where she made cooking videos, wrote recipes, and attended a big produce convention for them in New Orleans to perform cooking demos.

In addition, she was a brand ambassador for Every Kid Can Cook, a non-profit that teaches kids about healthy cooking. She made cooking recipes and videos for them, too, and won their yearly, national cook-off two years in a row.

And about two years ago, Deleshaw traveled to Pennsylvania and performed a cooking demo for a local news channel.

One of the reasons that Vinson decided to order macarons from Deleshaw was because of her young age.

"I'm self-employed. My husband's self-em-

ployed, and I love to help small business owners and people," Vinson said. "I just thought it was great because I could tell by the post that she's a teenager. I admired her, and I was impressed that at her age, she would put it out there."

Deleshaw's talents don't stop with food, though. She does voiceover work and she's also an actor, starring in short films, radio ads, promotional videos, and more. She recently did a voice-over about Coronavirus for the state of Alaska.

To learn more about Kelsey, check out: <https://www.facebook.com/kdeleshaw/>

To place an order, send an email to: Kelseydeleshaw@gmail.com

(This story was published on June 10, 2020.)

Emory creative writing professor wins Pulitzer Prize for poetry

By Dan Whisenhunt

Atlanta, Ga. – Jericho Brown, Emory’s Winship Distinguished Research Professor in Creative Writing, has won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for poetry for his collection, “The Tradition.”

The Pulitzer board described the work as, “A collection of masterful lyrics that combine delicacy with historical urgency in their loving evocation of bodies vulnerable to hostility and violence.”

Brown is an associate professor and director of the Creative Writing Program at Emory University, according to Pulitzer.org.

His work has appeared in several publications, including *The New Yorker*, according to the Pulitzer website.

According to Emory University, “The coveted award puts Brown, director of Emory College’s nationally renowned Creative Writing Program, in the company of literary luminaries such as poets Tracy K. Smith, Natasha Trethewey, Mary Oliver,

Rita Dove, Sylvia Plath, Robert Penn Warren and Robert Frost, and ensures his work as part of the canon of American literature.”

Brown said he was delighted and also surprised by the news.

“I have known about the Pulitzer Prize and understood its prestige since I was in elementary school and Rita Dove won it,” Brown said. “And I’m so glad I understood it as one of the possibilities for a writer even when I was a kid. Understanding it as a possibility doesn’t mean I ever expected to win it, and getting the news that I won is the very best thing to happen to me in 2020 by far.”

He added, “I didn’t expect to win it because when I write my poems I mean to be as subversive and radical as possible.”

According to Emory, it’s one of many accolades Brown has received.

“The Pulitzer Prize for Poetry is the latest honor for Brown, who previously has been named the recipient of a Whiting Writers Award, a Natio-



Jericho Brown. Image provided by Emory University

nal Endowment for the Arts Fellowship and a Guggenheim Fellowship,” Emory University’s press release says. “He was a finalist for the 2019 National Book Award for Poetry.”

To see one of his poems, titled “Another Elegy [‘This is What our Dying Looks Like’]” [click here](#).

(This story was published on May 4, 2020.)

‘Bear Hunt’ game helps Decatur parents and kids pass the time during COVID-19 pandemic

BY MARY MARGARET STEWART

Decatur, Ga. – Hannah Manry, a nanny in Decatur to three children under the age of six, is from the small town of Colquitt in South Georgia.

Recently on social media, she noticed that a couple of parents from her hometown were raving about how much their kids love the game Bear Hunt. Then, after seeing WALB from Albany, Georgia, report on kids playing Bear Hunt in the midst of COVID-19 quarantine, she decided to see if any Decaturites would be interested in playing.

“I’m a nanny of three children, and they’re five, three and two, and I just thought that it sounded like a really good idea because they are honestly going stir crazy being inside all the time and, you know, not being able to interact with other children,” Manry said. “I posted it on Nextdoor and just went from there, and a lot of people responded.”

Bear Hunt is a game played throughout neighborhoods, where people participating in the game put a stuffed animal, like a bear, in a window in their house for children to spot when they’re walking or driving by. Manry said that the game originated from a children’s book called, “We’re Going on a Bear Hunt,” which is also a popular children’s song.

“Every time we go outside, we sing the song,” she said.

While her post got locals playing in the neighborhoods near downtown Decatur, where she nannies, Manry said that people from all different neighborhoods around Decatur, like Oakhurst, Kirkwood, and Midway Woods responded, wanting to participate

Nassim Nichols, a mother to a two-and-a-half-year-old boy and resident of Midway Woods in Decatur, decided to post in their neighborhood Facebook group about playing Bear Hunt in their neck of the woods, so to speak.

