

PARADE OF TREES: HISTORY, FUTURE, AND HOW WE FAILED.



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One-Story-At-A-Time



January 2016

The Concept: The idea for the Parade of Trees came to the village of Green Cove Springs from Colorado when Mike McNaney, now a resident, relocated. He stayed at River Park Inn (Pat & Dale Garlinghouse) and shared a Christmas card with the Colorado event on it. Pat envisioned people "Adopting" trees.



In 2004 Pat shared the idea with Johna Hayes*, President of the Green Cove Springs



Merchant Association (GCSMA). Johna had already envisioned the big Christmas tree for the City and thought the Parade of Trees was a natural for Spring Park.

After all **Christmas On Walnut Street** (a private sector initiative) was presented by the GCSMA. Therefore, in 2004 (our first year) with borrowed, money 33 trees were obtained by the GCSMA. During the first few years trees were "Sponsored," mainly business and organizations, not by families and individuals.



*We lost Johna Hayes in a tragic house fire, Aug. 2008



ANNUAL THEME:
**TO REMEMBER FAMILY LOVED ONE
ONES AND HONOR OUR MILITARY
MEN AND WOMEN SERVING OUR
NATION WHO ARE UNABLE TO BE
HOME FOR CHRISTMAS**



CLAY COUNTY FALLEN WARRIORS MONUMENT: The west end of Spring Park was also the original (1997) site of the Parade of Flags, a display showing the names of all Clay County Fallen Warriors (Casualties) and the area identified for a permanent Veterans Monument. At that time the annual Parade of Flags was not a traveling display it was only seen at this location for a couple weeks during May - Memorial Day.

[More information available online and/or upon request.](#)



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Meeting Joys and Challenges: The GCSMA was grateful to have storage space in old City Hall, the use of Spring Park and the support of the community. However, during 2005 and 2006 the Parade of Trees went through some "growing pains." Posting signs?... Who decorates?... Fees?... Tree Location?... Materials?... Lights?... Thankfully, Amy Dunn, GCSMA treasure, stepped forward to create a map and a binder to organize the documents for the project. The Parade of Trees and Christmas on Walnut St. continued to be a dual activity of the GCSMA.



Funding the City Tree: As per the original GCSMA plan the 22' Red Cedar Tree had been planted at the north west corner of NEW City Hall. The GCSMA made this happen - Parade of Trees Funds made it possible for the decorating and lighting to be funded by the private sector, not the government. It was the intent of the GCSMA to cover the cost of maintaining the "City Tree" via private sector. *That tree is now: the Johna Hayes Jr, Memorial Tree*



By 2007, the display grew to 110 trees. Art Yeaman, GCSMA President envisioned 150 trees for 2008 to honor of the Clay County's Sesquicentennial (150 years) and it happened - there were 150 trees. That year we received national recognition by being featured in "Southern Living" magazine.



GSCMA 2009: New and out of town leaders created internal strife. As a result, the GCSMA abandoned the City Tree - turning it over to the government and severed its affiliation with the Annual Parade of Flags and were questioning the worthiness of the **Annual Parade of Trees.** GCSMA met its demise. However, the positive community effort and energy of the Parade of Trees survived, largely due to the efforts of Mike, Pat, Dale, Art, Amy and Kelly Russell, former GCSMA secretary. Kelly took the lead that year, the Annual Parade of Trees endured. Also the GCS Lions became the new leaders of *Christmas on Walnut Street* and partner of the Parade of Trees despite the demise of the GCSMA.

A Quest for Foster Parents: The core group of civic minded people imagined a new group. The Greater Green Cove Civic Association, Inc. (GGCCA) was created in August 2010, just in time to present a seamless public appearance for the 7th Annual Parade of Trees. Pat's original concept had always been to secure annual "Foster Parents" -- Trees Are Up For Adoption.



People in and around Clay County now know--- as the Christmas season approaches --- people see the lonely undress trees in Spring Park (3rd Sat. of November) -- they know it's time - **Trees-Are-Up-For-Adoption.** It's time for "Foster Parents" to finalize their plans -- They Decorate or We Decorate.

It Takes A Village: In 2010, the GGCCA secured the organizational skills of Jenny Yeaman (a long time volunteer). The Parade of Trees tradition continues. Each year Mike, with the help of Art, and many volunteers, make certain the trees are prepared, placed, and lit in a timely fashion. As they say, it "takes a village" and 2010 was no exception. The GGCCA is grateful to the City for its support. We appreciate the more than 40 volunteers that helped make the 2010 a great success. By the first Saturday in December, everything comes together, most often under sunshine and blue skies for a perfect day to fast forward us into the merry making of the season.



