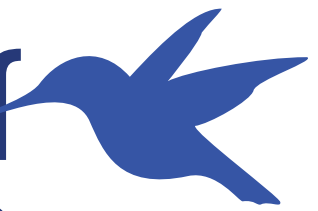


North Briarcliff Civic Association



The Official Newsletter of the
North Briarcliff Civic Association

July-Sept 2023

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Email Info@northbriarcliff.org

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THE PROPERTY TAXMAN COMETH

by Andrew Heaton, NBCA President

For many of us, the end of May and beginning of June feel like the start of summer. The majority of school children wrap up their school years, and families begin leaving for vacations, heading to camps, and generally welcoming the arrival of consistent warm weather.



For property owners in DeKalb County, something else arrives around the same time -- the annual Property Tax Assessment.

DeKalb County's Board of Assessors (BOA) have been trying their mightiest over the past few years to keep up with the rising values of homes and property in the County to ensure that the County's coffers keep up with rising costs and the growing lists of projects that the County has on its "to-do" list.

What may be good for the County's coffers has been an unwelcome surprise for some homeowners in our own neighborhood. After only modest or no increases in their taxes in recent years, these neighbors have been greeted at their mailbox by increases of 25% or, in some cases, even 50% more than their previous taxes.

This would be a shocking and unwelcome development for anyone, especially now when inflation has caused many of us to reimagine our budgets. This is even more important for our older residents who are retiring or near retirement. Huge jumps in property tax bills may completely shock and upset their plans for retirement.

How to Appeal a Tax Increase

Thankfully, there are avenues for hope, paths where you may try to remedy the situation. As your tax assessment should have explained, there are avenues for appeal.

The first step is a direct appeal to the BOA, which you may do directly and quickly online. That first step is required to be completed within 45 days of the date on your assessment letter. By the time you are reading this, the majority of you will have already completed this step or be past your initial appeal window.

Assuming that you filed your initial appeal, what happens next? Within a few months, you should learn whether the BOA has accepted or denied your initial appeal. The BOA may have rejected your initial appeal. When filing that appeal, you had to select what you wanted to be your next step in the process if the BOA rejected your initial appeal.

The most common next step is an appeal to the Board of Equalization (BOE). This is a three-member panel of DeKalb property owners who have undergone extensive training on property appraisal. At your hearing with the BOE, you will be able to present your evidence; an appraiser from the County's Property Appraisal office will present their evidence; and then the BOE will quickly review and render a decision.

continued on page 3

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Keep in mind that when I say “evidence,” this does not need to be extensive or time-consuming research. It might be as easy as showing the current value of your home as estimated on multiple real estate sites (Zillow, Redfin, etc.) and then the value of some comparable homes that are similar in size and age to your home. This entire process is free to property owners, although you may decide to hire an outside representative to advocate on your behalf.

The two other forms of appeal are much less common. You may have your appraisal appealed through Non-Binding Arbitration. This requires you to hire a professional appraiser and present the new appraisal to the BOA. If the BOA still denies your assessment, then your appeal may be heard before a neutral third-party arbitrator, either selected in agreement with the BOA or appointed by a DeKalb County Superior Court Judge. If the arbitrator decides on a value that is closer to your evaluation, the County will pay the arbitration costs. If the arbitrator decides on a value closer to the County’s assessment, you will pay for the arbitration costs.

Finally, there is the option to have the matter presented to a Hearing Officer. This is a state-certified general real estate appraiser or a state-certified residential real estate appraiser. A hearing will be held, evidence presented verbally to the Hearing Officer, and a decision rendered immediately. A resident may appeal an unfavorable hearing result to the Superior Court. However, be aware that if the County cannot find a Hearing Officer, your appeal will automatically be sent to the BOE, and you will go through the BOE process outlined above.

All of this may sound somewhat intimidating, but the process is not that tough or scary. Many of your neighbors have gone through the BOE appeal process and had some success. You just need to make sure that you have the numbers to back up your appeal.

You also have to be realistic in your request. A modest pullback in the initial appraisal you were sent by the County is entirely possible. If you think you should never have any increase, you are probably aiming too high. The reality is that property values in our area have risen considerably. You were fortunate if you had not seen an increase in your taxes for five or six years.

Good luck. If you have any questions about this, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. My email address is noted in the list of NBCA Board Members on the front page of this newsletter president@northbriarcliff.org!

