The Columbus Times

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SUNDAY, OCT. 25 - SATURDAY, OCT. 31, 2026 WEEKLY EDITION DAILY NEWS AT COLUMBUSTIMES.COM

FORT BENNING

Fort Benning Surveys a Site for 3 Nuclear Microreactors to Back Up Power on Post



Instructors prepare soldiers for parachute training at Fort Benning in 2009 (file photo). KRISTIN MOLINARO / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (PUBLIC DOMAIN)

BY MARK G

COLUMBUS, Ga. — Fort Benning is preparing to receive three nuclear microreactors designed to keep selected mission-critical facilities operating during commercial power outages. Army officials and representatives of Radiant Industries Inc. visited the installation Oct. 16 to assess a potential location for the reactors and review how they would connect to the post's existing power grid. The Army has identified a preferred site, but final approval depends on environmental and cultural resource surveys.

The project is part of the Army's Janus Program, an effort to strengthen energy resilience at military installations through nuclear microreactor technology. Radiant will provide, install, operate and maintain the systems planned for Fort Benning, according to an Oct. 19 Army news release. The Army has not disclosed the proposed location, identified which buildings would receive reactor power or specified the electricity output planned for the installation.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/509***

EDUCATION

Muscogee Schools Graduation Rate Rises to 96.3%, Nearly 8 Points Above Georgia



Seniors at a high school graduation ceremony (file photo). HARRISON KEELY / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY 4.0)

BY EMIL GERTJEGERDES

COLUMBUS, Ga. — The Muscogee County School District's four-year graduation rate reached 96.3% in 2026, nearly eight percentage points above Georgia's statewide rate of 88.5%. The district's rate increased from 96.1% in 2025, marking a 0.2 percentage-point gain and what district officials called "a new personal best for MCSD." All nine district high schools recorded graduation rates of at least 92%, according to results released Sept. 28.

Five Muscogee County high schools set all-time graduation records in 2026, while two maintained perfect 100% rates. The district's overall graduation rate has climbed 2.8 percentage points since 2023, when it stood at 93.5%. Although the district continued improving in 2026, Georgia's statewide graduation rate increased faster, narrowing the difference between local and state results.

GRADUATION RATES AT ALL NINE MUSCOGEE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOLS

The district's Sept. 28 release provides four years of graduation data for each of its nine high schools. Columbus High School and Rainey-McCullers School of the Arts maintained 100% graduation rates throughout the entire period from 2023 through 2026. Kendrick High School posted the largest one-year improvement in 2026, climbing from 95.9% to 98.2%.

Every school exceeded Georgia's 2026 statewide graduation rate of 88.5%. Carver recorded the district's lowest 2026 rate at 92.5%, while Columbus and Rainey-McCullers remained at 100%. The district identified Carver, Hardaway, Jordan, Kendrick and Shaw as the five schools that established new all-time highs.

MUSCOGEE COUNTY VERSUS GEORGIA: FOUR YEARS OF RESULTS

The statewide graduation rate also reached a record in 2026, according to the Georgia Department of Education. Georgia reported that 88.5% of students graduated within the four-year cohort measurement, compared with 87.2% in 2025. The state described its latest result as an all-time high since Georgia began using the federally required adjusted cohort calculation in 2011.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/507***

IN BRIEF

29,497 Muscogee Voters Have Cast Early Ballots, Now 3.3% Ahead of the 2022 Pace

COLUMBUS, Ga. — A total of 29,497 Muscogee County voters have cast early ballots in Georgia's 2026 general election, putting turnout 3.3% ahead of the comparable point in 2022. The total represents 20.9% of the county's 141,231 registered voters, according to GeorgiaVotes.com data updated Oct. 27. The figures include 27,115 people who voted early in person and 2,382 whose ballots were returned by mail.

More: columbustimes.com/story/504

Columbus Gas Falls to $3.62, 56 Cents Below a Month Ago, as Georgia Gas Tax Break Runs Through Nov. 30

COLUMBUS, Ga. — Gas prices in Columbus have fallen to an average of $3.62 a gallon, down 56 cents from a month ago, according to AAA figures released Tuesday, Oct. 27. The decline comes as Georgia's temporary suspension of its motor fuel excise tax continues. Gov. Brian Kemp extended the suspension Oct. 24 through Nov. 30, covering Thanksgiving travel.

AAA reported an average price of $3.615 per gallon for regular gasoline in the Columbus metropolitan area Tuesday, compared with $4.176 a month earlier. Prices have also declined about 6 cents over the past week, although they remain 91 cents higher than at the same time last year. The Columbus average sits below both Georgia's statewide average of $3.640 and the national average of $4.266 per gallon.

More: columbustimes.com/story/488

Georgia vs. Florida Moves to Atlanta Saturday: 3:30 p.m. on ABC, Bulldogs Riding 5-Game Win Streak

COLUMBUS, Ga. — Georgia and Florida will meet Saturday, Oct. 31, 2026, at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, with kickoff scheduled for 3:30 p.m. Eastern on ABC. The Bulldogs enter the Southeastern Conference matchup with a 6-1 record and five consecutive victories over the Gators. For Columbus-area Georgia fans, the game brings a different location for a familiar matchup, along with a chance to follow the action on local television.

Georgia enters Saturday's game with a 4-1 record in SEC competition, while Florida stands at 5-2 overall and 3-2 in conference games. The contest is designated a neutral-site game, although Georgia is listed as the home team. The teams will play outside Jacksonville this year because renovations at EverBank Stadium have temporarily moved the matchup away from its usual location.

