



1951 *65* 2016  
*years*

CELEBRATING  
GREEN HUNTER HOMES  
ATLANTA STREET COMMUNITY

COMMEMORATIVE KEEPSAKE EDITION

Provided Courtesy of The Gainesville Housing Authority

1951 **65** 2016  
years

## The End of an Era

The closing of Atlanta Street is truly the end of an era, bookmarking 65 years of a special community in Gainesville, GA.

To honor and celebrate this community, we wanted to somehow record a small slice of its character for the future with a commemorative booklet. Obviously, no book can begin to tell the whole story of 65 years of a community, but, hopefully, through a series of snapshot memories, we hope to give a partial sketch.

Seen through the eyes of those who lived here and some who worked or volunteered here, then, is that glimpse of Atlanta Street's Green Hunter Homes.

We hope that you enjoy the collection, and we hope you'll share these remarkable stories of this neighborhood and its generations with your family and friends.

We wish all of our former residents our very best in the future. It has been a privilege and honor to serve you these past few years. We want you to know that no matter where you go from here, you are always family to us.



Beth Brown, Executive Director  
Gainesville Housing Authority, October 2016

*"We were poor, but we  
were so rich as a village"*

Mary Lois Mason Young

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### On the cover: Green Hunter

Green Hunter  
Homes were named  
after Green Hunter,  
a prominent minister  
and community leader  
in Gainesville and  
Hall County. Read  
more on page 2.



# THE BEGINNING

## *Green Hunter Homes 1951-2016*

The city of Gainesville inaugurated the Gainesville Housing Authority (GHA) on August 15, 1949 and built Green Hunter Homes (Atlanta Street Apartments) in 1950-51, immediately after completing Melrose Apartments. John W. Jacobs, Charles Hardy, Dr. Clarence Butler, Carl Romberg Sr. and Henry Washington served as original board members for the Gainesville Housing Authority.

## *Mr. Green Hunter*

Green Hunter Homes were named after Green Hunter, a charismatic and respected leader in Gainesville and Hall County. Many of his relatives still live in the area. In *The Times*, columnist Johnny Vardeman wrote about Hunter\*:



*Green Hunter*

*“At age 19, he married Lottie Moon, and they had nine boys and three girls. They moved to Hall County, and he continued to plant new churches, among them Pleasant Hill, Cross Plain, Timber Ridge, St. John Baptist, Wahoo, Friendship Baptist and Mount Zion Baptist in Toccoa, Liberty Hill in Banks County and others in Lavonia, Rock Hill in Hall and Lumpkin counties, and one in Lavonia.*

*Hunter wrote numerous hymns and served 25 years as moderator of the Northwestern Baptist Association, an organization of mostly black churches. The association under his leadership established a school on the site where First Baptist Church on Martin Luther King Drive stands today.*

*The school cost \$1,200 to build in 1911 and served the black community until the public Fair Street School succeeded it.”*

\* From *Public housing and the legacy of a preacher*, April 10, 2016, *The Times*



*Green Hunter Homes during construction in 1950-51. Photo courtesy of the Black History Society photograph collection. Hall County Library.*

Green Hunter Homes began to be filled with residents by August of 1952 with 80 units available.

In February 1956, the USPHA approved funding for an additional 100 units, and 50 of those adjoined the Green Hunter Homes, giving it 130 apartments. Thirty of these units would be located on what was currently a vacant lot, and 20 units would be located on the north side of Atlanta Street.



*The Green Hunter Homes cornerstone*

The two 50-unit sites were begun early May 1957, with the completion date set roughly at March 1958. The average monthly rent was \$18 for a family who earned an annual income of \$1,380 and had three minors.

According to *The Newtown Story*, the black business community was substantial at that time. The book described: “Athens Street was the heart of black Gainesville since the 1920s.” By the 1950s, a long lineup of black and black-oriented business fleshed out the business strip: “Chamblee’s Drug Store, Clearview Restaurant, Carl’s Spoon, Carter’s Shoe Shop, Greenlee’s Funeral Home, Mr. Morgan’s little cleaning place, Daddy Poole’s, Asberry’s barbershop.” The area had its own all-black baseball team, the Gainesville Eagles, who played their games in cab driver Doc Harrison’s field.

# RESIDENT MEMORIES

## Freddie Nicely

Freddie Nicely was raised as a child in a house on Atlanta Street, beside current Pepper's Grocery. She recalls Atlanta Street as a peaceful neighborhood with a cluster of shops and businesses located along Atlanta Street. This local strip was the community's gathering place for adults and children alike. Ms. Nicely learned to skate on Athens Street as a child soon after it was paved, she said. She also remembers a popular 'peanut stand' she frequented, called "Cripple Willie's" (at the present location of the Kangaroo store), where residents would play "a piccolo" (jukebox) for a quarter, and "dance the jitterbug."



*Freddie Nicely*

Ms. Nicely recalled conditions of housing prior to the construction of Green Hunter Homes as being substandard. There was no electricity in the neighborhood, and almost everyone used kerosene for heating and lighting. After a downpour the neighborhood roads were impassable. "If it rained, we had to walk in ruts where the cars had been," she said. The condition of homes and roads improved gradually after the construction of Green Hunter Homes in the early 1950s, Ms. Nicely recalled.

*Many of the houses that Green Hunter Homes replaced didn't have electricity or running water. Photo collection of the Gainesville Housing Authority.*



## James Hudson

While many people think of Atlanta Street as being in the city, it did have a 'country' side, if you knew where to look. Back in the 1960s, James Hudson knew exactly where to look: A creek ran nearby, behind Satterfield's garage, and for James and his pals, it was the place to be in hot weather.

"That was the best thing in the summertime," he said.

There was a rope swing over the water, and James and friends took turns swinging.

