

ACCGov 101 gov't academy for residents & employees starts in Jan.

ACCGov 101, a revamped educational community government academy, is launching in late January. The 10-week course will take place mostly on Wednesday evenings and introduce participants to a variety of local government functions, showcase departments and the services they provide, and educate residents on how to get involved moving forward.

"We are incredibly excited to relaunch this program and give residents a closer look at our operations and services," says **Cecile Riker** (Communications), who is coordinating the program with help from **Evelyn Pinto Mira** (People & Belonging), and the **Manager's Office**.

An earlier version of a community academy program was originally launched in 2017 by the Manager's Office and proved to be popular among residents, but was paused indefinitely in 2020 as a result of Covid.

The refreshed program will offer sessions held at different ACCGov facilities and offices with locations rotating each week. Topics of discussion will include city-county



Participants in the 10-week program will visit and tour a variety of facilities and departments.

history, unification, planning, leisure services, public safety, infrastructure, and other topics.

While ACCGov 101 is being facilitated by Communications, participating departments are responsible for programming hands-on experiences during their sessions. **Economic Development, Fire, Housing & Community Development, Planning, Police, Public Utilities, Solid Waste, Sustainability, Transit, and Trans. & Public Works** are a few that will be highlighted during sessions.

Participants will also have the chance to identify other departments

they'd like to learn about and visit as part of the program.

Athens-Clarke County residents ages 18 and older are eligible for ACCGov 101, which is expected to continue annually. Two of the 27 spaces for the spring 2026 cohort are reserved for current employees who want to learn more about ACCGov.

"This is a great opportunity to be exposed to different departments, meet staff and residents, and maybe even get ideas on how to better serve the community," says Riker.

For more details on the program or an online application open through January 4, visit acgov.com/101.

ACTV on public display at ACCGov facilities

On October 27, 2000, **ACTV** debuted on local cable TV channel 7 as a 24/7 government access channel to broadcast ACCGov information and, eventually, live Mayor and Commission meetings.

Twenty-five years later, what is now **Communications** still maintains 24/7 broadcast operations of ACTV, now on channel 180, as well as the channel's online streaming at acgov.com/actvlive and through ACCGov's Roku and Fire TV channels.

Communications also worked with its TV system provider and **IT** to create a second channel that streams ACTV's content through the internet to 14 digital displays in lobbies and public areas in ACCGov buildings.

With a steep decline in cable subscribers over the years, adding distribution outlets helps put ACCGov information in front of more residents. The displays show content ranging from full-length video productions to slideshows providing details about programs, job listings, public events, and other services. Most content displays a QR code for more details, and, since the displays are silent, Communications staff also captions the interview text on videos.

Residents can watch the displays in public spaces at the **Tag Office, Animal Services, the Multimodal Transportation Center, City Hall, the Water Business Office, Elections, Satula, and the Airport**.



City Hall is one of the eight public places where residents can watch ACTV.

"Having digital displays with our content is a form of community engagement, even if it seems passive," says **Stuart Robinett** (Communications). "It puts the information in front of residents where they are already visiting. The hope is that it serves as the tip of the iceberg for people curious enough to reach out and find out more."



Talking with... Tonyia Brooks (Tax Commissioner)

Brooks is the Motor Vehicle Division Administrator and has been with ACCGov for 29 years.

Where are you from? I'm from Oconee County.

What school did you go to? Oconee County High School.

Tell us about your career at the Tax Commissioner's Office. I was hired as a Motor Vehicle Registrar. In 2001, I was promoted to Operations Assistant. Then, in 2004, I advanced to Operations Supervisor in the Accounting Department. Most recently, in March 2025, I was promoted to Motor Vehicle Division Administrator.

What are your current responsibilities? I manage the overall operations of the Tag Office, coordinate staff, assist with the budget, and ensure excellent customer service and adherence to state laws.

Why have you stayed with ACCGov for so long? I truly enjoy the work environment and the people I work with. This office has a strong sense of teamwork, support, and purpose, which makes it a great place to be every day. Additionally, the benefits and stability that come with the position have made it a rewarding place to grow professionally.

What do you like most about your job? That each day is different and brings its own unique experiences. I appreciate the variety in our work and the opportunity to

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Officers deliver packages left by driver

On November 29, **Police** received a call regarding packages on a sidewalk in a neighborhood that appeared to have been dropped by a delivery driver.

