

# Senior News

## Georgia

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July 2021  
Vol. 35, No. 7








## Do Homework to Choose Caregiver Support Group

**I**f you are a caregiver, you may have already read articles about the importance of preventing burnout. Usually they include the suggestion to join a support group. Perhaps you're reluctant, though, because you're wondering what caregiver groups are all about and whether joining one would really help you. If so, read on.



**Lisa Petsche**



**Lisa Petsche**

The overall goal of caregiver support groups is to enhance participants' coping skills through mutual support and information-sharing.

- validating the important role of family caregivers;
- exploring the challenges and rewards of caregiving;
- acknowledging the emotional impact of a family member's illness and exploring various coping strategies;
- group problem-solving of practical issues; providing education about disease processes, behavioral issues and management strategies;
- identifying and addressing obstacles that seniors and their caregivers encounter in the community;
- promoting effective use of local resources that can help caregivers;
- recognizing caregiver needs and helping caregivers balance their own needs with those of their frail or ill loved one.

- realizing you are not alone in your situation – feeling supported and understood;
- having the opportunity to express thoughts and feelings in an empathic,

- non-judgmental environment;
- learning from the experiences of other caregivers;
- gaining satisfaction from helping others on the caregiving journey;
- making new friends who understand what you are going through;
- keeping current on caregiving issues and resources;
- recognizing the importance of self-care;
- joining together to advocate on issues of importance to caregivers; there is

A group setting is not suited to everyone, though. A caregiver support group may not be as helpful for those who:

- are very shy or private in nature;
- are self-focused, either as a long standing personality trait or due to extreme stress;
- have significant, often longstanding

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**Darryl Hodson, MD - Mark Bonner, MD - Russell Harris, MD  
Misty Banknell, PA-C - Tamika Chester, NP - Jim Lekas, PA-C  
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Senior News & Views of Georgia

## Taking Care

from page 3

personal issues (for example, a psychiatric illness or a conflicted relationship with the care receiver). In such cases, individual counseling may be a better approach.

Attending a group also may not be feasible due to severe hearing impairment or an inability to obtain respite care or transportation. Caregivers in such situations should explore telephone support networks, online caregiver message boards or virtual caregiver support groups. The latter have become more common as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions on gathering.

### Types of Groups

Some caregiver groups are very general and open to everyone. Others are specific to certain populations, such as caregivers of older adults or caregivers for those suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Some groups are quite structured, with set agendas and built-in time constraints (typically 4-6 weekly or bi-weekly sessions). Led by health care professionals, such as social workers and nurses, these groups are primarily educational in nature, and often include guest speakers.

More informal groups focus primarily on emotional support. Member sharing of thoughts, feelings and experiences is key. Facilitators may be experienced caregivers or professionals who work with caregivers. Meetings are usually held monthly, with new members welcomed on an ongoing basis.

### Evaluating the Support Group Experience

How to tell if you have found the right group:

- Is the physical setting comfortable and distraction-free?
- Are group norms – such as taking turns and respecting differing viewpoints – clearly articulated and observed?
- Can you relate to other members' experiences?
- Does the facilitator appear knowledgeable about caregiving issues and resources? Is he or she articulate, sensitive and skilled in maintaining focus, generating discussion, preventing individuals from dominating, and recognizing when someone needs outside help?

Highly rated groups also emphasize caregiver strengths, incorporate some humor and include time for social interaction.

### Where to find information on caregiver groups

- Hospital or community social worker;
- Non-profit organization associated with your relative's disease;
- Local area agency on aging;
- Community calendar of your local newspaper;
- Seniors center bulletin board;
- Community information service;
- Local public health department or mental health association.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Lisa M. Petsche is a social worker and a freelance writer specializing in boomer and senior health matters. She has personal experience with elder care.*

# Georgia Golden Olympics Registration Form

Special to *Senior News Georgia*  
by VICKI PILGRIM  
vcpilgrim@gmail.com

**H**i All: Yes... the past year has been a bit crazy and difficult for everyone but we are looking to the future and planning to have the Georgia Golden Olympics in September in Warner Robins and surrounding areas. The 2021 Registration form is available on our website and elsewhere on *Senior News Georgia's* website (www.seniornewsga.com) for your

information... and convenience.

