

THE CITIZEN ADVOCATE

CHATHAM-SAVANNAH
Citizen
Advocacy

Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy Newsletter

A MESSAGE FROM GEORGE SEABOROUGH

Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy is a 47-year-old community-based non-profit organization that recruits, matches and offers support to nearly 100 local citizens in voluntary citizen advocacy relationships.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- KIRSTEN PARENT, CHAIR
- CLAY MOBLEY, TREASURER
- LESTER LEE, SECRETARY
- TAWANA GARRETT
- JULIA GRABOWSKI
- CAROLINE GREGORY
- JUSTIN JONES
- SUZANNE KIRK
- LEANDREA MIKELL
- TRACY O'CONNELL
- CORBIN PARKER
- STEPHEN PLUNK
- FREDRICK SCOTT-FIELDS
- CHRIS STEINER

STAFF

- GEORGE SEABOROUGH
- ROB DOUBERLY
- KATHY BOHANNON

Turning Uncertainty into Opportunity

Within the last six months, Savannah has weathered the storms of Milton and Helene, navigated ice and snow in the South, went through the emotions of a presidential election, a strike at the Georgia Ports, and inflation with an uncertainty of financial stability in the near future. Even though our community, city, state, and country are covered by a blanket of "what nextism," we still find ways to show up for our fellow Savannahians.

In doing the work of Citizen Advocacy (connecting two people together, one person with a disability, and one person at the center of community), I have seen advocates and proteges use a moment of uncertainty to create a relationship of possibility. Advocates and proteges are challenging housing systems, creating financial freedom, celebrating big life moments together, and strengthening the fabric of our community in Savannah. I am fortunate to have a job to witness relationships that truly make Savannah the best city to call home.

Lessons From Rob's Journey

As an associate coordinator with Citizen Advocacy, I've learned that advocacy is built on everyday actions and authentic connections. Through my experiences, I've seen how small gestures—like sharing a meal or taking a walk—can foster trust and understanding. I've come to understand deeply that consistently showing up, truly listening, and finding joy in simple moments are the keys to building lasting, impactful relationships. My journey has reinforced the belief that the heart of advocacy lies in being present and genuinely caring.

"Let go of certainty. The opposite isn't uncertainty. It's openness, curiosity and a willingness to embrace paradox, rather than choose up sides. The ultimate challenge is to accept ourselves exactly as we are, but never stop trying to learn and grow."
— Tony Schwartz

The Importance of Your Own Ride

AND IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT TRANSPORTATION

Written by: *Erv Tate, Sha Dishong, and Scott Cleaveland*

If you are like most, sometime in your teens, you got your first car and gained the American dream of freedom and independence found on the open road. Driving and the first car, are milestones, along with prom and graduations. While technological advances have made it easier for the wheelchair dependent to drive their own vehicles, it is out of reach for those who rely on supportive living and the minimal Social Security disability income. The open road is rather limited for them.

While high-quality public transportation is a tremendous asset in many cities across the world, and should be advocated for by all who are environmentally conscious, we do not have such a system in Savannah with easily accessing stops, in an historic city for those in a wheelchair. Cabs and rideshare are not wheelchair accessible, plus costly.

Chatham Area Transit and its Tele-A-Ride Program are agencies working to provide on-demand wheelchair accessible transportation where need often exceeds supply. Because of limited resources, these agencies must prioritize who gets transportation and when; thus, the system will fail many individual travel needs. Because the system prioritizes healthcare and work, social, family, religious, or holiday events may not be prioritized. It can be quite restrictive. Certain Tel-A-Ride staff often castigate people who "over utilize" transportation as riders attempt to have fullness of life. Frequently that can be seen as punishment for demanding the freedom to simply travel at will.

Erv Tate, Shay Dishong and Scott Cleaveland - all active in Savannah's Citizen Advocacy community - have witnessed this dynamic time and again.

As a regular user of CAT's Tel-A-Ride, Erv's perspective is that "...if you don't have your own ride, the system is punishing because you are at the mercy of others. You do not have the freedom to simply go."

