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## November 16, 2009

### [Bill Bolling recognized as one of Atlanta's shining lights](#)

Filed under: [Reports](#) — Lyle Harris @ 2:38 pm

By Maria Saporta

Atlanta's shining lights have been gracing our city streets since 1963, and today, we added a new shining light to our city — Bill Bolling.

Bill Bolling, founder and executive director of the Atlanta Community Food Bank, was honored this morning at St. Luke's Episcopal Church — site of where Bolling started his career feeding the hungry and empowering those in need.

The Atlanta Gas Light Co. and WSB-Radio News/Talk 750 co-sponsor the Shining Light Award nearly every year. An actual gas light with an eternal flame is erected in that person's honor at a site of his or her choosing.

Bolling picked a spot on Peachtree Street, just in front of St. Luke's for his gas lamp.

Describing himself as someone who moves "between the worlds of the rich and the poor," Bolling said he often works "outside his comfort zone." And he laughingly said that being honored in front of so many of friends and mentors was outside his comfort zone.

Members of the business, philanthropic and faith communities spoke about the impact Bolling has had on Atlanta.

John Stephenson, executive director of the J. Bulow Campbell Foundation, described Bolling as turning youthful idealism into action. "He became the hippie food guy," Stephenson said of Bolling's founding of the food bank 30 years ago. "Our hippie food guy has done well, and thank God almighty you came our way."

Imam Plemon El-Amin, resident Imam for the Atlanta Masjid of Al-Islam and past chair of the Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta, said Bolling's work has been like a preacher in the community, engaging people and getting them to work with each other.

"He puts us at the table and give us an opportunity to dialogue," El-Amin said. "It's not...about alleviating hunger, but promoting health and well-being. He wants people in the community to be healthy. It's not about scarcity. It's about abundance."

Jim Rhoden, president of the Futren Corp., said he got to know Bolling by working on regional issues and building regional ties.

"We are poles apart on many issues," said Rhoden, who describes himself as a conservative Republican. "But as time goes by, our differences mean less and less."

Bolling said he was deeply touched by receiving the Shining Light Award, one of the most prestigious recognitions given in Atlanta. Past honorees include former Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young, former President Jimmy Carter, the late Mayor Ivan Allen Jr. and the late Mayor Maynard Jackson, baseball legend Hank Aaron, Home Depot's Bernie Marcus, the late columnist Celestine Sibley, and the late Robert W. Woodruff, who led the Coca-Cola Co. for decades.

Bolling urged everyone in attendance to reach out and help the future shining lights of Atlanta, just as people had reached out to help him three decades ago.

"I want to be remembered for having been faithful to my calling," Bolling said, thanking everyone for helping him "fulfill my life's work."

*Note to Readers: Journalists are supposed to be relatively objective. As someone who has a column, I can share my thoughts and analysis in my writings. So in all honesty, let me say that there's no way I can be objective when I write about Bill Bolling. I met Bill through my father, who became a partner in social justice while working on the Housing Forum decades ago. My father and my mother later adopted Bill like a son, making him part of our family. Bill, who stood by me and my sister through the illnesses and eventual death of my parents, has become the brother I never had. But what's so telling about Bill is that he has touched so many people in similar ways during his travels along the way.*

[Comments \(0\)](#)

**November 12, 2009**

**[Women can help change the world one step at a time](#)**

Filed under: [Reports](#) — Maria Saporta @ 10:49 pm

By Maria Saporta

What a day for women.

At lunch Thursday, the Atlanta Women's Foundation held its 13th annual Numbers Too Big to Ignore event at the Georgia World Congress Center with Nicholas Kristof, a New York Times columnist and author, as the keynote speaker.

Kristof was the first man to serve as keynote speak for the event.

And then, Thursday evening, state Rep. Kathy Ashe hosted a cocktail conversation with Lilly Ledbetter, a heroine for women across the country and beyond. She was the inspiration for the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, the first bill President Barack Obama signed into law.

A common theme at both events was that each one of us can make a difference.

Kristof recounted several stories of girls and women across the world who were able to overcome tremendous odds to reach their potential. Kristof has just published a book: *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*.

At one moment, Kristof asked the crowd of hundreds whether they believed there were more men or women in the world. Most answered incorrectly. There are up to 100 million more men in the world than women, and that's including all the men who have lost their lives to war or violence.

Kristof explained that in many countries, boys are taken better care of than girls, which contributes to that imbalance.

"It's not an equitable world when you've got 60 million to 100 million women missing from the planet," Kristof said.

