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The Red & Black

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Red & Black Editor-in-Chief Zach Leggio poses for a portrait in his office on Tuesday, July 1, 2025, in Athens, Georgia. Leggio is a fourth year journalism and international affairs major. PHOTO/FOREST X. DYNES

Dear reader,

Summer is a special time for Athens. Typically dominated by more than 40,000 University of Georgia students, the city empties out beginning in May, paving the way for its true character to shine through.

Parking lots become emptier, restaurants, bars and cafes quiet down and, thankfully, traffic clears out.

Despite the quieter day to day, summer brings out some of the most iconic events of the year for Athens. Between PrideFest, the Hot Corner Celebration & Soul Food Festival, the Juneteenth festival, the AthFest Music & Arts Festival and Athens Restaurant Week, downtown does not catch a break.

Since 1893, The Red & Black has acted as a cornerstone of the Athens-Clarke County community. This summer, we have covered all of the festivals, art, food and drink of the summer but also breaking news, politics, protests and sports. We understand what free and independent media means for a local community and for democracy.

We are working to be more present for all Athenians, not just UGA students. We have introduced new ways of covering events live, getting information to our readers as things happen. We have also revamped our social me-

dia efforts to include more video and to get information to readers faster while maintaining a standard of accurate and empathetic coverage.

We will carry these new reporting strategies into the fall. As students return to campus, The Red & Black will be there — from freshmen move-in, to every football game to fall graduation. We will also stay engaged with the community and take advantage of new connections — from covering government meetings to new restaurant reviews to Porchfest.

To the students, new and returning, I wish you luck in your new classes and I encourage you to explore all of the opportunities that this campus and university has to offer. The Red & Black is the only independent publication covering campus news and events and it should be your go-to information source for all things UGA, with more reliability than YikYak or Reddit.

To Athenians, thank you for trusting The Red & Black. Across the country, “news deserts,” like those in much of northeast Georgia, are being saved by student journalists, who are dedicated members of their communities and committed to learning new, innovative ways to tell community stories. Many of us students will not be here for more than four years, but learn to love Athens and cherish our

time reporting on the Classic City.

As my time as editor-in-chief wraps up, I reflect on this summer and feel incredibly proud of the work done by our summer staff. This 2025 Athenscape issue is an ode to the Classic City’s rich history, music landscape and sports culture. We dove deeper into the world of sports with our Classic City Kickoff issue, which will hit stands in two weeks. We also produced regular content from all of our talented desks: news, culture, sports, opinion, photo and social media.

I hope that all of you continue to read and support The Red & Black, whether it’s picking up our papers from red boxes across the city, reading the website with your morning coffee or stumbling upon headlines on our social media. We want to hear from you; a comment on social media, feedback and tips through our website — our ears are always open.

I hope that as you read the rest of this paper, you understand why I have loved living here this summer and that you can find a new way to enjoy Athens for yourself.

Thank you,

Zach Leggio, editor-in-chief

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Charlayne Hunter-Gault introduces Justice Robert Benham at the 2020 Holmes-Hunter Lecture at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. PHOTO COURTESY/PETER FREY

Leaders, luminaries and legends

The names and faces that built Athens

Sophia Eppley

Athens has long stood as a center of creativity and passion, shaped by its deep roots in music, education and social progress. The small town gave birth to the first state-chartered public university in the country, sparked music revolutions that echoed around the world and cultivated leaders who broke down barriers in the government and education.

Meet the Athenians who shaped the city’s past, opened doors to the future and defined the city’s creative spirit.

Making history

To understand the history of Athens, there are three names to know: John Milledge, Abraham Baldwin and Elijah Clarke. Each played a vital role in laying the foundations of the town and the university that defines it.

In 1785, Baldwin and members of the Georgia legislature chartered the University of Georgia, the first publicly funded institution of higher learning in the U.S. Milledge, a prominent Georgia politician and later the founder of Athens, donated land which the campus was officially built on in 1801. That same year, Clarke County was established and named in honor of the Revolutionary War hero, Elijah Clarke.

Several years later, in 1805, Milledge officially founded the city of Athens, naming it after the ancient Greek city in hopes that it too would become a thriving center of education and culture. Athens was formally incorporated in 1806.

“Without Milledge, Baldwin and Clarke, so many of our city’s attractions or streets would not exist,” Engagement Coordinator of Historic Athens Denise Sunta said. “Of course the county itself would not exist. The university would not exist.”

Two more Athenians that made history are Alfred Richardson and Madison Davis, ex-slaves that became the first Black state legislatures to represent Clarke County in the late 1800s. They were able to win, according to Sunta, because this was before the implementation of Jim Crow laws that would later disenfranchise Black voters.

“Reconstruction was an interesting time in our history because it was just post-Emancipation so you had all of these people who suddenly had the power and ability to vote,” Sunta said. “Athens itself had a pretty large Black population at the time, so that’s how they won.”

Davis was more conservative and “white-passing,” according to Sunta, so he was better equipped to navigate the social and political systems at the time. Richardson, on the other hand, was not “white-passing” and more politically radical, making him a target of mob violence, particularly from the Ku Klux Klan.

“We’re hoping to bring more awareness to these two people because I think that it’s important for us to recognize the fact that in Athens, during Reconstruction, we kind of had this elevation of Black life,” Sunta said.

“We’re hoping to bring more awareness to these two people because I think that it’s important for us to recognize the fact that in Athens during Reconstruction we kind of had this elevation of Black life.”

DENISE SUNTA | ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR OF HISTORIC ATHENS

Davis is buried at Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery in Athens and Richardson’s burial place is unknown, according to Fred Smith, executive director of the East Athens Development Corporation.

Trailblazers in government and beyond

Long after UGA was founded, several notable Athenians shattered racial and gender barriers — the first Black citizens elected to public office, the first woman to climb the ranks of the local government and the two Black students

that desegregated UGA.

Before Athens and Clarke County became a unified governmental body, Ed Turner and Nancy Denson paved the way for future local politicians. Turner was the first Black Athenian to be elected to Athens City Council and served for 18 years from 1970 to 1988.

Turner attended UGA in the mid 1960s, quickly becoming influenced by Black empowerment and Civil Rights Movement leaders like Malcom X and James Baldwin. Around the same time, Black voter registration rates in Athens were on the rise and locals were looking for someone in the Black community to run for Athens City Council. Little did Turner know, the community had their eyes on him.

At the time, 10 middle-aged white men represented Athens’ five districts. Turner won in a runoff, defeating the two white candidates — including the incumbent. Though the response was overwhelmingly negative, Turner stood his ground on the council; he was often ignored or stonewalled. Despite his struggles, Turner got the ball rolling. A couple of years later, the second Black man was elected and soon after that, the first Black woman.



Nancy Denson, former mayor of Athens, listens to a speaker at the unveiling of the new hybrid Athens Transit Buses, on Feb. 23, 2018, in Athens, Georgia. PHOTO/FILE STAFF

In 2025, half of the commission seats are held by people of color for the first time in the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government’s history.

Nancy Denson became the first woman on Athens City Council in 1980. Denson, a mother of four and running a part-time accounting and alterations business out of her home, had no prior political experience. Still, Denson beat her opponent, four-term incumbent Bryan Craft, in a landslide.

What began as a passion for speaking out against unfair zoning practices in her neighborhood soon led to her becoming president of the neighborhood association — and eventually, going door to door to campaign for the District 5 council seat. Although she was often the subject of sexist comments and the butt of the men’s jokes, Denson was not afraid to disagree — and anger — the councilmen. This attitude got her re-elected three times to the council, a win in the tax commissioner’s office and eventually the title of ACC mayor.

Charlayne Hunter-Gault and Hamilton Holmes were the first Black students admitted to UGA in 1961, effectively desegregating the university and breaking down barriers in public education in Georgia. Both graduated from Henry McNeal Turner High School in Atlanta, Holmes as valedictorian and Hunter-Gault as third in the class. Holmes had dreams to become a doctor, Hunter-Gault a journalist — they both saw those dreams coming true at UGA. However, their applications were denied, again and again.

In 1960, their legal team filed for an injunction seeking to prohibit UGA from “refusing to consider [Holmes’ and Hunter’s] applications and those of other Negro residents of Georgia for admission to the university.” Their request was initially denied, but a full trial was held later that year. On Jan. 6, 1961, Judge William Bootle issued a ruling, stating that Holmes and Hunter “would have already been admitted had it not been for their race and color,” and they were immediately admitted to UGA. Three days later, they became the first Black students to enroll in classes.

