

The Paper

of Flowery Branch



The Falcons' \$100 million man. **1B**

McEver Road may reopen on Friday

Ongoing rain has slowed road fixes

BY JEFF GILL
The Paper regional staff

A well-traveled stretch of McEver Road between Oakwood and Flowery Branch is set to reopen as scheduled Friday in South Hall, nearly 2½ months after torrential rain devastated the area.

Work on a double-box culvert was completed earlier this month, but excavated material from the site has been too wet to compact as backfill around the culvert, City Manager Stan Brown said.

"Weather has had a major impact on the project," he said.

Workers had to pull dirt from city property on W. White Road for the

backfill, which was completed last week. Paving and striping the road, plus guardrail installation, should take place this week.

"The road should open to traffic by the end of the day Friday," Brown said.

Workers have been fighting a soggy summer, with more than 14 inches falling in July alone.

"The contractor has been as innovative as (possible) to keep the project going, even with some austere and constrained work-site conditions," Brown said.

McEver was closed between H.F. Reed Industrial Parkway and Radford Road after a May 19 storm that dumped up to 7 inches in several hours throughout the South Hall area. The deluge

especially overwhelmed Flowery Branch, where Atlanta Highway was under water between the city's sewer plant and Wayne Drive.

Farther north on Mud Creek, a culvert also failed at Stephens Road, east of McKenzie Lane and near where the creek spills into Lake Lanier.

That section of road may reopen about two weeks after Hall County schools start the 2013-14 academic year, said Hall County Engineer Kevin McInturff.

Students return Aug. 12.

"We just had so many rain delays," he said, adding that backfilling should start today.

A culvert repair on Malibu Ridge, which is near Spout Springs Road in South Hall, should be finished before

See **ROAD**, page 3A



Scott Rogers The Paper regional staff

Portions of the failed culvert rest last Thursday morning on McEver Road near where crews are building a new culvert after heavy rains in May washed out a portion of the road. Above average rainfall this summer has slowed down repairs.

BLOCK WATCH HONORED



For The Paper

Reunion community's neighborhood watch committee accepting national recognition for its neighborhood block watch program. From left to right: Ron Scroggins, Dave Crumbley, Deputy Chad Mann, Sheriff Gerald Couch, Pattie Price, Karen Berry, Eric McNair, Tom Dibble, and M.L. Loudermilk.

Reunion receives national award

BY DANA TOWNS
dtowns@gainesvilletimes.com

The community of Reunion received national recognition, July 27, for its neighborhood block watch group.

Reunion's neighborhood watch committee was presented a 2013 national award of excellence in neighborhood watch on behalf of the National Sheriff's Association and the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Hall County Sheriff Gerald Couch presented the award.

"Out of the thousands of neighborhood watch programs across this country, Reunion was chosen to be number one," said Couch. "It's a pretty phenomenal award."

According to information provided by the National Sheriff's Association, groups eligible to receive the award are those that are innovative, demonstrate excellence and are exemplary in their approach to involving citizens and/or the community in volunteerism. Actions taken that may have prevented criminal activities and made the community safer are among eligibility requirements.

Tom Dibble, neighborhood watch coordinator, agreed that the award is an honor and said that the community is very proud of the accomplishment. "We won the award based off of our collective efforts with our committee, our block captains, our watchers and our residents," said Dibble.

Reunion resident M.L. Loudermilk founded the block watch program in 2006. The committee disbanded shortly thereafter and then reconvened in 2010. "We had it; then it went away. Then, within a two year period of time, we've grown it," said Dibble. "That's something to be proud of."

The master planned community of Reunion contains approximately 500-plus homes and is broken down into 19 block watch sections, each overseen by a block watch captain or "watcher." Block watch committee member Ron Scroggins said that watchers are encouraged to notify the block captain of any suspicious behavior. When notified, a committee member will then alert police and the community of suspicious activity.

The block watch committee

consists of six members and one police officer. Reunion also has an off-duty Hall County deputy that patrols the area during the summer, as well as the Georgia State Patrol who come out to monitor when available. "It says a lot about the concern that we have for our community," said Dibble.

"We have been very successful," continued Dibble. "We have reduced crime and incidents, within the community, because everyone knows that we are here and that we are serious about what we do."

Reunion residents Barbra Hasaka and Nancy Scroggins said that they are thankful for the neighborhood watch. "I had an incident last weekend," said Hasaka. "A delivery man came to my house to deliver something. I told the manager of the store that we would not be home and he apparently never changed the date in the computer."

"The delivery men showed up, in an unmarked truck, and were shining flashlights through the front of my house," Hasaka said that after neighbors reported the incident to

See **WATCH**, page 2A

FLOWERY BRANCH

Fifth Row Center to leave downtown

BY DANA TOWNS
dtowns@gainesvilletimes.com

Nonprofit community theater Fifth Row Center has announced it will move out of downtown Flowery Branch.

The group was notified in May that it would be required to either cease hosting performances at its Main Street studio or bring the structure up to fire code as required by Hall County Fire Services.

Theater founder and artistic director Donna Chalmers has since announced that the theater will move. According to its website, costumes will be housed at the Buford Community Theater during the interim. Chalmers has said she is not at liberty to discuss the new location until the contract is finalized.

"Emotions range from being nervous to being excited and scared," Chalmers said in an email about the theater's plans.

The theater underwent inspection by the fire marshal's office in May and was found to be delinquent under its current use. On its initial business application, Fifth Row Center was listed for

use as a studio theater with unknown and varied hours that would host rehearsals, classes and costume storage. This description fit under the city's "business occupancy use."

"It was our understanding at the time of the final inspection on October 26, 2010," said fire inspector Lt. Dax Lewis in a May 1 fire inspection letter, "that (Fifth Row Center) was using the structure for the purposes of teaching individuals in the art of theater. It has now been brought to our attention that the structure has recently been used for public performances in the theater, as well as for the purpose of church meetings."

According to fire code regulations, this would change the designation from business occupancy to assembly occupancy and require substantial fire safety enhancement, including replacing doors, adding panic hardware, reconfiguring lighting and electrical components and building a fire barrier between the storage and performance areas.

See **CENTER**, page 6A

Lutz to run for state Public Service Commission seat

BY SARAH MUELLER
The Paper regional staff

Hall County Commissioner Craig Lutz intends to run for higher office.

Lutz has announced he will run in the Republican primary for the District 4 position on the Public Service Commission. The commission regulates utility services in the state.

The seat is currently held by Lauren "Bubba" McDonald Jr., a commissioner since 2009. The Clarksville Republican's term expires next year.

Lutz started his political career in 2008 as a member of the Flowery Branch City Council. He was elected to the county commission in

2010. The county commissioner said he feels this is the time to put residents' concerns first in decisions made by the state agency, according to a news release. Lutz said in a

statement he will put families and small businesses first when making decisions.

"When elected to the Public Service Commission, my primary principle will be placing Georgians first," Lutz said in the news release.

"Engaging in conflicts between special interest versus the utilities places our families in the crossfire."

Before running for public office, Lutz served in the U.S. Air Force and was employed by BellSouth for about 16 years.



Lutz



INSIDE Volume 1, Number 36

Calendar	3A	Features	3B
Classifieds	6B	Forum	5A
Entertainment	5B	Sports	1B

Got a news tip?
770-718-3407
llaskey@gainesvilletimes.com

Want to advertise?
770-535-6345
acannon@gainesvilletimes.com

Want to subscribe?
770-532-2222

The Paper
P.O. Box 838
Gainesville, GA 30503

ECRWSS
CURRENT RESIDENT

PRSR STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 13
GAINESVILLE, GA