If you have competed in the games in Georgia in previous years, you may go to the website and register online. If you have not competed in Georgia before, please print a copy of our Registration form, complete all information requested and mail it to the address shown... along with age verification and fees.

Thank you! See you in September!

**Georgia Golden Games, Inc**  
**770-867-3603**  
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## Opinion

# The Magnificent Obsession!

by Daniel W Gatlyn, USN Ret.  
Minister/Journalist

**P**erhaps the name, more than the plot, will speak in analogous terms to the exceptionally observant of current National conditions. The 1954 Movie, starring Rock Hudson and Jane Wyman, unravels a tragic, yet unwavering story of a lifestyle that changes for the better. Graphic parallels to the mind set of millions brings our attention to obsession! Just what is the moral makeup, aims, and goals of Mr and Mrs America? The elusive answer is frightening, for reality has flown the scene; and, sacrilege now fills the space once occupied by virtue and valor! Ritual has replaced the spiritual!

I am watching, from multiple angles, the scenario across the political, racial, and leadership strata; and, hastily conclude that we are being confronted by “raging seas and troubled waters!” The America of 1776-1876 and 1976 is no more. The viability of by-gone days is only in memory. We have traded type for hype, glitter for litter, and roses for dandelions. Guidelines have given way to by lines, wholesome pursuits to gluttonous appetites, and just cause is now pronounced chaos. Basic instructional curriculum has now been unfortunately replaced with a sarcastic script which leans to personal aspiration. Sadly, we are currently obsessed with that which is self-serving, artificial, or mystical. We covet the best... while rejecting the solution!

If my description were merely a passing fancy, the alarms would not be sounded. Chicken Little would be totally embarrassed by what comes down the pike... for indeed, not only is the sky fallin’, but the traditional and fertile setting upon which has been labeled “incomparable” is in the process of being trampled upon and crushed. Fault my words if you will, but “how shall we sound forth a righteous melody in a strange territory?” The memory of former blessings

causes us to cringe and cry as the harps of magical sounds have been “hung upon the willows.” (Psalms 137 Para)

Very few citizens are able to digest the unthinkable stance of our present dilemma. Planned agendas, markedly successful endeavors, prudent diplomatic projections, and studious decisions have been shelved in favor of slanted or compromised patterns of acquiescence. No longer are we a favored nation of conscience and

compassion, we are for sale to the highest bidder of coin and clout! Sacrificial Liberty and Freedom no longer “rings our bell!” Justice and integrity are ghastly relegated to the archives! We are in a deep puddle of pronounced poverty... and are not aware! History will rightly judge our antics as hysterical and insane! The American Dream has been transformed into a mirage! Hopefully we will seek a Miracle... and a just restoration!

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# On the Cover

## Atlanta Beltline's Rich History is Worth Visiting!

By Carolyn Brenneman

Cover: Scooters along the beltline

Check out the Atlanta Beltline this July! The Atlanta Beltline, a former railway corridor around the city of Atlanta, has been developed over the years into a 22-mile multi-use path that connects neighborhoods to each other. The full beltline connects 45 diverse neighborhoods and parks to provide everyone with trails and walkways to open green spaces, parks, and shopping areas. It is worth visiting.

Everyday thousands of folks run, jog, ride a bike, skate, skateboard, roller skate, or walk part of the beltline. It is a great way to enjoy the scenery, get some exercise, explore the many diverse areas of Atlanta and spend time with friends, family, or just walk your dog. It is very pet friendly and bringing your fur creature with you on a walk along the beltline, is a very enjoyable experience.