Upon arrival, officers located approximately 70 packages with varying addresses in the Athens area. After contacting the delivery service, officers were told that the driver had quit their shift and left the packages behind. The delivery service informed officers that they would not send someone to retrieve the discarded packages, but would replace the items for customers. Officers were told by the company that they could donate or discard the packages as needed.

The west patrol's midnight shift understood the frustration customers would feel when their packages didn't arrive, so supervisors **Lt. Von Anderson** and **Sgt. Hilton Cooper** worked with on-duty officers **Haydn Asinas, Brandon Flores, Irvin Fuentes, Justine Hayes, Oscar Robles, Nathaniel Shelnut, Kalina Thurmond, and Zachary Weldon** to have the eight officers on patrol deliver the dropped packages directly to the recipients' homes. The officers made the deliveries between their normal calls for service.

"We knew that a lot of people worked hard for the packages," said Cooper, "and the right thing to do was to play delivery services/Santa."



Police's west patrol midnight shift split up the abandoned packages and hand-delivered each one.



News & Notes

January Blood Drive: The employee blood drive schedule for January is as follows:

- Tuesday, Jan. 13 from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM at **Police East Precinct**
- Wednesday, Jan. 14 from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM at **Lay Park**
- Thursday, Jan. 15 from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM at **Bobby Snipes Water Resource Center**

To schedule an appointment, visit acgov.com/blooddrive.

MLK Day of Service: A number of ACCGov departments are participating in the 2026 MLK Day of Service on Monday, January 19 by hosting project sites for volunteer service. The kick-off event is at **Lay Park** from 8:30-9:30 AM. ACCGov projects include tree saving and litter clean-up on the **Firefly Trail**, a revamp of Bobby's Learning Garden at **Sandy Creek Park**, and dog trail beautification with **Animal Services**.

Registration for the day of service is underway at acgov.com/mlkday.

Solid Waste Awarded: Solid Waste was awarded a \$25,000 grant from Made to Be Remade, a statewide initiative led by the Georgia Beverage Association with support from the Keep Georgia Beautiful Foundation. This grant will support local efforts to strengthen recycling and sustainability.

Fox Grant to Morton: The Fox Theatre Awards presented **Leisure Services' Morton Theatre** with \$57,000 through the Fox Gives Single-Year Grant Program. Funding will support the rehabilitation of the Morton's stage.

WaterFirst Excellence Designation: **Public Utilities** received the WaterFirst designation from Georgia Environmental Finance Authority for excellence in managing water resources. This is the 12th year the department has received this designation.

Retirements (Effective January 1)



Rhonda Bray
Public Utilities
34 years



**Clyvette
Daniels-Driskell**
Sheriff
31 years

Promotions (Oct. 27 - Nov. 23)

Building Inspections: Linda Ray - Customer Service Supervisor

Corrections: Elbert Canada - Correctional Sergeant

Fire: James Henson - Fire Sergeant and **Kyle Southers** - Fire Corporal

Mayor: Erica Thomas - Executive Assistant

Public Utilities: Troy Fleming - Electrical Supervisor

Sheriff: Teresa Wallace - Detention Officer

Solicitor: Catherine Priebe - Attorney II

Sympathy



**Cheryl Lynn
Cheatham** (retiree) passed away on November 20. She retired in 2018 from Fire as an Administrative Assistant after 22 years of service.



Kay Allyn Giese, who served as a Municipal Court Judge from 2005 until 2010, passed away on December 6. She was the wife of Superior Court Senior Judge David Sweat.



David Camp (retiree) passed away on December 15. He retired from Police in 2007 as a major after 24 years of service from 1974-1998.

James Alexander (Central Services) - aunt and cousin.

Access older ACCENTs since Jan. 2024 at accgov.com/accentsarchive

Get Well

Mary Hamby (Police)

Accomplishments

Employee of a Quarter: Solid Waste: Axel Skobba

Avery Drake (Public Utilities) and **Jason Jones** (Trans. & Public Works) both received Master of Public Administration degrees from the University of Georgia in December.

The following employees were recognized for practicing ACCGov's Core Values during November: **Katelyn Gann** (Animal Services) and **Johnny Wiley** (Central Services).

Sheriff John Q. Williams received the Community Impact Award from the Delta Mu Sigma Alumni Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma for the inspiration he provides to others through his leadership and service.

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Employees submitted over 500 Charity Drive pledge forms for 2026

◀ “Talking with...” from p. 2

serve taxpayers, whether in person or over the phone, which keeps the job both interesting and rewarding.