"We'd try to swing all the way to jump off on the other side."

Even though it was a city stream, it seemed like the country.

"We didn't care that there was broken bottle particles in it. We loved it," he said.

James grew up at Atlanta Street and lived in D-4. Today he is a television producer in Atlanta.

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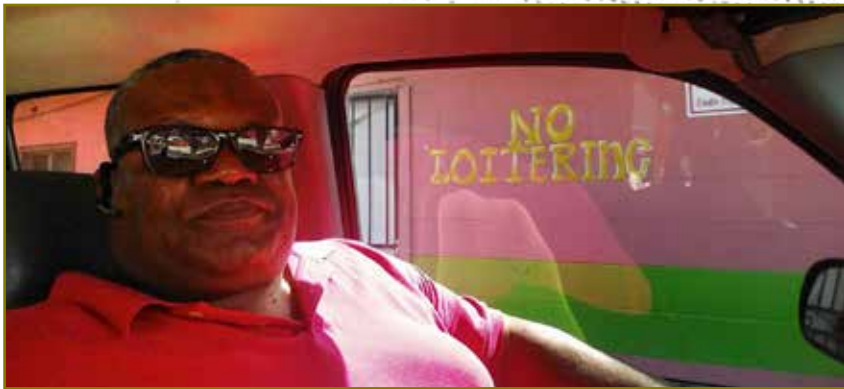
## Yasmin Thompson

"My best memory was at Christmas time.

Everyone would get roller skates for Christmas. We would all meet in the big parking lot. We would form one single line. And Pete Ware would be the leader. We would skate all over town.

That was a happy time for me.

I will never forget it."



Rev. Earnest Mason riding through the Atlanta Street Apartments.

## Rev. Earnest Mason

"I remember going to Green Hunter Nursery School...playing in the sand box in the corner...swings in the middle...monkey bars on the other side and the see-saw...we had green kerosene tanks in the back...the trash cans were built in the ground...all the metal balances and screen doors were painted green...even the poles attached to the overhangs on the porches were all green...most yards were bare because we played marbles in the yards and we were always outdoors playing..."The Corner" or "The Block" was were the "Big Boys" hung out...across the street from "Gene Bagwell Store"...where "Ms Naomi" was the store clerk next to the candy isle...the store had four isles and the meat and cheese was in the back...we used to ask for the bologna ends..."Rock n Roll" was a treat along with two for a penny cookies...

We used to buy 25 cent worth of bologna...My step dad drove a red 59' Chevrolet Impala... and we lived at R5 and moved up the street to W5...

We use to watch Fair Street Tigers Marching Band and get whipping for following the band...June Singleton, Lamar Johnson, myself and others would beat on boxes and had our own neighborhood band...we played in Mr Foots Riley basement and backyard and "The Branch"...it used to flood when it rained hard and we tried crossing it...so many memories...we caught "junebugs (tied the on a string and let them fly), bumble bees, tadpoles,...played "Simon said"... hopscotch...hiding go seek (our favorite especially at night to kiss the girls)"

*"Most yards were bare because we played marbles in the yards and we were always outdoors playing."*



In this photo: Dorothy Kea, Dorothea "Rita" Harris, Darrell "Baby Brother" Harris, and Ken "Kim" Harris



In this photo: Jack Borders, Phyllis Borders (deceased) Rita Harris, Ken Harris, Darrell Harris

## Darrell Harris

"We lived in Green Hunter Homes from 1960-1971. I have many fond memories of my days in "the projects." I attended daycare at the nursery under Mrs. Greenlee and Mrs. Imogene Neal. Skating around the circle and forming a train with other skaters at Christmas was guaranteed. Flying kites in the field in the fall and the spring was seriously competitive. Playing "throw-it-up-who-ever-gets-it," a form of tackle football where there was no team. Swinging upside down on the clothes line. Playing Simon says, tag, and fox and hounds after sundown. Walking home from St. Paul UMC and stopping in Chamblee's Drug Store for ice cream. When we lived in T-4, it was the height of the Vietnam war. We would watch the endless stream of troops and vehicles on their way to and from paratrooper training in the mountains of North Georgia. Marvin Hester's uncle use to toss us kids up in the air before he shipped out to Vietnam where he was killed.



Darrell Harris

I saw President Johnson's motorcade pass at the corner of Athens Street and Pryor Street in '64 or '65. I was standing in the front yard at B-1 when I heard my mother crying on the phone with a friend the evening Dr. King was assassinated. I remember the night I heard the Kesler sisters in their grief screaming, "Hershel shot Gary," which haunted me for a long time. I remember the thick-cut Bologna from Gene Bagwell's corner store and the slaw dogs from Kool Cone. Robert Hopkins' barber shop and John Butts' record store were on Athens Street. At night, I would hear Ms. Betty Ross yell out, "Richard, Joe Edward," which signaled dinner was ready or get your butt home, now! These memories and many more will stay with me for the rest of my life. 240 for life!"

## Mary Lois Mason Young

“Atlanta Street was never just the Projects to those of us who lived there.

We were poor, but we were so rich as a village that we never realized just how poor we were. We never went hungry on Atlanta Street, because if one person ate, we all ate, because we would share with each other.

Atlanta Street was a Village to us, where we as children were taught, disciplined, and loved.

It did not matter who your parents were or how many you had, we were all brothers and sisters and always overseen by the Atlanta Street elders. They were our de facto parents, our guardians. The Guardians, (I’ll call them), were always home when your parents were not. Or they were watching even when your parents were at home and always knew what was going on in the neighborhood.

They were always watching, scolding, correcting and loving — Always!