More: columbustimes.com/story/489

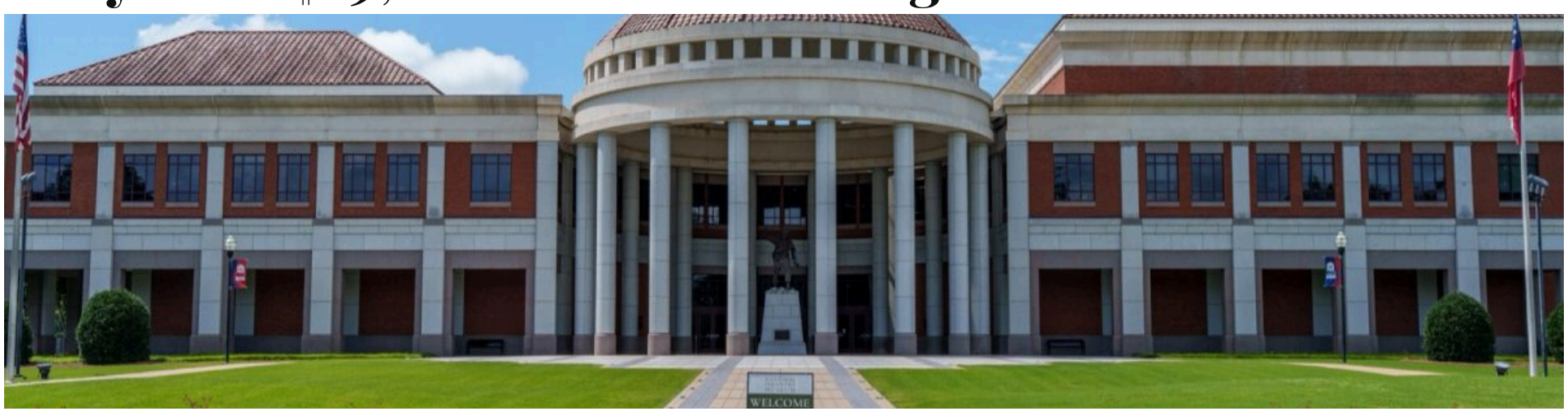
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INSIDE Bicycle Columbus grant, A2 Voter ID guide, A4 Jobs and gas, A5 Restaurant scores, A6 Things to do, A7 History, A8

VETERANS

Columbus Has 17,377 Veterans: 1 in 8 Adults Served, and They Earn $19,000 More Than Neighbors



The National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center outside Fort Benning, July 2026 (file photo). HUBCAPP / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY 4.0)

BY MARK G

COLUMBUS, Ga. — Muscogee County is home to an estimated 17,377 military veterans, representing 11.9% of its civilian adult population, or about 1 in 8 adults. Those veterans have a median annual income of $50,863, which is $19,230 higher than the $31,633 median for county residents who never served. The figures come from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2024 American Community Survey and offer a detailed look at the people who served in the military and now call Columbus home.

With Veterans Day approaching Wednesday, Nov. 11, the data provides a way to understand the county's veteran population beyond its overall size. Columbus has a larger share of veterans than Georgia, Florida or the nation as a whole. The numbers also show differences in age, income, poverty and disability that reveal a more complicated picture of veterans' economic circumstances.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/452***

SAFER STREETS

Bicycle Columbus Gets $82,502 State Grant for Bike and Walking Safety Programs



The Fall Line Trace at its Mile 4 marker in Columbus, on the stretch between Columbus State University and Interstate 185 (file photo). MCCUNICANO / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY-SA 4.0)

BY PETRA GERTJEGERDES

COLUMBUS, Ga. — Bicycle Columbus has received an $82,502.50 grant from the Governor's Office of Highway Safety (GOHS) to support bicycle and pedestrian safety programs in Columbus. The funding will help the organization distribute educational and safety materials, assess walking and bicycling conditions, organize family-friendly group rides and work with community partners to make streets safer. The grant covers the period from Oct. 1, 2026, through Sept. 30, 2027, according to an Oct. 16 news release from Bicycle Columbus.

The award continues a partnership between Bicycle Columbus and the state agency, which works to reduce traffic crashes, deaths and injuries through public education and highway safety programs. Bicycle Columbus will use the money for activities that encourage safer travel for people who walk and ride bicycles. The grant also supports the organization's broader efforts to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists throughout Columbus.

GRANT WILL SUPPORT SAFETY EVENTS AND STREET AUDITS

Under the grant, Bicycle Columbus will organize community events where participants can receive educational information and safety materials. The organization also plans to conduct audits of pedestrian and bicycle conditions, an activity that aligns with its mission of advocating for better walking and bicycling environments. Family-friendly group bicycle rides and partnerships with community organizations will provide additional opportunities to promote street safety.

The planned activities build on work Bicycle Columbus already conducts in the community. Each year, the organization hosts several events, including free bicycle maintenance clinics and Ride with the Mayor. The new funding will support its continuing efforts to reach residents through education, organized rides and community partnerships.

Allen Poole, director of the Governor's Office of Highway Safety, emphasized the importance of cooperation among organizations working to improve roadway safety. "The Governor's Office of Highway Safety continues to work with state and local agencies to develop innovative projects and campaigns that are designed to save lives and protect everyone traveling on Georgia's roads and highways." Poole also reminded drivers that obeying traffic rules helps protect themselves and others, allowing people to return home safely to their families.

The state agency focuses on educating the public about safe driving behaviors and supporting highway safety campaigns and programs. Its mission includes reducing crashes and eliminating deaths and injuries on Georgia roads. By providing funding to organizations such as Bicycle Columbus, GOHS supports local efforts that share those safety objectives.

BICYCLE COLUMBUS EXPANDS ITS MISSION AND STAFF

Bicycle Columbus was founded in 2012 with a mission centered on promoting safe bicycling and improving conditions for people who travel by bicycle. Its work includes encouraging bicycling for transportation and recreation while advocating for safer streets. In 2024, the organization expanded its mission to place additional emphasis on pedestrian safety and the needs of people who walk.

The organization operated entirely through volunteer efforts for more than a decade after its founding. In July 2026, Bicycle Columbus hired its first executive director, marking a change from its previously all-volunteer structure. With full-time staffing now in place, the group is looking toward continued growth while maintaining its focus on walking and bicycling safety.

Stacy Roberts, executive director of Bicycle Columbus, said the partnership with GOHS supports a shared objective of eliminating traffic deaths. "Bicycle Columbus and GOHS are committed to the same goal of zero traffic fatalities. By maintaining this partnership with GOHS, we will be able to continue working toward this goal by utilizing the Safe System Approach." The statement connects the organization's continued partnership with the state to its long-term safety goals.

STATE FUNDING SUPPORTS LOCAL SAFETY WORK

The grant provides Bicycle Columbus with financial support for a combination of education, community activities and assessments of local walking and bicycling conditions. Those efforts reflect the organization's expanded mission, which now addresses both pedestrian and bicycle safety. The planned partnerships also give Bicycle Columbus opportunities to work alongside other community organizations seeking safer streets.

The Governor's Office of Highway Safety administers programs and campaigns aimed at improving roadway safety across Georgia. Residents seeking additional information about the grant program can contact GOHS at 404-656-6996 or visit gahighwaysafety.org. The $82,502.50 grant awarded to Bicycle Columbus covers the funding year beginning Oct. 1, 2026, and ending Sept. 30, 2027.

