

## Duluth company gives a helping hand to Gwinnett seniors



Special Photo

L to R: Cait Patterson, Trish Elebash, Jeannie Gravett, Stewart Fogleman, Tim Conway, Jason Piper, Betty Huff, Marc Sporn, Jonathan London, Roger Green, Kelly Schmidt, Laura Green, Brittany Knowles and Amanda Gilbert

By Carole Townsend

SUWANEЕ – Tuesday, Sept. 22 dawned cloudy and breezy; golfers at The River Club in Suwanee welcomed the cooler temperatures as they geared up for a day of competition and camaraderie on a beautiful golf course. For the thirteenth consecutive year, Roger Green, president and CEO of Green Financial Resources, LLC, welcomed guests to the Green Financial Charity Golf Classic. With the help of wife Laura and the company's staff, the tournament raised more than \$40,000 for Friends of Gwinnett County Senior Services, a non-profit organization that supplements Gwinnett County's senior services.

"What a great day. We all had a terrific time, playing golf with some beautiful scenery and making new friends along the way," said Terry Whitlock, one of the golfers in Tuesday's tournament.

According to Gary Galloway, Resource and Marketing Coordinator for Gwinnett's Senior Services, the help that the county receives from Green's golf tournament and associated efforts fills a gap that otherwise would leave many senior citizens lacking critical services. "Friends of Gwinnett County Senior Services was actually founded in 1999 by (now Senator) Renee Unterman. She foresaw a day that held unfunded mandates and a growing senior population, and she knew that the county alone could not handle the need," Galloway said.

In the year 2000, the U.S. Census showed that the number of people age 60 and up in Gwinnett was 46,000. In 2015, there are 121,000 seniors of the same age in the county. People are living longer, and they are often outliving their financial resources. Living longer also means that a person's ability to remain in their own home may be jeopardized; even needing a little extra help can mean having to move to a senior community because the extra help isn't available.

Friends of Gwinnett County Senior Services exists for one reason, and that is to help senior citizens remain in their homes for as long as they want, preserving their dignity and peace of mind as long as possible. For example, if a senior

wants to continue living at home but has lost his ability to drive, that loss alone can mean a mandatory move, either to a child's home or to a senior community.

If a person is physically healthy but has lost the ability or desire to cook nutritious meals, that can necessitate an unwanted change in living circumstances. "Friends" can fill these gaps by providing vetted services, such as drivers for doctor appointments of shopping trips. "Friends" also provides one third of a person's meals – one third of the nutritional requirements – to a senior by delivering



Special Photo

Friends uplift seniors

prepared, nutritious meals to the home. These simple services - driving and cooking - even light housekeeping and other chores, provided to a senior citizen may mean the difference between living at home and being forced to move elsewhere. To a senior who has worked his entire life to be able to have a home and enjoy it, these simple services equate to dignity, health and peace of mind.

**How are senior citizens in need identified?**

Currently, there are about 100 seniors receiving assistance through the county

and through "Friends." There are about another 100 on a waiting list for services. Seniors in need are identified through Gwinnett County Senior Services, and need is not necessarily based on a person's financial circumstances. "Cognitive ability factors into it," Galloway said. "A person may be financially able to remain in his home, but if he needs help getting dressed or preparing food, that's where we come in."

**How are volunteers identified?**

"Right now, the number one need we have is for drivers," said Green. "The second most pressing need is for food security, meaning that seniors need nutritionally balanced meals prepared and delivered by people who they trust and feel comfortable with." Friends of Gwinnett County Senior Services is an organization comprised entirely of volunteers, from the board members to the volunteers who cook the meals. Volunteers are vetted by the organization, meaning that seniors can feel comfortable that a person who comes to their door can be trusted.

"While young people may be OK with using a service like Uber, older people are not," Green said. Uber is basically a taxi service made up of a network of drivers, who drive their own autos and earn money by responding to calls from people who need transportation. "This younger generation may be fine with a service like that when they are seniors, but this current population of elderly people is not," Green said. "That is one of the critical areas in which we can help."