For those of us who have been driving our own car since 15 or 16 years old, we may not appreciate the freedoms that having that car can offer. Erv can point them out



easily. First and foremost, it gives you agency. You can make decisions and set priorities to control your own life. You can access the full 24 hours that make up a day, rather than 6 AM to 9 PM, which makes up the Tele-ride day. You are less exposed to the elements while waiting. You can travel with your own stuff, rather than a three-bag limit. You can show up on time and leave on time - or not. But it's your decision. You are not embarrassed when others have to mind your coming and going because of the unpredictability of the system. You can take any job you want. Social connection requires you to be there - quality relationships necessitate spending time together, in valued spaces, at appropriate times, and sometimes promptly - and your car makes it happen.

You can celebrate Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter with family and friends when public transportation is unavailable. Your own car gives you the ability to be of service to others. You can give rides. You can deliver things that are needed. You can lend your car. And, you can drop everything and be there at the moment someone needs you. Plus, there's just something profound about pride of ownership - and taking on the responsibility of ownership.



The Importance of Your Own Ride

AND IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT TRANSPORTATION

Written by: Erv Tate, Sha Dishong, and Scott Cleaveland

For the past three years, with the support of knowledgeable professionals, friends have waded into the possibilities of transportation independence.

As Erv's advocate for many years, Shay Dishong reached out to friends and colleagues who knew Erv and collected a pool of funds to rent wheelchair accessible vans from Mobility Works here in Savannah. The van can be rented on parameters. Most importantly, this was funding independent transportation in support of the joy of living. The last such trip was a ride out to Tybee on a beautiful day, doing a little outlet Christmas shopping, enjoying a Mexican dinner with margaritas and seeing the holiday lights at the Bamboo Farm - nothing extravagant, just normal living. Realizing that a pool of money for a few short term van rentals is not a long-term solution, these friends are researching the idea of a micro-board that could own and manage a vehicle on

behalf of Erv Tate and the friends with whom he wished to share the vehicle. There are many ways to obtain a vehicle. There are also financial, maintenance, logistical and security issues that would need to be addressed. But, it's a big conversation worth having.

In talking about transportation and putting this article together for the CSCA newsletter, Erv made a profound statement. Referring to his motorized wheelchair, Erv said it is "my best friend, because it's always with me." And then he said, "but my own van, would be an even better friend." This conversation will continue, exploring opportunities and thinking through the challenges of ownership. Undoubtedly, others will be drawn into the conversation in support of Erv's dream of full independence. This is the way of the beloved community that is Citizen Advocacy in Savannah.



2025 Covered Dish

Join us on May 8th, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM at the **Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum Annex** (460 Martin Luther King Jr Blvd, Savannah, GA) for an evening of community, connection, and celebration!

Bring a big covered dish to share, a bottle of wine, or \$5 at the door!

RSVP Here



|||||

Some Citizen Advocacy Stories

Mike English and Billy: "Authentic and Intentional Connection"

Advocate Mike English and his friend Billy have been matched since 2012. Meeting with Mike recently, Rob learned about their relationship. Mike summed it up in this way: "Billy is living well, and our relationship has evolved since the beginning. I'm committed to supporting his future and new opportunities, ensuring he can do what he wants, be where he desires, and choose whom he will spend his time with. The most important aspect of my relationship with Billy is that it isn't about money or resources but rather the fact that it is an authentic and intentional connection. At its core, that is what Citizen Advocacy can be."

Ross Shepard and Michael: "It's Such a Simple Thing—Something I Took for Granted"

Advocate Ross Shepard and his friend Michael have known each other for a few months. Ross, a real estate professional, noticed during the holidays that the group home would not put up a Christmas tree. So in December, Ross and Michael got a tree, ornaments, and lights and set everything up. Ross shared, "It's such a simple thing—something I took for granted. It has opened my eyes to what we can learn from each other, and we both have so much to gain from that." Their friendship continues to grow, with the pair exploring new restaurants and sharing experiences. "We are developing a real friendship," Ross said.

