

2007  
ANNUAL REPORT

FORSYTH COUNTY, GEORGIA

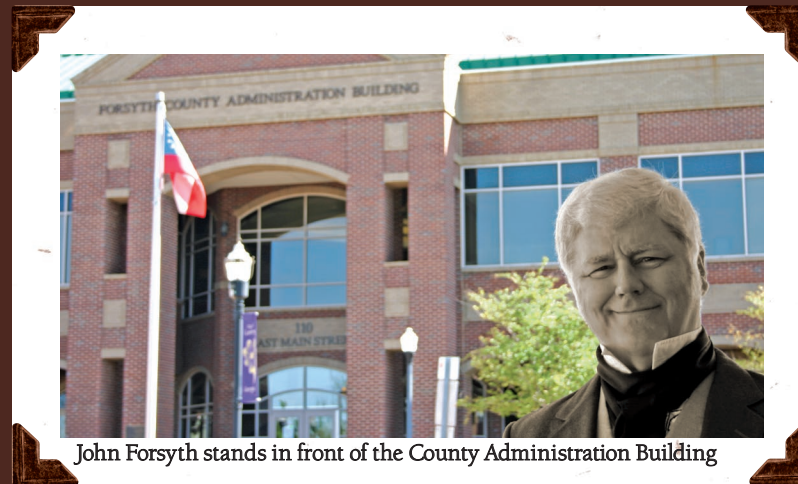


# Mission

As trusted stewards of Forsyth County's future, the elected officials and employees are dedicated to serving the community and to providing effective, professional public service with integrity and a commitment to excellence.

# Vision

Forsyth County is committed to providing and maintaining the most efficient, customer service-oriented county government possible. The county will be an innovative and strategic leader in providing essential and effective public services in a fiscally prudent and professional manner. By preserving and enhancing a high quality of life, Forsyth County will remain a healthy, safe and compelling place in which to live, work, recreate, visit and invest.



John Forsyth stands in front of the County Administration Building

**In this annual report,** take a journey through 2007 in Forsyth County with the community's namesake, John Forsyth (portrayed by Forsyth County resident George Pirkle). John Forsyth originally returned to Forsyth County for its 175th anniversary celebration, but he enjoyed the county so much that he decided to explore the community as it is today.



## County Board of Commissioners



The mission of the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners is to exercise the powers, duties and responsibilities vested in and imposed upon it as the duly constituted governing authority of Forsyth County. The Board of Commissioners is made up of five members, each living in a specific district but elected by voters countywide to serve four-year terms. Each January, the five members elect one of their own to serve as chairman of the board for the coming year. Forsyth County operates under the commission-county manager form of government.

The board meets in regular session twice a month, on the first and third Thursdays. The meetings begin at 5 p.m. in the Commissioners' Meeting Room on the second floor of the County Administration Building. The meetings are open to the public and also can be viewed on TV Forsyth on Comcast channel 23 and online at [www.forsythco.com](http://www.forsythco.com).

**Board of Commissioners, pictured left to right:** Jim Harrell, Secretary (District 3); David Richard, Vice Chairman (District 4); Charles Laughinghouse, Chairman (District 1); Dr. Linda K. Ledbetter, Member (District 5); Brian Tam, Member (District 2)

## County Administration



**Rhonda O'Connor**  
County Manager



**Doug Derrer**  
Deputy County Manager



**William J. Thomas, CPA**  
Chief Financial Officer





## Message from the Chairman

It is with a great sense of pride that we provide this annual report detailing Forsyth County government's activities and progress from 2007. This is an amazing county in terms of its people, its sense of community, its facilities, its progress and more. I could not be more proud to serve on the Board of Commissioners and also to serve as chairman.

The projects, people and places that you will learn about in this report are the very reasons why Forsyth County is such an outstanding place to call home. We have a stellar parks system, a commitment to public safety and a staff dedicated to service. Forsyth County's tax rates are among the lowest in metro Atlanta. Our convenient location between Atlanta and the beautiful north Georgia mountains is just one more reason why Forsyth County is a standout.

We celebrated Forsyth County's 175th anniversary on December 3, 2007. While this was a celebratory milestone, we continue to look to the future and ongoing progress of this fine county. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Laughinghouse".