“Oftentimes, the change that we see on campus extends into the community,” Sunta said. “For the community of Athens, what was so important about the two of them and the courage and bravery that they had to attend the university as the first Black students is that it showed Black Athenians that it was possible to receive the same education as white people.”

The community stood strong behind Hamilton and Holmes, according to Sunta. In fact, when Holmes was subjected to threats and feared for his safety, he would stay with one of the sheriff’s deputies.

“It showed that the community was behind these people coming to the University of Georgia and making that kind of stand in order to change the social systems that precluded them from higher education,” Sunta said.

Shaping culture: native musicians

Athens has earned its reputation as one of the South’s most vibrant music towns, where live music spills from nearly every corner. Iconic venues like the Georgia Theatre and 40 Watt Club have become launching pads for rising artists. Much of Athens’ rich musical identity today traces back to the legendary acts of the ’70s and ’80s — bands like R.E.M., the B-52s and Widespread Panic — who put the town on the global stage and transformed the genre of indie rock.

“I do think that Athens had a burgeoning [rock and folk] scene for a very long time,” Sunta said. “But I think that what the B-52s and R.E.M. and then later Widespread Panic did ... it kind of proved that Athens was what we all believed that it was: this town for creatives, for musicians, for artists to come and be in community with each other and kind of find their way here.”

The B-52s formed at a local Chinese restaurant in 1976, and played their first show at a Milledge Avenue house party on Valentine’s Day in 1977. The Red & Black watched and covered the band as they made it big — reporting on their first performances at frat houses and hearing them on the radio, describing their sound as strange and eccentric.

R.E.M. formed in Athens in 1980 when UGA students Michael Stipe and Peter Buck met in Wuxtry Records, bonding over shared musical interest. After teaming up with two more band members, who also attended UGA, they debuted at St. Mary’s Episcopal Church — with no idea that they would eventually sell more than 90 million albums worldwide and shape alternative rock forever.

Widespread Panic got its start in 1982 when UGA students John Bell, Mike House and Dave Schools formed a band named after Houser’s nickname, “Panic.” In the mid-80s, they began performing at Uptown Lounge and soon became known for staying on stage for hours, sometimes up to four.

Sunta attributes this stardom to Athens being an inherently creative town and having so many avenues — such as the Georgia Theatre, 40 Watt Club, Flicker Theatre & Bar, Buvez and more — for artists to collaborate and showcase their work. These bands gave and continue to give contemporary and future local musicians the motivation to continue with their craft, Sunta said.

“More than anything, there’s a scene here that’s always looking for ... indie rock alternative music, new wave post-punk music,” Sunta said. “Coupled with the fact that Athens is this weird, creative community at its heart, made it a safe space for some of these bands to cultivate their own sound and their own identity.”



R.E.M. performed a free concert for University of Georgia students at Legion Field on Oct. 3, 1983, hosted by University Union. PHOTO/FILE STAFF



The Taylor-Grady House located on Prince Avenue is seen on Sunday, June 29, 2025, in Athens, Georgia. PHOTO/FOREST X. DYNES

Building history

How some of Athens’ oldest houses came to be

By Madison Linton

Even after one visit to Athens, unique qualities of the town’s historic buildings are unforgettable. Whether an apartment complex, a restaurant building that frequently rotates names or a designated historic site, these buildings simultaneously provide insight to the past and ideas for the future.

T.R.R. Cobb House

The pink-tinted T.R.R. Cobb House, located on 175 Hill St., is a large, historic home that has been through several changes, yet remains historic. Over the years, its purpose has evolved. Now it serves as a museum, with staff making an effort to maintain the integrity of the building’s past appearance. The tastes of the Cobb family are reflected in the patterned curtains, blue and gold wallpaper and red and gold carpeting, some styles emulated by modern artists. Period-popular furniture and trinkets from the 1800s take up any space left up to the imagination.

Thomas Reade Rootes Cobb, who the house is named for, was born in 1823 in Jefferson County, Georgia, but is considered one of the first citizens of Athens. According to the T.R.R. Cobb House website, Cobb died in 1862 fighting as an officer in the Confederate Army in the Civil War, survived by his wife, children and the family’s 25 slaves.

Cobb’s wife, Marion, lived in the home 11 years following his death. Afterward, the home served as a rental property, fraternity house, and boarding house; the Archdiocese of Atlanta purchased the home in 1962 and the Stone Mountain Memorial Association bought it in 1984 and stayed in its ownership for over 20 years.

In 2004, the house was bought by the Watson-Brown Foundation, saving it from neglect. The home reopened as a museum in 2007.

“They cut the main hallway down the middle. The octagonal rooms each got their own truck, and then certain rooms got their own truck, and the upstairs was taken apart, some board by board, some entire walls,” said museum curator Ashleigh Oatts on the process of moving the home to different locations.

The home is filled with family heirlooms and replicas by local artists, but not everything about the history of this building is charming. While the controversy surrounding Cobb and his family is disturbing, the home has historical value, due to its records and the modern attempts to emulate the old look.

Oatts explains the history of the Cobb home and the happenings at the house today, including the efforts to preserve the space and to tell the stories that need to be told.



The inside of T.R.R. Cobb house seen on Monday, June 16, 2025, in Athens, Georgia. PHOTO/MADISON LINTON

“In 2021 [the museum] purchased a plantation log book that was written in by John B. Lamar,” Oatts said. “John B. Lamar managed the plantations for himself and for his sister. That book contains the names of all of the enslaved people at that point, or at those seven plantations, so we’ve been turning that into a database of all the enslaved people, including the names of the people who were enslaved here.” Once the names are in the book, the house will go back and check to see if they missed anyone from the Cobb family letters.

Taylor-Grady House

In 1844, the Taylor-Grady House was built by cotton merchant and planter General Robert Taylor as a summer residence, later bought by William S. Grady and lived in by his

son Henry W. Grady for a brief period in the 1860s.

“A lot of people have never been in this house. They do not realize that it is open to the public by appointment, it still belongs to the city-county government, and it was restored by the Athens Junior assembly, now Junior League, and they ran it for over 50 years. It was on the brink of disappearing from the local scene,” said Charlotte Thomas, a historical researcher who has been studying the home since the 1970s. Along with Thomas, Lee Epting, owner of Epting Events, has conducted research on the house. Epting prevented the home from being vacated and is on the board of the home, fascinated by its complex history.

Henry W. Grady, a writer for the Atlanta Daily Herald who coined “The New South,” encouraged industrial development as an answer to the country’s economic struggles. He was the managing editor for the Atlanta Constitution, and had beliefs about the post-Civil War South that endorsed white supremacy.

“We want people to get involved. We want them to come ask questions. We want them to have the guts to step into the past and learn from that,” said Epting.

Like the T.R.R. Cobb house, the Taylor-Grady House has a tragic past.

“The whole point now is to tell the entire story of all the different people who have lived here and the times that they lived through. See this house, not only was Antebellum and Civil War, but then you coast along a few years towards through reconstruction, and then you get to the Spanish American War, and this house was affected by it, and then a little bit later World War One and World War Two,” said Thomas.

“We want people to get involved. We want them to come ask questions. We want them to have the guts to step into the past and learn from that.”

LEE EPTING | FOUNDER OF EPTING EVENTS

The involvement of this home in many notable historical events has led the staff to prioritize teaching the history, rather than ignoring it. Most of the items in the house can be touched by visitors, with exception to furnishings and items with more importance, such as William Crawford’s chair upstairs. The house features 13 columns in front, intended to represent the 13 colonies. Inside, you can see the original ceiling moldings, a painting of Henry Grady’s daughter when she was presented at Queen Victoria’s court in England and period appropriate furnishings given by many.

The Hill, Donald-Epting House

Epting has helped save not only the Taylor-Grady House but also the Donald-Epting House, located on The Hill. Not only did Epting step in to prevent the Taylor-Grady House from being cleared out, he is heavily involved with The Hill, a picturesque event location tucked away in trees. Epting holds wedding events there in the Hodgson-Lumpkin House, as well as the Donald-Epting House.

“We found [the Donald-Epting house] and we jacked it up, moved it over here from South Carolina in 1979, because it was falling apart and was going just dilapidated,” said Epting, who added a small house to the back of the original one.

The Donald-Epting House was moved from Donalds, South Carolina, originally owned by John Donald, who purchased it around 1810. Originally a two-story log house, the home has had multiple additions since Epting took over. Today, the home has modern kitchenware, a gas chandelier from the 1840s that was taken from the Phi Mu house, and needlework from Mary Ann Lamar Cobb. Period antiques make up the whole house. Today, the home often holds formal events and is lived in.