Inside This Issue...

NBCA PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

The Property Taxman Cometh..... 1
NBCA Board Members 2023 1

COMMUNITY – ADMINISTRATION

2023 NBCA Membership Form..... 4

COMMUNITY – NEIGHBORHOOD

Another Food Truck in Our Neighborhood..... 6
When Will the County Finally Act to Solve the Flooding? 8
Engage DeKalb 9

COMMUNITY – SCHOOLS

Hawthorne Students Celebrate Their Accomplishments..... 10

COMMUNITY – LIBRARY

News From the Northlake-Barbara Loar Library 12

CONTRIBUTE YOUR IDEAS Tell us what you think are the most important priorities to improve our neighborhood. What are the biggest problems in the neighborhood? What should the NBCA Board be doing? What should we be asking the County to do?



Help the NBCA better serve our community by donating two or three hours a month to advise the board about a subject you care about or an area you want to improve. Contact one of the Board members to learn more about how to help us.

We Ask for Your Help



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North Briarcliff



Civic Association

2023 MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please return your check for annual dues and this form to:

North Briarcliff Civic Association (NBCA) • 2566 Shallowford Road, Suite 104, PMB 132 • Atlanta, GA 30345

To pay your dues with a credit card or via PayPal or Venmo, go to www.northbriarcliff.org.

YES! I SUPPORT THE NORTH BRIARCLIFF CIVIC ASSOCIATION

Enclosed is my \$25.00 check for 2023 Annual Dues. (Added optional donation \$_____.)

»»» PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY «««

Name: _____ Phone (in case of questions): _____

Address: _____ Email: _____

I am (We are) interested in helping NBCA with (Circle any of the following):

Newsletter or Website Layout or Updating

Member Recruitment and Benefits

Neighborhood Watch

Board Service

Membership in the NBCA is open for all residents and owners of property within the Hawthorne Elementary School district and residents on other bordering streets who may request inclusion.

The North Briarcliff Civic Association (NBCA) represents you. A civic association is an organization that exists to improve the neighborhood through volunteer work by members of the association. The purpose and mission of the NBCA is to promote the civic interests of the people living in our area. What this means is that this association is dedicated to informing, representing, and supporting the residents of our area in issues of public concern.

Membership in the NBCA is voluntary and is open to any resident or property owner within the Hawthorne Elementary School District and to other residents living on bordering streets who request inclusion. The newsletter is addressed to “Current Resident” to ensure that the newsletter is delivered (free of charge) to every house and condominium in the NBCA area as a service to all the residents.

We want you to help us become better representatives. As our paid membership increases, we have greater authority and leverage in dealing with (or confronting) the county and other organizations on your behalf. Renew your membership or become a member by paying your annual dues. The \$25 dues covers the household for the calendar year (January-December 2023).