At one point, Kristof said that women and girls are part of the solution and not part of the problem, a line which received loud applause.

Kristof also added that the Atlanta Women's Foundation must draft men to join in to broaden its base. Whites were involved in the civil rights movement and straight people support gay rights issues. There's no reason why men can't be part of the women's movement.

But most importantly, Kristof advocated for grassroots change. "Often things can be done on an incremental basis," he said.

Perhaps there's no better grassroots leader than Lilly Ledbetter.

Ledbetter is a disarming, Southern woman who was a production manager at a Goodyear tire plant in Alabama. Thanks to an anonymous note and an anonymous letter showing the pay discrepancies between Ledbetter and other male managers, Ledbetter ended up spending 11 years of her life working on equal pay for equal work.

"I could never let it go," Ledbetter said, adding that her husband always encouraged her despite suffering through four bouts with cancer before he passed away. Ultimately, she received \$300,000 from Goodyear (instead of a lower court ruling that said she should be compensated by \$3.8 million).

Ledbetter said much work still needs to be done — offering protection for employees who feel that they've been mistreated — and not be subject to retaliation from employers.

"This is a worldwide problem," she said. "It is not just in the South, in Alabama or Georgia or the country. It's all over the world. Women are struggling."

And then Ledbetter urged the women in Rep. Ashe's living room to continue doing what they can to get women in politics, in business, on boards and in positions of power.

"To me, it was never about the money," Ledbetter said. "It was always about what was right."

[Comments \(0\)](#)

## November 10, 2009

### [MARTOC versus MARTA: Little progress in state relationship](#)

Filed under: [Reports](#) — Maria Saporta @ 7:40 pm

By David Pendered

MARTA didn't appear to make any inroads with state lawmakers at a meeting Tuesday at the state Capitol.

The meeting began with state Rep. Earl Ehrhart (R-Powder Springs) chastising MARTA's board members and General Manager Beverly Scott for going ahead with a controversial plan to lobby state lawmakers. As Ehrhart portrayed his thoughts, it is offensive for MARTA to spend taxpayer dollars to hire a team of lobbyists to petition lawmakers to provide MARTA with more taxpayer dollars to run the transit system.

The meeting ended with MARTA officials promising to provide lawmakers with answers to some important questions. Among them:

- Why can't MARTA use any of the \$107 million it has stored in two reserve funds to keep the trains and buses running?
- Why does MARTA seem to be using an accounting gimmick to add nearly \$32 million in depreciation to its projected budget shortfall?

The thrust of the lawmakers questions went clearly to the central issue of how MARTA is to survive in these lean economic times. This question plays out against the backdrop of the decision by Clayton County to mothball its bus system.

And the hot-button issue of whether MARTA should continue to exist as an independent transit system is certain to factor into the broader debate over traffic congestion that lawmakers will take up when they return to the Capitol Jan. 11.

MARTA officials have said previously that although the \$107 million in reserves could be used to balance the budget, it would not be financially prudent to draw the money down quickly. On the depreciation issue, MARTA has said that it has not changed its depreciation methodology at a time it added new systems to maintain trains and collect fares.

At Tuesday's hour-long meeting, MARTA board members and staff remained mostly silent while MARTA board Chairman Michael Walls stood at a podium and fielded questioned from members of the governance subcommittee of MARTOC. MARTOC is a legislative committee that is directed by state law to oversee the transit system's financial and management matters.

Ehrhart, who chairs the subcommittee, and Walls clashed several times over Walls' response to questions. Walls would say that he needed a MARTA staff member to provide specific information and Erhart said he would not let a staffer respond. Erhart said the committee wanted to address only MARTA board members.

Midway through the meeting, a clearly frustrated Walls flared at Ehrhart. By this point, Walls had responded to comments including:

- Whether the MARTA board is merely a rubber stamp for staff recommendations;
- Whether the 18-member MARTA board is so big that it's unwieldy;
- Whether three-quarters of the injury claims filed against MARTA are really fraudulent, as MARTA maintains;
- Why the transit system reports having \$107 million in a rainy day fund when it says it is short tens of millions of dollars;
- Why staff costs rose by \$27 million from 2007 to 2008, an increase of 13 percent.

"I know I'm up here saying a lot, but I'm often saying, 'I don't know,'" Walls said. "There are two reasons for that. [These questions] really relate to the staff. The other is that it would help us if we had an agenda for these meetings. We asked for an agenda and did not get one. It's fairly typical we don't get an agenda until fairly late. It would be a better use of our time and your time if we knew what we were coming down for, instead of scrambling when I get down to this podium."

