



FORSYTHCOUNTY
Department of Communications

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**FORSYTH COUNTY GARNERS GEORGIA COUNTY
EXCELLENCE AWARD FOR PRESERVATION
OF SAWNEE MOUNTAIN**

FORSYTHCOUNTY, Georgia – The Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) and *Georgia Trend* magazine have named Forsyth County among the recipients of the fourth annual County Excellence Awards. The County Excellence Awards recognize local government programs and services that are highly innovative, improve efficiency in government operations and demonstrate leadership in problem solving and planning. Forsyth County is one of eight recipients statewide.

Forsyth County's award is for the Sawnee Mountain Preserve. The creation of the Preserve established protection of 963 acres of green space in a fast developing county and led to development of a passive recreation park featuring hiking trails, a visitor center, amphitheater and a variety of outdoor programming.

“Counties that were selected for the County Excellence Awards submitted outstanding projects that focused on maximizing cost savings and other efficiencies that are so important during the challenging times that we face today,” said Jerry Griffin, executive director of ACCG. “These projects highlight the best-of-the-best from the last year and provide examples that other counties can replicate in their own communities.”

This recognition is co-sponsored by ACCG and *Georgia Trend*, and the winning counties are profiled in the March issue of *Georgia Trend*, the April issue of ACCG's *Georgia County Government* magazine and recognized at ACCG's annual meeting.

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“This year’s recipients have all implemented initiatives that will have a long-lasting impact for years to come,” said Ross King, deputy director of ACCG. “The projects selected this year focus on conserving our natural resources, creating cost efficiencies in operations and finance, and understanding dynamics involved in consolidating city and county government. We applaud these local governments for their efforts and for sharing great ideas with their peers.”

“What an honor it is for Forsyth County and the Sawnee Mountain Preserve to receive this award,” Director of Parks and Recreation Jerry Kinsey said. “The Forsyth County community has certainly demonstrated over the years a commitment to protecting and preserving the area’s natural resources and this award recognizes that commitment.”

About the Preservation of Sawnee Mountain

Phase I of the project opened in June 2005 and features hiking trails, a playground, picnic pavilions, restroom facilities and amphitheater. The community overwhelmingly welcomed the project of preserving the mountain, with local businesses and civic groups participating. The main trail at the Preserve was the recipient of a \$74,155 trail grant from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and local Boy Scouts assist with ongoing trail maintenance and upkeep.

“A collaborative effort like the preservation of Sawnee Mountain is a perfect example of government, business and community working together for the good of all,” Interim County Manager Doug Derrer said.

Completed in March 2008, Phase II includes the Sawnee Mountain Preserve Visitor Center, hiking trails and a tree canopy walk. The first facility of its kind in the county, the Visitor Center serves as the administrative home to the Parks and Recreation Department’s Outdoor Division. The center features classrooms, a laboratory, interpretive gardens and exhibits focused on the three major themes of the Preserve and its programs: preservation, conservation and stewardship. A \$10,000 Local Assistance Grant from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs was received to assist in supplying resources for the center. The 5,600-square foot Visitor Center has to-date welcomed nearly 15,000 visitors and offered over 70 programs. Projected annual visitation is 30,000 to 35,000.

In addition to this recognition, Sawnee Mountain Preserve has received other accolades. In October 2005, the project was recognized as Georgia Urban Forestry Council’s “Most Outstanding Green Space Plan.” In October 2008, the Visitor Center garnered the Georgia Urban Forestry Council’s award for “Most Outstanding Development.”

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