"All of these services we can provide are inter-related, since a person's ability to get to every doctor appointment they need is critical to that person's health," Green said. "The cost to hire a taxi to take them to the doctor and wait until the appointment is over is prohibitive. People just can't afford that. We can help."

Meals for the seniors helped by "Friends" are prepared in a commissary in Lawrenceville. They are delivered by vetted volunteers. "We always have a need for volunteers, and the need is growing. We have some volunteers who are newly-retired. They have a lot of energy and a spirit of eagerness and helpfulness. Think of it this way: they are paying it for-

ward, because one day, they may very well need the services of 'Friends,'" said Green.

**Where do financial donations go?**

Green and his staff are proud of the fact that every penny raised by charities that benefit Friends of Gwinnett County Senior Services goes to the people who need it most – seniors. "We have no offices. Our board members do not get paid; we are all volunteers," said Russ DeLong, Walton EMC's Senior Vice President of Corporate Services. DeLong also currently serves as the President of "Friends."

"Think of it this way. As life expectancy increases, the need for these supplemental services will obviously grow," DeLong said. "Right now, it costs about \$2000 a year to provide the food and help that these seniors need." It costs much more if a senior has to move to a nursing

ally can't afford to feed their pets. "We would like to start a pet project, one that would provide resources to seniors that allow them to keep and feed their pets," said Green. "This is all about one thing, and that's preserving the dignity and well-being of our seniors."

**Who is Roger Green?**

Roger Green is president and CEO of Green Financial Resources, LLC. Green, according to some of the people who perhaps know him best, is a generous philanthropist who takes care of his employees like they're family. Betty Huff, a longtime employee of Green, speaks of her boss with words that are faintly choked, and with tears in her eyes. "He is the kindest, most trustworthy man I have ever known. His wife Laura is the same way. They give to missions work. They go on mission trips themselves. They go out of their way for (his employees), treating us



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L to R: Roger Green, Gary Galloway and Jennifer Orton – all members of the Friends of Gwinnett County Senior Services Board.

home or other senior living facility, and taxpayers often pay some or all of that cost. Right now, "Friends" has an annual commitment of \$80,000. Green Financial Resources' charity golf classic last week raised about half of that. The need for financial donations is as pressing as the need for volunteer drivers; the more donations the organization receives, the more seniors they can help. As DeLong said, it is a win-win for everyone. Seniors maintain their dignity and wishes, and the burden on taxpayers is lightened when seniors can continue living at home.

**Why choose "Friends" as the tournament's charity? – Roger Green**

It was actually my wife Laura's wonderful idea to get involved with our community, to give back," Green said. "I am passionate about helping seniors, because I remember my mother delivering meals on wheels. I remember what that meant to her, and to the people who received that help," Green said.

"Right now, we are working on a food bag program. We want to provide additional food to seniors, pantry food that supplements the refrigerator food from 'Friends,' to get them through the week if, say, we have another 'snowpocalypse,'" Green said.

Currently, according to Green, many seniors feed some of the little food they do have to their dogs, because they liter-

like family. They treat their clients with respect and honesty. What they are doing with this tournament and other works is nothing short of wonderful."

Future plans for "Friends," Green hopes, will include a partnership with the faith and business communities in Gwinnett. The need is great and growing.

**"How do I help Gwinnett's seniors?"**

The most pressing need that "Friends" has right now is for volunteers. "Primarily, we need drivers. Anyone who wants to help by volunteering once or twice a week to take a senior to a doctor appointment, or to the grocery store," said Green. "Many hands make light work." Volunteers are also needed to do light household chores, prepare meals and deliver them.

According to DeLong, financial donations are, of course, always needed. "Every penny of the money that is raised goes to help seniors. Whether it's spent on food or equipment used to prepare that food, whatever the direct need is, that's where the money goes."

To learn about Friends of Gwinnett County Senior Services, to see upcoming events, or to discover volunteer opportunities, visit <http://www.fogcss.com>. "Friends" is a 501(c)(3) volunteer-run organization.