Ehrhart didn't miss a beat.

"We're talking large, general concepts for a board of governance," Ehrhart said. "A \$27 million increase in staff costs seems something you should be able to talk to without staff. You said the board doesn't set salaries. You at least set guidelines. I would hope you have a concept of what is being put forward."

After the meeting, Rep. Jill Chambers (R-Chamblee), who chairs the MARTOC committee, said she expects to complete a committee report on recommendations about MARTA's budget issues before the start of the legislative session. She expects to have a committee meeting in December and allow the public to comment.

[Comments \(9\)](#)

## November 9, 2009

### [Five Republican gubernatorial candidates pledge to outlaw embryonic stem cell research](#)

Filed under: [Reports](#) — Maria Saporta @ 3:28 pm

By Maria Saporta

Five Republican candidates for governor have signed off on Georgia Right to Life's core principles, a pledge that would put a freeze on embryonic stem cell research in the state.

Those five gubernatorial candidates are: Rep. Austin Scott of Tifton, Jeff Chapman of Brunswick, Sen. Eric Johnson of Savannah, Ray McBerry of Henry County and Insurance Commissioner John Oxendine of Gwinnett County.

"Maybe these gubernatorial candidates did not know what they were signing," said James Shepherd, co-founder of the Shepherd Center, which is supportive of stem cell research.

According to a report in the Christian News Wire, the five candidates signed on to the Right to Life Political Action Committee's Affirmation regarding the definition of a "human life."

The organization said the candidates pledged to support a Georgia Constitutional Amendment that would state:

*WHEREAS, the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution states, "nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the law," Georgia Right to Life PAC affirms the principle that the right to life is the bedrock upon which all other Constitutional rights are derived.*

*IN ADDITION, we believe, in the face of compelling biological evidence, that a continuum of human life and personhood begins at the moment of fertilization and ends at natural death, the ethical treatment of human embryos must include their "best interests,"*

*THEREFORE, as a candidate for public office, I affirm my support for a Human Life Amendment to the Georgia Constitution and other actions that would support these principals. This would assure that regardless of race, age, degree of disability, manner of conception or circumstances surrounding a terminal illness, that the civil rights of the preborn at an embryonic or fetal level, the elderly and those with mental or physical infirmities are protected by law and are violated when we allow destructive embryonic stem cell research, therapeutic or reproductive cloning, animal human hybrids, abortion (except to save the life of the mother), infanticide, euthanasia or assisted suicide.*

Shepherd said that such an amendment could be devastating to Georgia's efforts to become a biomedical research center, one of the state's top economic development goals.

"It would have a tremendous impact," Shepherd said. "It doesn't matter whether it is embryonic, chord blood or adult bone marrow stem cells. We don't know which one of those three is going to work. All of them have the potential of improving spinal chord injuries, Parkinson's, Multiple Sclerosis, sickle cell anemia and juvenile diabetes."

An ad-hoc group of scientific and industry leaders have been meeting to figure out how they can prevent such an amendment being proposed in the state legislature and how they can get gubernatorial candidates to understand the economic implications of such a stand.

"From an image standpoint, it shows us as being non-progressive, that we don't favor testing of any of those technologies to see which one would work," Shepherd said.

Shepherd also said that trying to define "personhood" occurring in a pre-embryonic state could have serious implications, including limiting in vitro fertilization, a method that many previously childless couples have been able to have children.

"When you start down this road, it's a slippery slope," Shepherd said.

Instead of this becoming a state issue, Shepherd said it is more appropriate for these questions to be handled on a federal level.

"As a state, we should leave the legislation of stem cell research with the National Institute of Health, and approval of clinical trials with the Federal Drug

Administration,” Shepherd said. “Truthfully, our legislature doesn’t have the expertise.”

The gubernatorial election will take place in 2010.

[Comments \(3\)](#)

## November 4, 2009

### [Emory’s Johnson awards reinforce Atlanta’s stature as a center for human rights](#)

Filed under: [Reports](#) — Maria Saporta @ 11:38 pm

By Maria Saporta

Give Atlanta a year or two and James Weldon Johnson will become part of the city’s vocabulary of legends.

Johnson, who lived from 1871 to 1939, was one of the pivotal black leaders in American history. He was an author, songwriter, a poet, a Civil Rights leader, a journalist, an teacher and a diplomat.

Although he was born in Jacksonville, Fla., Johnson attended Atlanta University. He later became executive director of the NAACP and then became a professor of creative writing at New York University, becoming its first African American faculty member.