There were many of them, and this only represents a few. At one end of the street was Mrs Nina Moon or Mr and Mrs Albert Nicely; at the other end was Mrs Estelle Turner and Mrs Fanny Riley; in the middle on the upper end of the street was Mrs Dorothy Brown (Aunt Dot) and Sis Randolph and on the lower end was Mrs Elizabeth Westbrook. These women and men kept the neighborhood children always in check, because their hopes and dreams for the future were invested in us. They knew when it was time for us to do homework or chores; and made us go inside until it was done.

*“They taught us to love one another as brothers and sisters.”*

Then and only then would we be allowed to play. If we thought that we had escaped their line of sight, there was always someone else watching i.e., Mrs Annie Mae Ramsey and Mrs Borders was on the upper end of Atlanta and Athens Street; and Mrs Nora Young Wilmont (Madea), who lived in another part of Atlanta Street. She would send you home; or march you home and then the other elders would tell on you when your parents got home.

These people were our parents; they watched over us; they corrected us and were the foundation of who we are and have grown up to become. They were our elders, and today, even now we can not forget them, because they are apart of us—their hopes, their dreams, their joys and future desires were invested in us. Their blood, sweat, tears, and anguish are in the Atlanta Streets cinder blocks; in the concrete sidewalks, and in the red dirt that was our front yards (since we rarely had any grass). When we, as children had disagreements



*Ready and waiting for church, Mary Lois, Andre, and Doug Mason*



*W-5 Atlanta Street; Doug Mason, Fournier Green, Pam Young, Shan Montgomery .*

and would began to fight, they would settle it; by making us make up; apologize to each other and then send us off to play (if they did not whip us first). They taught us to love one another as brothers and sisters. Even though we no longer live on Atlanta Street, the lessons, love and bonds of the Village remain and will remain with us until we die. We are Atlanta Street, we are brothers and sisters, always.

*Mary Lois Mason Young, (R5 and W5)*



*The Summer Aunt Fannie came Home with Earnest*



*Playing in the backyard in our make-shift boxing ring*



*Doug Mason Graduation at Green Hunter Nursery*

## Remembering Ms Dessie Mason-Ware

The norms were set early in life for this group by mom.

She sought out a way of life to be lived by all who came in contact with her. Due to the fact of her mother being a God-fearing woman, she taught mom to be the same kind of person. Mom taught us through example and application of Biblical principles. We were raised in church and our whole life was centered around church and God's way of life. When we stepped out of line, we would quickly be reminded of the error of our ways. We all were taught the same lessons about life such as, "everyone grins in your face is not your friend," "Be careful, your sins will find you out," "Seek Jesus and He'll give you rest," "You reap what you sow," "Be careful how you treat people, you never know who will have to help you," "The same people you meet on the way up, you'll meet them on the way back down," "Ask God to do for you, what you can't do for yourself," and "Trust in the Lord," only to name a few things taught by her. She used these actual words to teach us. These words became the norms we had to live by. We obeyed, especially while young, but we got away from some while young adults only to return back to them as middle age adults. These norms were passed on from her parents to us. Now we see ourselves passing the same timeless lessons on to our children. We understand the "yes sir, no sir, yes ma'am, no ma'ams" now and the respect for elders and everyone else. This was simply doing for others as you would like others to do for you.



Ms. Dessie Mason-Ware

We had to learn to obey which brings me to the concept of obedience to authority, and who possess the power in this group. As children it was obey or suffer the consequences, mom did not have to keep telling us what she wanted us to do, we just obeyed her. She was the one who possessed the power in this group. We would be rewarded for doing good or punished for doing otherwise.

We even got punished for no reason at all. As I looked back, I think this was to ensure our obedience. Mom worked two jobs and couldn't afford to have six children funning around loose, doing as they please. Her power and authority was reinforced by other family members, friends and neighbors when we grew up.

"It takes a village to raise a child" was the norm for my generation.

Written by Rev. Earnest Mason



Above: Pepper's Market. Before it was Pepper's, it was called Gene Bagwell's.

## Alta Crawford

"My best memories are the Right On Gang, Gang Time, Kool Cone, hanging on the block, skating around the circle block watching E.E. Butler High band marching down the street to T3, Alta, L6, T1, P2, L1 and Pepper Grocery (shown above).

The Gents and Esquire, Food to Go, (Blue Light,) Blue Bell cab, Jonn Butts Record store."

## Debra Johnson

"I lived in M1 and raised my four kids Brittany, Dauphine, Shon, Lacey and Monique. The best memories was all the kids playing kick ball between M1 and the L- building"

*"She watched over us."*



## Nina Moon

"We were "latch key kids." We would have to hang out on Miss Nina's porch after school. She watched over us," said Darrell Harris. Photo provided by Derlyn Turner Jones.

## Rodney Turner aka Mahdi Abdul Hamid

“Our family move to Atlanta when I was six. Living in an apartment, our neighbors became like family. With four sisters and one brother, the youngest of six, I grew up fast. Atlanta St was like a family affair.

We had churches in our hood, pool halls, movie theaters, cafes – everything we needed was around our hood. We also had hustlers, boot-leggers, drug dealers and many good mothers to protect us. However, we all had a choice.

Lots of us left Atlanta St. Some became lawyers, doctors, business men and women. For me, Atlanta St. gave me my identity. I carried that identity all over the country. My experience from Atlanta St. made me a visionary, free thinker, positive thinker, a legal and illegal hustler and a seeker of the Truth!!

I left Atlanta St. in 1980 and moved to Denver and then to Seattle. Atlanta St. was still in me then as it is today in 2016.

I am Atlanta St.”



Rodney Turner aka  
Mahdi Abdul Hamid

*“I am Atlanta Street.”*

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## Howard Banks

“I remember my mother, Alberta B Stovall, moving my sister and two brothers on Atlanta street around 1954.