2011: The concept of "Showcasing" various organizations was developed. Girl Scout Troop 608 donated LED lights for the premium trees and developed theme Tree Decoration kits.



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2012: The GGCCA commence a merge with Heritage Guides (HG) resulting in the development of a Reserve & Return Program. 70% of the "Adopting Parents" wanted to return to the same tree location for 2013. During 2013 the Reserve and Return Rate grew to 82%. The Showcase Trees were the Japonica Garden Club and The Military Museum of North Florida. Both organizations became full Partners. The Girl Scouts and the Japonica Garden Club developed our "We Decorate" Program. We also developed a collaboration with the GCS Lions (Host of Christmas on Walnut St) - they offered Parade of Trees adoptions options to their sponsors.

2013: The Showcase Trees were the Village Improvement Association and Green Cove Springs Athletic Association. That year we also developed and launched a **Virtual Parade of Trees** concept by also placing trees with message on a virtual world map. Spring Park and our participants were featured in 15 states and 22 countries. More than 225 Christmas Trees are seen 24/7/365 via the internet.



This virtual project was also in line with the creation of a localized *virtual* historical marker program called **H.A.R.P. (Heritage Awareness Rediscovery Project)**. We presented the HARP concept to city staff in an effort to help showcase the City Archive, however, the offer was rejected. We then presented the concept to the Clay County Archives and it was welcomed with open arms.

2014: Our Showcase Trees were the Gateway Girl Scout Living History Program and Clay County Division of Tourism and Film Development. Also, two new location were added: Methodist Church (500 Walnut St), and Council On Aging (604 Walnut St.). During December we invited the Clay County School (800 block of Walnut St.) and the Clay County Government (Archives) at the 900 block (Historical Triangle) to consider having trees at their locations during 2015.



Also during 2014 we made our long range Showcase Trees plan available to the City with the intention of developing a 5 year plan. As we saw it, a long the range plan would be good for many - specifically the GCS Business League. Our efforts were designed to help revitalize the 2005 "Tomorrow Vision." plan. Our concept of a 5 year plan was met with a lack of enthusiasm by both parties.

As a result of this we needed to decide where to place our efforts. During 2015 we elected to refocus on the original plan to do more work directly in support of honoring our Clay County Fallen Warriors and our Departed Veterans while we continue the development of the Clay County Traveling Parade of Flags.



CURRENT EVENTS AND THE FUTURE:

During the early part of 2015 we followed through on our plans for two new - 2015 - locations. 800 & 900 Walnut St.

1) Clay County Schools (800) was willing to explore the logistical plans to have trees at the 800 block, however there is not suitable electrical power available. We withdrew our plans to present trees at that location.

2.) Historical Triangle (900) the Clay County government. That plan did not work out.



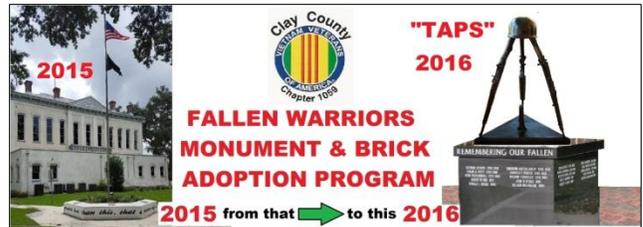
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2015 PARTNER STATUS:

- 1.) Added Partners: We tripled our dual partner participation.
- 2.) Royal British Legion (Chris & Dot Mayer) Poppy Awareness program for honoring our fallen warriors since 1919.
- 3.) Green Cove Springs Lions (Christmas on Walnut St partners): The City terminated the relationship.
- 4.) Council on Aging (604 Walnut St.) was a willing host in 2014, but became disinterested in 2015.
- 5.) Methodist Church: (500 Walnut St.) was a willing host in 2014 and willing to host again in 2015.
- 6.) Japonica Garden Club: Our most loyal partner, merged with the Village Improvement Association - they plan to continue to take care of the "We Decorate" Trees - a very smooth transition.
- 7.) Foster Parents: We remain grateful to those who adopt trees (Clients, Partners and Participants).
- 8.) City of Green Cove Springs: Hosting of the primary display location.

9.) **Vietnam Veterans of America: 2015 Showcase Tree. As of August 2015 "TAPS" the CLAY COUNTY FALLEN WARRIOR MONUMENT is no longer simply an idea.** Vietnam Veterans of America, Clay County Chapter #1059 is providing the leadership. The project is now a community action item.