Now Johnson’s is solidly based in Atlanta at Emory University, home of the James Weldon Johnson Institute for Advanced Interdisciplinary Studies.

The significance of the institute hit home Wednesday evening at the Johnson Awards Ceremony held at the Carter Center — the first year that Atlanta has hosted the awards ceremony.

Receiving awards this year was an all-star cast of national leaders.

Myrlie Beasley Evers-Williams received one of the Johnson medals for her lifetime dedication to civil rights, serving as chairwoman of the NAACP from 1995 to 1998. She was widowed at an early age when her husband, Medgar Evers, was assassinated in Mississippi by a white supremacist.

“I knew change would come, but I had no idea that I would be fortunate to live long enough to see the change take place,” Evers-Williams said. “For whatever time I have left, I will continue to be one of those persons who will make a positive change.”

The second Johnson medal was awarded to Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin for her leadership as a public servant and for securing the collection of Martin Luther King Jr. papers for Morehouse College and Atlanta as a whole.

Franklin said she was sharing her honor with the “many men and women who have come before me in public service.” She then mentioned several former mayors — Maynard Jackson, Ivan Allen Jr. and William Hartsfield — for forming “the foundation that makes our city great.”

Retired Coca-Cola CEO Neville Isdell also received a medal for his leadership and understanding of the global community and human rights.

Isdell described how he and his family were non-sectarians who lived in a “very sectarian Northern Ireland.”

When he was 10 years old, the family moved to South Africa where he saw the mistreatment of blacks by those in power, images that haunt him to this day.

Isdell commended Emory President Jim Wagner and Rudolph Byrd, founding director of the James Weldon Institute, for "creating something that I think is going to have tremendous meaning for the city, the country and the world..."

U.S. Rep. John Lewis also received a Johnson medal. He was the one honoree who was not present because he was in Washington, D.C. working on the healthcare bill.

The next award went to Gloria Steinem, a legendary journalist, author and feminist who founded Ms. magazine in 1972.

Steinem said that if Johnson were alive today, he would have been described as being "platform agnostic," meaning that he used multiple channels to communicate his beliefs to others.

Before starting Ms., Steinem said she studied Johnson's efforts to start the Daily American, the first African-American daily newspaper ever published in the United States. Steinem said Johnson's goal with the newspaper was to "make the invisible, visible." The newspaper only lasted eight months, but that didn't stop Johnson from finding other avenues to "make the invisible, visible."

"I don't know how many years I have left. I'm counting on at least 25," said Steinem, saying that would make her 100 years old. And then she pledged that for the rest of her life, she would continue Johnson's efforts to make the invisible, visible.

The last medal award winner was Alice Walker, an author whose most famous work is "The Color Purple."

The Negro anthem — "Lift Every Voice and Sing" — was written by James Weldon Johnson, and his brother, J. Rosamond Johnson.

"I grew up nourished by 'Lift Every Voice and Sing,'" Walker said. "So I sit here tonight thinking of my father," who she said shared Johnson's ideals.

Although her father had only had a fifth grade education and her mother a fourth grade education, her parents helped build a school so their eight children could get an education. Immediately, it was burnt to the ground, so her parents went out and rebuilt the school.

Somehow they knew that their children would achieve the success that Walker has enjoyed, partly because they believed in the uplifting message of Johnson's song.

"Nobody can stop a song. Nobody can stop music. We need songs like that now," Walker said, adding that these are frightening times for our planet. "We need the music to lead us."

She then recounted a recent visit to the White House with President Barack Obama when someone mentioned how the structure had been built by slaves.

"They thought it was a negative, but I said they built it for him (Obama)," Walker said.

It was a pretty incredible evening to have such legendary leaders in Atlanta being honored for their contributions to improve society.

Surprisingly, the event was not that well attended given the human power that was gathered in one place. Perhaps it's because Atlantans have not yet discovered Johnson. Or perhaps it's because there's a lack of awareness that the Johnson Institute and its awards ceremony is now in Atlanta.

But these awards could quickly become one of Atlanta's greatest annual events, reinforcing the city's role as a beacon for civil and human rights.

For inspiration, here is the first verse of Johnson's "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

*Lift every voice and sing  
Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise High as the listening skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
Let us march on 'till victory is won.*

[Comments \(1\)](#)

## November 2, 2009

### [Clean audit means state can now start supporting MARTA](#)

Filed under: [Reports](#) — Maria Saporta @ 5:41 pm

By Maria Saporta

It's time to move on.