Also, along the most popular part of the beltline, the Eastside which is the most famous, is the Art on the Beltline project. In many sections along the walkway are fences, walls, and part bridges and this is known as the art walls. It spans about 12 miles along the corridor on the south and east sides of Atlanta. Art on the East beltline will show us works by gifted artists from all across Georgia. This is a fabulous experience to see the variety of art, with different mediums including paintings, murals, sculptures, photography and film.

Also, when we take a walk on the Eastside beltline, we will walk through the area, and there are many places to exit to enjoy some of Atlanta's favorite parks and shops and restaurants, as well as the Ponce de Leon City Center and the Kroc Center. In addition, right off the beltline, there are many walk-up patios where we can grab some delicious food.

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Photographs of the category People



Works by Karen Navarro



Photographs of the category Creatures



Painted walls by an unknown artist



# Beltline

from page 6

The beltline slogan is “Where Atlanta Comes

Together” because Atlanta’s southern hospitality shines through as friends, neighbors, and folks come together. So, let’s check out this delightful experience and take our grandkids out on a stroll!



Very decorated wall area we can walk on



George and Dan jamming



A great stop to take a photo of yourself



Taking a rest surrounded by wings



## **On the Cover**

# **Barbara Williams retires to become Mayor!**

By CLAIRE HOUSER-DODD

COVER: Fort Valley Mayor Barbara Williams

**L**ot's of people retire, but very few retire to become a mayor... or much of anything in the leadership department!

Not so with Barbara Williams. She retired to become Mayor of Fort Valley, Georgia. Not only that, but she is also in her eighth year, second term, and is possibly facing another.

Barbara was born in Roberta, Georgia to Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Braswell. Her mother's maiden name was Jordan, Willie Etta, who died when Barbara was born. She was afraid she would not survive the sixth birth and had arranged with Barbara's older half-sister, Ellen Braswell Reeves, who had the same birthday and same year as she, to take over. Ellen and her husband raised Barbara and her five brothers... after their father died... and saw that they had a good education and were well prepared for life.

There are only two left, Barbara and brother Bennie.

Barbara went to grammar and middle school in Roberta, started taking private piano lessons in the seventh grade, graduated Sumacumlaude from Crawford County High School; and, went to Fort Valley State University to major in Classic Piano, planning to be a Classical Performing Pianist. Somehow, she fell in love with Bands, graduated and went to Vienna, Georgia and directed the Dooley County Band from 1971-1989. At that time, she and her husband, Dr. Jimmy L. Williams, moved to Fort Valley where she taught for several years at the Middle School.

Around 1996, Barbara started teaching at Fort Valley State University and is still at it. She just attended a Florida Jazz Festival and took one of her outstanding piano students. She has taught as an adjunct at Fort Valley State University for 14 years and is signed up for the next semester. Add that to the thirty years teaching in the public schools and you'll come up with 44 every time. Congrats, Barbara. We need more teachers like you.

Dr. and Mrs. Williams had three children, two boys and a girl, all educated with great careers and lots of culture.

Todd Williams is now with L.L. Cool J. writing

**continued on page 9**



**Blue Bird Manufacturing announces production of new "Zero-Emissions Electric" School Buses!**



**Mayor Williams taking a little time off to enjoy some relaxation!**



**MAYOR WILLIAMS**  
from page 8

“Rock the Bells.” He is also a Free Lance writer who has written for many magazines. He has left his long-time home in New York and moved to Lawrenceville, Georgia. Yes, Georgia. New York’s loss was our gain!

Daughter, Jamie Blount, is enjoying being principal at Emerald High School in Greenwood, South Carolina.

Barbara has lost her husband and one son, Vernon Stravinsky, who went to Troy State in Alabama on a musical scholarship, traveled with Johnny Long Band, became a recording artist who loved taking his Mama with him on his many recording trips. Of course, that was not a problem. He said, “Go,” and she said, “When?” Our bet is that she left her suitcases packed... one for North and one for South!