“Somebody offered me a lot of money when I was first out here to buy the land and because they could put 100 houses on this land. And I said, there is not enough money in the world that you could buy my house with,” Epting said. “I mean, what more could I want out of life than what I’ve got? I’ve got 200 years of history. It’s a fun, interesting place. I’ve got land, I’ve got birds, I got trees, I’ve got too damn many deer and squirrels.”

Despite modern renovations, writings remain on the wall from the previous residents.

“It says John Smith slept here from June to July of 1821,” said Epting on the writings, which were done with lead.

In addition, not everything about the home has been renovated, with the doors having small cracks in them. Epting does not mind, though, because of his preference for letting the house “breathe.”

“Cleaning it? Yeah, it’s hell,” said Epting.

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Rock Lobsters return

Reflecting on a successful debut season

Liam W. Dreesen

After a successful inaugural season in the Classic City, the Athens Rock Lobsters will be back for their second season this October.

The Rock Lobsters finished their first season with a 32-10-3-4 record, which was good enough for a second-place finish in the Continental conference of the Federal Prospects Hockey League.

The Rock Lobsters players and coach also brought home plenty of awards. Star forward Garrett Milan won the regular season MVP award, finishing the season with 37 goals and 64 assists. Former Head Coach Steve Martinson won the Coach of the Year award and Carter Shinkaruk won Defenseman of the Year.

To the dismay of Rock Lobsters fans, who have dubbed themselves the “Crustacean Nation,” the team was eliminated in the first round of the FPHL playoffs. Despite that, the season was still considered a success by Rock Lobsters President Scott Hull.

“Year one was bigger than we ever imagined,” Hull said. “The fans showed up, the community got behind us, and we made a serious statement not just in the league, but right here in Athens.”

The fans did indeed show up. The Rock Lobsters were third in the FPHL in attendance, with over 104,000 fans attending the team’s 28 home games for an average attendance of 3,733. This attendance in the franchise’s first year ranked ahead of the only other team in Georgia, the Columbus River Dragons.

Fans have been connected to the Rock Lobsters franchise since the team was announced as an expansion franchise in March 2024. A fan vote was used in May 2024 to choose the name “Rock Lobsters,” which is a reference to



Athens Rock Lobsters forward Troy Miller (8) skates during a FPHL hockey game between the Rock Lobsters and the Columbus River Dragons on Saturday, Jan. 4, 2025, at Akins Ford Arena in Athens, Georgia. The River Dragons won the game 5-2. PHOTO/ETHAN GREENE



An Athens Rock Lobsters fan celebrates a goal during a FPHL hockey game between the Rock Lobsters and the Columbus River Dragons on Saturday, Jan. 4, 2025, at Akins Ford Arena in Athens, Georgia. PHOTO/ETHAN GREENE

the famous Athens band the B-52s’ famous song “Rock Lobster.”

“Long story short, when we first came to Athens and (were) doing the market research on the team, we realized that music and artistry was a big thing in Athens,” Britton Briley, director of marketing for the Rock Lobsters, said. “We started looking at Widespread Panic. We looked at Rock Lobsters or B-52s, and then just ‘Rock Lobster’ sort of stuck from fan voting.”

Year two will bring some change after the departure of Martinson, who is the all-time leader in coaching wins by an American-born ice hockey coach. Martinson announced in May that he would be rejoining the Allen Americans, whom he coached from 2012-2022.

Martinson is being replaced by Garrett Rutledge, an Ontario native who has seen success as a coach. His accolades include a 2023 FPHL Coach of the Year, a division championship and multiple deep playoff runs.

Rutledge said he is excited for the opportunity to coach in a city like Athens and for a team as talented as the Rock

Lobsters. He’s also determined to win the FPHL.

“The [upper management] wants to push to the next level. They want to make players better. They want to make the city better. They want to have their fan base correct. They want everything done properly. I think the professionalism in Athens speaks for itself,” Rutledge said on why he liked the Rock Lobsters’ position.

Rutledge says he plans on building a familial culture with the team and emphasized that their connection to the community is one of the biggest reasons he loves the FPHL.

“I think it’s awesome that the players are reachable,” he said. “You can see them working in the community, volunteering, being at events, skating with the fans, signing autographs and just doing whatever needs to be done to grow hockey in Athens and help make it a bigger game.”

The Rock Lobsters’ second season will start on Oct. 25, at Akins Ford Arena as they play against last year’s Continental Division champion and FPHL runner-up, the Carolina Thunderbirds.

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Thursday Crossword - Answer Online FRIDAY Aug. 8

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ACROSS

1. Little jerks

5. Head downtown?

10. Help in a holdup

14. Balming target

15. Beyond partner

16. Screenplay direction

17. T-bone region

18. Medical research goals

19. Every family has one

20. Illuminated

23. Holiday follower?

24. Skier's challenge

25. Unlike a litterbug

27. Palindromic windmill part

30. End of two state names

33. Scratch, say

36. Better copy?

38. Bahrain bread

39. Passed with ease

41. Genetic info carrier

42. Arboreal abode

43. Things to rattle

45. Fishtail, e.g.

47. Daydreamer's limit?

48. Fit to be fare

50. Killed, as a dragon

53. Tux accessory

54. Prepare for hanging

57. Wrestling area

59. Serving as a diplomat

64. Beer selections

66. Hindu grouping

67. Tat-tat intro

68. Folk facts

69. Pagoda roofing

70. Black cat, some think

71. It may come before "we forget"

72. Failed as a sentry

73. Bird's perch, perhaps

DOWN

1. Chaucer bit

2. They may be clicked on

3. Flu symptom

4. Grad-to-be

5. Bushwhacker's tool

6. Go to the edge of

7. The good olde days

8. Cooking place

9. Transmit anew

10. Back on a battleship

11. Crooners, often

12. Creation location

13. "High School Musical" extra

21. Main mail drop (abbr.)

22. Disconnected, as a phone line

26. Like siblings

28. Chances in Vegas

29. Roller Derby milieus

31. Checklist item

32. Pretentiously stylish

33. Attack deterrent

34. Military sch.

35. Enrolls

37. Barbary ape's lack

40. The red

44. Inner city concern

46. Most absurd

49. Official orders

51. Emotion of the miffed

52. Long and thin

55. Sight from Biscayne Bay

56. Gourmand

57. Shoppers' site

58. Ubiquitous lily relative

60. Place for some polish

61. "Cast Away" setting

62. Manual component

63. A driver may change one

65. Firm or fixed

—© Lovatts Puzzles



Teresa Edwards, a two-time All-American, led the Bulldogs to two Final Four appearances during her time at Georgia. Additionally, Edwards competed in the Olympics five times and earned four gold medals and one bronze. COURTESY/UGA ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION



Fran Tarkenton, left, kneels beside head coach Wally Butts, center, and Pat Dye. Dye and Tarkenton's Georgia football careers coincided for three seasons between 1958-1960. Their friendship lasted until Dye's death on June 1, 2020. COURTESY/AJC, BILL YOUNG

ATHletes

Local athletes on the global stage

Kira Doppel

Athens has been called home by a plethora of successful athletes. Some called it home while attending the University Georgia, while others were born and raised in the Classic City. Meet some of Athens' best athletes.

Teresa Edwards may not have grown up in Athens, but the legacy she left on the city is lasting. Edwards' jersey number, 5, is one of just four basketball jerseys retired by Georgia. After her time with the Bulldogs, she went on to become the first American basketball player to compete in five Olympics. As a sophomore at UGA, Edwards competed at the 1984 Olympics and played all the way through the 2000 Olympics, taking home four gold medals and one bronze.

She was ranked 22nd in the Sports Illustrated list of "100 Greatest Female Athletes of the 20th Century" and holds the record for being both the oldest and youngest Olympic gold medalist in women's basketball at the ages of 36 and 20. In 2011, she was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.

"Being a five-time Olympian isn't just about longevity, it's about consistency and love for the game," Edwards said.

From one Olympic stage to the next, Olympian and Athens native Graham Blanks has quickly become one of the best distance runners in the world. A Harvard graduate and two-time NCAA Cross Country Champion, Blanks recently achieved a personal best time of 12:48.20 in the outdoor 5,000-meter to become the third fastest in U.S. history. In 2024, he finished ninth in the Olympics representing Team USA in the 5,000-meter with a time of 13:18.67.

Recently, Blanks returned to Athens to train for the World Athletics Championships, which will be in Tokyo starting on Sept. 13.

"I think I want part of my legacy, at the very least, to be like the guy who trained in Athens and became one of the best distance runners in the world," Blanks said.

