

*in*FORM

SPECIAL EDITION ISSUE

Relevant. Resourceful. Reliable.

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ONE ATLANTA |

**ATL
PARKS
& REC**



HISTORY MEETS INNOVATION

The beauty and splendor of the City of Atlanta's oldest public greenspace was on full display as nearly 100 guests gathered at the Historic Oakland Foundation's (HOF) Bell Tower Groundbreaking Ceremony recently. The bell tower, constructed by the City in 1899, originally housed the chapel and sexton's office. More recently it served as the Foundation's visitor's center, museum shop, and office space. In the '70s and '90s upgrades were primarily made on the building's interior structure. However, the exterior has never been completely remodeled.

About the Project

Soon that will change as full rehabilitation of the Oakland Bell Tower gets underway. The building, now more than a century old, will transform into a flexible exhibit, classroom, meeting and innovative event space featuring customized ADA design. HOF Executive Director Richard Harker says, "The bell tower rehabilitation is a flagship project and marks another step on Historic Oakland Foundation's journey to preserve, restore, enhance and share Oakland Cemetery." The project is made possible through the Historic Oakland Foundation's \$12.5 million Living History Capital Campaign for which The Imlay Foundation and Invest Atlanta are major contributors. Construction

continued next page

is expected to begin in December. Other campaign objectives slated in 2022 include restoration of the nearly 8-acre East Hill section of the cemetery including its infrastructure and the construction of a new visitor's center outside the main gate which will feature interpretive exhibits, a dedicated store and an outdoor gathering space.

Oakland's Historical Value

Oakland Cemetery was founded as a municipal cemetery in 1850, it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and became a City of Atlanta park in 1932. Today, it is inhabited by a combination of lesser-known and celebrated residents including former Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson, Morris Brown College founder Bishop Wesley John Gaines, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Author Margaret Mitchell, Country Music Hall of Famer Kenny Rogers, businessman John Imlay, and over 70,000 others. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in the 1970s, DPR Commissioner John Dargle says, "Oakland Cemetery is a true gem in the City's illustrious roster of parks and greenspaces!"

A Time to Reflect

During the groundbreaking program on November 30, Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms acknowledged City employees and other entities who despite the pandemic continued working nonstop. Among them, the Department of Parks and Recreation. "They really were the frontline employees who kept our city going." After the event, cemetery sexton Sam Reed who has served the City for 23 years, facilitated Mayor Bottoms' tour of the sacred grounds. It was a sentimental moment for Atlanta's 60th mayor. Stopping to reflect along the way, she is pictured by the Mayor's Monument which bears her name and those who paved the path before her. With regard to one of Atlanta's most treasured and unique greenspaces, Mayor Bottoms shared with guests: "Oakland Cemetery has such a rich history and speaks to the story of who we are as a city."

No stranger to creativity and innovation, Oakland Cemetery hosts a myriad of well-attended events year-round. To learn more, visit www.oaklandcemetery.com



Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms Reflects at Mayor's Monument



HOF Executive Director Richard Harker



Oakland Bell Tower



a message from the **COMMISSIONER**

The past few months have been significant for the City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation. In July, we took steps to rejuvenate the historic Vine City community with the opening of Cook Park. Then in August, we activated Atlanta's new premier destination, Westside Park! It has been extremely rewarding to see communities realizing the dreams they have envisioned. Whether installing a new trail, playground or dog park, their efforts are commendable! As we prepare to close out the year, we are pleased to share the great work accomplished in 2021 in this issue. Through Activate ATL, our

comprehensive 10-year master plan, our goal is to provide every Atlantan equitable access to quality parks and recreational programs, regardless of zip code. Learn more about Activate ATL in the next issue of *INFORM*. Thanks to our incredible staff for their tremendous commitment and dedication. It is because of their effort that we can accomplish great things!

John Dargle, Jr.



Rodney Cook Park

“It has been extremely rewarding to see communities realizing the dreams they have envisioned.”