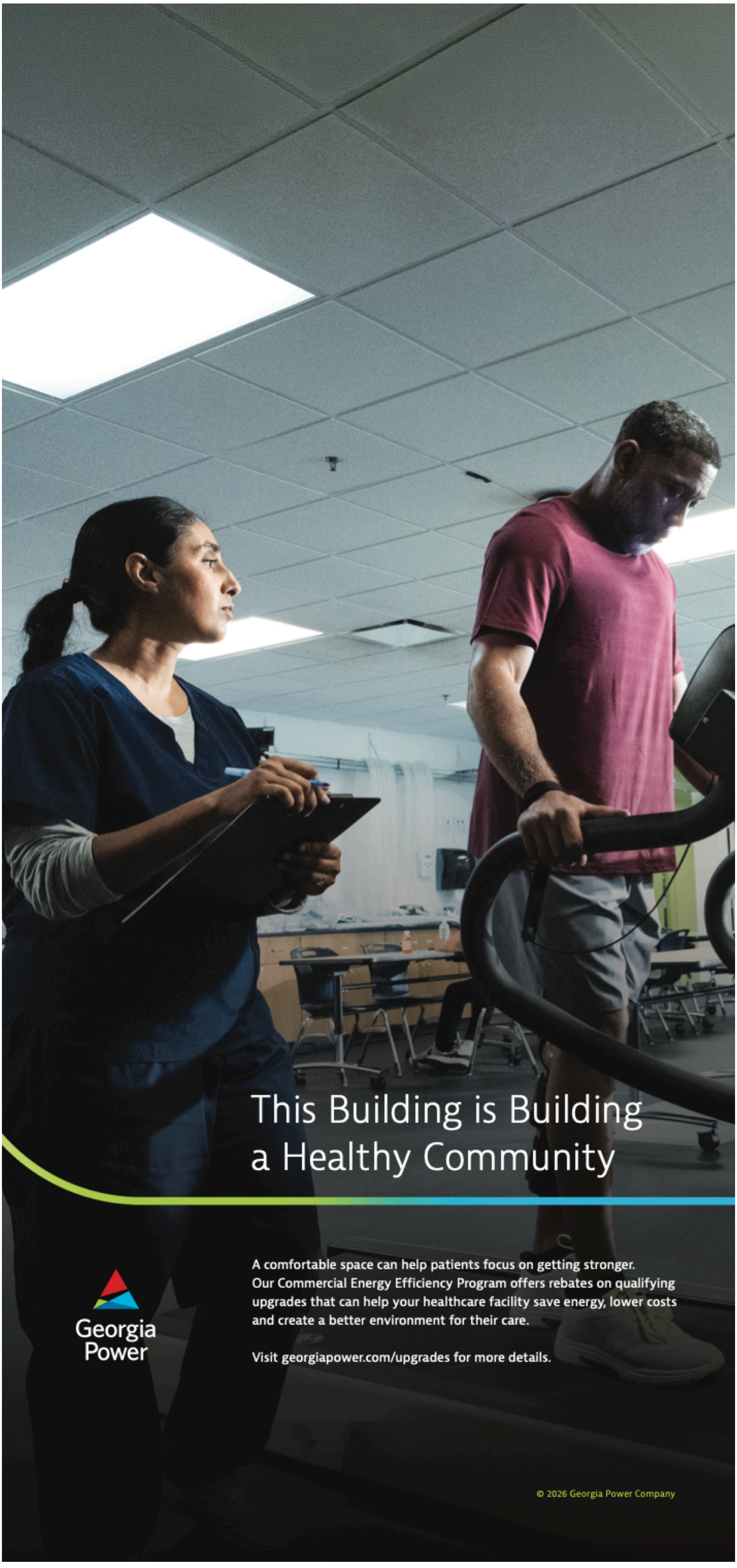
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ELECTION 2026

Georgia Voter ID on Nov. 3: The 7 Accepted IDs, the Free Voter Card and What Happens Without One

BY EMIL GERTJEGERDES

COLUMBUS, Ga. — Georgia voters who cast a ballot in person on Tuesday, Nov. 3, must show a photo ID, and the Georgia Secretary of State lists seven kinds of ID that count. Voters who don't have one can get a free Georgia voter ID card at the Muscogee County Elections and Registration Office or a Department of Driver Services office. A voter who shows up without ID can still cast a provisional ballot, but it counts only if the voter gets a copy of a valid photo ID to the county registrar within three days of the election.

The rules come from Georgia law, O.C.G.A. 21-2-417, and from guidance posted by the Secretary of State and the Muscogee County elections office. Nov. 3 is the date of Georgia's general and special election. Here are the answers to 10 common questions about voter ID and the related deadlines.

1. WHAT PHOTO IDS DOES GEORGIA ACCEPT?

The Secretary of State lists seven acceptable forms of photo ID for voting in person. They are any valid state or federal government-issued photo ID, including a free ID card from a county registrar or the Department of Driver Services; a Georgia driver's license, even if it has expired; a student ID from a Georgia public college or university; a valid employee photo ID from the federal government, the state, or a Georgia county, city, board, authority or other public entity; a valid U.S. passport; a valid U.S. military photo ID; and a valid tribal photo ID. The Muscogee County elections page lists six of these and leaves out the student ID, so this guide follows the Secretary of State's list of seven.

2. DOES AN EXPIRED GEORGIA DRIVER'S LICENSE COUNT?

Yes, it does, according to the Secretary of State. The state's list says a Georgia driver's license is accepted "even if expired." The other IDs on the list, such as a passport or a military ID, must be valid.

3. WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE ANY OF THOSE IDS?

Georgia offers a free voter ID card. The Secretary of State says it is issued at no cost at any county registrar's office or Department of Driver Services office, and the Muscogee County Elections and Registration Office provides it in Columbus. The card stays valid as long as the person lives in the same county and remains qualified to vote.

4. WHAT DO I NEED TO BRING TO GET THE FREE CARD?

The Secretary of State lists four kinds of documents. They are a photo identity document, or an approved non-photo identity document, that shows your full legal name and date of birth; documentation showing your date of birth; evidence that you are a registered voter in Georgia; and documentation showing your name and home address. The Muscogee County elections office lists the same four requirements.