You have probably guessed by now that Barbara Braswell Williams has retired many times. Shortly! She is absolutely not a retiree. She has far too much energy and goie de vie. She just returned from a fishing trip aboard a yacht with a good friend of Fort Valley and ours too, Constantine. Yep, fishing is one of her main interests. It keeps her young and having fun.

Good luck, Barbara, and thanks for putting all that education, plus 16 years on City Council and 8 years as Mayor, expertise to work for us!



Fort Valley, Georgia Mayor Barbara Williams!



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# Michael Collins’ 20TH YEAR REUNION with his RESTORATION of ATHOS MENABONI’S MURAL PAINTINGS at the J.R. Reynold’s Mansion located on Sapelo Island, Georgia

Special to Senior News Georgia

After 20 years Michael Collins, the restorer of Athos Menaboni’s mural paintings, was hosted with a Reunion by the R.J. Reynold’s Mansion on Sapelo Island, Georgia.

The private reunion in January 2021 between Michael and his subjects, “Blackbeard and his Pirates,” was an event to remember.

This was the first time in 20 years for Michael to see his old friends again after spending many hundreds of hours in his Georgia studio restoring Blackbeard and over 15 Pirate scenes depicted in Athos Menaboni’s mural paintings back to their original glory of the 1930’s.

## The Art of Michael Collins

Artist, writer, engraver, restorer of murals and conservationist, Michael Collins has risen to the front ranks of wildlife artists. Collins is proud to have had President’s Kennedy, Nixon and Carter as collectors of his work. Most recently HR Majesty Queen



Elizabeth II has added his work to her private collection.

His reputation is based on his ability not to just paint what he sees, but make it come alive. Collins will spend countless hours researching a project and the finished product is nothing short of miraculous. Very few artist’s go to the length and precision that he goes to ensure the accuracy and uniqueness of his work. Collins is known for hiding

small details in all his work. From putting the time and date the project was completed on the face of the Rolex a man is wearing in a portrait Collins engraved on the man’s gun, to a flea on the collar of a commissioned dog portrait. Always striving for more, for one customer’s gun who wanted the locomotive engine his grandfather drove engraved, Collins put the locomotive number on the front of the engine, .020th of an inch tall. He wants to ensure that people truly take the time to look at his work and appreciate the amount of detail he goes to for their benefit.

Each painting or engraving is an expression of his authentic personal vision. The artist allows us to see beyond the familiar to the intricate patterns and textures of his subject. Collins is truly unique in his ability to do all aspects of art. Lifelike wildlife paintings, engraving, one of a kind knives or guns, scrimshaw and sculpting. Very few artists have such a limitless ability to express their work.

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## COLLINS

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Being a world class engraver, his ability has not gone unnoticed. Collins spent years designing for Browning and is now designing for Fox Knives of Italy. His knife designs and cammo patterns have been sold worldwide by many other outdoor related companies.

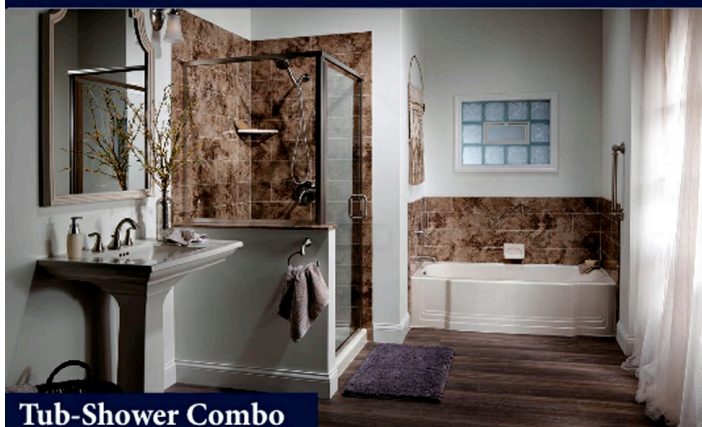
Upon the recommendation of the internationally known artist, Athos Menaboni, Collins restored Menaboni's murals in the RJ Reynolds Mansion on Sapelo Island Georgia, and Atlanta's famous Peacock and Swan Houses. When Menaboni reviewed the work he could not tell which was his and which was Collin's.