And for the record, this game isn’t just trending in Georgia. Nichols said that the first place she saw it was in her sister’s neighborhood in Texas. After posting in the Midway Woods Facebook group, she said that people started to say where they were located in the neighborhood and that they put a stuffed animal out, ready to play.

So far, Nichols has seen several houses participating in Midway Woods. “It’s been really nice.”

“Well for us, I mean, my son loves the book, so I always talk about the



Photo provided to Decaturish.com

book before we go on our walks. ‘We’re going on a bear hunt. Let’s go find bears,’” Nichols said. “I think in this day and age, we all need something to look forward to, and he loves spotting the bears.”

Aside from the entertainment and joy that children find in playing the game, Nichols and Manry both believe that Bear Hunt has given neighborhoods in Decatur a sense of community in light of the COVID-19 outbreak.

“It’s some type of togetherness, just seeing a bear in a window,” Nichols said. “Knowing that we’re all in it together, since we’re all kind of isolated from each other, it just feels nice to be thought of like, ‘Oh, look, they actually took the time and put something in their windows so my son can point it out.’ It’s just been kind of heartwarming that way.”

(This story was published on April 1, 2020.)

IT'S ALL GOOD, DECATUR – GOOD VIBES AND GENEROSITY CONTAGIOUS DURING PANDEMIC

By Logan C. Ritchie, contributor

Decatur, Ga. – More than a month into schooling and working from home, the Decatur area is projecting more positive vibes than a wellness coach on Instagram.

In Oakhurst, the [Chicken Lady](#) rides her bike through the streets – she has even driven by a child's birthday celebration.

Down on East Lake Drive, a T-Rex skeleton wearing a face mask serves as a reminder to thoroughly wash your hands. Local gym owner Josh Guerrieri of FitWit hosts online fitness classes for his followers while continuing to build out a new space.

On the education front, City Schools of Decatur is providing substitute teachers who are out of work with a one-time paycheck in an amount of approximately equal to the six pay periods from Jan. 6-March 12.

Unable to hold their annual fundraiser, Decatur Rotary dipped into reserves to award \$20,000 in grants to non-profits in support of literacy and at-risk youth. Beneficiaries include the Decatur Education Foundation, Decatur Family YMCA, Decatur Housing Authority, Dekalb Library Foundation, Family Heritage Foundation, Friends of Refugees, and Project Transformation North Georgia.

Meanwhile, restaurants, utility companies, museums, and attorneys all have one common goal – to protect and serve those who protect and serve.

Bad Daddy's Burger Bar, 1575 Church St. in greater Decatur, is offering a 20 percent discount for first responders and healthcare workers through April 30. The deal applies to take out and curbside delivery orders only.

Known for healthful smoothies and juices, Kale Me Crazy created a fundraiser to provide immunity shots of super juice to first responders and healthcare workers. In partnership with digital health company Sharecare – who promised a \$10,000 contribution – Atlanta Hawks player John Collins joined the effort. Kale Me Crazy upped their goal from \$10,000 to \$30,000. The GoFundMe fundraiser has \$15,000 to date.



Appreciation abounded when Sean Crotty, owner/operator of the Old Depot District's Kelly's Market walked home Tuesday evening from yet another extended day of working to meet the City of Decatur's community's needs during this challenging time. Sean's customers, neighbors and friends from the Old Depot District decorated their homes and the street, constructed signs, donned costumes and plastic regalia, sounded horns, tamborines and other noisemakers and cheered while raising a glass as Sean turned the corner onto Hillyer Place where he also lives - all, of course, while maintaining social distancing protocols.

Photo provided to Decaturish

Hashtag #feedthefrontlines is now viral on social media. Patrons of Universal Joint paid for 48 lunches to be delivered to Emory Midtown anesthesiologists on April 15.

Over at Kelly's Market on Decatur Square, husband and wife team Sean Crotty and Tauna Jecmen implemented social distancing shopping with remote ordering and curbside pickup for toilet paper, paper towels, groceries, beer, and wine. On April 14, Crotty witnessed his patrons' appreciation when he was met with cheers, signs, noisemakers, and costumes on his arrival home from work.

In Pine Lake, Eat Atlanta, run by Stephanie Morales, has served 1,500 lunches to Dekalb County sanitation workers, paramedics, ambulance drivers, and nurses – with full support of Mayor Melanie Hammett and Police Chief Sarai Y'hudah-Green. The April 16 menu includes "Social Distance Dog," a locally smoked sausage with Vidalia onions, "Car 54 Where Are You," barbecue chicken sliders, and "The Crowd Pleaser," a bacon cheeseburger.

But the Decatur are isn't just feeding locals – they're providing lifesaving personal protective equipment as well.