That message is directed to state Rep. Jill Chambers (R-Dunwoody), who chairs the legislature's MARTA Oversight Committee (MARTOC).

Chambers has turned beating up on MARTA an intramural sport, calling on a host of investigations of the agency and accusing MARTA of mismanagement and fiscal irresponsibility.

Chambers had asked the state auditors to do a thorough investigation into MARTA's finances, hoping to find evidence to back her accusations.

Well, on Monday, the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts — State Government Division released its audit, giving MARTA a clean bill of health. See story that appeared on the [Atlanta Business Chronicle website](#).

This audit review should be enough to silence Chambers once and for all. She has made MARTA and the state jump through time-consuming hoops on her witch hunt for evil and wrongdoing.

And now it's time for her to stop.

MARTA is facing enough challenges with declining sales tax revenues and increasing operating expenses without having to defend itself at every turn from a Chambers' attack.

In fact, for the life of me, I don't even understand why MARTOC exists in this day and age. Remember, the state of Georgia does not have any money in the game.

Unlike all the other major transit agencies in the country, the state shamefully does not contribute to MARTA's operations, which puts our transit system at a major disadvantage.

Worst than that, the state won't even give MARTA the flexibility to use the sales tax that it collects in Fulton and DeKalb counties on where it's most needed.

When the MARTA act was created nearly 40 years ago, the state required the agency to spend half of its sales tax revenue on capital and half on operations. That worked when the system was expanding, but it is now an albatross around MARTA's neck. Yet the state legislature has failed to remedy this inequity.

Again, no other major transit agency in the country has to deal with this kind of constraint.

The state audit now should change the tune at the state legislature. Perhaps our state can start looking for solutions to help MARTA survive these tough economic times rather than using the agency for target practice.

[Comments \(13\)](#)

**October 31, 2009**

**[Atlanta's mayoral campaign has been a learning experience](#)**

Filed under: [Reports](#) — Maria Saporta @ 6:55 pm

By Maria Saporta

As we enter the closing stretch of Atlanta's mayoral campaign, it's as good a time as any to reflect on how unique this election has been.

Its uniqueness goes way beyond the fact that there's a white woman who is the odds-on favorite to win the election — either on Tuesday without a run-off, or on Dec. 1.

It goes way beyond the demographic changes underway in our city. And it goes way beyond whether the candidates pass the test of being Democrats, Republicans or Independents. (In fact, pollster Matt Towery said this has been the most difficult campaign he has ever polled because of all the unknowns).

This mayoral campaign has stood out in another significant way. By latest count, there have been close to 50 forums and debates with the top mayoral candidates.

Some people, especially the candidates, have said having so many forums in a campaign is overkill. In previous contested mayoral elections, close political observers say there couldn't have been more than 20.

As grueling as all those forums have been, they have been invaluable in several ways.

First, it was an opportunity for Atlantans to get up close to the candidates and compare/contrast their views and their presence.

Second, the forums provided an essential educational role for the candidates. In many ways, these were "mayors-in-training" events where the candidates were able to hear from every corner and every constituency in the city about the issues that are important to them.

Whether it was transportation, quality of life, the arts, neighborhood issues, minority business concerns, public safety or city finances, the forums gave Atlantans an opportunity to inform the candidates about what priorities they believe the next mayor should address.

But something else that's a bit more subtle also has occurred — I'll call it opinion by osmosis.

The major candidates have been listening to each other during all these forums. While they may not all agree on the various issues, there has been an opportunity for the winner to borrow ideas from his or her opponents.

At the end of a recent forum of the Buckhead Business Association, I asked City Councilwoman Mary Norwood if she has seen a sharing of ideas among the candidates.

She quickly answered yes. Some of the ideas she presented earlier in the campaign were now being repeated by the other major candidates in the race.

City Council President Lisa Borders, former state Sen. Kasim Reed, attorney Jesse Spikes and Norwood might be sick of each other by now. But they have all been become experts on each other's positions.

So one of the great opportunities of this election is the ability for the winning candidate to adopt the best ideas that were discussed during the campaign and incorporate them in the new mayor's agenda.

On the downside, this has been a negative, acrimonious campaign that has painted Atlanta in an unflattering corner. The next mayor will have lots of cleaning up to do to heal the fractures that have inevitably developed.

For starters, the new mayor needs to reconcile with current Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin and give credit where credit is due. In fact, the next mayor would be smart to model herself or himself after Franklin in several ways.