Always a conservationist, Michael Collins has devoted his time, energy and talent for environmental and wildlife preservation. Collins has donated many of his works to Ducks Unlimited, Quail Unlimited, and the Turkey Federation. His very first individual exhibit was in the Chattahoochee Nature Center, a facility in Roswell, Georgia which serves injured or orphaned wild animals and birds.

In addition to his phenomenal talents as an artist, Collins is a competitive archer, shooter, chef and even singer. A true Renaissance man and Southern Gentleman, Michael Collins will continue to produce works that will be unique and legendary.

Michael Collins website to view & purchase artwork: [www.michaelcollinsart.com/html/about.php](http://www.michaelcollinsart.com/html/about.php).

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# BBB Scam Alert: Watch out for Social Security Administration Impostors

by **KELVIN COLLINS**, President/CEO, BBB of Central Georgia & the CSRA, Inc.

**W**hile not necessarily a new type of scam, the rates of government impostor scams are beginning to rapidly increase across the nation, particularly from scammers claiming to represent the Social Security Administration (SSA). As tax season comes to a close and the rate of IRS-impersonation scams begins to decline, SSA impersonators rise to take their place. In 2020, more than \$395,000 was lost to government impostor scams across the nation and, and a large part of these scams claim that they are representatives of the SSA, according to BBB Scam Tracker data.

In a May 2021 Semiannual Report to Congress, the inspector general of the SSA reported that the rates of social security fraud calls increased exponentially between May-August 2020. Additionally, scammers are using advanced techniques to convince victims of their legitimacy, including using official SSA phone numbers, employee names, official logos or symbols and fabricated federal badges. In some cases, scammers are texting or emailing copies of these badges to victims to convince a wary consumer of their legitimacy.

To combat against impersonators, the Office of the Inspector General for the Social Security Administration states that the SSA will never:

- Text or email images of an employee’s official government identification
- Suspend your Social Security number
- Threaten you with arrest or other legal action unless

you immediately pay a fine or fee

- Require payment by retail gift card, wire transfer, internet currency or mailing cash
- Promise a benefit increase or other assistance in exchange for payment
- Send official letters or reports containing your personal information via email

Additionally, the SSA will use text to communicate only in limited situations if the recipient has opted in to receive text messages. The SSA will communicate via text message if you have subscribed to receive updates

and notifications from the SSA through text message or as a part of SSA’s enhanced security measures when accessing your Social Security account online.

“Don’t believe anyone who calls you unsolicited from a government agency and threatens you – just hang up,” said Gail S. Ennis, inspector general for the SSA in a January 8, 2021 press release. “They may use real names or badge numbers to sound more official, but they are not. We will keep updating you as scam

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DF-CD-NP-G221



# Fare Collection and Exact Fare Only To Begin On Augusta Transit and Richmond County Transit Buses – Thursday July 15, 2021

Special to Senior News Georgia

Submitted by Oliver Page, Ph.D.  
Deputy Director, Transit  
Augusta Transit; [augustatransit.com](http://augustatransit.com)

Augusta, GA

**F**are collection will resume on all Augusta Transit and Richmond County Transit bus services on Thursday July 15, 2021. Wednesday July 14, 2021 will be the end of free rides on Augusta Transit and Richmond County Transit buses.

Augusta Transit fares are shown on the flyer attached. All riders of Augusta Transit buses, ADA/paratransit services and Richmond County Transit buses will be expected to pay a fare for any and all trips as from Thursday July 15, 2021.