An Athenian by birth, Brian McCann moved to Duluth, Georgia, to play high school baseball. He spent the majority of his 15-year Major League Baseball career behind the plate for the Atlanta Braves. Drafted by the Braves in 2002, McCann is a seven-time All-Star, six-time Silver Slugger and finished his career with 282 home runs. He became a World Series Champion with the Houston Astros in 2017, before returning home to Atlanta where he played one final season before retiring in 2019.

"I was fortunate to be able to live out my dream and play for my hometown team," McCann said on returning to play for the Atlanta Braves.

Born in Richmond, Virginia, but raised in Athens, Fran Tarkenton became a record-setting and innovative quarterback. Known for his "scrambling quarterback" style, Tarkenton graduated from UGA in 1960. He led the Bulldogs to an SEC Championship in 1959 and led the Minnesota Vikings to three Super Bowl appearances, at Superbowls VIII, IX and XI. He played 18 NFL seasons from 1961 to 1978 with the Vikings and New York Giants and won the NFL MVP in 1975. He was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1986. Upon his retirement, he was the NFL's all-time leader in pass attempts, completions, passing yards and passing touchdowns.

"I love the University of Georgia. It's the place that gave me the opportunity to get an education, to grow up and to play football. Athens is home," Tarkenton said.

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GRAPHIC/CAROLINE NEWBERN

More than a college town, Athens is home

A perspective outside the university walls

Sophie Phan

While nothing beats the excitement of gearing up for Georgia gamedays, many people forget that when they visit the University of Georgia, they're also visiting Athens — a town with its own heartbeat, history and identity.

In 2022, Southern Living named Athens the "South's Best College Town," attracting visitors from around the country. There's no denying that UGA plays a major role in the town's economy — its statewide impact totaled a record \$8.1 billion in 2023, benefiting all 159 Georgia counties, including Athens-Clarke County.

But even as the university shapes the city in major ways, Athens is more than the sum of its college traditions.

In the summer before seventh grade, I moved to Athens. All I really knew at the time was that UGA was here. Coming from Atlanta, the transition from city to small town was a shock, especially to a place where the college-town connection runs so deep.

But I soon discovered that Athens is its own vibrant, tight-knit community with a dense but accessible population, it often feels like everyone knows everyone.

That closeness has made all the difference, allowing me

to get involved, connect and learn about the town outside of campus life.

I participated in programs such as Youth Leadership Athens and the Athens Mayor's Youth Council. I found spaces where my voice mattered and where I could learn about the city's government, people and possibilities. I began to see Athens not just as a college town, but as a home with a unique story and spirit.

Now when I have family visiting, I don't immediately steer them toward the Arch or Sanford Stadium. Instead, I say, "Let's go to Five Points or downtown." I show them Hot Corner and the Georgia Theatre; places expressing Athen's historic significance.

Eating out and shopping in Athens is its own experience. Five Points, in particular, offers a walkable, neighborhood vibe that blends the best of local flavor with community warmth. Restaurants near there have some of the best food. ZZ & Simone's roasted Brussels sprouts are a must try. Independent Baking Co. has the best pastries and coffee. The charcuterie board at The Expat is a staple.

For avid music listeners, Athens also has a rich musical scene. The AthFest Music and Arts festival takes place in downtown every year, celebrating the town's vibrant cre-

ative culture with performances from local and regional musicians and artists. Some of my sweetest memories were when my favorite artists came to the Georgia Theatre such as futurebirds, the Stews and Flatland Cavalry.

While Athens grows — with major projects like the new UGA School of Medicine and Akins Ford Arena — it's important to separate the town from the university.

Athens is where I found my voice, friends and passions. It's where a stranger became a resident and a resident became part of something larger. This place didn't just give me opportunities, it gave me a sense of belonging.

Giving back to such a special place historically and, personally, it only feels right to correct the stereotypes that revolves around UGA. I felt compelled to tell the real story of Athens: a creative, inclusive, ever-evolving community that welcomes anyone willing to look past the jerseys and gamedays.

So when people ask me for a tour of UGA, I smile and say, "Let me show you Athens instead."

Because Athens isn't just a college town, it's home.

Sophie Phan is a senior high school student at Athens Academy. Phan was a Red & Black summer intern.

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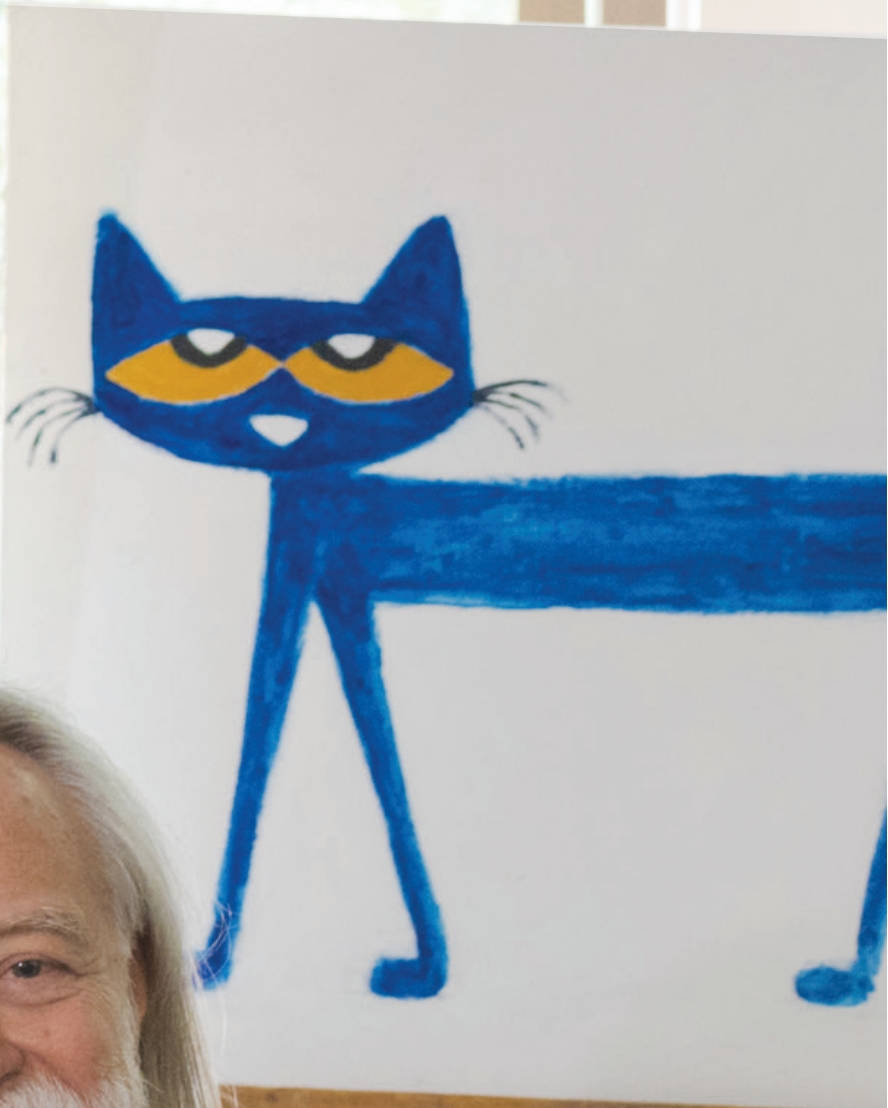
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The Red & Black



THE MAN BEHIND THE CAT

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SEE B3 FOR FULL STORY

James Dean poses for a portrait in his home on Monday, June 23, 2025, in Athens, Georgia. PHOTO/FOREST X. DYNES



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Your glimpse into government

Key information about the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government

Hogan Rigole

As new residents of Athens-Clarke County, University of Georgia students are affected by the government, influence local politics and have a civic duty to the community. Students and new residents can learn more about the greater community by understanding the key leaders, functions and impacts of their local government.

Mayor

Kelly Girtz is the mayor of Athens-Clarke County. He is in his second term as mayor after first being elected in 2018 and reelected in 2022. As mayor, Girtz heads the Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission which is the main governing body of the county. The primary responsibilities of the mayor are to set the agenda for commission meetings and to recommend candidates for county positions of manager, attorney, Municipal Court and internal auditor. The mayor also presents the budget for the city and provides tie-breaking votes on the commission.

Before his career in politics, Girtz was a teacher at several local schools including W.R. Coile Middle School and Cedar Shoals High School, where he eventually became principal.

“These relationships I had with my students were critical to my understanding of what was going on in Athens broadly,” Girtz said in prior Red & Black reporting. “In the 20 years I spent working with kids, there’s a lot I learned from them.”