She has made ethics a hallmark of her administration, a welcome contrast to her predecessor. She has been able to engage several companies to provide consulting services free of charge. Bain & Co. did comprehensive reviews of the city's financial situation (remember Franklin found a deficit of about \$80 million) when she took office. Bain also conducted "best-in-class" reviews of similar-sized cities to help Atlanta develop its agenda.

Franklin also established a close working relationship with top metro Atlanta business leaders. Through the Atlanta Committee for Progress, she was able to implement a host of initiatives — the Beltline, the Gateway Center, the Center for Civil and Human Rights, Sustainable Atlanta, the Peachtree Corridor and streetcar — to name a few.

Franklin also has been a strong ambassador for Atlanta. She has established close relationships with suburban elected officials through the Atlanta Regional Commission — forging the closest ties that the city has had within the region in decades.

Because Franklin championed a property tax increase earlier this year, the new mayor will take over a city without a budget deficit.

Franklin also has been a strong ambassador for the city nationally and internationally. The new mayor will need to strengthen the relationship with the Obama administration to make sure the city of Atlanta can get its fair share of federal dollars.

Yes, there have been problems. Franklin should have hired a much more qualified finance commissioner than she did. The city also should have been much more careful about committing the city to increased pensions for employees.

My hope is that whoever becomes mayor, be it on Tuesday or four weeks from now, will be forward-looking and visionary. We must get out of the accusatory mode of focusing on the Atlanta's shortcomings.

With apologies to legendary Atlanta leader Henry Grady, we need to redirect our energies to building a brave and beautiful city.

[Comments \(1\)](#)

**October 30, 2009**

**[Turn on the tube this week for two "must see" movies](#)**

Filed under: [Reports](#) — Maria Saporta @ 10:24 pm

By Maria Saporta

For those of you who don't mind watching movies on TV, two films that shouldn't be missed will air early this week.

The first is: "The People v. Leo Frank," which will air at 9 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 2 on PBS — Georgia Public Broadcasting — which is also Channel 8.

And the second movie is: "By the People, the Election of Barack Obama." Fittingly, it will air on Election night — Tuesday, Nov. 3 — from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m. on HBO. It's hard to believe that it's been a year since the historic election.

I've had the good fortune to see both movies, and I can enthusiastically recommend both.

A preview of "The People v. Leo Frank" was shown at the Cobb Energy Center on April 30th of this year — just a few miles from where the famous lynching of Leo Frank took place.

The movie depicts one of the most controversial murder cases in American history — the killing of Mary Phagan, a child laborer who worked in an Atlanta pencil factory. Her supervisor was Leo Frank, a Jew, who was accused of her murder.

[Click here](#) to read what I wrote the night that I saw the movie.

"By the People: the Election of Barack Obama," was previewed at the Carter Center Oct. 22 and introduced by the two filmmakers — Amy Rice and Alicia Sams. They spent nearly two years shadowing Obama and his campaign staff — providing incredible behind-the-scenes footage of the nation-changing campaign.

Mike Klein, my guest columnist for this week, wrote a wonderful review of the movie, and it is better than anything I could write. So [here is a link](#) to Mike Klein's review.

[Comments \(0\)](#)

### **[Race is on for chair of the Atlanta Regional Commission](#)**

Filed under: [Reports](#) — Maria Saporta @ 4:24 pm

By Maria Saporta

Three men made their case this week to be the next chairman of the Atlanta Regional Commission — which brings together leaders in the 10-county region — to work on regional issues, such as transportation, water, land-use and the needs of our aging population.

The three declared candidates are Charles Bannister, chairman of the Gwinnett County Commission; Tad Leithead, a citizen member who was an executive at Cousins Properties who now has his own public affairs consulting firm; and Jack Smith, chairman of the Fayette County Commission.

All three spoke of the need for local elected officials to understand that they need a regional mindset to deal with these issues rather than just represent one particular jurisdiction.

ARC needs to elect a new chairman because Sam Olens, who has been serving in that role for the last four years, is running for state attorney general.

There will be a vote for a new chairman at the next ARC board meeting on Dec. 2. Other candidates could decide to enter the ring at that meeting.

The current three candidates that already of declared their interest in being the next chairman were each given five minutes at this week's ARC board meeting to make their case as to why they would be the best choice.

They spoke in alphabetical order with Bannister going first.

"This is truly a great group, an exceptional group of leaders," Bannister told his fellow board members.

Bannister told them that he has been in elected positions for 34 years in Gwinnett — as a council member and then mayor of Lilburn, as a state legislator and as Gwinnett's chairman. He also has had his own insurance and financial services agency.