**Charles Laughinghouse, Chairman**





## Message from the County Manager

The past year was one filled with continued progress for Forsyth County. In 2007, the county broke ground for two new Sheriff's Office precincts, opened two new fire stations, offered a new recycling center, launched a 24-hour government access cable channel and much more. All of this was accomplished with a continued focus on customer service.

County staff members take pride in maintaining a responsive and professional government, providing a full range of services to citizens and to visitors. As a county government, we endeavor to mirror the fine people living and working in our community, while striving to serve them to the best of our ability.

This report endeavors to provide a glimpse into Forsyth County's extraordinary accomplishments of 2007. We hope you find it beneficial.

A stylized, handwritten signature of Rhonda O'Connor in black ink.

**Rhonda O'Connor**, County Manager



## Turning 175: An Historic Milestone

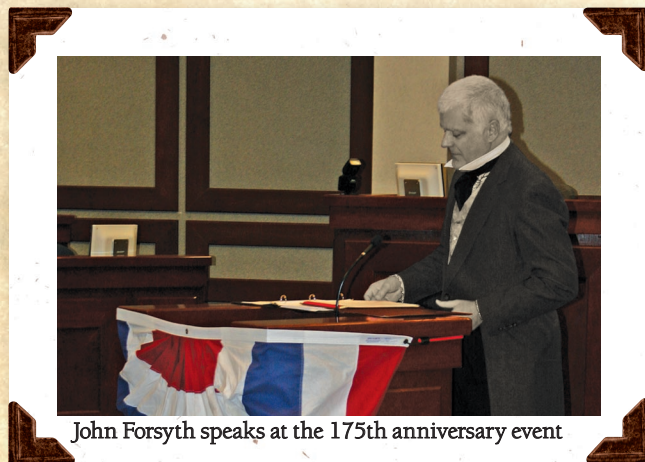
December 3, 2007 marked 175 years since the founding of Forsyth County, and a special anniversary event was held in honor of this historic occasion. The 175th anniversary event took place in the County Administration Building, featuring a display of historical county photographs and a surprise visit from the county's namesake, John Forsyth (portrayed by Forsyth County resident George Pirkle).



The Department of Communications created a special video documentary to commemorate Forsyth County's 175th anniversary and also as a means to preserve the history of the county for future generations. The documentary "In Their Own Words" follows the changes in Forsyth County from an area of rural farm land to one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation. This short film is told through the words of five lifelong residents of the county, each giving their own personal account of the historical events that shaped Forsyth County.