And least? Dealing with difficult or upset individuals can be challenging.

Anything you wish you could do differently? Not really.

Do you have to overcome any obstacles in your work? One big obstacle has been hiring and training new employees from different generations. Everyone learns and works differently, so it can take some extra effort to make sure training fits everyone's style. I've found that being patient, flexible, and open to different approaches helps the whole team get on the same page.

Are there any misconceptions about the Tag Office? That we have

control over all motor vehicle rules and fees. Many customers don't realize that we must follow state laws and regulations, and we don't have the authority to make some exceptions.

Over your time here, what have been the most significant changes?

When I first started, I was the youngest employee in the office and that's no longer the case!

What have you learned from working here?

When I first started, I didn't even know what a title looked like. Over time, I've gained a strong attention to detail, learned many state laws and county ordinances, and become familiar with all the various forms required for transferring a title. This experience has really helped me grow professionally, better serve

our customers, and assist effectively within the office.

What do you like to do outside of work? My family is my life, and I truly cherish the time I spend with them.

What was the highlight of your past year? Preparing for my first grandbaby!

Do you have any pet peeves? Yes! I get annoyed when people don't pick their feet up while walking, and when drivers stay in the left lane while going slow.

Anything else you would like to add? I'm grateful for the opportunities I've had to grow both personally and professionally during my time here...

Talking with... is a bi-monthly look at an ACC employee and their job.

Accomplishments (cont.)

These employees graduated from **Innovation Ambassadors**, a 12-month leadership course led by **Organizational Development** with workshops, case studies, peer collaboration, and assignments: **Anglia Arledge, Robert Gasper, and Katie Goodrum** (all Trans. & Public Works); **Kenshundria Bailey-Allen** (Economic Development); **Jonathan Carter** (IT); **Mimi Dykes, Jacqueline Fambro, André Greene, and Natasha Nelson** (all Corrections); **Katie Jenkins, Jessica Moller, and Lesley Moore** (all Police); **Madalyn Kelley and Katrina Murray** (both Public Utilities); **Laura Mitchell** (Sheriff); **Angela Munnell** (Building Inspection); **Samantha Murray** (Finance); **Carrie Slayton** (Organizational Development); **Jarita Smith** (State Court); **Erica Thomas** (Mayor's Office); and **Davin Welter** (Airport).



Wellness Hero

Blake Manning (Police) has always been an active person, playing sports and working out on his own time, but never consistently. After a work-related injury and a Crohn's disease diagnosis, Manning knew he had to make a change.

He began by eating healthier and starting a consistent workout routine. He lost 20 pounds and grew in both his strength and endurance while running.

"My overall health has improved and I actively feel excited daily about getting to exercise to continue improving my health," Manning says.

As Manning has taken on running more seriously, it has not come without its challenges. He has failed on runs and meeting time qualifications



Manning enjoying the outdoors

for races.

"I have taken each of these failures and taken lessons from each to improve for the next time I give it a try," Manning says.

The **ACC Wellness Program** has helped Manning to set goals and be motivated to check in on them daily. He is currently registered for a marathon and ultra-marathon. Looking ahead to the future, he hopes to compete in the Georgia Death Race and a 100-mile trail running event.

He encourages anyone looking to improve their lifestyle to simply stick with it.

"There will be days when you will not want to wake up early or stay up late to exercise," Manning says. "But you should do it anyways."

To Your Health provides health related notes from ACC's Wellness Program.



Departments showcased & awarded in Dec.'s Parade of Lights

A record number of departments entered floats in the Downtown Parade of Lights. **Police** was awarded the Mayor's Award - Best Overall Float, **HCD** was awarded Best Use of Theme - Government/School, and **Central Services Facilities Management** was awarded Best Use of Lights - Government/School. **Sheriff, Fire, Elections, Transit, and Animal Services** also entered floats.