The porch at Hagen Roskopf law firm, 119 N. McDonough St., is housing a contact-free bin for volunteers to donate fabric and contribute finished masks. Working with Sewing Masks for Area Hospitals Atlanta (SMAH), 1,000 masks have been sewn, dropped off, and picked up for SMAH for sanitation and distribution in healthcare facilities.

Georgia Power Foundation provided a \$25,000 donation to the Woodruff Arts Center. The Alliance Theatre's staff is working full-time to create 1,500 masks in a week for medical personnel at Emory Healthcare's hospitals in Decatur, Midtown Atlanta, Johns Creek, Sandy Springs, and Lithonia.

On a larger scale, CDC Foundation established

the Global Health Crisis Coordination Center in Atlanta to share resources between public health and private sectors, and philanthropic organizations. GHC3 is connecting corporate and non-profit resources with the folks who need them most – like ventilators to governors and facemasks to hospitals.

When residents just need a snuggle and a creative outlet, they can curl up with a LifeLine pup and a show.

Since April 1, LifeLine has rescued more than 80 pets in danger of being euthanized. All adoptions are only \$20 through the end of the month and include the animal's spay/neuter, vaccines, and microchip.

Get footloose and fancy-free with Oakhurst-sponsored jazz concerts every Thursday and Friday at 7 p.m. through April. Tune in with Gwen Hughes Hinton on April 16, Jeremy Rhett of Tiger Kings on April 17, Matt Wauchope of Mar Tans Band on April 23, Etyan Davidson of Her Majesty's Request on April 24 and Daniel Padron of Tito Gato on April 30. Glen Keith DeMerritt of The Pour Downs kicks off a May 1 show online. The shows benefit Oakhurst restaurant employees, a [GoFundMe account](#) is now active.

Core Dance of Decatur is presenting a free performance of "Dancing for Our Lives," for National Water Dance on April 18 at 4 p.m. The performance will be broadcast live via the Core Dance Facebook page and on the [National Water Dance site](#).

Perhaps some of these everyday heroes will appear on the DeKalb History Center's collection of stories. "The Covid-19 Chronicles" is calling for photos of grocery lists, sourdough starters, virtual birthday celebrations, and more of everyday life during the pandemic. To submit photos, [click here](#).

(This story was published April 16, 2020.)



Martial arts training continues with the help of Zoom, social distancing and masks

BY MARY MARGARET STEWART

Greater Decatur, Ga. — Claude Sullivan was in the seventh grade back in the 80s, when the iconic martial arts movies were released, and by 14 years old, he knew that he wanted to be a martial arts master.

Flashforward to 2002 – Sullivan founded Decatur Martial Arts Academy. And some of his students today have been with him since the beginning, 18 years ago.

“I’ve lived in the Atlanta area almost all of my life. There weren’t any martial arts schools in Decatur area or very few if any,” he said. “So I checked down at the Kroger shopping center [in North DeKalb] and there was a spot there – 2000 square foot spot, and it looked perfect. I just went from there.”

Sullivan’s academy stayed in that shopping center for eight years before moving to their current location on North Decatur Road, where it’s been for 10 years now.

“We have a core group, I’d say, of long-term students. Of course, like anything else, there are people in and out, but we have a good record of people achieving their black belt, which normally takes three to five years,” he said. “We have a solid amount of people that go at least that far, if not further.”

With a black belt, there’s nine levels or degrees, which Sullivan said can take 40 years and become “a lifelong practice.”

In addition to his students, Sullivan’s wife

and son both have their black belts, too. His wife Alicia is a master instructor as well as the membership director of the academy, and his son participates in some of Sullivan’s classes.

Decatur resident Mike Lobdell, his 13-year-old daughter and his almost 17-year-old son all have their black belts. It’s been over eight years since his kids started taking classes at Decatur Martial Arts Academy, and spending time in the academy for a few years inspired Lobdell to start learning, too, about six years ago.

“I’d been sitting there on the sidelines playing around my phone and realized I can get out there and can get exercise, spend time with my kids, and just learn something new – that’s what appealed to me,” Lobdell said.

Coronavirus hasn’t stopped the academy’s students from learning, though, including the Lobdell family. They’ve been taking their martial arts classes together via Zoom in time of quarantine. It’s been an adjustment, though, inside their house, which is a more confined space than the academy’s mats.

“But when the weather is nice, we’ll go out in the front yard, and the neighbors give us funny looks for jumping around,” he said.

While the academy has been offering Zoom classes for the past two-and-a-half months, Sullivan said it was an adjustment for him, too.