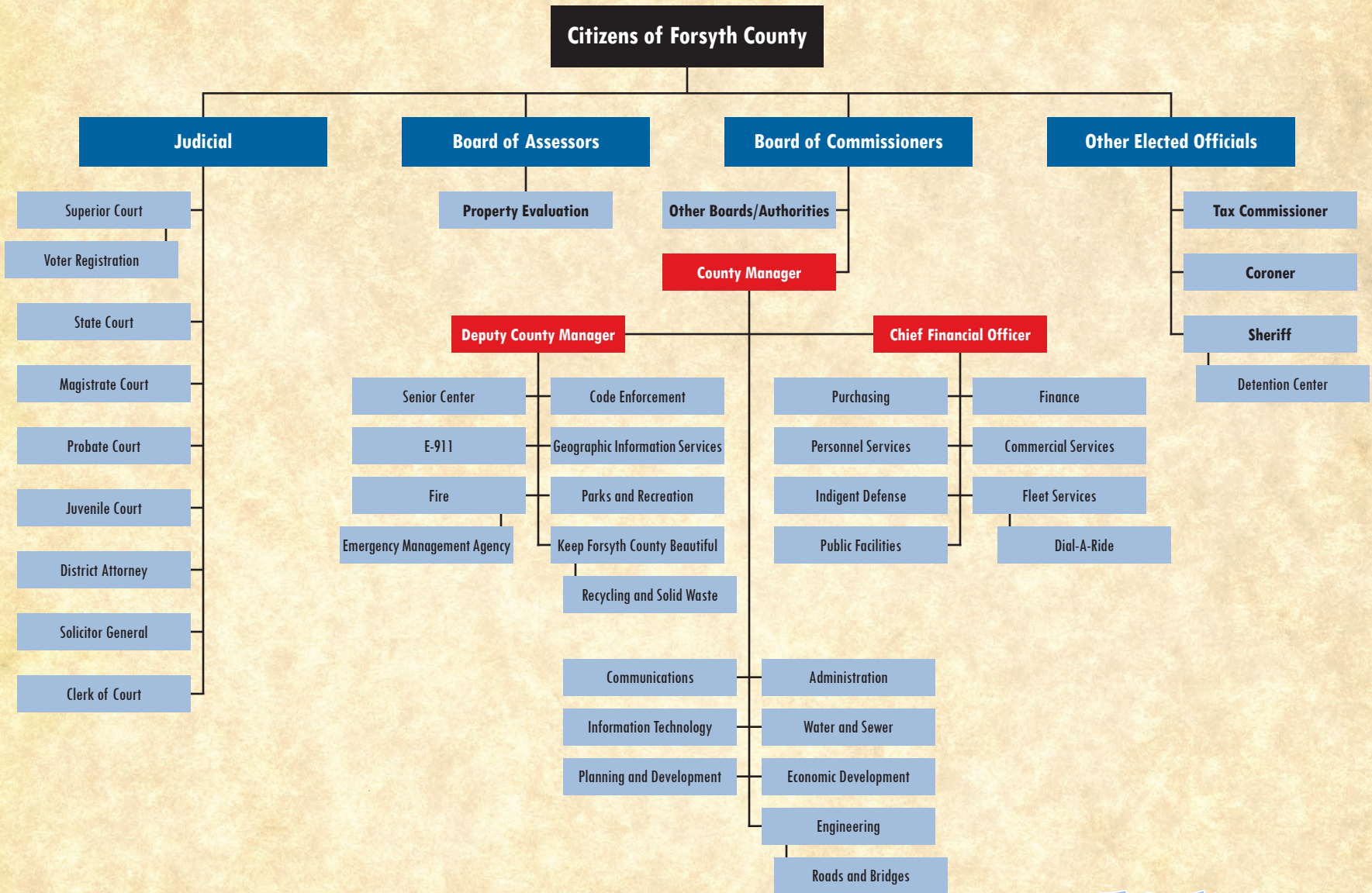
### The History

Forsyth County was created on December 3, 1832, from a partition of the Cherokee County Territory, formerly the Cherokee Nation East. The county was named for John Forsyth, who served as attorney general of Georgia, United States senator, United States representative, United States minister to Spain, thirty-first governor of Georgia and United States secretary of state under Presidents Jackson and Van Buren.





# County Organizational Chart





## 2007 in Review

### Shaping Public Safety

Forsyth County continued its commitment to providing top-notch public safety services in 2007. Two new four double-bay fire stations went in service in 2007. New Fire Station 1 is located at 234 Castleberry Industrial Drive, and new Fire Station 2 is located at 4055 Carolene Way. Two new engines and three new tankers also were put in service in 2007. For the first time in the Fire Department's existence, over 10,000 calls for service were responded to in a single year in 2007.

After meeting stringent requirements, the Forsyth County Emergency Management Agency earned the StormReady® designation from the National Weather Service in 2007. The StormReady® program recognizes counties that have reached a high level of severe weather preparedness.



John Forsyth breaks ground for the new North Precinct

The Sheriff's Office broke ground during 2007 for new North and South Precincts. The new North Precinct, located in Central Park, and new South Precinct, located on the campus of South Forsyth High School, both went in service in early 2008. Despite a growing population, crime in the county continues to decrease. In 2007, property crimes dropped by 8 percent.

- Calls received by the 911 Center in 2007: 165,611
- Alarms answered by the Fire Department in 2007: 10,530
- Calls for service handled by the Sheriff's Office Uniform Patrol Division in 2007: 74,675





John Forsyth stands outside new Fire Station 2



John Forsyth at new Fire Station 1

New Fire Station 1 and new Fire Station 2 were completed with SPLOST V funds in 2007.