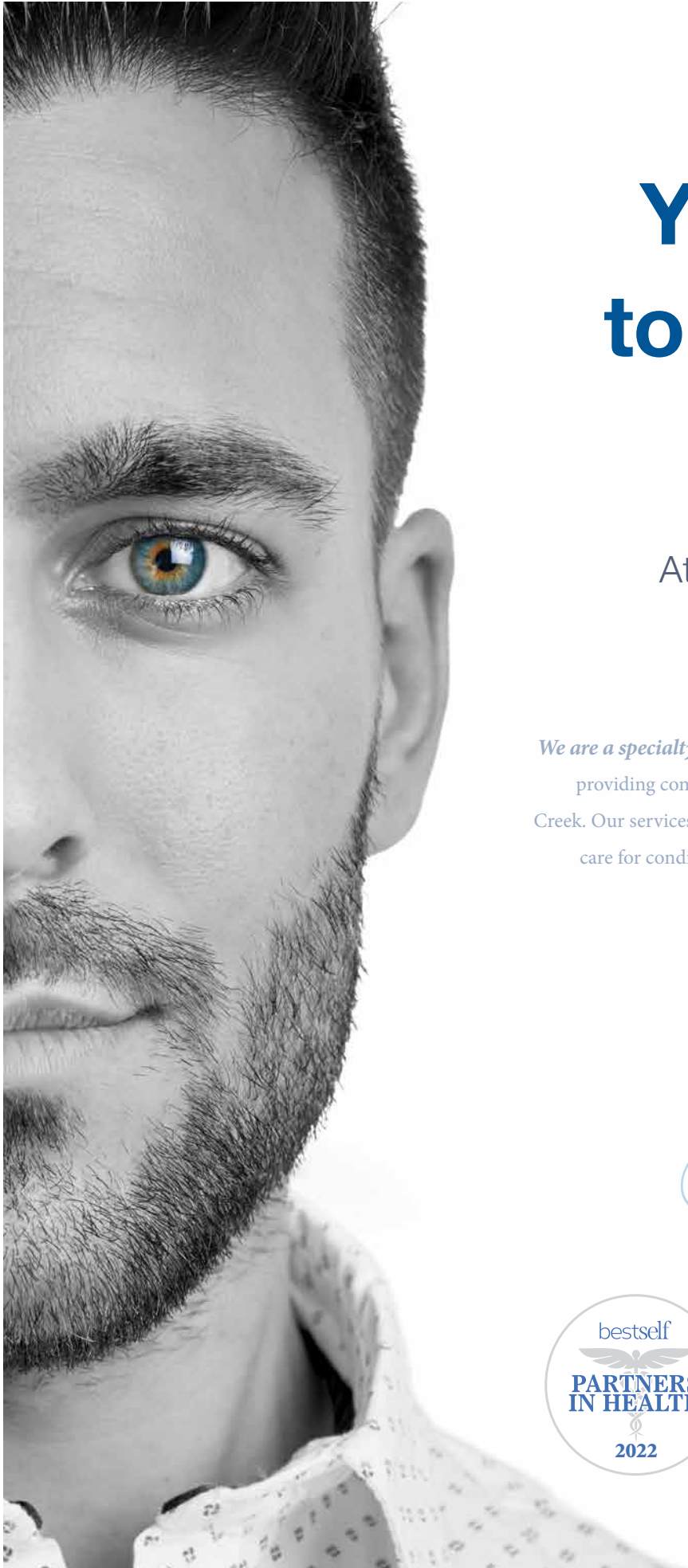
Help us to better represent the interests of our neighborhood by bringing to our attention any issues or events that merit our attention. We would appreciate your perspective, and you may know more or care more about

that issue than any board or off-board member. Consider joining the board or advising the board as an off-board member so that the association is better able to address the issue in question. We would welcome your assistance, enthusiasm and expertise.

The NBCA is a non-profit organization that is managed by its board members, all of whom are neighbors who have volunteered to work together to make a difference in our local community. All of the board members are elected by the dues-paying members of the NBCA at an annual meeting in the fall. Some board members have special interests and expertise in specific areas that are important to our area, while other board members are generalists. The board members are supported by off-board members, who are neighbors who have volunteered to help the board by identifying and addressing specific areas. None of the board or off-board members receive any monetary payment for their efforts.

If you want to report something or register a complaint with the county or other agencies, the board may be able to assist you or help you contact appropriate agencies. However, you are responsible for making your report or registering your complaint. Please remember that board and off-board members are volunteers with only so much time and energy.

Email addresses for board and off-board members are listed on the front page of each newsletter and are also found on the NBCA website www.northbriarcliff.org



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ANOTHER FOOD TRUCK IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

by Mark NeuCollins

Your neighborhood association (the North Briarcliff Civic Association) sponsored another appearance of a food truck in the neighborhood. This Sweet Auburn Barbecue food truck parked on Foster Ridge Road near Hawthorne Elementary School. This was on Wednesday, May 24th, the last day of school at Hawthorne.



As you can see, the food truck was popular. Sun-drenched under an azure sky, the aroma of barbecue wafted across the Hawthorne Elementary School grounds.

“I’ll have your barbecue sandwich with a side of the bourbon-baked beans, please.”

Neighbors enjoyed the opportunity to walk to a nearby food truck for good barbecue. I certainly enjoyed both the food and the community gathering.

Kids raced around in “last-day of school” excitement. Neighbors chatted in small clusters, and dogs tugged at their leashes. All (including the hopeful dogs) had gathered to savor the homespun delicacies of the Sweet Auburn Barbecue truck.

- Did I mention the raffle? Kelly Howard walked away with a brand-new Yeti cooler.
- Did I mention the ten volunteers who signed up to help build the new garden at Hawthorne Elementary School?



Everyone was relaxed, whether they sat on the school lawn or on chairs they brought.



We spend much of our time isolated in our homes. This was a chance for people to get out of the house and meet and talk with friends and neighbors.