Riders must have exact fare as NO change will be given. Bus Operators/Drivers will not issue change cards not can they give change. If a rider pays for a single fare (\$1.25) with a \$5 bill, \$3.75 will be retained by the farebox. If a rider attempts to pay for the same ride with \$1 they will be denied boarding and the farebox retain the \$1.

Riders who held a weekly or monthly pass for rides in February or March 2020 are able to have a new pass reinstated upon producing their weekly or monthly pass dated February or March 2020. Riders must take their expired pass to the Broad Street Transfer Center for pass credit. Weekly or monthly pass

credit will not be permitted without producing the expired pass dated February or March 2020. Augusta Transit is committed in its role to enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors in Richmond County through the provision of sustainable and safe transit services.

## DENTAL Insurance

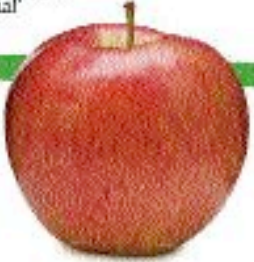


Get the dental care you deserve.

Medicare does not cover dental care<sup>1</sup>. That means if you need dental work done, it can cost you hundreds or even thousands of dollars out of your own pocket.

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<sup>1</sup>"Medicare & You," Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2020. Includes the Participating (in GA: Designated) Providers and Preventive Benefits Rider. Product not available in all states. Acceptance guaranteed for one insurance policy/certificate of this type. Contact us for complete details about this insurance solicitation. This specific offer is not available in CO, LA, NY; call 1-800-969-4781 or respond for similar offer. Certificate C250A (ID: C250F; PA: C250Q); Insurance Policy P150 (GA: P150GA; NY: P150NY; OK: P150OK; TN: P150TN); Rider kinds B438/B439 (GA: B439R). 6/25



# Sabrina Griffin promoted to Vice President for the Columbia County Chamber of Commerce

Special to *Senior News Georgia*

Submitted by **Olivia Reich**  
Communications Manager  
Columbia County Chamber  
of Commerce, [Olivia@columbiacountychamber.com](mailto:Olivia@columbiacountychamber.com)

EVANS, GA

**T**he Columbia County Chamber of Commerce announced today that Sabrina Griffin has been promoted to Vice President for the Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, effective June 21, 2021. In her new role, Griffin will oversee all office operations and managers will report directly to her.

“Since she started in 2017, Sabrina has become an integral part of the team and has done a great job of developing quality programs for the Chamber,” said Russell Lahodny, President and CEO of the Columbia County Chamber. “That experience and knowledge is irreplaceable and will be the key to the Chambers’ ongoing success.”

Griffin started out with the Chamber as Programs Manager before becoming Director of Programs and Events. She has organized and implemented over 100 events and programs each year. Prior to her employment with the Chamber, she was the Regional Senior Marketing Specialist with, formerly known Comcast Spotlight, now Effectv for 19 years.

While at Comcast Spotlight, Griffin received numerous Operational Excellence Awards.

“I’m both honored and excited to have the opportunity to serve the Columbia County Chamber in this capacity,” said Griffin. “I’m looking forward to continuing the mission of the Chamber

and serving the business community.”

Griffin is in her second year of Institute for Organization Management, a program of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and a graduate of Leadership Columbia County Class of 2017.

\*\*\*\*\*



**Sabrina Griffin**

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# Sterling Transitions Atlanta North opens in Roswell

Special to Senior News Georgia

Submitted by Gretchen Howard  
gretchen@ironskilletmedia.com at Melissa Libby & Associates, Cumming, GA

Roswell, GA – June 10, 2021

**S**terling Transitions, a moving and downsizing management company for older adults in various stages of transition, recently opened in Roswell. Owner/licensee and longtime Atlanta resident Melanie Stevens is at the helm, offering full-service and customizable solutions to sort, pack, unpack, move and liquidate. Headquartered in Asheville, NC and founded in 2012 by CEO Tanya Fletcher and co-owned by COO Betty Baker, the company has experienced steady growth in Asheville and has recently licensed additional locations in Roswell/Atlanta and Southwest Florida.