Girtz transitioned to politics in 2006 when he was elected as District 9 commissioner.

After being a commissioner for several years, Girtz launched his campaign for mayor, which focused on housing, economic and youth development, civil rights and public safety.

“Every day is precious and every day is an opportunity to get closer to improving people’s lives,” Girtz said. “If their roof doesn’t leak, or they are well fed and they have a path to employment or a healthy relationship, all those things really make a difference for those individuals. And then that’s also going to be true of the whole community.”

This will be Girtz’s last year as mayor since Athens-Clarke County sets term limits with a maximum of two consecutive terms.

Commission

The commission is composed of 10 members from the various districts in Athens-Clarke County. The mayor and commission is the main legislative body and have the responsibilities of enacting city ordinances, appropriating funds for the unified government and setting policy direction for the city manager to implement.

Allison Wright is the District 4 commissioner, representing downtown and a majority of UGA’s campus. Wright has been commissioner for 13 years and previously served on the Clarke County School District Board of Education for eight years.

“Your real duties are making policy so that we’re good stewards of the community’s resources, land, facilities,



Athens City Hall is illuminated during day one of the Athens Orthopedic Clinic Twilight Criterium in downtown Athens, Georgia on Friday, April 25, 2025.. PHOTO/ETHAN GREENE

budget, public safety is a huge part of it, employment,” Wright said. “We’re policy makers, then the manager and his staff, their role is to make it happen. So we’re the what, they’re the how.”

Mayor and commission meets annually with the UGA Student Government Association to discuss policy issues and how students and the local government can work together.

The mayor and commission meetings take place at City Hall on the first Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. and are open to the public, with time for the public to make comments. Each commissioner’s bio and contact information can be found on the ACCGov website and each commission meeting is livestreamed.

Manager

The manager is the chief executive officer of Athens-Clarke County and is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the city. These responsibilities include implementing policy decisions, making recommendations to the mayor and commission, overseeing daily operations, preparing budgets and the hiring of department heads.

The manager oversees 24 main departments, divisions and offices of Athens-Clarke County. The role is meant to fulfill the mission of the county and to ensure staff of the unified government effectively performs all of their responsibilities.

SPLOST

The Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax is a portion of sales tax that allows the local government to fund city improvement projects that would usually be paid for by the general fund and property tax revenues. In Athens-Clarke County, SPLOST is funded by 1% of all sales and purchases, without increasing the sales tax. This eases the burden that would otherwise be placed by an increase in taxes.

The 2020 period for SPLOST saw funds go towards facilities management modernization, affordable housing projects, the Classic Center Arena, improvements to the city’s parks, replacement of firehouses and sustainability, such as renewable energy, environmental restoration and green space acquisitions

TSPLOST, a type of SPLOST, goes toward transportation purposes such as roads, public transportation, buses, railways and other infrastructure.

How students can get involved

Mayor and commission meetings are an opportunity for UGA students to learn more about the functioning and processes of local government. Students can get in touch with their elected officials through their contact information on the ACCGov website. They can also register to vote in Athens-Clarke County to make a tangible impact and stay up to date with the city government’s social media and website, which provides crucial updates, events and dates.

The UGA Carl Vinson Institute of Government oversees the Vinson Fellows Program which is an experiential learning opportunity for undergraduate students who are interested in local and state government. Students have the chance to receive mentorships, training, applied research and technical assistance programs for state and local governments in Georgia.

The International City/Council Management Association Student Chapter at UGA introduces and integrates students in local government and familiarizes them with ICMA, which is one of the leading organizations that represents local government professionals on a national level.

The impacts of local government reach all Athenians, students and long-time residents alike, as it plays a key role in areas such as transportation, housing, public safety and education. By staying involved with local politics, students can engage with the Athens community and participate in local decision-making.

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James Dean poses for a portrait holding his first Pete the Cat drawing, right, and one of his recent Pete the Cat paintings, left, in Dean's home on Monday, June 23, 2025, in Athens, Georgia. PHOTO/FOREST X. DYNES

Cool cats of Athens

James Dean and his creation, Pete the Cat

Kaitlyn Harvey

History is no stranger to fictional felines. Sanrio's Hello Kitty, Dr. Seuss' Cat in the Hat and Jim Davis' Garfield are all fuzzy cultural icons with personalities as big as their names. But there's one who wouldn't exist without Athens.

With "phthalo blue" fur, bright yellow eyes and a lanky frame, Pete the Cat is as recognizable as he is cool. He's the star of more than 100 children's books — including several New York Times bestsellers — and even has his own Amazon Prime series. Pete's world is full of surfing, strumming his guitar and making friends while teaching lessons in acceptance and optimism. In our world, Pete was the real-life pet and creation of illustrator, painter and Athenian James Dean.



James Dean holds a jar of "Phthalo Blue" paint on Monday, June 23, 2025, in Athens, Georgia. "Phthalo Blue" is the iconic color that Dean paints Pete the Cat with. PHOTO/FOREST X. DYNES

One of Dean's earliest memories with art came in the first grade in his hometown of Fort Payne, Alabama. Following the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy, Dean's father mailed a charcoal portrait of the president to Washington, D.C. Jackie Kennedy later responded, informing the family that the portrait would be placed in the Kennedy Library. Watching his father create the portrait and other works of art inspired Dean; he began paying attention to fine art and drawing.

His favorite character growing up was Snoopy and he learned to draw by sketching loose circles and shapes until the iconic beagle appeared.

"Everything I draw is still the same way I drew in the first grade, which is to draw shapes until the point that I see [an image] start to emerge," Dean said.

But art didn't seem like a viable career. Dean grew up with limited means and noticed that his father never made any money from his artwork. A natural tinkerer, he chose a more practical path in engineering.

"I already knew that the adjective people used with artists was 'starving.' I was already starving and wanted to help my mom, so I just couldn't be an artist. I just couldn't be that carefree," Dean said.

Dean spent part of his time at Auburn University sitting on the steps of Samford Hall watching art students sit out in the grass and draw. This caused him to ponder his true passions even more.

"I could not stand to watch them walk by. It would kill me. I was sitting on the steps and I thought about how some day I was either going to make music or go to art school," Dean said. "Engineering was money, not that I didn't enjoy it."

After graduating from Auburn, Dean first came to Athens in 1982 for a job at Georgia Power. At the time, a co-op art gallery stood where Mellow Mushroom is today and Dean worked there once a month.

Across the street was the Hi-Hat Blues Club, a local music venue, where he began sketching its logo. This sparked a series of artworks, including hand-drawn prints of Athens landmarks like the University of Georgia's Arch and the Georgia Theatre.

His most notable piece from this period was a rendering of the now-demolished Allen's — a burger joint and nightclub that was, at one point, "the only place you could buy a beer back in the '50s." Selling these pieces allowed Dean to find financial security as an artist, an unexpected reality which eventually enabled him to leave engineering and pursue art full time.

Soon after, life brought Dean to an art festival in Rutledge, Georgia, with his wife at the time. The two also went to see the cats up for adoption. After initially not wanting a black cat due to the superstition of bad luck, there was only one cat that wanted his attention.

"All the pretty cats with long hair were in the back of the cage and didn't want to play, and Pete had his paw sticking out. So I said, 'Okay, it's you,'" Dean said.

As Athens once was, his new pet Pete became his muse after he noticed the cat's fearless nature. A friend, Camille Morgan, encouraged him to try painting the cat. However, the first iteration of Pete wasn't the wide-eyed, dark blue figure we know today.

Dean's first self-published book, "The Misadventures of Pete the Cat," takes readers through the progression of Pete's likeness. Initially, Pete was moody and realistic, with white eyes, climbing doors and getting into typical cat antics.

"[The prints of Pete] had to be simple because I was doing this all by hand," Dean said.

In time, the drawing of Pete began to resemble his real-life counterpart, with yellow eyes and signature dark blue fur added in a cartoon of him holding a coffee cup — an image inspired by Pete's attempts to drink Dean's morning coffee. Pete later appeared in fine art parodies of Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" and "Vitruvian Man."

To begin selling his artwork of Pete to the public, Dean started attending art festivals around Georgia, with his first being AthFest in 1998 — one of the first years with an artist market.

As Pete's popularity grew, patrons began sharing their own stories about the blue cat. While living in Decatur, Georgia, in 2001, Dean was driving through downtown Atlanta to pick up art supplies when he encountered a man claiming he had something for him.

"I didn't know the guy, but he had curly hair and I thought he might be homeless. But I guess I told him my email address," Dean said. "I went back home, and then on my email was this song and this story," Dean said.