Elizabeth and Shyeeta: "She is a Really Fun, Cool Chick"

Over the last month, Advocate Elizabeth and Shyeeta have been building their connection through shared experiences. While spending time together, they got their nails done, watched a movie, and enjoyed a meal. Shyeeta introduced Elizabeth to her sister and uncle over the phone, expressing that she hadn't smiled so much in a long time.

However, Shyeeta also shared concerns about feeling restricted in her current living situation. Elizabeth immediately thought of ways to help her friend figure out the next steps. She suggested setting goals for the year to help Shyeeta's voice be heard and began to explore what resources are available for her. Her proactive approach is a testament to the positive impact of Citizen Advocacy.

Elizabeth reflected on her experience, saying, "I'm grateful to have met George and Shyeeta! She's a really fun, cool chick!"

A "Possible" Path to Financial Freedom

For nearly two years, Advocate Carlee has seen potential in Olivia that others have overlooked. Their friendship has grown over birthdays and shared experiences, and now, Carlee is helping Olivia gain financial independence. Together, they are exploring budgeting, savings, and financial planning, giving Olivia the tools to control her financial future and live life on her own terms.

Carlee's advocacy is more than just support—it's about empowering Olivia to pursue her dreams and build a secure and independent life.

Thinking About What's Next

George Freeman and Jamison have been connected for several months. In getting to know Jamison, George has come to understand that Jamison can achieve far more than what has been expected of him throughout his life. They have recently been brainstorming ideas for Jamison's future, earning more money, getting off SSI, and living independently. George is also thinking of the small things to help him do so, like budgeting and time management



|||||

Thank You For Making The Oyster Roast Amazing!



The Staff and Board of Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy would like to thank everyone that helped make this year's Oyster on the Bluff a success!!!!

Thank You To Our Volunteers:

Chuck Bohannon, Scott Cleaveland, Sabrina Clark, Gavin Davis, Michelle Douberly, CL Gayheart, Brent Guest, Vanessa Haggins, Clinton Herndon, Brian Hussey, Amy Jones, Eliza Jones, Langston Jones, Helen Mahany, Nancy Olmos, Patrick Newman, Atoya Phoenix, Connie Reynolds, Allie Robinson, Mike Robinson, Will Robinson, Gerald Schantz, Frank Stokes, Lexi Thomas, Jamie Thomison, Tau Beta Sigma Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc., Travis Turner, Elizabeth Valdez, Gamma Zeta Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc., Carley Wiggins, Dicky Stone.

Thank You To Our Sponsors:

Bar Food LLC/Midtown Sports Grill, Bezilla Kinney Phifer Wealth Management Group, Bowtie Barbecue, Café M, Coastal Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (Mark Clayton DDS), Comcast Business, Cogdell and Mendrala, Employee Development Strategies Inc., Flashback Restaurant (Lacas/Flashback), FPC of Savannah - Mort Shor, Georgia Ports Authority, Great Dane, Great Oaks Bank, Howard Dental-South, Huey's on the River, Hughes Public Affairs, JK Productions, Justin and Amy Jones, Jon and Kimberly Pannell, David Lock, Gerald Shantz, Konter Quality Homes, Lighthouse Financial Group, Mahany Construction Company, Nothing Bundt Cakes, Pence Allstate Insurance, Port City Logistics, Queensborough National Bank, River Street Sweets, River Supply, Royal Restrooms, Savannah Bee Company, Simons Political Group, South State Bank, Sterling Seacrest Pritchard Inc., State Farm Holland Agency, Symbiosity, Thomas Branch-Pineland Paper, Thunderbolt Marine Inc., Toni's Steakhouse, TPG Isle of Hope Marina, United Distributing, Vic's River Grill, Vic's on the River, Workmen's Circle Credit Union, Zachary H. Thomas Law, P.C.