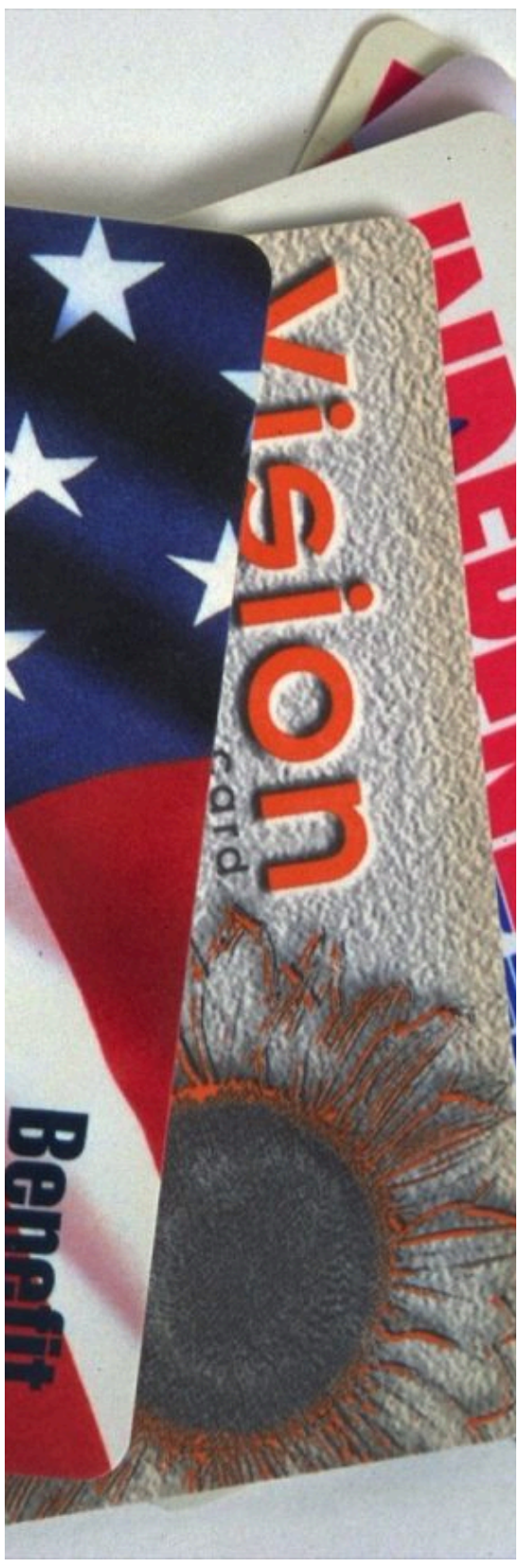
5. WHAT HAPPENS IF I GET TO THE POLLS WITHOUT AN ID?

The Secretary of State says a voter who has time to find a valid photo ID and come back can vote normally. If not, the voter can cast a provisional ballot after affirming that he or she is the voter on the voter roll. That provisional ballot counts only if the voter provides a copy of a valid photo ID to the county registrar's office.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/508***

GEORGIA

Georgia Got $15 of Every $100 in Food Stamp Benefits Wrong, 4th-Worst in U.S., as New Law Raises Stakes



State EBT benefit cards (file photo). Georgia's SNAP payment error rate was 15.21% in fiscal 2025, the 4th-highest among states. KEN HAMMOND / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (PUBLIC DOMAIN)

BY MARK G

COLUMBUS, Ga. - Georgia recorded a 15.21% error rate in food stamp payments during fiscal year 2025, the fourth-highest rate among the 50 states, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That means roughly $15 of every $100 in benefits was paid incorrectly, either because recipients received too much or too little. A new federal law could eventually require Georgia to cover 15% of food stamp benefit costs if its error rate remains at 10% or higher.

The stakes are substantial for a program that provided $3.51 billion in benefits to Georgia residents during fiscal year 2025. Under the new law, states with higher error rates must pay a larger share of benefits beginning in coming years. Georgia's particularly high error rate also qualifies it for a delayed start under the law's provisions.

WHAT THE ERROR RATE MEANS (AND WHAT IT DOES NOT)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly called SNAP or food stamps, helps eligible households purchase food. USDA measures payment accuracy by reviewing whether states correctly determine eligibility and calculate monthly benefit amounts. Errors include both overpayments, when households receive more than they should, and underpayments, when they receive less.

A payment error does not mean fraud. Errors commonly occur because a state agency or household makes a mistake when reporting information, determining eligibility or calculating benefits. For fiscal year 2025, USDA counted payment differences exceeding a $57 tolerance threshold when calculating error rates. The measure tracks accuracy, not intent, which is why underpayments count as errors too.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/424***

HOW TO

How to Get a Columbus Library Card in 5 Steps: Free for 4 Counties, $50 for Everyone Else



Shelves at a public library (file photo). STEVE LYON / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY-SA 2.0)

BY EMIL GERTJEGERDES

COLUMBUS, Ga. — A library card from the Chattahoochee Valley Libraries is free for anyone who lives in or owns property in Muscogee, Chattahoochee, Marion or Stewart counties, and for students and educators who attend school or work there. Everyone else can get a full-access card for $50 a year per household. Signing up takes a valid photo ID and, if the ID doesn't show your current address, proof of where you live.

The library system runs seven branches, two bookmobiles and two automated 24-hour library kiosks, according to its website. It is owned and operated by the Muscogee County School District but has its own board of directors. Here is how to get a card, what it costs and what it gets you.

STEP 1: CHECK WHETHER THE CARD IS FREE FOR YOU

Free cards go to residents and property holders of the library's four-county service area, which covers Muscogee, Chattahoochee, Marion and Stewart counties. Students and educators who attend school or work in that area also qualify for a free card. Anyone outside those groups can still get a full-access card for $50 a year per household, according to the library system.

STEP 2: GATHER YOUR ID AND PROOF OF ADDRESS

The library asks for a valid photo ID to register for a card. If the ID does not show your current address, you will also need proof of address. When an adult signs up a child, only the adult guarantor has to provide ID, and the guarantor can choose full access or child and teen materials only.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/521***

EDUCATION

Columbus State University by the Numbers: 7,690 Students, a 1958 Start in a Hosiery Mill and 4 Campuses



The entrance to Columbus State University's main campus. DEUTSCHLANDREFORM / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY-SA 3.0)

BY MARK G

COLUMBUS, Ga. - Columbus State University started in an old hosiery mill with about 300 students, and today it enrolls nearly 7,700. The university has grown from a two-year college into the only four-year institution in the governor's 17-county Economic Region 5, with campuses in midtown Columbus, Uptown and along the Chattahoochee River. Here is a look at CSU by the numbers, from its founding to its newest enrollment and graduation data.

The idea is older than the school itself. The Columbus Chamber of Commerce first proposed a junior college for the city in 1949. It took nine more years before the college opened its doors.