Did I mention the free balloons and popsicles for the kids? There were many.



Seventeen neighbors took advantage of the gathering to become members of the North Briarcliff Civic Association. Our annual dues are only \$25 for the household.

Residents of the North Briarcliff neighborhood have a sense of community, and events like the neighborhood food truck sponsored by the North Briarcliff Civic Association (NBCA) strengthen those bonds. Those of us who serve on the NBCA board look forward to hosting many more such events in the future.

The Sweet Auburn Neighborhood

As I reclined in the grass that early evening, soaking in the sun and savoring my barbecue sandwich seasoned to perfection, I reflected upon the name “Sweet Auburn” and the neighborhood that wears that moniker. To me, the name conjures up a lot of what is good about Atlanta: the resilience of the businessmen who crafted it into a center for Black entrepreneurship in the 1940s and 1950s, the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement, and the thriving culture of the neighborhood that we were celebrating with our choice of food vendors.

Sitting on the Hawthorne Elementary School lawn, feeling the soft Georgia air, the taste of Atlanta-style barbecue sauce in my mouth -- rich and savory with just a bit of tanginess finishing with that long sweet tail -- I realized just how happy I was to be where I was. Next time we sponsor a food truck, I hope you’ll join me.

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WHEN WILL THE COUNTY FINALLY ACT TO SOLVE THE FLOODING?

By Art Hansen

The intermittent flooding of the important intersection of Briarcliff Road and Briarlake Road is a clear threat to public safety. The county's unwillingness or inability to correct this dangerous situation is a disgrace to DeKalb County and a clear expression of misguided priorities in allocating public resources, poor long-term planning and poorly managed development.

Public Safety Hazard

Public safety is endangered when flooded roads block essential traffic (such as police cars, ambulances, fire trucks, etc.), strand cars and drivers, and increase the risk of traffic accidents. Briarcliff and Briarlake Roads carry a lot of traffic. When that intersection floods, traffic backs up for blocks on Briarcliff, Briarlake, Shallowford, and Oak Grove Roads.

Another concern is that drivers may not be able to see the problem in time to stop safely. Visibility is poorer in a storm. Drivers might not recognize that a black asphalt road is flooded, and tires have poorer traction on wet roads.

Another public safety concern is that Lakeside High School is just one block south of this intersection. Students trying to reach the high school have to wade through the murky floodwater. We know that one student has already been injured wading through this intersection.

Years of Delay (1975-2023)

The county has known about Briarcliff Road being frequently flooded for more than 40 years. In 1975, DeKalb County ordered a study. The study's report to the county commissioners noted that the rapid growth of the county and the increased runoff from development had overloaded the existing drainage system. The consequences included "the frequent flooding of Briarcliff Road" (W.L. Jordan, 1976). The county never implemented any of the study's recommendations.

Reference. W.L. Jordan and Company, Inc. (Civil and Sanitary Engineers, Decatur). February 1976. Pilot Sub-Basin Drainage Program: Echo Branch Sub-Basin Study. Prepared for the Board of Commissioners, Roads and Drainage Department, DeKalb County, Georgia.

Lakeside High School Student Injured on Flooded Sidewalk (2016)

In February 2016, a Lakeside High School student was injured on his way to school. The intersection of Briarcliff Road and Briarlake Road was flooded, and a car had stalled in the intersection, blocking traffic. Two students decided to walk across the intersection and up the hill to the high school. The sidewalk was under four inches of murky water, which concealed an uncovered manhole on the sidewalk. One of the boys stepped into the hidden manhole, cutting his left leg.



The student's injured leg after being medicated

The County's Dewberry Study (2016)

In 2016, DeKalb County's Department of Roads and Drainage contracted Dewberry Engineering, an Atlanta-based firm, to conduct a study to identify and evaluate:

- 1) Factors that cause repeated flooding of the Briarcliff-Briarlake intersection

when excessive stormwater overtops the south and north culverts that flow into Echo Lake.