Thank You To Our Donors for Our Auction Items

Individuals: Friends of Rob Douberly, Mike Grabowski, Justin and Amy Jones (Tybee & Savannah Getaways), Caroline Lyons, Clay Mobley (Surfing Lessons), Kirsten Parent (Sorted Gift Card), and Renee Summerell (Bulldog Necklace).

Businesses: Captain Derek's Dolphin Tours, Citizen Advocacy Board, Line of Sight Charters Fly Fishing, Pottery by Maria Bailey, Rhino Hospitality, Savannah on Wheels (Melissa Austin), Savannah Riverboat Cruises, and The Hawthorne (Alex Bender).

Looking for pictures of the Oyster Roast? Visit Citizen Advocacy's Facebook page.

|||||

The Heart of the Matter

THE STORY OF CHATHAM-SAVANNAH CITIZEN ADVOCACY

By Tania June Sammons with Scott Cleaveland, George Seaborough

For nearly five decades Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy has provided support to some of the most vulnerable citizens in and around Savannah. A new book titled *The Heart of the Matter: The Story of Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy* will share the organization's important work, beginning with founding director Tom Kohler's early work with the Georgia Advocacy Office, and including highlights about many citizen advocacy matches. The book launch will take place at The Sentient Bean, 13 East Park Avenue, on April 29, 2025, from 6 – 8 p.m.

Savannah's unique story of individual citizens standing side-by-side on behalf and in support of people with disabilities brings to light one of the city's most powerful and inspiring narratives. People within the citizen advocacy movement around the world admire and study Savannah's citizen advocacy program. *The Heart of the Matter* will bring Savannah's program to a larger audience and present a broader understanding about relationships between people with and without disabilities, demonstrating that connections can and do exist outside the human services sector. The book will also present a deeper, more nuanced look at life in Georgia's first city. Expanding Savannah's identity beyond history, architecture, and natural beauty, the book will show everyday citizens committed to creating a better community for everyone, one person at a time.

Citizen advocate and former Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy board member Tania June Sammons is an award-winning writer and museum curator. She has written extensively about Savannah's people and material culture, including books and articles about many of the city's historic houses, museums, parks, and people.



Monthly and Quarterly Donors

Individuals: Hon. Louisa Abbot, Katrina Bostick, Barbara and Don Cogdell, Frances Curry, Rachel Goldsmith, Piper Head, Kathy and Preston Hodges, Preston and Kathy Hodges, Sara M. Laidlaw, John Lientz, Quentin L. Marlin, Mindy Motlagh, Robert and Ashley O'Brien, Kirsten Parent, Ken and Deanne Rimes, Richard and Maureen Simmons, Don Smith, Mary Ellen and Larry Sprague, William N. Tumlin III, and Linda and Rich Wittish.

Businesses: Georgia Advocacy Office and Sentient Bean.