"I've been on both sides of many tables, and I understand the challenges and opportunities that we face in the fast-growing diverse region that we are," Bannister

said, adding that metro Atlanta's competition is no longer Birmingham and Charlotte, but major cities around the world.

He said the most prominent regional issues are transportation and water.

"We simply can not prosper without each of those items," Bannister said. "We need more roadway capacity, but we also need as much transit opportunities as we can get for mobility."

Bannister then expressed frustration with the state legislature for not letting the region vote to tax itself to make transportation improvements.

"We need more attention to regional issues," Bannister said. "We need to cultivate relationships with the state and federal government. We simply have not achieved here what we can."

Then Bannister said he was convinced that there are "better days in front of us."

Leithead told his colleagues that it's been a "great honor and privilege to serve" on ARC's board.

"I'm not here running against Chairman Bannister or Chairman Smith," he said. "I would support either one of them should they be elected chairman."

Leithead said he was motivated to serve as chairman for two reasons. "I believe I have the experience and qualifications for this job," Leithead said. "Two, I have a tremendous amount of passion."

Leithead joined ARC's board in 2000, and he now serves as chairman of the Transportation and Air Quality Committee.

It was the late Manuel Maloof, former chairman of DeKalb County, who encouraged Leithead to get involved with regional issues because he had an opportunity to make a difference.

Leithead then addressed two issues that make his candidacy different. "We have never had a citizen member of ARC," Leithead said. "With all due respect, I believe that not only can a citizen member serve, I believe the time has come."

The other sensitive issue is Leithead's position. Although he left Cousins, a top Atlanta developer, Sept. 1, Cousins is his top client, and some have expressed concern that there could be a conflict of interest.

"As I develop my company and build my business, if I think they represent a conflict, I won't accept those contracts," Leithead said, adding that he would seek advice from the ethics committee.

The third candidate, Fayette's Smith, said he used to be one of those people who would complain about the government. When people would ask him why he didn't run for public office, he would say: "Do I look like I just fell off the turnip truck?" And then someone told him that if he didn't run, he had no room to complain.

Fayette commissioners elect their chairman for a one-year term. But Smith said that if he is elected ARC chairman, his fellow commissioners have pledged their support for him to remain as Fayette chairman.

"I'm from one of the smaller counties," Smith said. "That doesn't mean we have any less or any more understanding of how metro Atlanta works."

Smith said he admired Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin for her work as sewer mayor and her willingness to reach out to the rest of the region.

The issues of transportation and water are important, Smith said. But leadership is just as important.

"This group probably has the most influence on what happens under the Gold Dome than any other group in the state of Georgia," Smith said. The success of ARC depends on its ability to put aside individual concerns and think as a region.

"If you elect me chairman, I promise you I will give you 110 percent," Smith said.

Another interesting note: Decatur Mayor Bill Floyd was sworn in as the mayor's representative from DeKalb County. Up to now, Floyd has resisted serving on ARC's board. Floyd has been Decatur's mayor for 18 years, and he currently is president of the Georgia Municipal Association.

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**October 29, 2009**

### **[House on Auburn Avenue will help revive King district](#)**

Filed under: [Reports](#) — Maria Saporta @ 8:02 am

By David Pendered

Now, only one vacant plot of land stands in the way of visitors being able to experience the birth block of Martin Luther King Jr. much as he did in the 1930s.

The last house that wasn't contributing to the historic experience on this stretch of Auburn Avenue is to be the hands of the National Parks Service by Friday. Once funding is secured to restore the house, NPS plans to turn it into a public space or private home.

The spiritual meaning of seeing the street as young King did was the common theme among speakers at an event Wednesday. The NPS accepted a ceremonial key to the vacant and boarded-up house from Trust for Public Land, its veteran acquisition partner in the King historic district.



Christine King Farris, vice chair of the King Center remembers growing up on the street with her brother, Martin Luther King Jr. Photos by David Pendered

"This is living history," said King's sister, Christine King Farris. "It is a humbling experience to be here today because this brings back so many, many memories of growing up here.... Each of us was born in that home; we were not born in hospital. We were born in the birth home."

The transaction also highlighted the challenge of rejuvenating the Sweet Auburn corridor and historic district. Both are real neighborhoods with long-time stakeholders. Both are located in an area that began decaying some 50 years ago, when black middle class residents started to emigrate to areas west of Downtown.

"This is a living environment, so some things don't change as quickly as we would want them to," said Kwanza Hall, the Atlanta councilmember who serves the area. Hall is unopposed in Tuesday's city election for his second term on City Council.