I have great memories and remember my well known grandmother, who everyone called Ms Estell, (apt S6). Her apartment was welcome to the whole Atlanta street section. It was a place where any given morning you may walk in her apartment and someone off the street will be welcome to sleep over because her door was never locked.

The apartment was right across the street from then Gene Bagwell store and to this day I would like to see his son Eddie and he had a daughter it brings so much peace n my mind to think of those wonderful days. There was Paris and Dunlap where Jacob Wilmont would purchase our baseball uniforms.”



Bernice Austin at her home.

## Bernice Austin

Bernice and her family moved to Atlanta Street from a house that had no indoor plumbing. “We had to bathe in a tin tub”

She said Atlanta St. was a good place to raise children. “There was discipline.” And everyone watched out for everyone else’s children.

“It was the only decent place for low income people.”

There, two of her boys went to the Boys & Girls Club with Gene Beckstein. “He worked with the boys and spoke to them as if he were their father.”

“Mr. Gene Beckstein saved a lot of people. He loved them, but he would make them mind. Three of my children have college degrees and I give Mr. Beckstein credit.”

“He kept our young men straight,” she said.

In 1978, after saving for years, the Westbrooks moved out and built a home in Gainesville.

“I wouldn’t give anything for the experience of living at Atlanta Street,” she said.

## Joe L. Norman

Looking back on those days now, we were all part of a “project.” That project made us all work together, play together, share what we had.

Do you remember yelling across the way or next door for a cup or sugar or that last minute item you needed while you were cooking? Sometimes you could even come over for dinner! We lived in the F’s, K’s, and others.

We played football out on that big field or between apartments that had a lot of yard in front. I remember my brother Willie Norman always wanting to play quarterback.

I remember all the kids who had gotten skates at Christmas hanging onto cars as they came around the curves on Atlanta Street. They had to slow down and the kids would hang on until the car exited the area.

I am very proud to say I enjoyed my time in the projects. There are so many of our friends from Atlanta Street who have gone on to glory and I know they are missed as well. Four of my family members were living on Atlanta Street when they passed. I send out prayers to the memories of Willie C, Annie Lucille, Ralph Curtis, and Arthur Lee. Let me also send out great memories with my dear friend Wanda Ann Hendrix. I know she would want to wish all of us to keep her in our memories.

I will stop here before I start crying.

Love to all of you who came the 240 way either to live or to play.

Stay Strong!!



## Remembering the Green Hunter Nursery

Green Hunter Nursery was formed in 1952 as a day care center for children of working mothers. Many Gainesvillians have fond memories of attending Green Hunter.

The images shown on these facing pages are courtesy of *The Times*, with the exception of the photo on top facing page.



Imogene Morrow (above right) ran the daycare for many years and is a well loved part of Atlanta Street community history. Emily Dunlap "Sissy" Lawson, at left, became Gainesville's first female mayor.



## The Best and the Brightest



Photograph of Green Hunter Nursery School graduation class. A graduation program held at Green Hunter Nursery School at 240 Atlanta Street is pictured. The diplomas were presented by Mrs. Dan Syfan, President of the Junior Service League who sponsored the Green Hunter Nursery. The graduates were Eddie Christian, Charles Glasper, Michael Graham, Michael Hancock, Eugene Harris, Donald Charles Wright, Gary Maxey, Theodora Merritt, Larry Morrow, Billy Joe Randolph and Benjamin Rucker. The staff consisted of Mrs. Ester Logan, Mrs. Margaret Moorehead, and Mrs. Reba Davis. The Green Hunter Nursery continued to give service to many more children until it closed in 1979. Photo courtesy of the Black History Society photograph collection. Hall County Library.





Gwendolyn Kesler Johnson shows a photo of when she was in Washington D.C., as part of a Peace Corps internship. (Gwendolyn is the one at the top in photo).

## Gwendolyn Kesler Johnson

Gwendolyn Johnson and her husband, Alvin Johnson (who also grew up at Atlanta Street) were in Aruba, Mexico, and heard someone shouting “240! 240!”

She knew it was someone from 240 Atlanta Street.

Gwendolyn lived there from 1959 until the 1980s and she can name a number of folks who went on to be successful lawyers, doctors and even some famous folks. Labuoy Blake, for example, went on to sing with the Platters.

Gwendolyn went on to become Miss Black Hall County, an Outstanding Young Woman of the Year, as well as a graduate of Stillman College – along with her 3 sisters. Gwen earned a Master’s Degree in Sociology and



Gwendolyn, (in glasses) her sister Georgette, and friend Angela Ware were Gainesville High School Cheerleaders.



Alvin Johnson, Gwendolyn’s husband, was awarded the Good Citizenship Award. Alvin also grew up at Atlanta Street.

today teaches at Centennial Elementary School.

Gwen recalls great athletes, such as Phil Smith in baseball at GHS (shown at right), and Kenneth Austin (shown at right), a basketball great at GHS.

She was one of the first black cheerleaders at GHS, and she and several friends worked hard at gaining inclusion for blacks in homecoming court, student council and other student organizations.

Gwendolyn views the Atlanta Street closing with wistfulness. “It hurts my heart to see it close,” she said. “But we will always be 240.”



Phil Smith (see page 19)



Kenneth Austin



Gwendolyn is shown in center of photo.



The State Champions The Fair Street Tigers. Courtesy of The Times.

## Remembering Atlanta St. Sports Greats

Gene Carrithers was part of the Fair Street Tigers team that won the State Tournament in football in 1956 in Class B. They won again in 1957 in Class A. The Fair Street Tigers included such notable players as Gene Carrithers, Clifford Stephens, Ellis Cantrell, Cecil Young, Arthur Moss, Eddie Strickland, John Keith, Clarence Niles and others.

Phil Smith (on facing page) of Gainesville High School threw two no-hitters in the 1978 championship season.