That man was Eric Litwin, a teacher and musician. The song and story would become "I Love My White Shoes," the first of many Pete the Cat books. Originally, the story was about a little girl who stepped into blueberries, strawberries and mud but still loved her shoes. After seeing Dean's Pete the Cat artwork at a festival, Litwin reimagined the character into the groovy cat.

Litwin and Dean became collaborators and spent several years developing the book. Self-published in 2007, "I Love My White Shoes" was meant to be supplemental material for Litwin's teaching and Dean's festival sales.

"I always had a good following at festivals and was confident the book was going to be a little extra thing in my tents, but Eric and I ended up selling 7,000 books in less than a year," Dean said.

Three years after self-publishing, the book found its way to HarperCollins thanks to Karen Wilson, a bookstore owner in Fairhope, Alabama. She saw the story's potential and sent it to booksellers in New York. Soon after, Dean received a call from his editor, Margaret Anastas; the book had landed on The New York Times Best Sellers list for children's books.

"I wasn't trying to write a children's book, I wasn't trying to draw pictures of cats, I wasn't trying to do any of this. It just happened," Dean said. "You have to get out there and just start. If you start taking opportunities, you're going to land somewhere."

Today, Pete the Cat appears not just in classrooms and bookstores internationally, but in 2,699 of Dean's paintings and counting. While the real-life Pete is no longer alive, he's immortalized through Dean's artwork and present in nearly every corner of his home.

Now back in Athens full time, Dean's work can be spotted on cans of Jittery Joe's coffee and in storefronts in downtown Athens.

Bear Hug Honey Company, owned by Sam Johnson, works with local beekeepers and artists to sell honey, candles, soaps and artwork. Over the past summer, Dean's pieces featuring Pete at Athens landmarks were featured in the store's window.

"[Dean] came across us and we started talking and just really hit it off. He's such an awesome guy," Johnson said. "We actually had to extend his feature due to his stuff being so popular. Our customers really love it."

The collaboration between Pete the Cat and Jittery Joe's is a full-circle moment for Dean, as the cafe's early logo helped inspire his art.

"I painted a picture of Jittery Joe's before there was Pete the Cat," Dean said. "When they opened their store in downtown Athens, I saw that flaming coffee cup with the pink on it and thought it was so cool that I made a painting," he said.

The moral of "I Love My White Shoes" is that "no matter what you step in, keep on walking along and singing your song because it's all good." Life has made James Dean step all around Georgia and through different careers, but his love for art and Athens has kept him walking.

"Athens is such a cool town. If it wasn't for Athens, I wouldn't be sitting here talking about Pete the Cat," Dean said.



James Dean poses for a portrait in his home on Monday, June 23, 2025, in Athens, Georgia. PHOTO/FOREST X. DYNES

Hidden gems

Dive into Athens eateries

Madison Linton

Any long-time Athenians have likely heard the same restaurant recommendations, often located downtown. While downtown has its charm, there is more to the Classic City. After making a Facebook post asking townies what their favorite hidden gems are in town, a flood of responses followed. Here are their suggestions.

Preacher Green's

Word-of-mouth is important. Rather than by way of commercial slots and advertisements, smaller restaurants often rely on customers who spread the word, according to Paul Allen, co-owner of Preacher Green's on the East Side. Allen and his co-owner Ted Lahey both grew up in the East Side.

"We have been coming to the shopping center since we were little kids. This space we're in right now used to be Turtle's record store ... so a lot of people from our age group came here all the time and bought music and concert tickets and stuff. It was really cool," Allen said. "We looked all around Athens for different locations, and this was occupied when we were first looking, and then Pizza Hut moved out and we jumped on getting this spot."

Preacher Green's opened in April 2024, serving Southern comfort food such as collard greens and mac-n-cheese. The restaurant has grown a loyal customer base on the East Side. Still, there is difficulty getting the word out across town.

"We have a lot of people coming in that we haven't seen in decades. A lot of our old teachers from Barnett Shoals, Gainesville, Hillsman and Cedar Shoals come in. We are seeing a lot of our friends' parents come in, a lot of old friends that we haven't seen since high school," Allen said. "Usually when we get to talking to people, you figure out one way or another how you know each other. So the East Side is definitely a community."

As a customer walks out the door, they let Allen know that they love the restaurant.

Preacher Green's is located at 1995 Barnett Shoals Road and is open from Tuesday to Saturday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. for lunch, and 5-8 p.m. for dinner. They are only open for lunch hours on Sundays, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Automatic Pizza

Close to the downtown area, Normaltown features a narrowed variety of options. The area of town has picked up a niche audience who praise the area for its uniqueness and small town feel. Restaurants in the area are not as popular as downtown options, yet there are still many options that have garnered loyal local customers.

"I know we have an online presence, but we don't do much on it," Andrew Shepard, a front-of-house cashier at Automatic Pizza, said. "People just like a Normaltown [place]. A lot of families come in here, and a lot of regulars."

Automatic Pizza opened in 2015, located at 1397 Prince Ave. in an old gas station building with the Texaco pumps still outside. The restaurant serves whole pizzas and slices and features an outdoor seating area in front of and on the side of the small building. Automatic also sells subs, canoli, beer and wine.

"My favorite is the Chieftain or the Wayfairer," continued Shepard. The Chieftain is marinara-based with bacon, sausage and pepperoni as the meats. Green peppers, black



Fanshea "NeNe" Browner, left, and Bryan "Street" Browner, right, pose for a portrait at their business Street Treats on Tuesday, July 1, 2025, in Athens, Georgia. The couple first opened their business on April 17, 2024. PHOTO/FOREST X. DYNES

olives and onion are also on it. The Wayfairer is pesto-based with no meat. The pizza includes spinach, banana peppers and green peppers. There is also onion and mushroom on this dish.

Open 4-9 p.m. on Mondays through Wednesdays, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and noon to 9 p.m. on Sundays.

Street Treats

Long-time Athens resident and arts and culture reporter for the Athens Banner-Herald, Andrew Shearer, boasted of his love for Street Treats, saying that it is at the top of his hidden gems list.

Located inside Piggly Wiggly, at 484 North Ave., family-operated Street Treats offers breakfast sandwiches, waffles and chicken tenders. Wings, shrimp and country-fried steak are also available.

Owners Bryan "Mr. Street Treats" Browner and Faneshea "Pretty Chef NeNe" Browner are married with chil-

dren and began their business because of the popularity of the breakfast sandwiches that Bryan would bring to work, which Faneshea made.

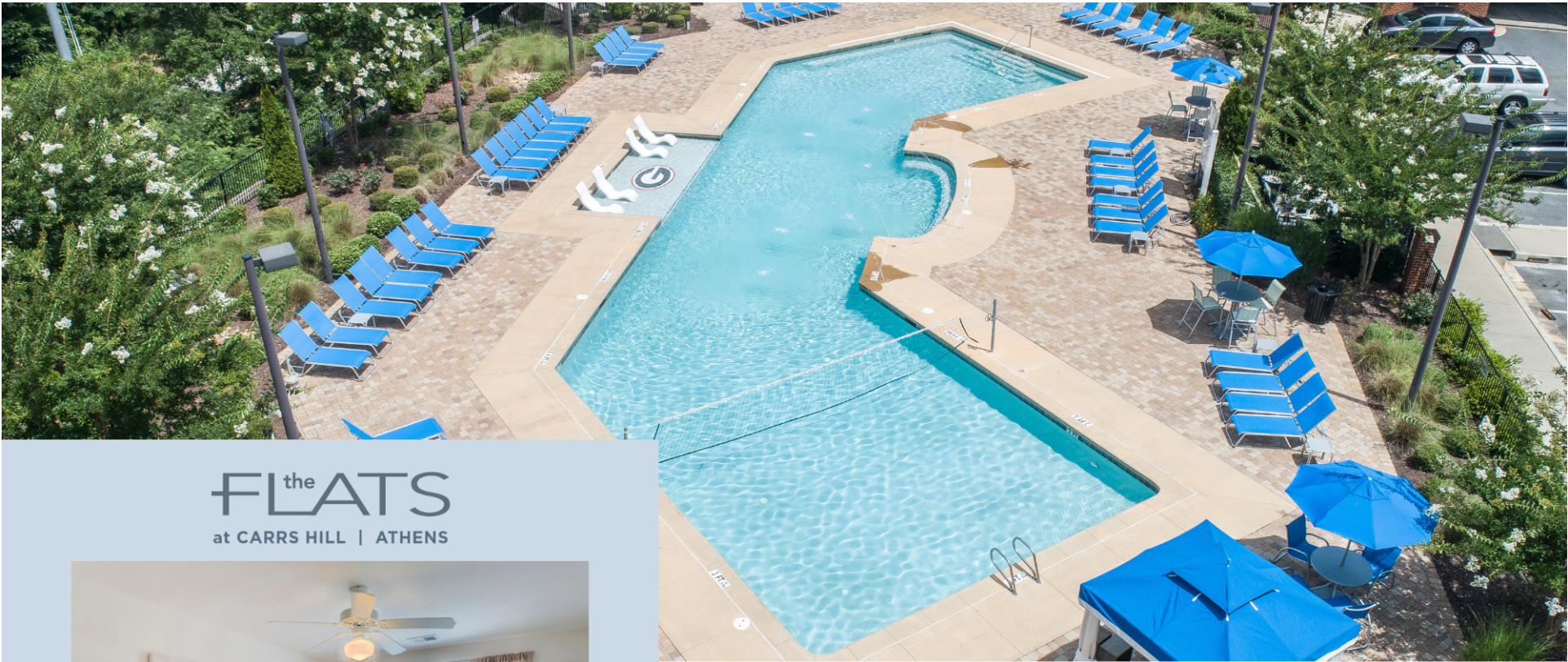
"I used to take them to work, I used to sell like, 30 sandwiches a day just at work," Bryan said. "Then, we went from sandwiches to a full-blown hotline."