Thank You To All Of Our Donors From July 1, 2024 to March 1, 2025

<p>Businesses Bezilla Kinney Phifer Wealth Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church Bonitz of Georgia BowTie Barbeque Chatham Steel Corporation Christ Church Coastal Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery Colonial Oil Foundation, Inc. Comcast Business Faith Hope & Love M3D Foundation First Presbyterian Church Georgia Advocacy Office Georgia Port Authority Great Dane Great Oak Bank H.R. Lynah Char Rem Trust Hibernian Society of Savannah Foundation Hughes Public Affairs Iezzi-Mazzeo Family Foundation JDL Investments LLC JIT Logistics Jolly Foundation Lacas, LLC/Flashbacks Lighthouse Financial Group Michael M. Dobbs Insurance O.C. Welch Ford-Lincoln, Inc. Port City Logistics River Street Sweets River Supply Inc. Royal Restroom Savannah Bee Company Savannah Community Foundation South State Bank Stephen Green/Properties Stone Wood Insurance Company Symbioscity The Brown Firm LLC The Chatham Foundation The Georgia Ports Authority The Godchaux Family Fund The Guerry Beam Fund The Human Fund The Solomons Foundation Thunderbolt Marine LLC Toni's Steakhouse TPG Isle of Hope Marina Vic's on the River Vic's River Grill Family Workmen's Circle Credit Union</p> <p>Individuals Louisa Abbot</p>	<p>Anthony Abbott Laurie Abbott Kimetra Adams Pam Rhoads Allen and Steve Allen Felicia Amusan JoCarolyn Amusan Solomon and Jo Amusan Charles Anderson Wanda Andrews Jamie Smith Arkins Kim Bennett Ira Berman Mary Ellen and Tom Beytagh Madeline Bialecki Heather Bilton Katrina Bostick Deborah Bowen Lawrence A. Brody April Brooks Dr. Altomese Brown Frank Brown Robert F. Brown Moya Campbell Becky Cheatham Anne Clayton Mark Clayton Scott Cleaveland Don and Barbara Cogdell Bruce and Karen Cohen Constance Coleman Brittany Curry Blanche Eden-Gnann Flora Emerson Mike English Jody Espina Carol Estes Carol Fallon John Farrell Pat Farrell Patrick J. Fogarty Kevin G. Fox Marc Friday Aileen Gabbey Gracie Gaughan Benjamin Goldberg Rachel Goldsmith Kim Green Sally and Steve Greenberg Caroline Gregory Greg and Vickie Guenther Stephen H. Harris John N. Harty Patti Scott and Dave Hasbury</p>	<p>Melvin Haysman Piper Head Coran Hendry Elizabeth and William Hodges Preston Hodges Julia and Lea Holliday Eric Howell Tom J. Hussey Wade Wilkes Herring II Curtis Lewis III Edward J. Derst III Wilbur D. Owens III William N. Tumlin III Mark and Jackie Immel John and Linda Jensen Angelyne and Paul Johnson Justin and Amy Jones Thomas S. Gray Jr. Stephen J. Stephens Jr. Michael L. Karpf Letha and Kevin Kelly Frank and Cynthia King Alan and Rhonda Kinney Tom Kohler Mark Konter Sara M. Laidlaw Sissy Schram Levy John Lientz Jesse Lipson Margie Livingston David Lock BJ and Julie Lowenthal Brennan Lowenthal Grayson Lowenthal Richard Lutz Patrick and Patti Lyons Brian and Amy Markowitz Joseph Gannam and Melanie Marks Quentin L. Marlin Samuel G. McCachern Thomas and Gwen McKee Patricia McLeod Donald Melroy Margaret and Robert Minis Clay Mobley Mindy Motlagh Elizabeth Mount Moirra and Ken Mumma Billy and Nasia Norse Robert and Ashley O'Brien Tracy O'Connell Jon B. Pannell Kirsten Parent</p>
---	---	---



Thank You To All Of Our Donors From July 1, 2024 to March 1, 2025

Leoni Peloqu	Ryan Sewell	Zachary H. Thomas
Chris Phillips	Mort Shor	Carolyn A. Tucker
Wesley Phillips	Patience Showunmi	Juanita D. Tucker
Dawn and Douglas Piel	Richard and Maureen Simmons	Brooke Tyler
Nicholas Puhala	Nancy Slotin	Timothy H. Ward
Randall Reese	Don Smith	Don and Cindy Waters
J. Pearce W. Reeve	Mary Ellen Sprague	Michael and Helen White
Kory and Andrea Reeves	Brenda and Edward Steiner	Jason Williams
Kim Traub Ribbens	Karen and Don Stewart	Linda Wittish
Leigh Rich	Robert Stewart	Ellen Woodall
Ken and Deanne Rimes	Jennifer and Reid StonerIrwin	Melissa Wright
Mariah Ringhoff	Pepi Streiff	Annette Youmans
Jack Robertson	Donald Stuber	Mickey and Annette Youmans
Billy Robinson	John and Mary Ellen Sullivan	Arnold C. Young
Kristin Russell	John D. Sullivan	David and Pam Young
Cathy and Larry Schmitz	Sheldon and Zelda Tenenbaum	David Young

