



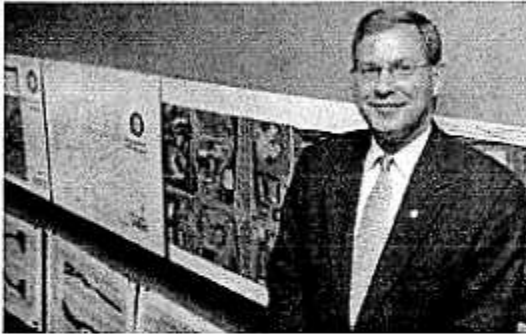
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## Community connection: Joe Allen

By **Jamie Ward**  
Staff Writer

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Joe Allen

Gwinnett Place is in the midst of a business revival - new signs to brand the area, new sidewalks, new opportunities for commerce. Joe Allen, the executive director for its community improvement district, is leading that charge. A lifelong Gwinnetian, married and with two children, his family has been in Georgia since the Revolutionary War.

On how his service to the people of Gwinnett County began:

In 1984, Tom Phillips, a state senator whom I was an aid for said, "Hey, you should go work on this campaign." I'd gone to school with Senator Phillips' son, Michael - we graduated in the same class. So I worked on Katherine Sherrington's campaign. I passed out stuff, put

up signs, and I didn't even know Ms. Sherrington before that. 1984 was the year the Republicans really came in and took power in Gwinnett County. Ronald Reagan had coattails that year. Katherine won. Years later, when I took some time off from working for the federal government to attend graduate school at Georgia State to get my master's in public administration, I ran into Katherine who was starting her MPA degree. I didn't know if she remembered me, but we worked together and just by chance she had a position open. I applied for it and she hired me as her director of administration in the tax commissioner's office.

On how Gwinnett County has changed over his lifetime:

Depending on your network of relationships and friends, it still has that small-town feel where everyone knows each other. But I can remember when I was a kid, people making fun of you for living in Gwinnett. You were out there in the rural area. But the respect Gwinnett has earned over the last several decades has really increased. And the diversity we're seeing is exciting.

On what the biggest challenges are for Gwinnett:

The biggest problem for our area is going to be transportation and infrastructure because of the funding. That scares me the greatest, that we don't have a plan. We're beginning to see a portion of that plan coming together, but we've needed that for a number of years.

On where he and the family like to go to escape:

We love to camp, especially at Victoria Bryant State Park. But my family loves Fort Wilderness at Walt Disney World. We're Disney freaks. It's our happy place. My wife has a goal. She said we're going to stay at every hotel on Disney property. And she's very close to accomplishing that goal. But spending time with my family is the most important thing to me.

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