Making a *Difference*



"If you want to get kids outdoors, there is no better partner than Atlanta Parks and Recreation. The City is building a first-class mountain bike facility at Southside Park, and the Trust for Public Land (TPL) wants to support those efforts," attests TPL Georgia State Director George Dusenbury. One of the most fun events of the year occurred September 30 when Trust for Public Land donated mountain bikes, safety gear and an artistically designed storage bin to the City through a \$19,000 grant provided by Hydroflask. Southside Park, home to the City's first mountain bike trail system, is the proud recipient of the much-needed gift. TPL's Thrive Outside initiative is geared toward facilitating opportunities for communities of color to engage in outdoor activity. "What could be better than getting outside and enjoying the fresh air in our City of Atlanta Parks?" DPR Commissioner John Dargle Jr. asked participants who came to celebrate.

"It is so good to see the passion for outdoor recreation thriving throughout the city," attributes Thrive Outside Program Coordinator Daisy Mugford. Teens from Rosel Fann Recreation Center's afterschool program enthusiastically took to the trails to give the bikes a whirl. "Donating these bikes to the city means that thousands of kids will have the opportunity to learn to ride and enjoy the wonderful trails that Southside Park has to offer," Dusenbury shares. DCOO LaChandra Butler Burks, District 12 Councilmember Joyce Sheperd and 2021 Inspiration Award winner and greenspace advocate, Shirley Nichols were among the attendees. Reflecting on Mayor Bottoms' vision, DCOO Burks said, "This is truly an example of what it means to be One Atlanta!"

Special thanks to our partners at the Outdoor Foundation, Thrive Outside, Trust for Public Land, REI, SORBA and South River Gardens for their participation and commitment to City of Atlanta parks and greenspaces.



THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

This summer marked the completion of many park projects in Atlanta communities. Delays, due to COVID shut down, quickly dissolved and soon our neighborhoods and partners returned to the drawing board to finish existing plans. Many of these incredible projects could not have been completed without the assistance of Park Pride grant-funded programs supported by the Home Depot Foundation and others. Congratulations to these outstanding communities for rallying in the troops and finishing 2021 strong!



Lucius D. Simon Park Ribbon Cutting and Tree Planting



Lucius D. Simon Park Ribbon Cutting and Tree Planting



Lang Carson Manigault Playground Ribbon Cutting



Lang Carson Manigault Playground Ribbon Cutting



Mozley Dog Park Groundbreaking



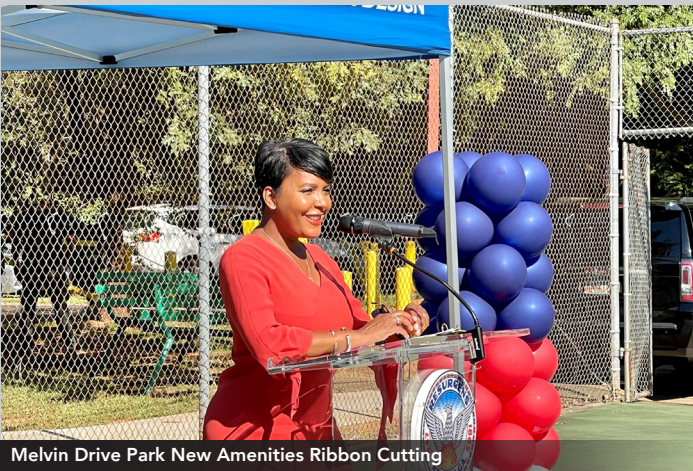
Mozley Dog Park Ribbon Cutting



Friends of Chosewood Park Workday



Friends of Chosewood Park Workday



Melvin Drive Park New Amenities Ribbon Cutting



Melvin Drive Park New Amenities Ribbon Cutting



Underwood Hills Park Playground Ribbon Cutting



Underwood Hills Park Playground Ribbon Cutting



Opening Day



The City of Atlanta oversees more than 500 parks, recreation centers and green spaces. We have a dedicated staff of professionals who are committed to providing Atlanta residents and visitors the latest in cutting-edge development with all the attributes that make their visits an exceptional experience. From high-quality programs, nature preserves and facilities to stellar customer service, we are on the fast track to creating a world-class parks and recreation system that Atlantans can be proud of! Neighborhood revitalization is a key aspect of our efforts. To that end,