Just consider the challenge of getting the house at 530 Auburn Ave. into public hands. The price is of note and illustrates one aspect of the dynamic nature of revitalizing highly prized intown neighborhoods.



This home at 530 Auburn Avenue now is part of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site.

TPL bought the house less than a year ago for \$99,000, according to Richard Tucker, an associate director of Georgia TPL. The park service paid TPL \$72,000, a price established by the federal appraisers, Tucker said. The deal is to close by Friday, Tucker said.

TPL absorbed the financial loss as part of the cost of getting the home into public hands, Tucker said.



The ceremonial transferring of the key to the house included (from left): Will Rogers, president, Trust for Public Land; Christine King Farris, vice chair, The King Center; Helen Tapp, Georgia state director, TPL; Judy Forte, superintendent, Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site; Gail Barnes-Goodwin and Linda Phillips, granddaughters of the former owner; Arthur Frederick, deputy Southeast director, National Park Service.

Meanwhile, Fulton County tax records show the property's value this year was \$159,600. The sum includes \$65,900 for the land, amounting to 0.05 acres, and \$93,700 for the building – a five bedroom, two-bath house built in 1920 and spread over 2,086 square feet, tax records show. The county's valuation of the property has more than doubled since 2000, when it was \$73,500, records show.

Finally, the owner who sold to TPL, Gail Barnes-Goodwin, became the owner in December 2008. She said at the event Wednesday her grandmother had lived in the house from the 1930s until a few years ago, when the elderly woman moved to College Park before dying last year at age 101.

Tax records show Barnes-Goodwin acquired the house for free in 2003, then transferred it in 2006 to a conservator. In December 2008 she paid \$33,300 to reacquire the property, records show.

The transaction for the house represents a microcosm of the work Hall said goes into revitalizing Sweet Auburn and the historic district.

"It goes house by house, or lot by lot, block by block, street by street," he said.

"When you have that strategy, sometimes you can have eight of the 10 lots you need come together, but you don't have the last two.

"Some families donate land [to the government], others sell, others refuse to sell, and others contribute negatively," Hall. "This is a labor of love."

Hall expects the labor to bear more fruit within a few months. The list of expected outcomes include:

- Altering development codes to allow larger houses to be built on smaller lots in the historic district. The result would be houses big enough to meet the needs of families and those who need adequate space to run a business from home. Current codes result in houses too small to meet modern appetites.
- Accessing money from the Empowerment Zone program to fix streetscapes and building fascades. The buildings could become art spaces, with the idea that art would stimulate foot traffic similar to the trend at Castleberry Hill. The money must be earmarked by year's end.
- Securing federal funding for the so-called Peachtree streetcar to serve the King Center and Sweet Auburn corridor.
- Throwing an arts party on Nov. 21 similar to the ones in Castleberry Hill. The twist would be that vacant buildings would be used, as opposed to the galleries at Castleberry Hill, much as the water tower that's part of Studioplex hosted a multisensory show in an arts walk in 2008. For more information, Hall said to contact him at [khall@atlantaga.gov](mailto:khall@atlantaga.gov).
- Closing a portion of Auburn Avenue, from Boulevard to Jackson, to vehicular traffic for a portion of each day. The result would be an improved pedestrian experience while still allowing vehicles to make the popular night-time drive in front of the King Center.



Students from Centennial Place Elementary and Hill-Hope Elementary schools were among those

celebrating the acquisition of a home in the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site.

As this work is completed, the historic district will become a place where future generations can better understand the environment that helped shape King, and his thoughts on humanity, according to Helen Tapp, TPL's director in Georgia.

"King was nurtured by this street, and the lessons this street will teach for generations to come are powerful," Tapp said. "On this street, the entire King family, and others, learned ... three poignant things: The importance of the individual, [that] sense of self and sense of responsibility; a sense of community ...; finally, that sense of intergenerational responsibility, [that] mix of generations that leads to an understanding of the sense of legacy and responsibility to those who come after you."

Hall and many others share a vision of what the district and Sweet Auburn can become – a collective place that warms its residents and welcomes the world to the birthplace of Martin Luther King Jr. Progress has been slow, but he says little has come easily to the historic district and the rest of Old Fourth Ward.

"We're used to tough times, but we're on the other side of the zero and things are about to start spiking up," Hall said. "And that's not counting market conditions improving. That's just looking at the good things we have.

"It's little steps, but, man, are they hard."

*Note to readers: David Pendered was a journalist at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution for more than two decades. He is a contributor to SaportaReport.*

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