“I set up my computer here in the school, and it was strange at first because I’d be the



While Claude Sullivan gets practice in his martial arts through teaching, he’s the Georgia Representative for the World Kido Federation in Korea, where he goes every few years for training. In addition, he has an instructor of his own in Winder, Ga. to keep his skills sharp.
Photo by Mary Margaret Stewart.

only person on the mat, and they’re all on the computer screen,” he said.

Other than the barrier of the screen, the classes have run the same way as if the class was in the school, starting with a 15-minute warmup and going through the different patterns of kicking and punching.

Starting on Saturday, May 23, the academy reopened to offer in-person classes in tandem with Zoom classes. Classes are limited to 10 students and everyone must wear a mask.

And while some gyms and businesses alike have reopened, there’s something different about the practice of martial arts.

“I like exercising a lot, and one day varies a lot,” Lobdell said. “I like the bike and I’ll do some running and stuff like that, but that’s pretty much the same from one day to the next. One training class is very different. We usually go like Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, and they’ll do three very different lessons, working three different areas of the body.”

Sullivan said that while “you’re definitely going to get physical exercise” each person can get something different out of it, making it a special practice.

“While getting physical exercise, you’re learning self-defense skills as well, which I think puts it above just going to the gym,” Sullivan said. “I don’t have any problem with gyms – I go to the gym. I’m just saying, you’re actually learning a skill as you move along. You learn patterns, which are almost meditative. It’s really a mind and body combination.”

To learn more about the Decatur Martial Arts Academy, check out: <http://deaturma.com>.

(This story was published on June 3, 2020.)



Although businesses have started to open back up, safety measures are in place to stop the spread of COVID-19. At Decatur Martial Arts Academy, in-person instruction just started back up, with class sizes limited to 10 and everyone in the school required to wear a mask at all times. Still, to the side of these kicking students is a Zoom call with more students, who doing their kicks from home. Photo by Mary Margaret Stewart.

NATURAL BORN TILLER: DECATUR FARMER TURNS LOVE OF BACKYARD GARDENING INTO A BUSINESS

By Logan C. Ritchie, contributor

Decatur, Ga. — When cities across the country shut down this spring, Southerners took to their land. Sunny plots were tilled and earth was boxed until victory gardens popped up on every block. Cucumbers, squash, zucchini, berries, tomatoes – seeds and starters were flying off the shelves of local hardware stores.

First planted during World War I, these vegetable gardens were meant to supplement rations and boost morale during wartime. The revival of victory gardens gave Cory Mosser, who has farmed Georgia land from the piedmont to the coast, an idea he could implement in his own Decatur neighborhood.

“A lot of people will put a garden box in, and plant tomatoes,” Mosser said. “When it gets too hot outside, that’s it. They give up. As farmer, I know how much potential is being wasted.”

Mosser said year-round, edible gardening is possible in Georgia.

That idea sprouted a new business: Resurgence Gardens.

Resurgence Gardens assesses a client’s yard for sustainability, designs an organic garden, installs everything needed, and maintains the garden for a full year while educating clients about biodiversity and gardening.

Resurgence Gardens is comprised of Todd Eittrich of Global Growers, Nuri Icgoren of Urban Sprouts Farms, community food educator Maurice Small, and Andrea Richard (and Mosser) of Natural Born Tillers.

Mosser isn’t new to reinvention. He has worked in kitchens, on farms, and at markets. He is a consultant, strategic planner, and business owner. Whether he is riding his bike to Jekyll Island or driving country roads, Mosser takes in every greenscape, every sweet scent, every edible plant.

“When you wander, you can find the coolest things,” he said.

And his passion was sparked by a hike.

“Moondog”

He was a newlywed, rested from his Costa Rican honeymoon, and packed to go. But on day two of Cory Mosser’s long trek from Maine to Georgia, his hiking partner, brother-in-law Seth Solomon, injured his knee and retired from the journey. Mosser found himself on the wildest stretch of the Appalachian Trail – the 100 Mile Wilderness – with too little shelter, too little insect repellent, and too little food. Buzzing black flies and mosquitoes the size of Cadillac thrives in Maine’s woods. It was a painful way to begin a 2,000-mile hike. Alone.

Of course, Mosser wasn’t unaccompanied for long. His wide smile and quick wit make him affable. Soon he had a few travelling buddies and sideways adventures off the trail. He earned the nickname “Moondog” because he was just back from his honeymoon and was often in the dog house with his wife, Sara, whom he called from high ridges along the trail.

“What occurred to me on the trail is that you see all these defunct, sad downtowns – before the resurgence of downtowns happened – and you think about what makes those places special,” Mosser said. “Econ-



Cory Mosser (right) and Nuri Icgoren (left) are part of the team at Resurgence Gardens, a new company that builds and maintains organic gardens in Atlanta backyards. Image provided to Decaturish

omies can stay intact by localizing food production.”