three key accomplishments stand out this year. We graciously acknowledge the efforts of the Office of Park Design Deputy Commissioner Alvin Dodson, Park Design Director Keith Hicks and Project Manager Aaron Weiner for their exquisite architectural design of Cook Park in historic Vine City and Atlanta's newest and largest greenspace, Westside Park! Spanning 280 acres, the \$44 million project serves as a gateway to Westside neighborhoods and a critical emergency source of drinking water for the entire city. However, this year's highest achievement goes to Dodson and Hicks for making Grant Park Gateway the first project in the world to achieve LEED Silver, SITES Gold and Parksmart Bronze certifications!

ONE ATLANTA





Commissioner John Dargle at the Westside Park Groundbreaking



Atlanta Ol' School Drummers at Westside Park Groundbreaking



Rodney Cook Park Groundbreaking



Commissioner John Dargle, Deputy Commissioner Alvin Dodson, Park Design Project Manager Aaron Wiener, Park Design Director Keith Hicks at the Rodney Cook Park Groundbreaking



Grant Park Gateway

PASSING the TORCH

Askia Drellie Bashir is the Aquatics Supervisor at CT Martin Recreation Center. We met him while covering a story with Camp Best Friends over summer and quickly learned there was a far bigger story behind his connection to City of Atlanta aquatics.

Born the 6th of 8 children to Askia and Deborah Bashir, Drellie and his siblings learned to swim at Pittman Park – once the largest outdoor 50-meter pool in the nation! His father was the swim coach. The senior Bashir did such a great job training young swimmers, parents in their Perry Homes neighborhood asked if their kids could learn too. “In the beginning, we were called the Diplomats,” says Drellie. His dad would simply take them to pools around the city to race other kids.

Ultimately, what started out as a family fun activity led Mr. Bashir to launch the City of Atlanta’s very first swim team, the Atlanta Dolphins, in 1984. Bashir’s eight children officially became his students. Drellie began swimming at the age of two, then competitively at four. His father, who later became the first Aquatics Director for the City of Atlanta, remained his coach until he was 10.

Some of Drellie’s accomplishments as a young swimmer include becoming #1 in the Southeast in breast stroke, back stroke and free style division (age 8) and achieving the title “Most Outstanding Swimmer” for the state of Georgia (age 10 – and the first African American in Georgia to clinch the title). He was awarded the latter at the All Star banquet. “When you’re selected to participate in the All-Star Banquet, you are among the top 10% of the fastest swimmers in the nation!” Drellie attests.

Mrs. Deborah Bashir, a long-time employee of the City of Atlanta who currently serves as Senior Recreation Operations Assistant at the Reverend James Orange Recreation Center, is extremely proud of her son. She shares that he once went to Sweden to train. “He called me every day it seems!” Mrs. Bashir fondly recalls.

The Bashir’s set a precedent for their children within the city by instilling a genuine passion and capacity to serve. All eight became lifeguards as teens, with many pursuing careers in the field of aquatics. Although the senior Askia Bashir is now deceased, his legacy lives on in his children. Drellie, his sister and mother are currently employed by the Department of Parks and Recreation. As fate would have it Coach Tommy Jackson, who once trained Drellie, is now a colleague of his at CT Martin.

The disparity in aquatics accessibility for children in underserved communities fueled his commitment to serve Atlanta’s youth. “I understand the children we serve and I am going to do my part to contribute to their success,” Drellie says. Our thanks to the Bashir family for sharing their legacy and contributing to this article.



Mayor Bottoms Receives Park Honors

In November, the Piedmont Park Conservancy honored Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms with the unveiling of the Mayor's Memory Grove which now reflects her name. A tree was also planted in her honor. The Atlanta Women's Club started the tradition in 1925. "To now have my name join the names of so many mayors who made the city what it is...I really am in awe," Mayor Bottoms acknowledged.