1958: A HOSIERY MILL ON TALBOTTON ROAD

Columbus College opened in 1958 in the renovated Shannon Hosiery Mill on Talbotton Road. It started with 14 faculty members, five administrative staff members and almost 300 students. Classes were held in the converted mill for five years while a permanent campus was built.

In 1963, the college moved to a newly built campus in midtown on land that had been a dairy farm. The new campus opened with four buildings. That site is still the heart of CSU.s main campus today.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/416***

JOBS

Columbus Unemployment Rose to 4.4% in September as Metro Lost 600 Jobs From August



A “Help Wanted” sign along a Nebraska road (file photo). BRADLEY WEBER / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY 2.0)

BY EMIL GERTJEGERDES

COLUMBUS, Ga. — Muscogee County's unemployment rate rose to 4.4% in September 2026, up from 4.2% in August and 4.2% a year earlier, according to preliminary figures from the Georgia Department of Labor. The Columbus metropolitan area also lost approximately 600 payroll jobs from August, although its job count remained about 500 higher than in September 2025. The figures show that unemployment increased even as the number of employed residents grew during the month.

The county had 3,677 unemployed residents in September, compared with 3,488 in August and 3,432 in September 2025. Its labor force expanded to 84,362 people, an increase of 546 from August and 2,164 from a year earlier. The county's unemployment rate stood 0.9 percentage point above Georgia's not-seasonally-adjusted rate of 3.5%.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES IN SEPTEMBER 2026

The Georgia Department of Labor released its September labor force estimates for all areas on Oct. 22, 2026. The county and metropolitan figures are not seasonally adjusted, meaning they have not been adjusted for regular seasonal employment patterns. The table compares September with August and the same month a year earlier, with changes expressed in percentage points.

Source: Georgia Department of Labor and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. All rates in this table are not seasonally adjusted. Changes are calculated in percentage points.

MUSCOGEE COUNTY LABOR FORCE GREW BY 546 PEOPLE

Muscogee County's labor force increased from 83,816 in August to 84,362 in September, according to the Georgia Department of Labor. The number of employed residents also rose, climbing from 80,328 to 80,685, a gain of 357. However, the number of unemployed residents increased by 189, resulting in the county's higher unemployment rate.

Compared with September 2025, the county had 2,164 additional people in its labor force and 1,919 more employed residents. The unemployed population increased by 245 over the same period, from 3,432 to 3,677. Those changes pushed the unemployment rate from 4.2% to 4.4%, an increase of 0.2 percentage point.

The department's separate city table lists Columbus with the same September figures as Muscogee County. It reports a labor force of 84,362, employment of 80,685 and unemployment of 3,677. The city unemployment rate is also listed at 4.4%.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/503***

COLUMBUS AIRPORT

Columbus Airport Could Get Air-Taxi Landing Pad and Charger Under $2.2 Million Plan

BY MARK G

COLUMBUS, Ga. — Columbus Airport could get a dedicated landing facility for electric air taxis and an electric aircraft charging station under a $2.2 million project going before Columbus Council on Tuesday, Oct. 27. The proposal would add an airside electric charging station and a vertiport designed for electric vertical takeoff and landing aircraft, commonly called eVTOL aircraft. Council members are scheduled to consider an agreement with the Columbus Airport Commission at their 5:30 p.m. meeting.

The project is part of an effort to prepare Columbus for Advanced Air Mobility, a developing transportation system focused on moving passengers and cargo at low altitudes. City officials envision the airport becoming a regional hub for electric aircraft that could serve urban and suburban areas. However, the proposal does not identify an aircraft operator, announce passenger service or establish a construction schedule.

WHAT THE $2.2 MILLION WOULD BUILD

The proposed agreement would authorize the city and Columbus Airport Commission to move forward with two pieces of infrastructure. The first is an airside electric charging station intended to support electric aircraft operations. The second is a dedicated vertiport, a facility designed to accommodate aircraft that take off and land vertically.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/478***



Columbus Airport seen from the air to the west (file photo). MCCUNICANO / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY-SA 4.0)

TRAVEL

Fly From Columbus or Drive to Atlanta? $9-a-Day Parking, 1 Airline and What Each Trip Really Costs

BY EMIL GERTJEGERDES

COLUMBUS, Ga. - Every Columbus traveler eventually faces the same question: fly out of Columbus Airport or make the drive to Atlanta. Columbus has one airline and one destination, but parking is a fraction of the price and the lines are short. Here is how the two options compare on parking, flights, shuttles and total cost.

The gap between the two airports is about 100 miles of interstate. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport is reached from Columbus by Interstate 185 and Interstate 85, a drive that usually takes about an hour and a half without traffic. The Delta flight from Columbus to Atlanta covers 82 miles and takes just under an hour.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/417***

GAS PRICES THIS WEEK

Area	Regular
Columbus metro	$3.56
Muscogee County	$3.53
Harris County	$3.68
Chattahoochee County	$3.73
Russell County, Ala.	$3.82
Lee County, Ala.	$3.76

CHEAPEST POSTED PUMP PRICES

RaceTrac, 4399 Victory Drive, Columbus	$3.49
RaceTrac, 3423 MLK Jr Pkwy, Phenix City	$3.69
RaceTrac, 1901 Marvyn Pkwy, Opelika	$3.67

AAA averages and RaceTrac posted prices as of Thursday, Oct. 29. Prices change daily.

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RESTAURANT INSPECTIONS

Columbus Restaurants Got 8 C Grades in 2026, 4 Times Last Year: The Lowest Inspection Scores So Far



Cooks in a restaurant kitchen in 1954 (file photo). SEATTLE MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY 2.0)

BY MARK G

COLUMBUS, Ga. — Columbus restaurants received eight C grades during the first 10 months of 2026, four times the two C grades recorded during the same period last year. The average restaurant inspection score also declined to 96.48, compared with 97.13 in 2025, according to the Columbus Times restaurant inspection database. The figures cover 1,151 inspections in Muscogee County through Oct. 26.

The database, available at columbustimes.com/restaurants, uses Georgia Department of Public Health food service inspection records. Restaurants received 90 B grades, eight C grades and no U grades during the 2026 reporting period. Despite the increase in lower grades, inspectors awarded 587 perfect scores of 100, representing 51.0% of all inspections, according to Columbus Times calculations.

HOW GEORGIA GRADES RESTAURANTS

Georgia uses a numerical scoring system that assigns restaurants a letter grade based on their inspection results. An A represents a score of 90 to 100, a B covers 80 to 89, a C covers 70 to 79, and a U represents 69 or below. Restaurants generally undergo inspections twice a year, while establishments receiving a C or U receive a follow-up inspection.