A graduate of West Georgia University, Mosser returned to Carrollton to manage the kitchen at Rome Street Tavern. His appetite for local food and market-style, grower relationships – before the farm-to-table trend – led him to a job with a cooperative of growers called Farmer’s Fresh Food Network.

Learning more each day about organic farming practices, Mosser was consuming the work of food writers like Michael Pollen and farming activists Wendell Berry and Joel Salatin.

Agribusiness in Georgia is a multimillion-dollar industry. Because the state has long growing seasons and a favorable climate, 9.6 million acres of land are farmed in Georgia. There are 42,000 farms in Georgia but in 2019, only 200 were certified organic.

Locals may remember the old Farmer D stand at the corner of Briarcliff and LaVista Road, and Daron Joffe’s rise to popularity from Serenbe and other community-based farms.

It was Farmer D who Mosser narrowly missed collaborating with on his next gig: Farm manager at the coastal Georgia luxury development Hampton Island Preserve. The gorgeous, low country estate lies near Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge and Sapelo Island.

“No one was around to see all the mistakes I made,” Mosser laughed. “I took it as a cause to learn, and made it my own little laboratory. I learned some hard lessons. Growing that far south is pretty difficult.”

A community of growers

Hampton Island is marshy, gumbo muck, he said, noting how his foot would sink into the land after too much rain.

Mosser, his wife, and their two girls made a home in a 1950s fish camp and tootled around in a little creek boat. He attended meetings for the Coastal Organic Growers Association. There he met Heritage Organic Farm owner Shirley Daughtry, now in her 90s, the first certified organic farmer in Georgia.

“Shirley truly created a community of growers,” he said. “I went to meetings and learned from other growers who had been doing it for so long.”

Living on very little income and craving deeper community ties, the Mosser family packed yet again

and headed back toward the city in 2010.

Mosser landed at Burge Farm, a 1,000-acre private hunt club in Newton County. For four years Mosser not only propagated heritage crops like elephant garlic found wild near an old sharecropper’s cabin, he also studied agricultural records from the turn of the century.

“You can feel the history of the land,” said Mosser. “You could see where cotton was grown and food was grown. Being there and working in that environment, made me realize how the South functioned for so long.”

The history of the land is rich but haunting, encompassing Native American artifacts dating back to 8000 B.C., unmarked slave graveyards, an owners’ graveyard, and old cabins.

When he left, Mosser was proud of the work he did at Burge’s organic farm. He built a medium-sized market farm on 16 acres from nothing, 11 high-tunnels (a type of greenhouse in which food is grown in the ground, without electricity), a 200-member Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), sales at three farmers markets, and relationships with a dozen restaurants all over Atlanta.

“I realized I’d been at a farmers market every Saturday for four years,” he said. “That part of the farming lifestyle was not balancing well with my family. Many successful growers don’t have kids. The farm is their baby.”

Mosser did what he does best: He shifted into a new role. While planting new roots in Decatur, now dad to three girls, he was planting gardens for clients like Adult Swim and Delta Airlines on tiny plots of land. His company name? Natural Born Tillers.

“Adult Swim called and said, ‘Hey, there’s a little piece of land on Williams Street. Can you make a garden?’ We took an 80-foot by six-foot slot and put in raised beds with muscadine vines trellised on brick, and herbs, and grew a bunch of weird stuff,” he said. “Adult Swim loves weird stuff. Employees started going outside and watching butterflies. Big dudes with tattoos. And here they were, taking care of the gardens.”

Creative Director of Adult Swim, Matt Harrigan said, “What used to be an empty space is now filled with food, ecology, and happy people. We get to enjoy regular harvests, without worrying about the upkeep. It’s a no-brainer.”

Mosser created a half-acre plot at Delta Airlines headquarters in Atlanta with seasonal, organic fruits and vegetables featuring signs that indicate what’s blooming, and when it can be harvested by employees.

He was in talks with well-known, local organizations when COVID-19 hit. Although the current climate has impacted his business, Mosser noted that “people are being squeezed financially and still see the importance of gardening.”

Along came the concept for Resurgence Gardens. “It’s a similar idea of a victory garden, but ‘resurgence’ reflects the identity of Atlanta,” he said.

“Constantly prolific and bountiful, we are taking what was a static place and make it constantly change. It’s a resurgence from your original yard.”

(This story was published on June 16, 2020.)



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Local entrepreneurs complete business training program

BY ZOE SEILER, CONTRIBUTOR

Clarkston, Ga. – Businesses in the Clarkston, East Lake and Southside Atlanta communities recently completed the Goizueta Business School's Start:Micro-Enterprise Accelerator Program.