## Shaping Quality of Life

Forsyth County made it easier for residents in the northern part of the county to go green in 2007, opening the county's third recycling center. The Coal Mountain Recycling Center, located inside Coal Mountain Park, opened in October.

The county's senior population benefited from two exciting projects in 2007. The backyard beautification project at the Senior Center, the class project of the Leadership Forsyth Class of 2007, brought a walking path, gazebo, shuffleboard area and new landscaping to the center. The Hearthstone Lodge Community Center opened in late 2007, and it provides active adults age 50+ with a new space for fitness and fun.

The county's Dial-A-Ride program continued to serve the community, providing 15,977 trips in 2007. Dial-A-Ride provides on-call transportation services to all Forsyth County residents for such things as medical appointments, shopping, employment, education and personal errands. The Fleet Services Department operates Dial-A-Ride.



John Forsyth reads at the library's Cumming branch

The Code Enforcement Department worked throughout 2007 to address citizens' questions and concerns, reviewing 2,966 cases. The department continued its focus on developing partnerships with citizens and with businesses to preserve and improve quality-of-life issues by providing Forsyth County with a safe, healthy and quality environment.

The Cumming branch of the Forsyth County Public Library underwent renovations together with the addition of the new library administrative offices in 2007. These administrative offices will position the library system to add additional branch libraries in the future.

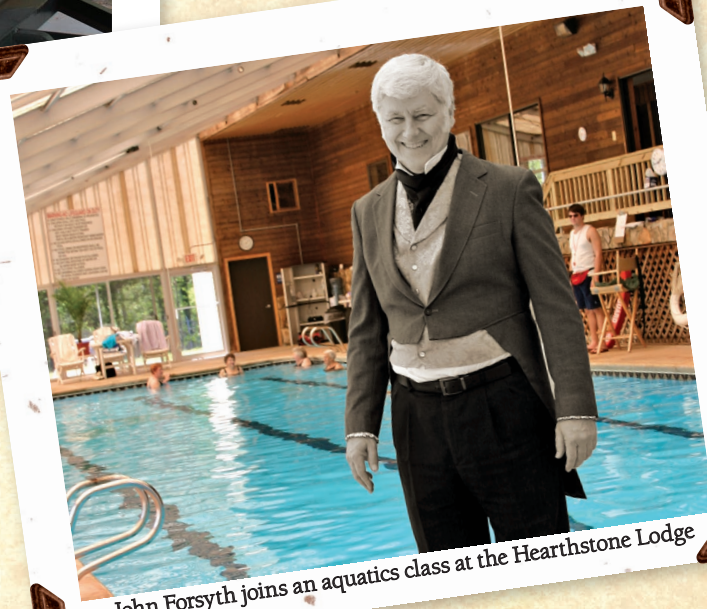




John Forsyth recycles a tin can at the new Coal Mountain Recycling Center

Forsyth County recycled 3,681,559 pounds in 2007. Recycling is available to all Forsyth County residents at no charge.

The new Hearthstone Lodge Community Center emphasizes active aging. Located at 7305 Lanier Drive, the facility features a fitness room and indoor heated pool.



John Forsyth joins an aquatics class at the Hearthstone Lodge



## Shaping Infrastructure

Transportation issues remained a priority in 2007. A major transportation project started was the widening of McGinnis Ferry Road. Forsyth, Fulton and Gwinnett Counties, along with the Georgia Department of Transportation, broke ground for this project in August. Slated for completion in 2010, this project will impact the roadway from the intersection at Sargent Road to the Chattahoochee River. The projects finished in 2007 included the widening of Mathis Airport Road from Old Atlanta Road to State Route 141; construction of two lanes of Market Place Boulevard Extension from Buford Dam Road to Mary Alice Park Road; construction of the Melody Mizer Lane intersection project and extension of sidewalk to Daves Creek Park. The county also completed the right-of-way process for 16 state intersection projects in 2007, all slated to be under construction in 2008.

Planning and Development staff worked with the Board of Commissioners on changes to the Unified Development Code during 2007. Major changes included adopting the Castleberry-Bethelview Crossroad Overlay District, adopting the Peachtree Parkway Overlay District, adopting provisions for senior housing and revising the rezoning process.