The popularity caught on, leading them to be asked by the owner of the Piggly Wiggly location to sell their food in stores.

Street Treats is open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 8-11 a.m.

Faneshea, who attended the Art Institute of Atlanta, has culinary experience.

"I worked in several different arenas in the culinary scene. But, you know, my husband, he really helped me hone in on just the whole Southern cooking and being okay with just pushing simplicity," Faneshea said. "You know, sometimes we kind of over-complicate food, but we really are big on really good, fresh and simple."



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Cutters Pub General Manager Bryce Fowler poses for a portrait at Cutters Pub on Monday, June 30, 2025, in Athens, Georgia. PHOTO/FOREST X. DYNES

Townie vs. student bars

Downtown Athens bartenders spill the difference

Kaitlyn Harvey

There’s a well-known statistic that Athens has more bars per square mile than any other city in the country; 80 bars packed into one square mile. This comes as no surprise — in downtown Athens, it’s not uncommon to see bars and pubs stacked right next to or even on top of each other. But just because they’re close together doesn’t mean they’re all the same.

The divide between bars that cater to longtime Athens residents, or “townies,” and those that attract college students during the school year is clear. No one understands this divide better than the bartenders behind the counters.

Magnolias Bar of Athens sits just steps from the University of Georgia’s North Campus, hugging the corner of South Jackson Street and East Broad Street. The spot, commonly referred to as “Mags,” opened in 2009 in what was once the Tasty World Lounge. Today, it’s the closest bar to Sanford Stadium and was voted “Best Bar to Celebrate a UGA Win” by The Red & Black editors in 2018. It touts itself as “one of the largest bars in town” and regularly hosts Greek life and graduation parties.

Alisha Arora, a senior at UGA studying genetics on a pre-med track with a minor in human services, has worked at

Magnolias since October 2024. Thrown into the chaos of football season, she’s seen a healthy mix of townies and students at the bar. While she once frequented bars like 9d’s and 1785 Bar & Grill, Arora now mainly visits Emporium, Clarke’s Collective and Cutters Pub.

“A townie bar, I would say, is more lowkey. It’s just more sophisticated and mature. There are more regulars and not as many student bartenders,” Arora said. “Student bars are super fun dive bars, with music blaring and people dancing.”

Bryce Fowler saw similar trends during his time bartending at 1785. Known for its drink specials — such as \$1 wells until 11 p.m. — the student-frequented bar often drew customers seeking the cheapest drinks possible. Fowler remembers the bar being crowded, crazy and difficult to bartend in.

“If you couldn’t keep up with the volume, you didn’t get put in a good spot to bartend,” Fowler said.

Fowler, a UGA 2022 alumnus, is now general manager of Cutters Pub on Clayton Street. One of the biggest shifts he noticed between 1785 and Cutters is the music. At Cutters, classic rock plays at a lower volume throughout the bar to allow conversation, while student-focused bars tend to blast mainstream rap and pop. He also noted differences in cleanliness and atmosphere.

“As far as Cutters goes, the older the kids get, they kind of don’t want to be in a packed bar shoulder to shoulder. That’s more of what the younger demographic goes for because that’s the college experience,” he said.

While Cutters aims to be a “hybrid” bar that welcomes both students and residents, The World Famous is more widely considered a townie spot. Located away from the downtown bustle on Hull Street and within Athens’ historic Hot Corner, The World Famous opened in 2013 with a listening room, full-service kitchen and intimate bar, billing itself as a classier alternative to typical venues.

Zack Evans currently bartends at The World Famous but has worked in downtown Athens for 21 years.

“I have definitely noticed an influx in student customers,” Evans said.

Across his two decades downtown, he said the biggest factors that distinguish the bar scenes are which side of town they’re on — and the age of the staff.

“I definitely enjoy chatting at the bar with people closer to my age,” Evans said. “Because what do I have in common with college kids?”

No matter the difference, Athens’ bar scene offers more than nightlife or your drink of choice. It offers a meeting space and memories for anyone living here year round or stopping by for the semester.





GRAPHIC/FOREST X. DYNES

Soundtrack of our steps

A brief history of the Athens Music Walk of Fame

Kaitlyn Harvey

In downtown Athens, sidewalks shimmer with bronze guitar picks engraved with names — some familiar, others lesser-known. Rock stars, rappers, performers and pioneers are commemorated on the Athens Music Walk of Fame, where the city's rich musical history rests just below our feet.

The Walk of Fame was installed in 2020 with 10 initial inductees. Since then, 20 more names have been added, with five new inductees slated for installation in fall 2025: Walter Allen Sr., Randall Bramblett, Five Eight, Flagpole Magazine and the Michael Guthrie Band.

Spanning two blocks between Lumpkin and Pulaski streets, the walk passes historic venues including the Morton Theatre, 40 Watt Club and Georgia Theatre. Notable honorees include artists such as the B-52s, R.E.M. and Widespread Panic, along with institutions like Nuçi's Space.

Among the existing 30 inductees is Love Tractor, a local alternative rock band from the 1980s that helped shape the foundation of Athens' alternative music scene. Members of the group include Mark Cline, Mike Richmond and bassist Armistead Wellford, who are all University of Georgia alumni.

"Being on the Walk of Fame is great. It's like seeing family," Cline, founder of Love Tractor, said in a previous interview with The Red & Black. "It's really raw. It's really real. And it's really Athens."

The Walk of Fame project is funded by the Athens Cultur-

al Affairs Commission and supported by several community organizations, including the Athens Downtown Development Authority, the Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services Arts Division and the Athens-Clarke County Transportation and Public Works Streets & Drainage Division.

Nathaniel Mitchell, a longtime Athens resident, has been a member of the Walk of Fame Committee since its inception. Mitchell is also an employee at Wuxtry Records, a music promoter and a DJ.

"I guess it's all inspired by the Hollywood Walk of Fame, to celebrate the music scene and people who have contributed in other ways," Mitchell said.

Each year, the committee reconvenes to narrow the nominations down to five significant spaces, bands or artists. Members are selected by Athens-Clarke County Mayor Kelly Girtz. The 2025 committee includes Mitchell, David Barbe, Alyssa DeHayes, Hope Iglehart, Montu Miller and Mark Mobley. When the first selection process began in 2020, about 50 people with backgrounds in the local music scene were invited to a meeting at the Lyndon House Arts Center, with around 15 people coming to the first meeting.

"I thought a lot more people would be involved with the committee. But after the first round, only half of the people came back," Mitchell said. "It's easier to make a decision with seven people than with 25 or more."

Current selection criteria include contribution to Athens' identity, representation of diversity and culture, career longevity, musical style and historical significance. Many nominees are considered multiple times and may be eligible for

induction across several years.

The walk doesn't only honor individuals — creative spaces can also earn a plaque. That idea emerged after the passing of Nuçi's Space founder Linda Phillips. In her memory, a plaque was added to the walk in 2021 to commemorate both her legacy and the nonprofit she built.

"It's about the person's connection to Athens," Mitchell said. "Not necessarily does everybody need to be born and raised here, but it's about how closely they're associated with the city and the music scene."

The bronze plaques were designed by Allen Sutton, a local artist and senior graphic designer at UGA. His design was selected through a public call for proposals.