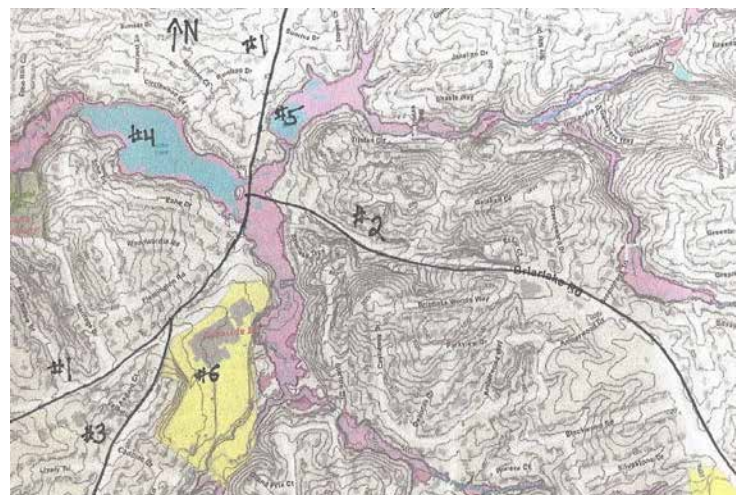
- 2) Strategies that could reduce the frequency and impact of flooding and possible mitigation options for key utilities (major water main and gravity sewer under Briarcliff) and blockage traffic during construction.

Results of the Dewberry Study (2017)

The results of the study were publicly presented in September 2017. The report noted that two major creeks drain a large watershed (1,464 acres) bringing stormwater into the intersection and then into Echo Lake.

The South Creek. This creek feeds into Echo Lake from the south through what used to be Simmons and Greeley Lakes (behind and below Lakeside High School). This creek drains a large area (732 acres) between Briarlake and Oak Grove Roads. There is only one culvert (10 feet by 7 feet wide) feeding this stream into Echo Lake. The Dewberry study focused on this flow because this is the primary source of water "overtopping" the intersection. The culvert is not big enough, and this creek overflows with "five-year event" floodwater.

The North Creek. The other creek feeds into Echo Lake from the north through Doreen Lake. This creek drains a smaller area (634 acres) between Briarlake and Briarcliff/Payton Roads. There are two culverts (each 8 feet by 10 feet wide) feeding this stream into Echo Lake. The flow from the north was not a focus of the study because the twin culverts generally handle the floodwaters, so this creek overtops only in a 50-year event.



The Dewberry group presented this flood plain map of Echo Lake Sub Basin. This shows the two major flows into the Briarcliff-Briarlake intersection and then into Echo Lake. (1) Briarcliff Road, (2) Briarlake Road, (3) Oak Grove Road, (4) Echo Lake, (5) Doreen Lake, and (6) Lakeside High School.

The study presented three options to relieve/mitigate flooding. All three dealt with the southern creek and culvert.

The first option would install more culverts (14 smaller ones) under Briarcliff and construct a low wall on the Briarcliff and Briarlake sides of the Greeley wetland. This would reduce flooding by increasing the flow of water into Echo Lake and increasing the capacity of Greeley as a retainer area. Estimated cost: \$1.4 million, which included purchasing land.

continued on next page

WHEN WILL THE COUNTY FINALLY ACT TO SOLVE THE FLOODING? CONT'D

The second option would install more culverts (five larger ones) under Briarcliff and raise the height of both roads -- Briarcliff (three feet at the low point) and Briarlake (two and a half feet at the intersection). This would reduce flooding in the same way as the first option except the roadsides themselves would serve as sides of a retainer area. Estimated cost: \$1.57 million, which included purchasing land.

The third option would reconstruct a dam (six to nine feet high) where the old Simmons Lake dam was and construct a low wall on the Briarcliff and Briarlake sides of the Greeley wetland. The low wall would increase the capacity of Greeley to retain floodwater. The new dam would not be designed to create a new Simmons Lake but to utilize the old Simmons ravine as a retainer area. The dam would have an opening at the bottom sufficient to allow the normal stream volume to pass, but flood waters would back up behind the dam and only slowly flow through the small opening. Estimated cost: \$955,000, which included purchasing land.

Comparing the Options. All three options increased the capacity of the southern system to handle a 100-year flood without overtopping, and none of them appeared to affect any houses. The second option was the only one to increase the capacity of the northern system to 100-year levels.

The third option had the advantages of being least expensive and not requiring relocating the water main or an extended closure of Briarcliff Road, whereas the first and second options both required relocation and road closure.

The third option also was expected to reduce to some extent the sediment reaching Echo Lake.

Reference: Dewberry Group. September 13, 2017. Briarcliff Road at Echo Lake Presentation.

