

# The Paper

of Flowery Branch



New names emerge on Falcons' defense. **1B**

## Flowery Branch named fastest-growing city in Hall County



Photos for The Paper

Available home inventory has dramatically dropped as Sterling on the Lake has seen a 60 percent increase in visitors seeking homes over the past 24 months.

### City expands 2.7 percent from 2011-12

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Flowery Branch has experienced the largest increase in population among Hall County cities, expanding 2.7 percent between July 2011 and July 2012, according to recently released census statistics.

According to City Manager Bill Andrew, building permits reflect the increase surpassing the city's annual projection of \$50,000 in revenue in the first six months of the year. The city collected \$62,542.30 in permit fees by April 2013.

Jennifer Landers, marketing director of Newland Communities, which oversees Flowery Branch's largest subdivisions Sterling on the Lake, has seen a tremendous amount of growth recently in the community.

"Guests looking for homes over the past 24 months have increased by 60 percent, which is a significant change," said Landers. Home sales in Sterling on the Lake have increased by another 60 percent in the first five months of 2013 as well. "There has been a drastic drop in available inventory homes on the market due to rising demand, which has increased new home sales in 2013."

Landers believes that these numbers can be attributed to the newly opened neighborhood named "The Springs" inside of Sterling on the Lake, which caters more toward "empty nesters," or older couples whose children have moved out of the home. In the past year, Sterling on the Lake has seen a 12 percent drop in growing family buyers and a 15 percent increase of empty nester buyers. "I would credit the decrease in growing family buyers to current market conditions. Many of these families have been waiting for market pricing to rebound," said Landers.

"We have an abundance of homes available



D.R. Horton currently has approximately 20 homes under contract for completion in Sterling on the Lake community

for purchase," said Landers. Upon completion, the community is expected to contain 2,000 homes.

"We believe that the population increase in Flowery Branch and the surrounding areas in Hall County are due to the quality of the homes, and local amenities and retail available," said Landers.

"Hall County is at that point where they are definitely going to develop," said newly-appointed Flowery Branch City Planner John McHenry.

"A lot of people don't see development as a sense of employment but it is," said Andrew, noting that more economic value is being brought to Flowery Branch with the recent population increase.

In neighboring Oakwood, growth noted by the Census was 1.2 percent above previous numbers. The Norton Agency's Frank Norton

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'Guests looking for homes over the past 24 months have increased by 60 percent, which is a significant change.'

Jennifer Landers, marketing director of Newland Communities

### FLOWERY BRANCH

## City planner eyes downtown development

BY DANA TOWNS  
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John McHenry has been named the new city planner for Flowery Branch and has identified the redevelopment of its historic city center — Old Town — as one of his main goals coming into his new job.

McHenry replaces James Riker who was named planning director for the city of Duluth in January.

"There is already a lot that has been done. We are in the process of bringing in a consultant to assist with the redevelopment plan," said McHenry. The firm that will handle the redevelopment and marketing analysis for Flowery Branch is expected to be named at the June 6 City Council meeting.

"We have a growing area down here," McHenry said.

McHenry was an obvious choice for city planner, according to City Manager Bill Andrew, because of his background previously in Hall County as senior transportation planner at Gainesville-Hall Metropolitan Planning Organization before moving to the Gwinnett Village Community Improvement District as a program

director.

During his tenure in Gwinnett County, McHenry was responsible for managing road projects, such as transit and intersection improvements as well as zoning, grant submittal, and code enforcement.

"The fact that he has experience in the community made him my choice for city planner," said Bill Andrew, Flowery Branch city manager. "People know him. He was active in the CID."

McHenry and Andrew said that they both understand that the most important thing that could improve the economy for Flowery Branch is development. "A lot of people don't see development as a sense of employment but it is. It's a way to improve our economy,"

said Andrew, noting that with the expansion of subdivisions and the buying of properties, more economic value is being brought to Flowery Branch.

According to McHenry, the biggest challenge he believes he will face is making sure that downtown Flowery Branch is being built to last.

"There are always some challenges; but that's the fun ... There is no doubt that there is going to be

See **PLANNER**, page 3A



McHenry

## HEROES' RELAY

### Walk to help fight cancer

From staff reports

Hall County superheroes gathered at Road Atlanta May 31 for the county's annual Relay for Life event, sponsored by the American Cancer Society.

The event, with the theme "Superheroes Fighting Cancer," featured more than 100 teams and thousands of area cancer survivors during its six-hour reign, which began at 6 p.m. The event was shortened in length this year, lasting from 6 p.m. until midnight.

Funds raised go directly to the American Cancer Society's many programs, including services delivered at local levels. "Not much money is made after midnight, and not many people stay after midnight," said the event's leader Joan Riddle. "So we're trying to get people to come and stay for the closing ceremonies."

For Jenny Vonilla, a teacher at West Hall Middle School, her participation took on a double meaning.

"It's one of those things, where I really wanted to get involved in the community, because I just moved here and started teaching here," she said. "But, also, in November, my father was diagnosed with gastrointestinal cancer.

"So, this cause just became closer



Nat Gurley The Paper regional staff Participants rallied around each other as more than 100 teams walked in support of the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life.

to my heart."

Flowery Branch SalonPURE is a regular participant in the event. Co-owner Brittany Bentley's father is a cancer survivor. Salon stylists spent the evening coiffing corkscrewed, temporary-colored styles fit for a Superhero's walk.

Students from C.W. Davis Middle

See **RELAY**, page 6A

## Cause of house fire undetermined

BY DANA TOWNS  
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The cause of an early morning fire in Flowery Branch on May 24 that left a 6,000-square-foot home destroyed remains undetermined according to Hall County Fire Chief David Kimbrell.

Firefighters responded to the house fire just before 5 a.m. in the Royal Lakes

subdivision, only to find that the home was already heavily consumed in fire said Kimbrell.

Neighbors said that they were awakened early that Friday morning to see the back half of the house in flames. Kimbrell said neighbors called at 4:48 a.m. reporting a fire at the rear of the home. It took approximately one hour to contain the fire, utilizing six fire engines and a ladder truck

he said. Damage to the home is estimated between \$600,000 and \$700,000.

Homeowners were not in town when the fire took place, but returned upon being notified. There was no damage to the surrounding homes. "The house was a total loss," said Kimbrell. "The cause of the fire is currently listed as undetermined by Hall County and by the insurance investigators. Foul play is not suspected at this time."



Dana Towns The Paper

The garage and its quarters upstairs were all that remained of the 6,000-square-foot home that burned May 24 in the Royal Lakes subdivision.



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