Water continued to be a focus during 2007. With the addition of 2,760 new accounts, the Water and Sewer Department served 42,655 customers. A new 48-inch waterline went into operation in February, delivering additional raw water to the county's water treatment plant off Antioch Road. New development added over 34 miles of water main to Forsyth County, bringing the total inventory to over 900 miles. A combination of county projects and new development added over 31 miles of sewer main, including 975 new manholes, bringing the total inventory to over 450 miles. Forsyth County continues to be a leader in Georgia in implementation of reuse water, which is wastewater that has been highly treated and disinfected and then primarily used for irrigation. The system was extended to serve several schools and a large county park in 2007. The county now provides reuse water to a wide customer base including golf courses, school campuses, a rock quarry, parks, residential homes and subdivision landscape features.





### Shaping Communication

Forsyth County's 24-hour government access cable channel, TV Forsyth, launched in November, providing a new way for residents to stay informed about their county government. TV Forsyth airs on Comcast channel 23 and is operated by the county's Department of Communications. The channel broadcasts a variety of county meetings as well as original programming focused on informing citizens about the county and an electronic bulletin board featuring information about government meetings, events, programs and more.

### Shaping Recreation

The Parks and Recreation Department experienced another year of growth in 2007. New playgrounds were added at Windermere Park and Shady Grove Campground, the new Midway Park Community Building opened in December and the master plan for Fowler Park was approved by the Board of Commissioners. Ground was broken at Coal Mountain Park for the new Miracle League field, handicapped-accessible playground and additional park improvements. Ground also was broken for the new Sawnee Mountain Preserve Visitor Center. These projects were completed in early 2008. Forsyth County has 15 parks, totaling 1,643 acres and serving approximately 925,000 visitors annually.



Miracle League field groundbreaking



John Forsyth explores the SMP Visitor Center (opened early 2008)



## Financial Outlook

Fiscal sustainability is one of Forsyth County's primary goals. Throughout 2007, Forsyth County embarked on a journey to strengthen its financial position and establish a strong foundation for guiding the county into the future.

In fiscal year (FY) 2007, executive management positions, including the chief financial officer (CFO), were put into place. The CFO's initial emphasis is to update the internal controls within Forsyth County, establish a long-term investment strategy and improve the county's current bond rating with the three bond rating agencies.

Due to a nationwide downturn in the economy, the county did not realize significant revenue growth in 2007 over 2006. The considerable General Fund surpluses of recent years decreased as a result, but the county still ended the year with \$463,300 in surplus.

Total General Fund revenues, excluding transfers in, increased in FY 2007 over FY 2006 by 5.82%, although actual revenues collected fell short of budget estimates by \$4.4 million.

- Taxes and commissions: \$70.04 million
- Licenses and permits: \$6.65 million
- Fines and forfeitures: \$2.82 million
- Intergovernmental revenue: \$2.51 million
- Charges for service: \$3.11 million
- Other revenues: \$2.7 million
- Expenditures were 4.8% under budget, resulting in a savings of \$4.87 million



## General Fund

Forsyth County provides the majority of its services through the use of General Fund resources. The General Fund supports the general administration of the county. The Fire Department is funded by a separate property tax, and E-911 is funded by land and wireless telephone charges.

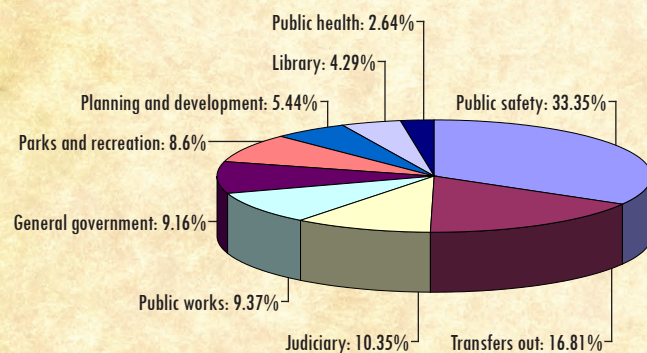
## Public Safety Expenditures

Public safety (the sheriff, coroner and ambulance services) utilizes the largest part of the General Fund, representing 33.35% of the total expenditures in 2007.