Forty-nine small businesses finished the mentorship and business training program on May 5.

The Start:ME program is a 14-session training program that provides entrepreneurs the tools and connections needed to build and grow a successful business, according to the Start:ME website.

The businesses in the program typically have one to five employees and less than \$50,000 in startup capital.

The business owners also have various experiences with their ventures. The program works with those who are in the beginning stages that have a good idea of what they want to do and have been selling to family and friends or at markets but that want to launch more formally, Program Manager Erin Igleheart said.

Small businesses that have been operating for several years also participate to gain more business knowledge and a strong supportive network of mentors and peers, Igleheart added. Igleheart said this year's group of businesses came from across all industries and backgrounds, from underground dining to art and lawn care.

"We find that while each of those businesses individually is quite small, collectively they have a really significant impact in terms of job creation, occupying brick and mortar locations that can help attract and serve those in the community and in generating wealth for households," she said.

DeAndrea Byrd participated this year. She owns Tutu Maniac, a children's birthday party company. She produces themed parties for girls and also sells boutique-style tutus and tiaras.

"One of the things I liked is that they offered mentors. That was cool for me being able to have somebody to help because I never had it before," Byrd said. "I've never experienced this much giving of knowledge in one place."

"It was the family that I needed, the tribe that I needed at the time," she added.

This year was an unusual year as the program had to shift to virtual meetings, presentations and networking during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We're big proponents of doing things in person and building relationships and delivering content in communities, but obviously that model had to change pretty dramatically," Igleheart said. "We tried to replicate that as best we could."

She added that a big part of the program is connecting entrepreneurs with mentors and



SATL - DeAndrea + Roxann: Start:ME Southside alumna DeAndrea Byrd of Tutu Maniac and her mentor Roxann Smithers participated in an improv exercise at the program's first community session earlier this year. Image provided to Decaturish

the mentors continued to engage with and support the business owners in developing business plans and strategies to navigate the pandemic. The mentor-entrepreneur relationship is usually very hands-on.

"It's had to shift but we found that people are surprisingly willing and resilient to kind of shift as much as they can," Igleheart said. "We've seen a lot of people shift their business models, but maybe even more so they've shifted their mindset of what it means to build a relationship."

Many small businesses have faced many challenges due to COVID-19 and Byrd has felt this.

"When COVID started, I thought 'oh my god, I'm not going to be able to do spa parties,'" Byrd said. "My business instantly shifted, and [the program was] there to support me."

Throughout the program the group saw "some wonderful stories of pivots and changes and resilience," Igleheart said.

For example, Byrd was able to shift her business model to sell arts and crafts boxes and has been filling tutu orders. She started doing so after having conversations with a Start:ME friend and another mentor.

"I think that one thing about everybody being home is that they start to realize different needs week (after) week," Igleheart said. "One thing that we have seen is an upswing and health and beauty products."

Those who work in hair and skincare have found themselves in high demand and have been able to leverage that to gain new customers, Igleheart said.

She also added that overall, the pandemic has been very challenging for Start:ME alumni. A March survey of 49 businesses conducted by Start:ME found that 76% of businesses have been significantly impacted. Over that percentage, 43% have decreased business hours and 33% have fully closed.

Also, 61% of respondents anticipate needing to apply for emergency loans or grants to support their business, which many businesses have struggled to get.

"We've seen that a lot have applied for the various loan programs. A lot of people are spending a lot of time applying for various grant opportunities," Igleheart said. "There are just so many people. There's so much demand that it can feel a little bit like a moonshot."

In the midst of these challenges, the program was able to celebrate the end of the session virtually.

"Normally we wrap up with a big celebration in person and we just had the biggest, noisiest Zoom webinar and still brought in a DJ and as much of the joy as we possibly could bring from an in-person event to an online program," Igleheart said.

Each community also has \$10,000 available to give as grants. The entrepreneurs and mentors decide how to allocate the money. Eighteen businesses received grants ranging from \$4,000 to \$500.

She added that her favorite highlights of the program are the ones where people come together and build relationships.

"We see people start to collaborate," Igleheart said. "We see people start to advise one another and share what they're doing during a challenging time like this to pivot and grow and really use that as an opportunity to help one another."

Start:ME helped Byrd build those connections and friendships. The program also helped her grow her business and feel more confident in her business.

"What's helped my business grow in a major way was understanding my business, understanding my business from outside of myself, understanding how to tell my story," Byrd said. "It made me come from behind my business and be more up in front of it."