An inspection provides a snapshot of conditions during a particular visit rather than a complete picture of a restaurant's operations over time. Inspectors may identify problems that restaurants correct during the same inspection, and many violations are resolved before the inspector leaves. The latest inspection scores are especially important when reviewing older C grades because subsequent visits can produce different results.

8 RESTAURANTS RECEIVED C GRADES IN 2026

Eight inspections resulted in C grades between Jan. 2 and Oct. 26, 2026, according to the Columbus Times database. The lowest score was 70 at Chef Lee's Peking Restaurant, followed by two restaurants that received scores of 72. Six of the eight restaurants subsequently earned higher grades, one remained at a C as its latest recorded inspection, and the remaining restaurant improved from a C to a B.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/501***

GUEST COLUMN

As pink ribbons come down, keep paying attention to your breast health

Don't wait for a lump: Routine screening, knowing your body and family conversations save lives

BY DR. MAESHA TWYNER



Dr. Maesha Twyner COURTESY OF DR. MAESHA TWYNER

Every October, pink ribbons go up on storefronts, jerseys, and coffee cups across America. By the end of this week, most of them will come down. Breast cancer does not take the rest of the year off, and neither should we.

As a board-certified OB-GYN, I spend much of my day talking with patients about their health. One common misconception I hear is a lump being the only warning sign of breast cancer. A lump matters, absolutely. It is not the whole story, however, and waiting for one to appear is no plan.

The best way to lower your risk of dying from breast cancer is detecting it long before you ever feel a symptom. Routine screening makes this possible. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends women at average risk get a mammogram every other year starting at age 40 and continuing through age 74. Many women choose annual screening, and most insurers must cover annual mammograms beginning at 40. Your doctor can help choose a schedule fitting your personal health history.

Screening also happens in the exam room. Many women think of their annual visit strictly as "the Pap smear," but a well-woman exam includes a comprehensive clinical breast exam. Examining a patient involves looking at skin texture and symmetry, checking for nipple changes, and feeling lymph nodes under the arms. Crucially, each visit offers an opportunity to show patients what normal feels like for them.

You can also take action at home without medical expertise by simply knowing your baseline. Every so often, stand in front of a mirror and look closely. Notice if one breast appears larger or different in shape than before. Pay attention to skin dimpling, thickening, altered texture, unexplained itching, redness, or tenderness along the sides of your breasts and under your arms.

Notice a change? You do not have to diagnose it. Finding answers is my job. Come in for an evaluation, even with a normal mammogram result from a month or two ago. A negative screening result should never cause us to ignore a new physical change, regardless of age, size, or shape.

This rule applies to men, too. Male breast cancer is rare, often linked to an inherited genetic variation, but men have breast tissue and can develop the disease. Any man noticing a lump, skin change, or nipple discharge should alert his primary care doctor immediately.

Urgency around this work remains personal for many families I serve. The American Cancer Society estimates about 42,140 women in the United States will die of breast cancer this year. Burden varies significantly across communities. Black women face the highest breast cancer mortality rate of any racial or ethnic group, roughly 40% more likely to die from the disease than white women despite a slightly lower overall incidence. Prioritizing early detection and equitable care remains one of our most powerful tools to close this gap.

Finally, consider a conversation many families avoid: sharing a cancer diagnosis. Keeping medical news private is an understandable instinct, yet your diagnosis offers vital health information for sisters, daughters, sons, parents, and cousins.

Hereditary cancer testing becomes more accessible every day, making knowledge of your family tree vital. A relative carrying an inherited gene variant or receiving a breast cancer diagnosis may qualify family members for earlier screenings, specialized diagnostics, or genetic counseling. Documented family history helps ensure insurance coverage for higher-level tests. Speaking openly gives loved ones a fair chance to catch cancer early or prevent it altogether.

As Breast Cancer Awareness Month ends, please make three simple commitments: schedule your well-woman exam and stay current on mammograms, pay attention to your body to notice subtle changes early, and talk openly with your family about cancer history across generations. The ribbons will come down this week. Habits saving lives must stay.

Dr. Maesha Twyner, MD, MPH, is a board-certified OB-GYN dedicated to patient-centered women's healthcare at The Healthy Woman OB-GYN in Conyers, Ga. Her background in public health shapes her commitment to early detection, genetic risk education, and closing gaps in maternal and preventative care.

RESTAURANT INSPECTIONS THIS WEEK

LOWEST SCORES

Restaurant	Date	Score
Players 1500 54th St.	Oct 26	**88 B**
AC Hotel - Columbus 1225 Broadway	Oct 27	**88 B**
El Carrizo 6575 Whittlesey Blvd 6575 Whittlesey Blvd. Bldg C	Oct 27	**88 B**
New China Express 6361 Talokas Lane Suite C 190	Oct 28	**88 B**

PERFECT SCORES (100), INCLUDING SCHOOL AND CARE-HOME KITCHENS

Blanchard Elementary School; Forrest Road Elementary School; Jordan High School; Tipsy Bar & Grill; Stewart Community Home; Georgetown Elementary School; Wendys; West Central Georgia Regional Hospital

Georgia Department of Public Health inspections, Oct. 25-28, 2026. Inspections are snapshots of one visit. Look up any restaurant at columbustimes.com/restaurants.

LEGAL NOTICES

RFB No. 27-0015
Carpet (Annual Contract)
Due: November 18, 2026 - 2:30 PM
Chadwick Brewer, Buyer

Columbus Consolidated Government is requesting submittals for the above solicitation. Electronic responses must be submitted via OpenBids by the due date shown above.

Specifications may be obtained by visiting the webpage of the Finance Department/Purchasing Division at https://www.columbusga.gov/finance/Bid-Opportunities, notifying the respective Buyer via BidOpportunities@ColumbusGa.org or calling 706-225-4087. Bid opening information is listed on page 1 of the RFB document.

Andrea J. McCorvey
Purchasing Division Manager

Published: Friday, October 30, 2026

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ARTS

The Columbus Museum by the Numbers: 9 Acres, 86,000 Square Feet, a $30 Million Makeover and Free Admission



A colorful glass sculpture in the lobby of the Columbus Museum (file photo). THECOLUMBUSMUSEUM / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY 4.0)

BY EMIL GERTJEGERDES

COLUMBUS, Ga. — The Columbus Museum sits on nine acres in the Wynnton neighborhood, occupies 86,000 square feet and completed a $30 million renovation in 2024. Admission is free, making its collections of American art and Chattahoochee Valley history accessible without a ticket charge. Here is the museum by the numbers, from its grounds and building to its hours and history.