We Are Still Waiting for Action by the County (2017-2023)

This was one of three studies that the county funded. The commissioners wanted to utilize these studies to help them formulate a county-wide program to address stormwater flooding. After reviewing these reports, the county intended to formulate a county-wide plan and seek funding to implement the plan.

The NBCA applauded the county for commissioning this study. This was a positive step forward in the search for a solution to this threat to public safety. However, we were concerned that the implementation of this study's recommendations might become sidetracked and lost in the search for a county-wide plan and funding.

In 2018, the county supposedly allocated the funds to implement the third option.

In 2023, we are still waiting for the county to actually implement a solution to this public safety hazard.

Will DeKalb County ever follow through and solve the flooding?

ENGAGE DEKALB

from DeKalb County Department of Planning and Sustainability

Want to learn more and share your ideas about projects around DeKalb County? Express your views and help shape the future of your community at <https://engagedekalb.dekalbcountyga.gov/>.

Engage DeKalb is DeKalb County's online public engagement platform, a new way for you to provide input to county staff quickly and easily. Engage DeKalb is open to everyone who lives, works or plays in the county or owns property or a business here.

Why is DeKalb County engaging online?

Traditional public engagement or community involvement usually means that you must attend a public meeting or provide written submissions. Engage DeKalb gives you the opportunity to learn what other community members think about an issue or topic, to respond with your own views and to engage in a discussion at a time and place of your choice.

Registration is not required to view the site or other people's comments or questions, but you must register to use many of the more interactive engagement tools offered here. You may use Engage DeKalb anonymously. Even when you register and post comments, other users only see your Username. If you want to remain anonymous, do not use your actual name as your Username.

To participate for the first time, simply:

- 1) Sign up for Engage DeKalb by clicking on the "Sign In" button in the top right of any page.
- 2) Choose a username and password.
- 3) Answer a few quick questions about yourself. Then you will receive an email to validate your email address.
- 4) Return to the website and click the "Sign In" button.

Engage DeKalb is managed by DeKalb County's Department of Planning and Sustainability Long Range Division Administrative Specialist. If you have any questions about Engage DeKalb, please contact Nicole Marchant at 404-371-2404 or nvmarchant@dekalbcountyga.gov.

HAWTHORNE STUDENTS CELEBRATE THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS!

By Lisa Limoncelli (Hawthorne Principal)

Graduations and the Last Week of School

Hawthorne students, teachers and parents enjoyed the last week of school -- a week of honoring our students' efforts and celebrating their achievements.

At the beginning of the last week of school, our Pre-K and Kindergarten students graduated in style with performances that showcased how much they had learned this year.

Our 1st-4th grade students received a variety of honors, ranging from Most Improved and Citizenship Award to the A/B Honor Roll and the All A's Principal's List.

At the end of the week, the teachers said goodbye to our 5th grade students with a wonderful graduation ceremony, and our principal, Ms. Limoncelli, gave the students some advice before sending them off to middle school.

- Be Brave! Be confident! Take risks! Don't back down when you are challenged...and when you fail, and you will, don't get discouraged. Failure is how you learn. Find the lesson in the failure.
- Be You! What you say, what you do, and what you think matters. Your opinions matter. Every one of you has the potential to be a leader, so lead. But lead with your own thoughts, words, and actions.
- Be a Bridge! We all have a responsibility to take care of one another. Continue to reach out and be a structure that connects instead of divides. Be kind, be respectful, and be a good friend.

We wish all our students a fun and safe summer. We can't wait to see your smiling faces in August.

Exciting Updates from Hawthorne Elementary

- 1) The Capital Improvements Project (CIP) that was awarded to Hawthorne Elementary is underway. The \$7 million scope of work will include a new heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system, re-roofing, new plumbing fixtures, and site sanitary sewer replacement. Work is expected to begin in Winter 2024.
- 2) Hawthorne will receive a digital marquee this summer! Announcements will be programmed from a computer inside the school and will scroll on the marquee outside. No more individual letters! The new location of the marquee will be by the main entrance to the school on Caladium Drive.
- 3) A new primary playground is expected to be installed soon. This playground will replace the Kaboom playground in the back of the school and will serve students in Pre-K through 2nd grade.

Our Great Parent Volunteers

Parent volunteers have been spending time this summer "sprucing" up the school. Projects that are underway include painting the front entrance, a new mural, and a rejuvenated garden. Stay tuned for "before and after" pictures in the next issue of the newsletter!