Other outstanding sports figures were Roger 'Redeye' Smith, Greg Young, A.J. Johnson and Kenny Austin.



Kenneth Austin



Roger 'Redeye' Smith



The Fair Street Letter.  
Photo courtesy  
of The Times.

**Champs**  
(Continued from Page 10)  
ship series.

"Against Marist, we were down 5-3 in the top of the seventh with the 7-8-9 hitters coming up," Carter said. "Dwayne Wellborn singled, Ben Martin singled and Frankie Young hit a three-run homer. Billy Wilson came up and hit a homer. The next day David Coker pitched a one-hitter."

Throughout the playoffs a lot of heroes emerged.

"Every game was won by someone different," said Coker, who works for Turbo Transport in Gainesville.

Tim Strickland led the '78 team with a .453 batting average. Wilson and Scott Powers, who played for Clemson University and in the Atlanta Braves organization, led the team with 11 home runs.

The team batted .345 and hit 53 home runs. Dexter Smith hit 410, Wellborn 345, Young 328, James Smith 322, Phil Smith 314 and Martin 300.

Coker was 12-0 with a 0.94 earned run average. Phil Smith was 6-1 with a 1.39 ERA and pitched two no-hitters.

Walls, who pitched one no-hitter, finished the season 9-1 with 1.09 ERA. The team ERA was 1.52.

"A lot of people didn't think

**Pitcher Phil Smith delivers in the 1978 state playoffs for Gainesville. The left-hander was 6-1 with a 1.39 earned run average and pitched two no-hitters during the championship season.**

Other team members were Tim Tankersley, Blake Nix, Bartley Wilson, Gary House, Jeff Saltas, Wade Smith, Chris Patton, Jimmy Martin, Randy Phillips, Gene Edwards, and Turner were the team managers. George Groover was the game coordinator and Allen Whitaker was the statistician. "I think Coach Carter had

Courtesy of The Times.



Phil Smith



Ellis Cantrell and Gene Carrithers in 2008.  
Photo shown here courtesy of The Times.

## Atlanta Street's Soulful Sounds

If you ever passed by Atlanta Street with an open ear, then you probably heard some soulful sounds, including musical groups 2+2, Soul Squad, Onyx or other great bands.

Or maybe it was Howard "Barefootin' Phillips, who sang out in the open air as everyone listened to him sing through their open windows.

The list is long of musical greats: Charlie Johnson, "Big" Lamar, Kenny B Brawner, Willie Stevers, Doug Ellison, Micke Westbrook, Deborah Westbrook, Jarrice Johnson and many others. Labuoy Blake, for example, went on to sing with the Platters. (Shown below)



Labuoy Blake with the Drifters



Johnny "June" Singleton is one of many musical greats to come from Atlanta Street.

## Ruby Robinson

"We had a very good neighborhood when we were there from 1966-1982. There was always somebody watching the kids, everybody watched over everybody else's children. We helped each other. Whatever you needed. If you needed a little money or some flour, we'd all help each other out."

## Elaine Tanner's family snapshots

Photos submitted by Elaine Tanner: Elaines' family with her twins Heather and Kristi and others of Billy Ray Tanner, Bo Young, her uncle, her aunt Nora Wilmont, her grandmother, Ms Margaret Young, and sister Vickie Randolph.



## Peggy Ann Bell-Caliman

Here's a picture of 240 Atlanta St. Apt. S-6: Kim, Lynn, Sherri...from Peggy Ann Bell-Caliman...she's Ms Estelle Turner's granddaughter (Peggy Ann) and here's her daughter Kim along with friends on Atlanta Street in 1969.



Rev Earnest Mason

## Gloria Kesler

Gloria Kesler credits the strength of family, community and the grace of the Lord for making her the person she is today.

She remembers the good times, like walking to church with six brothers and sisters, marching 'like ducks in a row,' she said, laughing.

"I remember at Christmas, getting skates, playing softball with the Melrose kids, who'd walk over from Melrose," she said. She also recalls cracking a window or two.

She recalls watching her mother, Mary Kesler, making and selling candied apples.

She also remembers sad times at Atlanta Street, such as the tragic day that her brother Gary Kesler, was accidentally shot and killed in 1965. "The neighborhood supported us," she said. "It was a loving community."

Gloria credits her mother with helping the family survive the tragedy through her example. "She taught us not to hate," she said.

In fact, it was her mother who, against all odds, sent her kids to college, most graduating with high honors. The girls graduated



Gloria Kesler

from Stillman College, and her brother graduated from Morehouse, at the head of his class.

Mary Kesler also set a high bar for herself. In 1969, she completed night school and earned her degree from E.E. Butler High School. "She did that alongside of keeping Barbara Putnams' girl," she said.

Mary's motto for getting things done, especially the impossible-seeming one – was: "By the grace of God, where there is a will, there's a way."

In addition to her mother's guidance, there was also the community at large that offered supervision to the neighborhood kids.

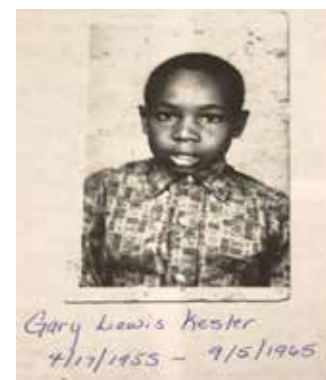
"The respect we had for our elders was always a big part of it," she said. "If anybody saw a child doing something and it wasn't decent and respectful, they would get on to them."



The Kesler sisters graduate Stillman College – and brother at Morehouse.



Mary Kesler was named "Mother of the Year."



Gary Kesler was accidentally killed in 1965.



Gerald Franklin Kesler was the first baby born at Atlanta St. in 1953. Photos courtesy of Gloria Kesler.