ACCENT

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Congratulations

to current and recently retired employees who received service pins in 2025



Trans. & Public Works: William Lamey



Building Inspection: Doug Hansford, Fay Lamb • Central Services: Angel Helmy, Beth Smith, Howell McKinnon III • Finance: Chris Caldwell • IT: Dierdra Stroud • Police: Michael Ward • Public Utilities: Rhonda Bray, Stanley Wymbs



Building Inspections: Jeffrey Norman • Central Services: Ronald Harris, Rita Shelnutt • Finance: Rena Durie, Jackie Scott • HR: Tami Brown • Clerk of Commission: Christine Howard • Police: Raymond Anderson II, David Norris • Public Utilities: Michael Hughes • Sheriff: Luke Bishop, Wyukan Mahoney • Solicitor: William Collinsworth



Animal Services: Kathy Casper • Budget & Strategic Analysis: Tim Taylor • Central Services: Willie Craddick • Finance: Elizabeth Griffin • Fire: Charles Black, Christopher Culver, Howard McCants III, Jason Pierce, Jeremiah Smith, John Thompson, Jr., David Wall, Jr., Jeremy Wall • IT: John Guest, Jr., Uma Kandasamy • Leisure Services: Cathy Padgett • Planning: Joanne Dejausserand • Police: Anthony Banks, Preston Cusachs • Public Utilities: Kevin Porter, William Brooks • Sheriff: Takreem Gomes, David McAllister III • Solicitor: Pamela Morrison • Tax Assessor: Joseph Dunagan • Trans. & Public Works: Grady Davis • Transit: Charmaine Barnes

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Central Services: Reginald Glenn, Gilberto Fonseca-Cespedes • **District Attorney:** Heather Moore, Takia Taylor • **Extension:** Judie McAllister • **Fire:** Joshua Allen, Brian Burke, Christopher Dorsey, Kenneth Jackson, James Sapp, Kenneth Wilson, Glenn Wood • **HR:** Sara Ivy • **Police:** Kenya Campbell, Stewart Heard, Ashley Ivey, Irene O'Rourke, Jonathan Patterson, Enrique Rivera, Jr., Matthew Smith, Felix Troche, Sung Wang, Kevin Zapata • **Public Utilities:** Bill Hodo, Gary Puckett, Bomani Wilson • **Sheriff:** Benjamin Chaloux • **Solid Waste:** Jeremiah Poole • **Tax Commissioner:** Sarah Stephens • **Trans. & Public Works:** Nancy Garner Cerrato, Michael Young, Sr.



Central Services: Rico Hopp • **Finance:** Eric Griffin • **Fire:** Robert Bettis, Michael Burel, Benjamin Jeffers, Kevin Kearney, Sherrod Lawrence, Carl Martin, Charles Newson, Daniel Saeidian-Bavani, Emily Thompson, William Wooden • **IT:** Travis Cooper • **Police:** Amanda Blair, Frederick Dearing, Jr., John Johnson, Jr., Lesley Moore, Catrena Sims, Jennifer Stewart • **Public Utilities:** Soraya Lattimore, Cynthia Poole, James Taylor • **Sheriff:** Adrian Goodman, Gwendolyn Jones, Untwann Leverette, Justin Prestridge, April Slay • **Solid Waste:** Stacy Smith • **Superior Court:** Brandon Andrews, Daniel Schmidt • **Tax Commissioner:** Stephanie Aarstad • **Transit:** Brian Cannon, Felipe Max, Victor Pope



Airport: Justin Roberts • **Budget & Strategic Analysis:** Matt Justus • **Building Inspection:** Bryan Dobson • **Central Services:** Jeffrey Dawson, Cory Haynes, Corey Weaver • **Clerk of Courts:** Callie Bennett, Rachel Richards • **Corrections:** Hiawatha Covington, Jackie Fambro, Charles Mason • **Finance:** John Holden • **Fire:** John Branch, Ron Foster, Adam Gardner, David Lampe, Mark Melvin, Charles Trippi • **HR:** Stacie Norris • **IT:** Ashley Frederick, Teri Knight • **Leisure Services:** Freddy Banks, Megan Hong, Julia Johnson, Todd Miller • **Police:** Charles Burgamy, Shawn Denmark, Daniel Freeland, David Hardgrave, Joey Lewis, James Mitcham II, Christopher Shapland, Kristy Thrasher • **Public Utilities:** William Ashworth, Davis Erwin, Corey Mize, Justin Ryan, Billy Samples, Hollis Terry IV • **Sheriff:** Stephen Bray, Mohamed Elhallak, Jennie Evans, John Truitt, Ketonnia Vereen, Shamyla Vereen • **Solid Waste:** Kevin Sexton • **State Court:** Lesley Weise • **Superior Court:** Carol Adams, Nicole Bates, Kristen Daniel, Kimberly Norwood • **Trans. & Public Works:** Jamie Barnes, Kyle Dalton, Wayne Mead, Ronald Whited, Jr. • **Transit:** William Ellis