"My hope is that some of these people that might have slipped through the cracks, people will listen to their music," Sutton said in a previous interview with The Red & Black. "I just put together a nice design, but without them being famous in the first place, there wouldn't have been a vehicle for it."

While the walk currently highlights musical contributions from the 1970s onward, Mitchell said the committee intends to recognize earlier eras of Athenian music in future selections.

"With Athens' music scene, it's probably easy to focus on a specific era, like the 1970s or 1980s," Mitchell said. "But, one of the goals is to put all of the names that contributed. Those might be names that people need to look up and find out the historical significance."

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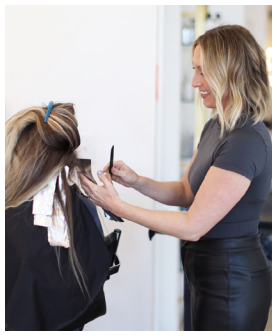
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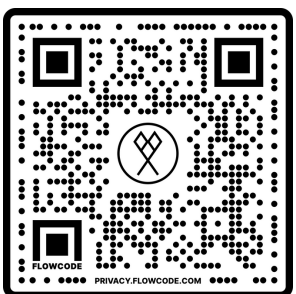


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Highlights from uniquely Athens events



Event attendees dance in front of the Wicked Weed Main Stage during day three of the 2025 AthFest Music and Arts Festival in Athens, Georgia, on Sunday, June 22, 2025. PHOTO/ASHTIN BARKER



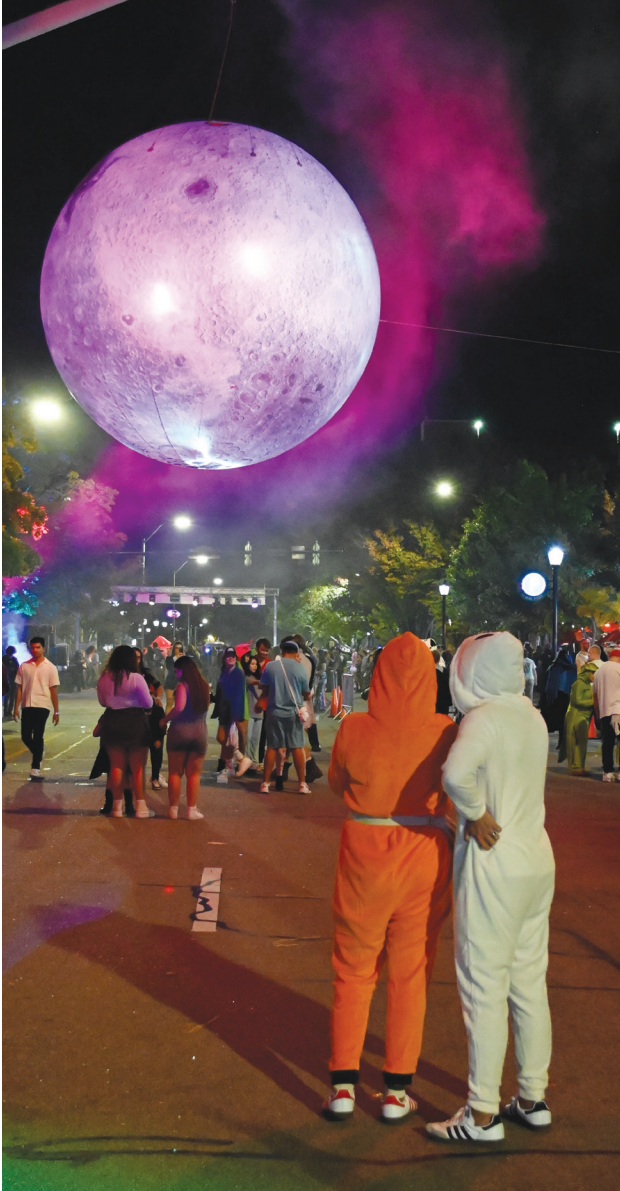
Cyclists take a turn during day two of the Athens Orthopedic Clinic Twilight Criterium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, April 26, 2025. PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN



The band Goodhost performs during Historic Athens Porchfest in Athens, Georgia, on Sunday, Oct. 15, 2023. Porchfest featured over 200 bands that performed in neighborhoods in Athens. PHOTO/JAXON MEEKS



Scenes from the Hot Corner Celebration & Soul Food Festival in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, June 14, 2025. This year was the 25th year of the festival in Athens. PHOTO/ASHTIN BARKER



A large inflatable moon suspended above the event at the Wild Rumpus Parade and Spectacle in downtown Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Oct. 26, 2024. PHOTO/MERRIELLE GATLIN

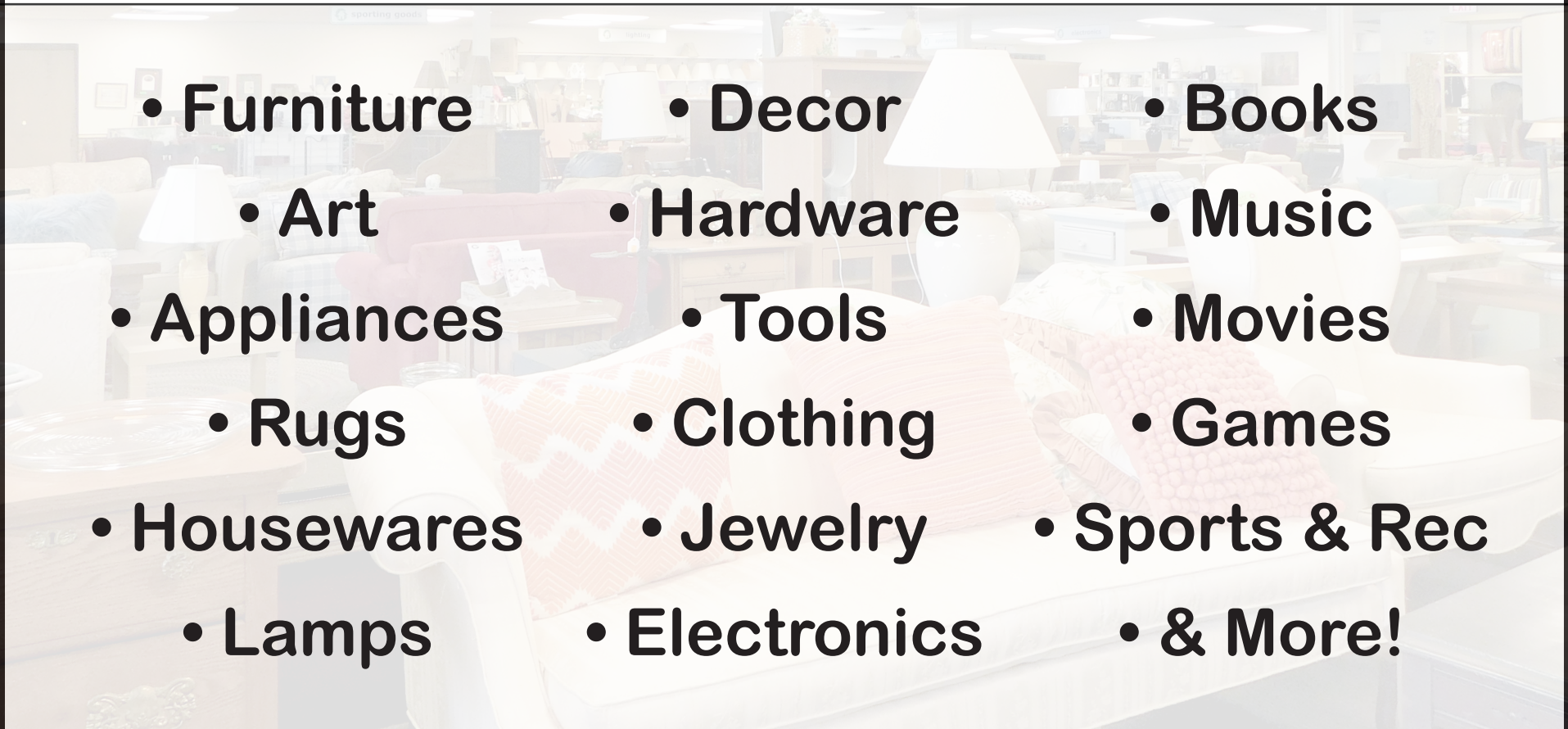


A supporter holds a sign during the AthHalf half marathon in Athens, Georgia, on Sunday, Nov. 3, 2024. The AthHalf is run by a nonprofit organization, AthFest Educates, which use race proceeds to sustain and advance music and arts education for K-12 youth in Athens-Clarke County. PHOTO/FOREST X. DYNES



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