## Other General Fund Expenditures

Other, non-public safety General Fund expenditures include judiciary, public works, general government, parks and recreation, planning and development, library and public health. These functions account for \$47,704,791 in expenditures (or 49.85%) of the General Fund expenditures. The remaining expenditures are for the transfer of General Fund resources for use by other funds. In 2007, these included the following transfers:

FY 2007 General Fund Expenditures



- \$1.9 million transferred to the vehicle fund to purchase vehicles and equipment
- \$5.4 million transferred to the capital projects fund to pay for capital projects, including construction of the Sheriff's Office North and South Precincts
- \$0.429 million transferred to victims rights, solid waste and fire fund
- \$8.3 million used for a one-time expenditure of SPLOST funds

Overall, the General Fund expenditures were \$3,820,796 above the 2006 expenditures, representing a 4.16% increase.



## SPLOST

Forsyth County's Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) is a one-percent sales tax approved by county citizens. This tax has provided funding for new capital projects and infrastructure improvements that otherwise may not have been possible. SPLOST funds were utilized in 2007 to complete the following projects:



New Fire Station 1

- New Fire Station 1
- New Fire Station 2
- New Hampton Library Branch design (construction scheduled to begin in late 2008)
- McGinnis Ferry Road widening (ground broken in August 2007)
- Magistrate Court building removal and new parking lot construction
- Midway Park Community Building

The current SPLOST program (SPLOST V) will generate over \$141.05 million. The county was able to leverage these funds to receive additional funds from the federal and state governments. Including interest earnings, an additional \$31.71 million was added to

the SPLOST funds for a total of \$172.76 million that is being used to fund SPLOST projects. The SPLOST V funds have been used to provide over \$92.66 million for transportation projects; \$15.36 million for intersection improvements; \$3.92 million for public building improvements; \$5.97 million for new fire stations and equipment; \$12.01 million for upgrading E-911 communication equipment; \$6.2 million for park improvements; \$2.55 million for pedestrian and bike path improvements; and \$4.3 million for building new libraries. Forsyth County also provided over \$29 million to the city of Cumming. SPLOST V expires June 30, 2008.



John Forsyth at the Midway Park Community Building



## Bond Rating

Forsyth County's bond rating was upgraded from Aa2 to Aa1 (Moody's) and AA to AA+ (Standard and Poor's) in 2007. This rating provided the county with the ability to market \$50 million of Water and Sewer bonds in late September 2007 at very competitive rates.

## Grants

In 2007, Forsyth County received \$1,016,285 in grant funding through 24 grants. Three grants for capital projects were also received, providing funding for recycling materials, technical planning assistance and the Fire Department's Hazardous Materials Unit.

## Excellence in Financial Reporting

The county earned the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada for its comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR). The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management. Forsyth County has received the award each year since 2000.

## Economic Development

The county will continue to work jointly with the Cumming-Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce, Development Authority and city to foster economic development. In 2007, leaders worked with 65 companies, with eight of those companies announcing relocation of their facilities totaling \$222 million in capital investment and creating 730 new jobs. Five companies also announced expansion projects. With all the community has to offer, it is no surprise so many companies are choosing to call Forsyth County home.



# Forsyth County at a Glance

**Date of Incorporation**  
December 3, 1832

**Form of Government**  
Commission – County Manager

**Total Area in Square Miles**  
247

**2007 Population\***  
158,914

**Historic Population\***

- 1990: 44,083
- 2000: 98,407
- 2005: 140,393

**Population Growth Ranking (July 1, 2006 – July 1, 2007 [percent])\***

- Eighth fastest-growing county in United States
- Fastest-growing county in Georgia

**County Government Employees in 2007**

- Total employees: 1,400
- Full-time employees: 1,175
- Part-time/seasonal employees: 225

\*source: U.S. Census Bureau







John Forsyth plays shuffleboard in the renovated backyard of the Senior Center

Forsyth County celebrates 175 years of progress while remembering yesterday and shaping tomorrow.



John Forsyth slides at Coal Mountain Park's new playground





## **FORSYTHCOUNTY**

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[www.forsythco.com](http://www.forsythco.com)

TV Forsyth — Comcast Channel 23

This annual report was prepared by  
the Forsyth County Department of Communications.