November & December 2015: We presented the 12th Annual as planned. We decided to make 2015 our last year to present the event and immediately commenced to seek new leadership. Since the first week of November we have been seeking a new leader (group). All 2015 participants have been notified. Many have asked questions, however, no one has stepped forward to demonstrate a desire to take the leadership position.

On Dec 17, 2015, the City of G.C.S. published a news release: Chris Eversole, Communications Coordinator, 352-494-7837. "This event amplifies the beauty of our community's rich historic, cultural and natural resources," City Manager Danielle Judd said. "It is a testament to the value that volunteers and community organizations offer..." City staff is making plans to work with the new organizer on the 2016 edition.



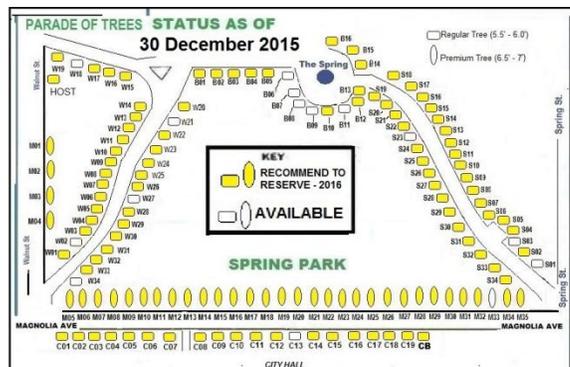
The last few days of December 2015 the display items (trees, lights, electrical cords, tree stakes) were turned over to Mike McNaney 904-501-5899. Mike is the only other individual who has been involved in this project from the beginning.

PENDING: A leader (group) to step forward to organize the 2016 event. We will maintain the adoption records, individual sign information, an online presents, and contact with the participants until such time an event leader is ready.

HISTORICLALY - WHO ADOPTS A TREE?

- From Clay County (other than GCS).. 56%
- From Green Cove Springs..... 36%
- From St. Johns County..... 5%
- From Other Locations..... 3%

- Individuals/Families.....47%
- Business.....17%
- Civic Groups/Charities...34%
- Government..... 2%



I Hear, and I Forget I See, and I Remember I Do, and I Understand!
 To our GUESTS, our participants, our volunteers, and our hosts we say Thank You!

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WE FAILED:

We had lofty ideas, We met muster, we participated. Yes, for 10 years we tried, we tried to support "Tomorrows' Vision" - a community based 20 year plan created in 2005 - a plan to help revitalize Green Cove Springs.

One of the goals was to make Green Cove Springs the "Downtown" of Clay County. As we saw it the Parade of Trees was in direct support of that goal. Another goal was to continue the Spring Park master plan - in the original plan Spring Park Main Entrance was to be on Magnolia Ave. Our long time work and effort has been consistent with the annual theme and aimed at sparking interest in others to help develop community activities from the river, Spring Park at 200 Walnut Street all the way to the Historical Triangle (900 Walnut Street).

WE FAILED - we met muster for 10 years - we now Secede. We remain Semper Fi to the cause but absent with leave for muster.

As very, very few people now remember the site of the Parade of Trees (Spring Park) and the former site of the Memorial Day Parade of Flags was a bench mark for the creation of the permanent Clay County Fallen Warriors Monument.

WE FAILED (at that location). We appreciate our dual partners - who helped us develop the Clay County Traveling Parade of Flags while creating joint efforts for the Clay County Fallen Warriors research project. [More information posted on line and or available upon request.](#)

The initial private sector (1997) idea for a Clay County Parade of Flags was for the week prior and following Memorial Day our streets would be lined with American Flags to honor our Fallen Warriors. The idea was a big hit with the City Council, however, the city leaders wanted the display to be in Spring Park. All was well for several years. But by 2010 many community leaders became complacent and apathetic. By 2011 and 2012 the two week display was damaged and disrespected more than ever before. This situation created a rebirth - the Traveling aspect was born - by 2013 the Parade of Flags started to travel.

The creation and development of a PERMANENT Clay County Fallen Warriors Monument is now alive and doing well. No longer just an idle sound bite. Thank You!

We are moving towards goal - success!



Yes, we are closing the Parade of Trees chapter... But more important we are opening another local chapter. We invite you to come along. **After all - these are the times that try men's souls...**

Godspeed.



Good day,
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HONORING OUR FALLEN WARRIORS & DEPARTED VETERANS