Now known as COMU, the museum at 1251 Wynnton Road traces its beginnings to a donated estate and a 1953 public opening. Its history includes a major expansion, a renewed focus on American art and regional history, and a transformation that introduced redesigned galleries and public spaces. Here is a look at the Columbus Museum through the numbers that tell its story.

1941: THE YEAR THE MUSEUM WAS CHARTERED

The Columbus Museum was chartered in 1941, more than a decade before it welcomed its first visitors. Its development centered on the former estate of Columbus business leader and philanthropist W.C. Bradley, whose family donated the property to the people of Columbus after his death in 1947. The donation established the physical home for an institution that would eventually become one of the Southeast's largest museums.

The property included a Mediterranean Revival house constructed in 1912. Workers remodeled the house for museum use while preserving its role as the central building on the estate. That residence remains part of the museum's architectural history.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/485***

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Fall Harvest Luncheon
Thu, Oct 29, 11:30 AM, W.C. Bradley Co. Museum. Free

Pretty Ricky & Plies pre show party
Fri, Oct 30, 12 AM, Jack Tent in front of the arena. Free

John D. Allen Judicial Center Ribbon Cutting Ceremony
Fri, Oct 30, 1:30 PM, John D. Allen Judicial Center. Free

Show and Tail Ebook Launch - "The melanated hair guide for at home care."
Sat, Oct 31, 1 PM, Main Squeeze, The Landings Shopping Center. Free

Fall Festival
Wed, Nov 4, 5 PM, Green Island Grocery. Free

Lunch & Lecture
Thu, Nov 5, 12 PM, OxBow Meadows

Cuff Links & Pearls
Thu, Nov 5, 7 PM, Not listed. Free

Vets Town Hall
Fri, Nov 6, 12 PM, 662 Forest Road, Salem, AL 36874. Free

Fountain City Classic Tailgate party
Fri, Nov 6, 1:20 PM, Columbus Civic Center

Fountain City Classic Parade
Sat, Nov 7, 9 AM, Downtown Columbus. Free

Mosaic Lamp & Ceramic Painting Workshop in Columbus, GA
Sat, Nov 7, 10 AM, Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites-Columbus At Northlake

Fountain City Classic
Sat, Nov 7, 2 PM, A.J. McClung Memorial Stadium

Brunch in the Garden and Sunset in the Garden
Sun, Nov 8, 12 PM, Warehouse 9. Free

Elegance and Entertainment
Fri, Nov 13, 8 PM, Columbus Convention and Trade Center. Free

Anthony Hamilton + Leela James
Sat, Nov 14, 12 AM, Columbus Civic Center

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SCIENCE

Coca-Cola Space Science Center by the Numbers: 30 Years, $17 Million in NASA Artifacts and 4 Flight Simulators



A space shuttle mockup at NASA's Space Vehicle Mockup Facility (file photo). RAEVAZ / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (PUBLIC DOMAIN)

BY MARK G

COLUMBUS, Ga. — The Coca-Cola Space Science Center marks 30 years in 2026, with more than $17 million in NASA artifacts and four flight simulators among its attractions. The downtown Columbus facility also offers planetarium shows, a collection of Space Shuttle equipment and opportunities to learn about astronomy through telescopes and interactive exhibits. Operated by Columbus State University, the center serves university students, school groups and public visitors at 701 Front Avenue.

30 YEARS: A COLUMBUS SCIENCE CENTER SINCE 1996

The Coca-Cola Space Science Center opened in 1996, making 2026 its 30th year. According to its website, it is Georgia's only science center and museum facility dedicated to astronomy and space science experiences for students and the public. The center operates as a division of Columbus State University, serving both as an academic enrichment center and a regional informal education institution.

The center's mission includes inspiring and educating future scientists, engineers, science educators and communicators. Its activities connect public education with university coursework, research and student employment. That combination gives the facility responsibilities beyond operating a museum and offering public exhibits.

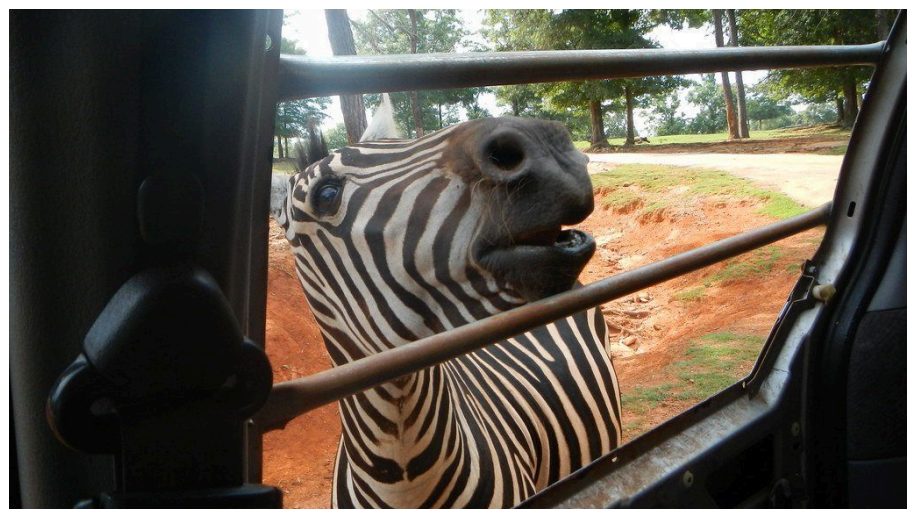
$17 MILLION: NASA ARTIFACTS IN THE EXHIBIT GALLERY

The center's exhibit gallery contains more than $17 million in NASA artifacts from the Space Shuttle program. According to the center, its collection is the most extensive collection of Space Shuttle artifacts in Georgia. Visitors can explore equipment from the shuttle program through gallery displays and staff-led tours.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/520***

DAY TRIP

Wild Animal Safari by the Numbers: 500 Acres, 600 Animals and a 3.5-Mile Drive 40 Minutes From Columbus



A zebra leans toward a car window on the Wild Animal Safari drive-through. CURTIS ABERT / FLICKR (CC BY 2.0)

BY EMIL GERTJEGERDES

PINE MOUNTAIN, Ga. - About 40 minutes north of Columbus, zebras, bison and camels walk up to car windows looking for a snack. Wild Animal Safari, at 1300 Oak Grove Road in Pine Mountain, lets visitors drive their own vehicles through pastures of free-roaming animals and then walk through a zoo-style section on foot. The drive-through has been open since 1991, and the whole visit is covered by one general admission ticket.

