

STORIES OF THE YEAR: A look at Gwinnett's top headlines

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As of Tuesday, December 31, 2013

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From staff reports



» Balfour indictment, not guilty verdict

Gwinnett's recent history has been marred by corruption scandals for years, but the swift trial of Sen. Don Balfour had a different ending in 2013. The Snellville politician, whose erroneous expense reports had followed him for months, was indicted in November, but found not guilty of 18 counts the next month. After calling the controversy politically motivated from the witness stand, Balfour's suspension was lifted in time to return to the General Assembly for its session in the new year.

RELATED LINKS:

- » Sen. Don Balfour acquitted of all charges
- » Balfour to return to Senate after trial
- » Sen. Don Balfour suspended from office
- » Sen. Balfour booked into, bonds out of Fulton jail
- » Balfour indicted on theft, false statement charges

Don Balfour, was indicted in November for his erroneous expense reports, but was found not guilty of 18 counts the next month.



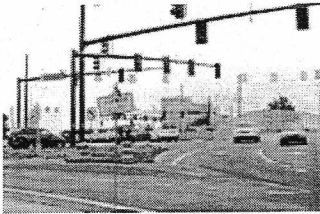
The five firefighters that were held hostage at gunpoint spoke to the media in April. Pictured from left are Jody Moss, Jason Schuon, Tim Hollingsworth, Chip Echols and Sydney Garner.

» Firefighters held hostage

A Suwanee man took five Gwinnett firefighters hostage in April for more than three hours and demanded that his utilities be turned on. Lauren Holman Brown, 55, died that evening following a loud explosion and an exchange of gunfire with members of a SWAT team. Brown faked chest

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 - » [Hints of abuse pre-dated 10-year-old's murder by starvation](#)
 - » [Parents charged with murder after girl's body found in trash](#)
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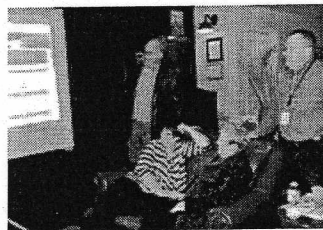
The Pleasant Hill Road bridge over I-85 opened in June as a new diverging-diamond interchange. It is designed to relieve congestion and improve safety.

» Diverging Diamond opens

Gwinnett's traffic patterns took a twist, with the opening of the county's first diverging-diamond interchange along Pleasant Hill Road at Interstate 85. The conversion of the bridge one June weekend shifted traffic to the opposite side of the road to allow for free-flowing turns on and off of the interstate. Also in 2013, construction began on a second diverging-diamond project at the Jimmy Carter Boulevard interchange with I-85. The bridge is expected to be converted in the spring.

RELATED LINKS:

- » [Drivers adjust to new interchange](#)
 - » [First diverging-diamond interchange to change traffic in Gwinnett](#)
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Gwinnett voters continued to give overwhelming support to the county's Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax. Gwinnett Commission Chairwoman Charlotte Nash (second from left) watches returns of the election with her husband Michael (left), Gwinnett Clean and Beautiful Director Connie Wiggins and Commissioner Tommy Hunter.

» SPLOST passes

Just over a year after voters rejected a regional sales tax directed at transportation, Gwinnett voters continued to give overwhelming support to the county's Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax. The majority of the one-percent tax to be collected over the next three years will be directed toward transportation projects, with county officials making headlines days before the November vote by setting aside \$5 million to go toward an emergency alert system to help police in incidents at schools.

RELATED LINKS:

- » [Voters approve SPLOST extension in Gwinnett](#)