“Beginning Sterling Transitions Atlanta North has been a natural life and career progression and a promising business opportunity, especially given the aging population and multiple generations within families,” says Sterling Transitions licensee Melanie Stevens, who is focusing on north metro Atlanta and north Georgia. “There are many families where the children have extensive obligations of their own and don’t live near their parents, making it difficult to be physically present to provide the support needed as their parents downsize or change home environments. Tanya and Betty’s proven experience has provided me with all the knowledge and background to get Sterling Transitions Atlanta North started successfully and make a positive impact on people’s lives.”

Sterling Transitions’ services include downsizing assistance, move management, clear outs, inventory of assets, and sales of possessions through various resources for older adults and their families as well as the clients of estate lawyers, executors, realtors and eldercare managers.

“We’re excited to expand Sterling Transitions to other locations and offer our services to those who need extra support during such a critical time,” says co-founder and CEO Fletcher. “We assist licensees and provide them with all the tools and knowledge to run their own business under the Sterling Transitions brand. The moving process isn’t easy at any age, but later-in-life situations can be complicated and tedious, and we aim to



Tanya Fletcher and Melanie Stevens

alleviate the stress and uncertainty our clients often experience. Plus, our three geographic areas have synergy as residents move between these locations as they retire or want to be closer to family. Having Sterling Transitions work together in these regions can ensure a more seamless move experience for our clients.”

Stevens brings 20+ years experience in

hospitality and event management to her downsizing and speciality move career for older adults. She is from Puerto Rico and speaks Spanish fluently. She’s honed her skills over a lifetime of moves – 20 and counting – from San Juan to Baton Rouge to Atlanta. She loves hiking/walking around the beautiful trails in Roswell and Alpharetta with her husband, Mark, and their golden retriever, Fletch, playing league tennis, volunteering with St. Vincent de Paul Society and supporting the St. Peter Chanel Parish community. Melanie and Mark share in raising his three sons from a previous marriage.

Sterling Transitions Atlanta North is a member of NASMM (National Association of Senior Move Managers) and of Atlanta WealthCare Network. For information on Sterling Transition’s services, sales, and licensing opportunities, visit [www.sterlingtransitions.com](http://www.sterlingtransitions.com) or [www.facebook.com/SterlingTransitionsATLNorth](https://www.facebook.com/SterlingTransitionsATLNorth). To schedule a free consultation with Sterling Transitions Atlanta North, contact Melanie Stevens at 404-281-2763 or [mstevens@sterlingtransitions.com](mailto:mstevens@sterlingtransitions.com). Sterling Transitions adheres to all COVID safety protocols mandated by state requirements.

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# BBB Scam Alert: Beware of an increase in travel scams during the summer

by **KELVIN COLLINS, President/CEO, BBB of Central Georgia & the CSRA, Inc.**

**A**s the rainy spring season gives way to the warmth of summer, many families are eagerly planning their summer travel adventures. According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, the 16-week period between Memorial Day and Labor Day weekend has historically been one of the busiest for traveling domestically in the U.S.

While the pandemic has affected the rate of traveling for the past year, recent data suggests that traveling is beginning to make a comeback. While still less than its pre-pandemic levels, air travel has seen a marked increase in recent months, with approximately 465,000 domestic flights recorded in March 2021 – a significant difference from the May 2020 all-time monthly low of approximately 180,000 flights.

Unfortunately, with increased opportunities to travel, scammers are looking to take advantage. In the first six months of 2021, Americans have lost over \$370,000 to travel scams across the nation and over \$190,000 just in the past two months, according to reports generated by BBB Scam Tracker.