A native Atlantan, Mayor Bottoms reflected on childhood memories and more recent times spent in Piedmont Park. "This is not a moment that I envisioned when I ran and took walks through this park. But that is the beauty of our great city. That there are dreams that we don't even know to dream!" Mayor Bottoms shared. The city's 60th mayor concluded with expressions of gratitude and reminded those gathered that great possibilities continue to unfold in Atlanta for those who dare to dream.

"That there are dreams that we don't even know to dream!"



Tennis and Your Mental Health



Primary care physician, TV medical commentator and tennis enthusiast, Dr. Saju Mathew says tennis is more than just a fun sport. It has incredible health benefits that not only improves mental function, but may also extend overall life span. Check out CNN's "Staying Well" segment featuring Dr. Saju at City of Atlanta's Bitsy Grant Tennis Center.

<https://www.cnn.com/videos/health/2021/06/23/staying-well-tennis.cnn>

Bringing Home the Gold

We simply could not create this issue without highlighting our seniors. This fall, DPR's Prime-Time Seniors participated in the Georgia Golden Olympics in Warner Robins, and every senior athlete earned a gold, silver or bronze medal, with some earning multiple medals. Competitive events included pickleball, single-double-team bowling and track & field. Here are a few highlights!



**Mens Ages 55-59
Basketball**



**Womens Ages 60-64
Basketball**

HONORING COMMITMENT

We value and celebrate the dedicated men and women who go the extra mile every day to make our parks and recreation system the best that it can be. While there are countless hidden treasures within the department that have not yet been acknowledged, these are among this year's nominated Frontline Heroes. We see you and appreciate your commitment. Keep up the great work!



Patricia Brown, Willaim Walker



Cimyun Benson, David Mathis, Craig Blackmon, Northwest District



Daryl Loyd, Tony Pullin, Olanda Harper, Trevor Stephens, Michael Wilson, Andre Scott, Geno Demons, Southeast District



Albert Robinson, Quazavier Dupree, Bob Smith, Maddox Park



Timothy Jernigan and Darrell McDowell, Southeast District



Dwan Williams, Northeast District



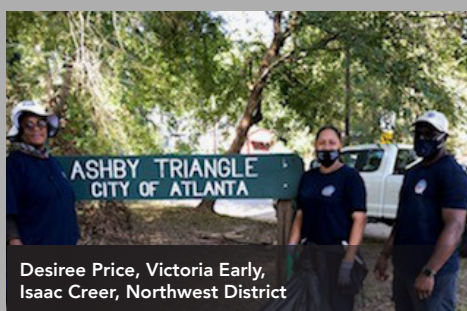
Marterious Rivers, Northeast



Jarrett Brown, Transportation



Nikita Utley, Beltline



Desiree Price, Victoria Early, Isaac Creer, Northwest District



Raymond Jackson, David Smith, Southeast District



Nominating a team member is easy! Simply send us his/her name, title and 1-2 sentences telling us why you're nominating them to yoharris@atlantaga.gov. Let's keep the momentum going. Nominate now!

Bringing Home the Gold continued



**Mens Ages 60-64
Basketball**



**Womens Ages 55-59
Basketball**

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Deputy Commissioner: Steven Aycok
Deputy Commissioner: Doug Voss
Parks Director: Quentin Moore
Recreation Director: Ramondo Davidson
Parks Design Director: Keith Hicks
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EDITOR'S NOTE

In this issue of *INFORM*, we celebrate the Best of 2021! Although many businesses and government entities were impacted by the pandemic shutdown, the City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation forged through with many of our employees never missing a beat. To recognize the tremendous efforts of our staff, the Frontline Heroes program was initiated. Our honorees are presented in this publication. We also acknowledge the Office of Parks and the Office of Recreation for going the extra mile to serve the deserving residents of Atlanta this year. Because of their fortitude, our parks and greenspaces were continuously maintained, and many families were sustained through food distribution, learning pods and youth programs. This has been an incredible year of realized goals and successful community partnerships. We look forward to accomplishing more in the coming year!
Yolanda Harris