Great to see all these Pre-K and Kindergarten students, and this was a good opportunity for parents to get their photos.



Some of our 1st-4th grade students receiving their awards



Graduation is a happy time for both the students and their parents.

Congratulations

NEWS FROM THE NORTHLAKE-BARBARA LOAR LIBRARY

by Sarah Helwig (Branch Manager)



Summer Reading Challenge

We have kicked off our annual Summer Reading Challenge! This year's challenge will take place June 1 to July 31 with a theme of "All Together Now." You may sign up and track your progress online at dekalblibrary.beanstack.org or by using the Beanstack app.

Keep an eye on our online events calendar for special programs and activities for all ages, including family movie nights, magic shows, friendship bracelets, teen tie dye, dancing, and more! Be sure to register early, as classes often fill up!

Celebrating the Life of Steven Sandler

On April 29th the Northlake-Barbara Loar Library celebrated the life of long-time patron and generous donor Steven Sandler by dedicating the Sandler Reading Garden in his honor. Mr. Sandler had a long career at the Environmental Protection Agency, so the Friends of Northlake-Barbara Loar Library are using a portion of his bequest to improve the library's outdoor programming space. Plans are also being made for a series of programs about environmental issues this coming fall.

The ceremony included dedicating a Japanese Stewartia (*Stewartia Pseudocamellia*) and inviting patrons to swap plant cuttings. More than 40 people attended the event, including Mr. Sandler's cousins, Joe and Gloria Kusmik.

May Celebrations

May was filled with events. We enjoyed the beautiful weather with outdoor performances by local musicians during our Northlake on the Lawn Concert series.

May was Older Americans Month. We celebrated with Senior Bingo and trivia, art and jewelry classes, and Lunch and Learn programs led by Emory Healthcare professionals.

May was also Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. We honored that with a performance by the Atlanta Chinese Dance Company.

Spring Book Sales

The Friends of Northlake-Barbara Loar Library raised almost \$600 during Spring book sales. This money will help fund more programs and activities at the library.

Please Help your Library with your Donations

We are currently collecting gently used books, puzzles, games, CDs and DVDs for our next sale in October. To donate, bring your items to the library during operating hours: Mon – Wed 10am-8pm and Thursday-Saturday 10am-5pm. Your donations are tax-deductible.

12 North Briarcliff Civic Association // July-Sept 2023



The memorial ceremony included the opportunity for people to exchange plant cuttings.



This tree was planted in memory of Steven M. Sandler, a generous donor to the library.



The guitarist and vocalist Berne'.



The saxophonist Paul Edwards.



Members of the Atlanta Chinese Dance Company performed at the library during May.

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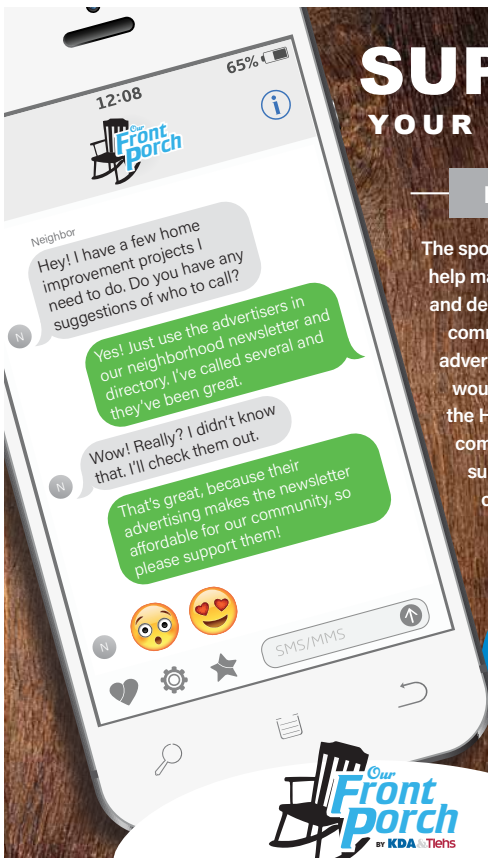
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2MyPlace

To coach, educate and provide life tools for today's youth to navigate their lives and become strong and confident adults.

2myplace offers classes on life, business, stress management and confidence skills.

We want to educate young adults on:

- Social Media Boundaries
- Human Trafficking
- Life
- Business
- Stress Management
- Suicide Awareness

Visit www.2myPlace.org for more information.



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