The rate of travel scams generally increases during the summer months. They can take a variety of forms, either as sweepstakes, airfare, timeshare or rental scams and can completely disrupt even the most meticulously planned travel schedule. Spontaneous traveling can be a lot of fun – but it is important that travelers spend the time to research their lodging arrangements, rentals and any deals or discounts that they are offered by a business and do not allow a sense of urgency to rush them through the decision-making process.

The top five most-reported travel scams include:

- Vacation rental con. These con artists lure in vacationers with the promise of low fees and great amenities. The "owner" creates a false sense of urgency – such as telling potential clients that another vacationer is interested in the rental – to get payment up before

doing sufficient research or questioning the legitimacy of the ad.

- "Free" vacation scams. When a cruise or travel company advertises a vacation as "free," it does not necessarily mean the trip is without cost or restrictions. Watch out for add-on fees for air transportation to the port, port charges, taxes, tips and other undisclosed fees.

- Hotel scams. When staying in a hotel, beware of scammers who use various techniques to obtain credit card information, including fake front desk calls, "free" wi-fi connections and fake food delivery.

- Third-party booking site scams. If you book your airfare, hotel or other travel

through a third-party website, be sure to use caution. BBB Scam Tracker continues to receive reports of scammers pretending to be online airline ticket brokers. In the most common version of the scam, travelers pay with a credit card and, shortly after making the payment, receive a call from the company asking to verify name, address, banking information or other personal details – something a legitimate company would never do.

- Timeshare reselling cons. A timeshare owner looking to sell gets a call from someone claiming to be a real estate

**continued on page 18**




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**BBB SCAM ALERT**  
from page 17

broker or agent. These scammers claim to specialize in timeshare resales and promise they have buyers ready to purchase. To secure this service, the scammer pressures the target into paying an upfront fee. The timeshare owner pays up, but the reselling agent never delivers.

To assist those with travel plans this summer season, Better Business Bureau recommends prospective travelers follow these guidelines:

- Get trip details in writing. Before making a final payment, get all the details of the trip in writing. This should include the total cost, restrictions, cancellation penalties, and names of the airlines and hotels. Also, review and keep a copy of the airline's and hotel's cancellation and refund policies and the cancellation policies of the travel agency or booking site used.
- "Too good to be true" deals. As is common in various scams, if the deal or discount seems to be too good to be true, it probably is. Scammers often use this tactic to lure in potential victims and use

aggressive "limited time" language to entice travelers to pay before they can research the business.

- Avoid wiring money or using a prepaid debit card. These payments are the same as sending cash. Once the money is sent, there is no way to get it back. By paying with a credit card, charges can be disputed and dramatically limit liability from a fraudulent purchase.
- Call the rental owner. If you are not using a service that verifies properties and owners, do not negotiate a rental solely by email. Many scammers don't live locally. Speaking with the owner on the phone, asking detailed questions about the property and local attractions will clarify if the listing is genuine. An owner with vague answers is a clear red flag.
- Unsolicited offers. Be particularly cautious if you "win" a free trip without entering a contest or sweepstakes. This is especially true if the offer is time-sensitive and requires the consumer to accept and pay for the offer immediately or risk it going to another "winner." Check the official website of the company the offer is originating from to verify that it is legitimate.

For more tips on planning your summer vacation travel plans, visit [BBB.org](http://BBB.org). If you or someone you know has been a victim of a travel scam, report it to BBB Scam Tracker. Information provided could prevent another person from falling victim.

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*Kelvin Collins is president & CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, serving 77 counties in East Alabama, West Georgia, Southwest Georgia, Central Georgia, East Georgia and Western South Carolina. This tips column is provided through the local BBB and the International Association of Better Business Bureaus (IABBB). The Better Business Bureau sets standards for ethical business behavior, monitors compliance and helps consumers identify trustworthy businesses. Questions or complaints about a specific company or charity should be referred directly to the BBB at Phone: 1-800-763-4222, Web site: [BBB.org](http://BBB.org) or E-mail: [info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org](mailto:info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org).*

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