IN EFFORT TO MAKE CITY MORE WELCOMING, AVONDALE ESTATES REMOVES LOCK FROM PUBLIC PARK GATE

BY DAN WHISENHUNT

Avondale Estates, Ga. — The city of Avondale Estates recently announced that it would remove the lock on the fence gate separating Willis Park from the Museum School on Forrest Boulevard.

In the announcement, the city said, “The city has decided to remove the lock on the fence gate at Willis Park to provide better connectivity for residents and visitors and to be more welcoming to all.”

The recently formed Avondale Alliance for Racial Justice advocated removing the locks from the gates.

The site of Willis Park was conveyed to the city by town founder George Francis Willis in 1928.

Mayor Jonathan Elmore said the move makes sense from the city’s perspective.

“You know, it’s a public park,” Elmore said. “We want to be better neighbors with Forrest Hills. It’s not the friendliest thing from a lot of people’s perspective and I agree with them, and a lot of our citizens like to walk through that gate.”

It isn’t the only cultural change in Avondale Estates that has occurred under Elmore’s leadership. Until 2017, signs at Lake Avondale and Willis Park said these amenities were exclusively for the city’s residents and violators could be prosecuted.

But why was there a fence and a locked gate at the park to begin with?

Commissioner Lisa Shortell, who lives near the park and moved to Avondale in 1990, said the fence was there when she moved in. When she moved in, she said there were apartments on Craigie Avenue nearby that has since been replaced by single-family homes. At the time, the apartments were a source of friction with the city of Avondale Estates.

“The perception in Avondale was that there was a lot of crime coming over from that area,” Shortell said. “I say perception. I can tell you we were victims of it.”

At the suggestion of the city’s police department, the city added more fencing to close off areas behind homes, she said. At one point, Shortell said, the fence was topped with barbed wire. The city added a gate with a lock when the Museum School opened in 2010.

“The gate was not put in the fence until the Museum School moved to that location,” Shortell said. “There was no gate there. There was only a fence.”

The gate was added to allow children to safely walk and bike to school without having to walk around the park.

In recent months, the conversation about Avondale Estates being unwelcoming to outsiders has accelerated due to protests over police brutality against people of color. Shortell said that it makes sense to unlock the gate now given that the apartments that created many of



The city of Avondale Estates recently removed a lock from a gate in a fence separating Willis Park from The Museum School. The move is intended to make the city more welcoming. Photo by Dan Whisenhunt

the problems were removed and given the city’s renewed commitment to being a welcoming community.

“That area has drastically improved in terms of people feeling safe when they’re over in that area,” Shortell said. “There’s all kinds of families and individuals now who are walking and biking. That area itself has a different feel. Even more than that, in Avondale, we’re working on becoming more connected and welcoming in our downtown and this is another extension of that.”

She said the change will benefit the city’s residents as well.

“There’s a lot of people out walking and biking and we want to support that activity and connectedness and I think the perception from Forrest Hills and Decatur Terrace has been they aren’t welcome,” Shortell said. “We don’t want them to have that perception. That’s another reason the gate came down. I see it as a two-way street. It’s good for our residents and people who want to come into our city.”

Mayor Elmore said he would like to replace the chain-link fence on Forrest Boulevard to a wrought iron fence.

“If Forrest Hills would annex into Avondale, that would create additional revenue that would help a project like that happen faster,” Elmore said.

(This story was published on July 29, 2020.)

Decatur Superintendent David Dude donates \$20,000 bonus to cafeteria workers and custodians

By Dan Whisenhunt

Decatur, Ga. – The Decatur School Board recently awarded Superintendent David Dude a \$20,000 performance bonus.

Dude turned around and used it to pay school nutrition and custodial staff who were on the front-lines during the COVID-19 pandemic. These employees continued working while schools remained closed. During the closure, CSD served meals to students who needed them. The money will go to 66 staff members based on how many hours they worked after schools closed on March 13.

Dude said he was grateful to the frontline workers and wanted to show his appreciation.

“I am once again humbled that the Board has awarded me my full bonus,” he

said. “My success is directly tied to the amazing colleagues I work with throughout the district. In this extraordinary time, I wanted to share my good fortune with those who have most directly been serving our students through our student nutrition program. These awesome staff members have continued coming to work in order to keep students fed. While others could work virtually, the work done by these staff can only be done in person. These additional funds will approximately double the amount they are paid during this period of online learning.” The School Board said the gesture was Dude’s idea.

“David earned every penny of the bonus, and we were pleased to award it to him,” the School Board said via email. “We are very happy with the job he is doing for our kids. He is an effective leader who works hard and understands this community. We believe that his handling of the changes due to COVID, the management of the district staff as well as COVID communication have been stellar. The Board did not ask David to redistribute his bonus to the front-line staff. This was entirely his initiative. It was incredibly generous of him, and this generosity is one thing that makes him such a great leader. We are fortunate to have him and intend to keep him.”