## Remembering Alice Williams

“My grandmother Ms. Alice Williams (RIP) resided on 240 Atlanta Street, apartment C2.

Growing up as a child, my siblings and I would visit my grandmother and I can remember the old days all so well. You see, she was a great neighbor in the 240 community, she had many of her neighbors visit her often.

My grandmother would cook daily and feed any and everybody.

She had a heart of gold always giving somebody a ride to the store or to pay their bills so her neighbors became her family; we were all family.

I learned many lessons from the 240 community back then. The older mothers or grandmothers – if they saw you doing wrong they would get on to you – a lot of kids learned sportsmanship by playing football out in the field. My grandmother also kept a nice yard, she loved flowers and everyone also spoke nice words about her yard.

She also resided in Apt T4, facing the front street, so when you entered Gainesville, you had a nice view of her beautiful flowers. Atlanta Street will be missed dearly!!! Saying good bye to 240, such sweet great memories.”

*Written by Melinda Harris*



*Robert Rucker (at right) with Georgette Ware Kesler Riggins (left) and Gloria Kesler, at top.*

## Robert Rucker

Robert recalls playing around “the branch,” a creek near the property. There, the local boys had lots of fun, he said. Usually it was good clean fun, but a person might find a little “fighting and shooting dice,” he said. He also remembered a man named Cowboy, who owned a nearby chicken house, and the boys would sometimes hang out there. Atlanta St., famous for its talent, is also famous for pretty girls, Robert said.

It was also famous for the mothers who watched over the little ones who sometimes got a bit naughty.

“Mrs. Westbooks would make sure we went to church,” he said, smiling. “Every Sunday.”

## Lamar Turner ('Stuff', 'Zero')

“My name is Lamar Turner also known as Lamar Cobb with the nickname of ‘Stuff’ and ‘Zero’ later in years. We moved in the Green Hunter Homes on Atlanta Street the year of 1954 or 55 in Apt. Q1 and moved out in 1967.

The best memory that I remember was when the Kool Kone was built. After a plan went through to rebuild on Athens St. and Atlanta St. there was a piece of land vacant on Athens St. and College Ave. A business man name John Mansfield who became a mentor in my life around the age of 8 or 9 asked me what would I like to see built on that corner and I said “an ice cream place.”

Mr. Mansfield had the Kool Cone built. I was given the job of helping to keep it clean inside and out. I also made sure that my friends were given plenty of ice cream, hot dogs and other food items after we played sports and for the kids whose parents did not have money.

It is 2016, my wife and I continue to have a close relationship with Mr. John Mansfield even though Church’s Chicken replaced the Kool Cone.”

## *Great Grandson of Green Hunter*

### **Benjamin Green Hunter**

Great grandson of Green Hunter.

Although Benjamin never met his great grandfather, he heard the stories about him starting churches and leading the black community. Benjamin lives in Gainesville and is retired.



## *Pulitzer Photographer*



*Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Michael duCille came from Atlanta St. and returned home to visit occasionally. Photo courtesy of Gwendolyn Johnson.*

## Vanessa W. Ellison

When I recall growing up on 240 Atlanta St, numerous images flood my memory. Our hard-working parents, Oscar and Elizabeth Westbrooks raised most of their 9 children at apartments K6 & G7 in the 1960s and 70s. We were a loving family with plenty of siblings to play with and learn from. A pristine set of encyclopedias and a stereo were the prize possessions in the living room.

Music and education were a huge part of our lives. Our home was tidy and neat even though Mama sometimes had 3 jobs. We younger 4 were always supervised, clean and well fed, as we walked to Main Street and Fair Street schools. We were held to strict bedtimes and you knew to get home by the time the street lights came on. Atlanta St. parents were leaders in the neighborhood, the church and the PTA. Large groups of parents walked to every school meeting and performance. We still laugh about the time Mama played Gladys Knight for a PTA Fund-raiser, while other Moms played the "Pips." When schools integrated, but school buses were not provided by the city for black students, black parents had to pay a private company, Cheeks Transportation, I believe, weekly, to get our older siblings to Jr. High and Gainesville High. Mama and others sought legal council that demanded the schools provide free buses for all students. We were extremely proud of our 240 Atlanta Parents!

We all sang in the Westbrooks family, and were expected to behave and do well in school. I think I learned to read from the hymn book before I started school. Sundays after church we would start singing and our neighbors and friends would come by to listen. After school we had to change into play clothes, do all our homework and chores before we went outside to play. I remember fondly, playing on the playground like we owned it because was located squarely in the front yard of our 5 bedroom apartment. We played hopscotch, Chinese jump rope, and marbles on our sidewalk, but the competition really heated up when we played a serious round of Jacks, 'Not It', or One-base Kickball, or softball. We all had to watch out for Phil Smith's fastball. We knew he was destined for the majors. Several male and female Adult League softball/baseball teams played on the Atlanta St. field with members of other large families like the Blakes', Rucker's, Lipscomb's, Kesler's, Williams' and Putman's. I recall some of my neighbors like the Carringtons, Wares, Wilmonts and Smiths were quite impressive players!

Game Time was a big event several times a year on the Atlanta St. field. Game Time came in a huge tractor trailer, equipped with a cool playspace for kids, booming music and PA system allowing talented singers and dancers like Gloria Stevens, Bobby Hargrove and others, a chance to shine! I'll never forget the Hoola Hoop contests that made champions of Gwen Kesler, Barbara Putman and others.

Smart and talented people were all around Atlanta St. Mr. Author Henry Jones was a noted photographer. An array of talented musicians and singers came from Atlanta

St., including my family, friends and neighbors. My brother Michael, and sister Deborah were teens in bands with Johnny Singleton, Jarrice Johnson, "Big" Lamar Johnson, Barry Storey and others. Most of my Westbrooks siblings went on to the military and/or college.