(This story was published May 21, 2020.)

Decatur high school student creates online community for LGBTQ teens

BY LOGAN C. RITCHIE, CONTRIBUTOR

Decatur, Ga. — Eli Rubenstein, a sophomore at Ben Franklin Academy in Decatur, spent the spring and summer playing video games, reading books, recording bass guitar on SoundCloud, and livestreaming on Twitch when he wasn't in a virtual class.

Typical stuff for 16-year-olds, except Rubenstein also made history by programming the only online community in Georgia for LGBTQ teens, created by a teen.

Rubenstein is an energetic kid in perpetual motion. His idea for a safe space where LGBTQ teens could socialize twice weekly was something new. Other groups, including the Atlanta chapter of Parents, Families, and Friends of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans Community (PFLAG), have a monthly online component but Rubenstein felt it was too infrequent.

The Closet, which launched in July, is for teens ages 14 to 18. Every Friday and Saturday night The Closet hosts a Zoom chat with themes including a talent show, movie night, anime, and e-sports.

Participants are required to sign up in advance to protect their privacy. The online chat events are moderated by an LGBTQ adult to ensure the space is safe, appropriate, and fun.

The Closet website reads, "The Covid-19 pandemic has greatly affected the amount of communication available to those looking for interpersonal relationships, whether it be casual friendships, or something more. Those who didn't have many friends before this pandemic have been greatly affected."

Rubenstein said an online support group is ideal because some people just don't like face to face interactions.

"Talking in person is uncomfortable. People don't want to be 'out' in public. But everybody is really lonely, and they still need someone to

talk to," he said.

In a recent essay for JumpSpark ATL, (jumpsparkatl.org) Rubenstein wrote many teens are afraid to tell family members about their sexuality.

"There are so many teens in the State of Georgia who can't come out to anyone because they are afraid of how their life will change, or who have no friends because nobody can accept the fact that they are different," he wrote. "There are some people who are too shy to make friends and stay hidden in the background. The pandemic has greatly magnified the effect of this issue, causing widespread depression and loneliness in the LGBTQ+ community, which is sending teens to toxic parts of the internet for positive attention, only to get the opposite."

According to a study by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the average age of a youth who is transgender to recognize they're not cisgender is 8.5 years old. The median age to recognize sexual orientation is 12 years old.

The Closet has set rules, including no hate speech; information can be exchanged if both parties consent; camera and microphones must be on; participants may not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

School started this month, and Rubenstein said he was ready to go back to campus to talk to people, "even if it's from six feet apart. I haven't socially interacted with my peers for months."

The pride in his mom's voice is reflected in the way she speaks about her son.

"The Closet is an amazing way to give back to community," Ali Rubenstein said, adding social justice is a vital part of their family. She's been attending the Atlanta Pride Parade with Eli since he was in a stroller.

"We are really supportive and accepting of



Eli Rubenstein and his mom, Ali, visited the Reddit office in San Francisco in early March 2020, days before the world shut down due to the pandemic. Image provided to Decaturish

Eli, but I want to be sensitive to the fact that not all families are in the same position," she said. (This story was published August 20, 2020.)

SOLAR PANELS INSTALLED AT TALLEY STREET UPPER ELEMENTARY

By Dan Whisenhunt

Decatur, Ga. — This week workers with Creative Solar USA finished installing 56 solar panels on the roof of Talley Street Upper Elementary.

Executive Director of Operations Sergio Perez said funding for the project came from a matching grant provided by the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority. It's not the first City Schools of Decatur school to receive panels, he said. Renfroe Middle School received 60 panels in 2018, saving the school district \$15,000 per year in energy costs.

The panels produce 20-kilowatt hours and that can be expanded to 40. The panels will cut 60,000 pounds of CO2 emissions, equating to about 1,400 trees planted. The panels are estimated to produce 30,348 kilowatt-hours per year, enough to power the school's media center and a couple of classrooms.

"Once active, the Talley Street teachers and students will have access to a live dashboard like the one used at Renfroe," a press release from City Schools of Decatur says.

Perez said the panels are part of the school district's ongoing efforts to power schools with clean energy.

"We're excited about it," he said. "We're planning to keep going on these energy plans we have in place."

Christopher McMahan, a project manager with Creative Solar, said his company has installed solar panels at several schools in the greater Atlanta area.

He said the panels don't require maintenance and have a 25-year warranty.

"Once the system is installed properly it takes care of itself," he said. (This story was published on August 14, 2020.)



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