From my point of view, many of my Atlanta St. family and neighbors were caring, hardworking citizens, who through faith, made "the Projects" into a safe and encouraging home for their children.

I thank God for my Mother who knew when to move us in and when to move us out of Green Hunter Homes. The Westbrooks Family: Charles, Billy, Teresa, Michael, Deborah, Stephanie, Vanessa, Patrice and Patrick.



Oscar Westbrooks



Elizabeth Westbrooks (read more on page 28)



The local production of Purlie represents multiple families including Michael Westbrooks, who starred in the lead role.



Jarrice Johnson



*Elizabeth Westbrooks, at far right in the photo, was part of the Parent Teacher Association. Many Atlanta Street families were also involved.*

## Mary Elizabeth Westbrooks

With nine kids – and seven in school at the same time – Mary Westbrooks had her hands full. She appreciated the family neighborhood that Atlanta Street offered. The house they were moving from was rough, she said.

“The only air conditioning was the air coming through the cracks,” she said. Moving to Atlanta Street meant having heat and basic needs.

“I was proud to move into the projects,” she said. “It was like moving into the White House.” With five bedrooms, there was plenty of room.

“We’d eat in shifts, the little ones first and then the high school kids would come in.”

“It was rough after integration, when E.E. Butler closed down.” The kids were not provided with a way to get to school.

“We had to get a lawyer,” she said, resulting in winning a lawsuit which forced the schools to send buses to pick up the children thereafter.

Eventually, the Westbrooks family moved away from Atlanta Street and bought a house in Gainesville, where she has been for the past 40 years. Her happiest times included her family and friends walking to St. Paul’s Methodist Church every Sunday. Afterwards, they come home and share a meal.

Like many of her friends, Mary still attends the church. “I’ll be there until they roll me down the aisle,” she said, laughing.

## Stephanie Westbrooks Watkins



*Photos submitted by Stephanie Westbrooks  
Standing L to R, Stephanie, Patrice and  
Patrick, Seated Ms Westbrooks, Vanessa  
and Shannon Westbrooks*



*Teresa Westbrooks and  
Francis Clark Apt G-4 1970s*



*Thin-Man, Larry Jones  
and Ruby Finney*

## Betty Morrison

“My mother, Dessie Mason Ware moved to Atlanta Street apartment R5 in 1956. It was a blessing to leave the “warm morning” heater behind. The neighborhood was nice, being my first time living in an apartment. The neighbors supported each other. If you needed anything, a cup of sugar, flour, etc., they were always there for you. We were all like one big happy family. Adults looked out for all the children and would chastise you when you needed it and when you got home you would get chastised again by your parent for the same thing.

I was a babysitter for a lot of the neighbors, which was a means of earning spending money. Being the oldest at home, I had a lot of chores to do and the incentive for doing my chores awarded me the opportunity to go places like the movies, etc. During summer, I knew what was ahead because that was canning season. I had to help mama with preparing food to store for the winter such as shucking corn, stringing beans, peeling peaches, you name it! This was a lot of work, but my mama did what she had to do to feed her family. I remember when you could leave your house unattended. You could also sleep with the doors unlocked and windows up. I lived in these apartments even after I got married until moving to New York in 1970. My life on Atlanta Street was an unforgettable experience.”



## Gwennell Williams Brown

Assistant Principal –New Holland Knowledge Elementary

“My name is Gwennell Williams Brown and I had four brothers (Albert Jr., deceased, Etherean, Andre, Lamar) and three sisters (Mary, Valerie, Teresa-deceased) and my parents are Albert and Georgia Williams.

My first memories of Atlanta Street are when I was 4 years old and it was 1965. I remember my sister starting Fair Street School and me crying to go with her. My mother told me I would get to start school next. At the time I had two brothers and I played with them every day.

We lived at E-3. When I did start school I would walk daily and go to Ms. Maria store after school to buy “Big Jack Cookies” and penny candy. We also stopped at Pepper’s Grocery after school to get snacks.

As our family began to grow we moved to W-6. This was a 5 bedroom apartment with a bath and a half. We now had a family of 6 children and later I had 2 more siblings added to the family.

Our big porch was the gathering spot for our neighborhood. We played marbles in the yard, jackstones on the porch, kickball, hide and seek red light and chase. We played after school every day until it was supper time. My mother always stayed home with us and my dad worked a full time job and worked on cars to get extra money for our family. We did not have a lot but we always had food to eat and clean clothes to wear. Our parent took us to church and instilled in us to always do our best and respect everybody. They also taught us that if we wanted anything we had to work hard to earn it.

We were all expected to get good grades in school. We all graduated from GHS. We were active in school activities. My brothers played football, so every Friday night we followed the team. My sisters we active in chorus and I was a GHS cheerleader. When I graduated from high school I attended Gainesville College. I knew that I wanted to be a teacher and transferred to Georgia College. I was the first to graduate from college with the help of my brothers and sisters. My dad told us we could go to college or start a career or get a job. My brothers did go Lanier Tech.

As we grew up and moved out, my mom and sisters moved to F-2.

I worked at White Sulphur, Jackson County Elementary, Enota and transferred to New Holland when it was built. I have been in education for 33 years. I love teaching and having an influence to help students learn and be ready for our global society.”

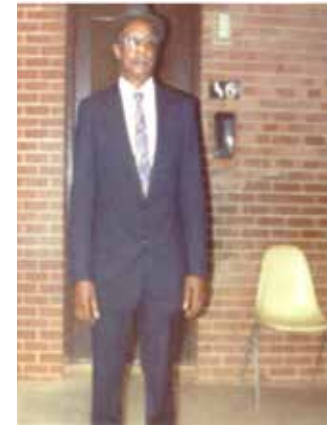
*“We were all expected to get good grades.”*



Lamar, Andre, Etherean, Albert Jr., Valerie, Mary, Teresa, Gwennell and Gwennell's nephew Tyrone Goss



Gwennell's mother, Georgia



Gwennell's father, Albert

# FRIENDS OF ATLANTA STREET MEMORIES



Jananne Waller, left, founded the Awaken program at Atlanta Street. Awaken served up to 70 kids per day as an after-school mentoring and homework help program. At right Denise Alu, and middle, an Awaken student.

## Jananne Waller (leader of Awaken, YES! programs)

“There was no division of ethnicity– we were family. The community center was a safe place. Praise God we never had an injured child or a major incident! We had a lot of love and laughs.

We expected the best from our kids, but extended grace and love when hard moments came. The kids saw this example from our volunteers – we loved authentically and consistently. It was a dance of grace.

We had a place that fostered creativity and community.

I miss those moments more than can be adequately explained. I miss those beautiful children.”



Bethany Halverson (daughter of Mitzi) third from left, and Selah Waller, right, (daughter of Jananne) were longtime Awaken volunteers.



Jananne Waller and volunteers from Free Chapel Worship Center spent several years at Atlanta Street, often four afternoons a week.



Awaken Team:  
From left: Jananne Waller, Mitzi Halverson, Denise Alu, Rachel Cook, Glenda Cook and Salissa Glutting



The Awaken program with Atlanta Street kids heading for the Forward Conference in Duluth, with Jananne and Gene Waller at far left.

Lisa Chester, as featured in the Sept. 2016 issue of MOXIE magazine for her work with Atlanta Street girls. Courtesy of The Times.



## Lisa Chester (Black Diamonds, BLING, Building Leaders in North Georgia)

“It all started as an internship for me to earn 50 hours of Community Service hours. I wanted to work in my community and give back to girls that grew up like I did. I grew up in the Gainesville Housing projects and remembered the crime and bad influences.

I went out into Atlanta Street, meeting residents and their children and I asked some of the teen girls about their interests. I learned that several of the girls from Atlanta street had created a dance team, and they were practicing outside.

I took the news back to my field supervisor, Maria Calkins, and told her what she had come up with. Maria loved my idea and told me to go for it. I met with the girls and told them I was interested in working with them and could help make their dreams come true if they were willing to commit to some of the goals I put in place for them.

I agreed to be their mentor and help them to be known and to get them into dance competitions as long as the girls went to school regularly, maintained grades, were respectful to parents and teachers, and participated in weekly activities an hour prior to dance practice.

All the girls agreed and they did well. The girls came up with the name ‘Black Diamonds.’ Dekia Boone was the girl choreographer and was a sophomore at GHS, she led the girls to their first competition at Grove Street where the girls won first place for creative dance, and second for the overall compe-

*“We worked hard with the girls and watched them overcome a lot of obstacles.”*

Atlanta Street’s ‘Black Diamonds,’ who went on to compete and win in a dance competition.



tion. We worked hard with the girls and watched them overcome a lot of obstacles.

Today, the group has now been detoured to the Melrose location and is no longer a dance team. After the relocation process of Atlanta Street, and all the families moved separate ways, so we lost some of her girls but still have two attending the new program BLING, which stands for Building Leaders in North Georgia.

BLING is working with more than 30 public housing girls at Melrose and Harrison Square, and it was based on the success of the Black Diamonds.”



Ga. Sen. Butch Miller congratulates Lisa Chester on her work with girls at a meeting of the Rotary Club of Hall County, who sponsors BLING, the club which Lisa leads today for public housing girls.

**Salissa Glutting  
(Awaken, FC Melrose,  
Melrose Art Club)**

At Awaken, I not only met a family of forever friends, sisters in Christ and my spiritual mama who I love dearly, I found a place where I belonged.

I met kids who will forever be in my heart and prayers. We laughed with, cried with, and loved these kids with all our hearts.

Not only did it change my life but it changed my kids' lives as well. They learned to serve others.

One of my favorite memories was being able to give Jaysha her Bible (shown below at right).

There are so many other wonderful memories I could share!



*Salissa Glutting, left, with Awaken student Zayria at Atlanta Street.*



*Salissa's children, Mimi, at far left, and Maddox, at right, play with Zayria.*



*Jaysha shows off her new Bible.*



*YES! entrepreneur students, with Jim Chapman at far left, and Jananne Waller, at far right, attend the Masters of Innovation conference in 2016.*

**Jim Chapman  
(Gainesville Housing Authority)**

I had the pleasure of helping out a bit with the Atlanta Street kids in the YES! (Young Entrepreneurs Succeed program) and Awaken, both led by Jananne Waller. In YES!, we took the kids to the Masters of Innovation conference in Gainesville, where they met and mingled with top area entrepreneurs. We took Awaken (and the Melrose Art Academy) to the High Museum in Atlanta and to the Varsity. Both great memories for me.

They represented our community well. Seeing these great kids growing toward maturity and success has been incredibly rewarding for me. I feel like they're my own kids, and I love seeing them do well.



*Awaken and the Melrose Art Academy kids at the High Museum of Art*



## Special Thanks

We appreciate the cooperation of the community in putting together this memorial booklet.

Thanks to Rev. Earnest Mason in getting the word out.

Thanks to Keith Albertson, Executive Editor at The Times, Gainesville, GA, for allowing us to search the newspaper's archives and to reprint articles and photos for this publication.

Thanks to Keith Fairhurst, at ATP Printing, for his willingness to rush through a big job on such short notice.

Thanks to the Atlanta Street residents and friends for providing so many wonderful memories.



*The RISE Summer Program kids visit Truelove Dairies in Clermont.*



*The Gainesville Fire Department visits Atlanta Street kids.*