The park is owned by Parks! America Inc., a small public company that runs three regional safari parks. Its Georgia property was the company's first acquisition and is its largest by acreage, according to its annual filings with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. The other two are in Strafford, Mo., and the Bryan-College Station area of Texas.

THE LAND AND THE ANIMALS

The park sits on a 200-acre portion of a 500-acre property about 75 miles southwest of Atlanta, according to the company's fiscal 2025 annual report. The park's website describes more than 250 acres of trails, and local tourism listings often give the 500-acre total. Most of the animals roam in open habitat rather than behind fences.

The company counts about 600 animals, birds and reptiles representing about 55 species. The park's website lists more than 400 animals along the drive-through and more than 50 species in its walk-through zoo. Species named on the website include giraffes, plains zebras, blue wildebeest, dromedary camels, European fallow deer, common eland, North American bison, llamas, scimitar-horned oryx and pot-bellied pigs.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/434***

HISTORY

The Battle of Columbus: The April 16, 1865, Night Fight a Week After Lee Surrendered



The Dillingham Street Bridge over the Chattahoochee River in Columbus, near the 1865 battle's bridge crossings (file photo). MCCUNICANO / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY-SA 4.0)

BY MARK G

COLUMBUS, Ga. — On April 16, 1865, Union cavalry attacked Confederate defenses across the Chattahoochee River in a battle that continued into the night, exactly one week after Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox. The Battle of Columbus, also called the Battle of Girard, took place on Easter Sunday in Columbus, Georgia, and Russell County, Alabama. Union commander James H. Wilson did not know about Lee's April 9 surrender when his cavalry reached the city.

The fighting became one of the final significant battles of the Civil War and brought destruction to Columbus, a major Confederate manufacturing center. Confederate forces defended the Alabama side of the river, attempting to prevent Union soldiers from crossing two covered bridges into Georgia. The battle ended with Union troops capturing Columbus and destroying much of the city's wartime industrial infrastructure.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/502***

LANDMARKS

Columbus Iron Works: How an 1853 Foundry Made Confederate Guns, Survived 2 Fires and Became a Trade Center



The restored Columbus Iron Works buildings, now the Columbus Iron Works Convention and Trade Center (file photo). FARRAGUTFUL / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY-SA 4.0)

BY EMIL GERTJEGERDES

COLUMBUS, Ga. — The Columbus Iron Works began in 1853 as a foundry serving a growing industrial city, became a major Confederate military manufacturer during the Civil War and survived two devastating fires before its historic building became the Columbus GA Convention & Trade Center. Its history stretches from steamboat repairs and weapons production to commercial ice machinery, Char-Broil outdoor cookers and the meetings and events that now fill the former industrial site. Here is how the Iron Works changed over more than 170 years, chapter by chapter.

The brick building along the Chattahoochee River remains one of downtown Columbus' most recognizable historic structures. Its industrial history spans more than a century of manufacturing, rebuilding and adapting to changing markets. In 1969, the federal government recognized that legacy by adding the Columbus Iron Works to the National Register of Historic Places.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/487***

SPORTS

Fountain City Classic by the Numbers: 35 Games, a 27-8 Edge and the Most Memorable Moments



An HBCU football rivalry game in a packed Southern stadium (AI-generated illustration, not the actual Fountain City Classic). ILLUSTRATION: AI-GENERATED (GEMINI)

BY MARK G

COLUMBUS, Ga. — When Fort Valley State and Albany State kick off at A.J. McClung Memorial Stadium on Saturday, Nov. 7, it will be the **36th Fountain City Classic** and the **92nd meeting** between the two Georgia HBCU rivals. Here's the rivalry by the numbers.

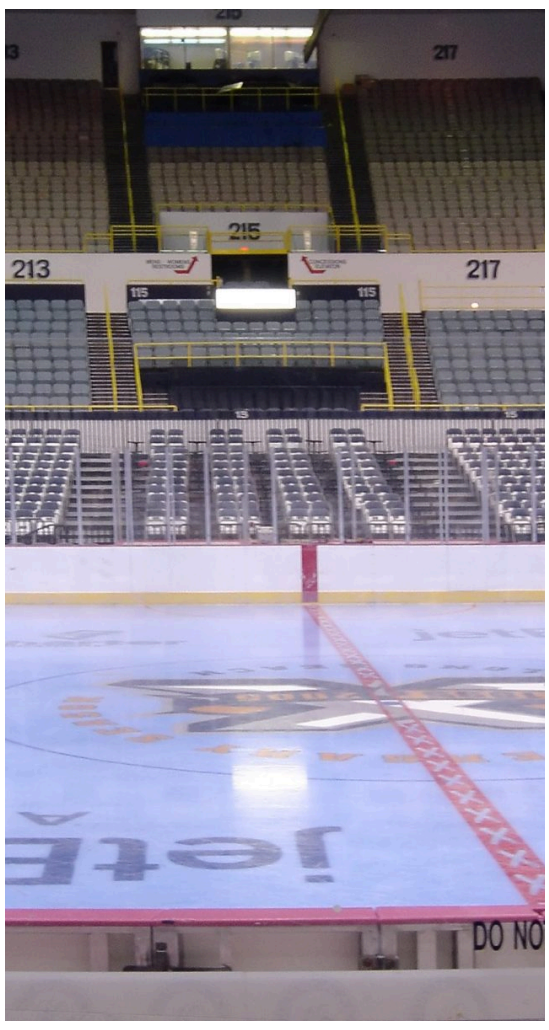
WHO LEADS? IT DEPENDS ON WHERE YOU START COUNTING

In the Classic era (since the game moved to Columbus in 1990): Albany State leads 27-8.; All time (going back to 1924): Fort Valley State leads 45-42-4.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/480***

HOCKEY

Columbus River Dragons 2026-27: 28 Home Games at the Civic Center, a Thanksgiving Eve Game and the Dates to Know



A minor league hockey game at the Long Beach Arena in California in 2004 (file photo). MARK6MAUNO / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY-SA 2.0)

BY EMIL GERTJEGERDES

COLUMBUS, Ga. - Hockey is back at the Columbus Civic Center. The Columbus River Dragons opened their home schedule this weekend, Oct. 23 and 24, against the Binghamton Black Bears, the three-time defending champions of the Federal Prospects Hockey League. The team will play 28 home games this season, with the regular season running through mid-April.

The River Dragons play a balanced 56-game schedule, with 28 games at home and 28 on the road. The season opened on the road with two games against the Blue Ridge Bobcats in Wytheville, Virginia, on Oct. 16 and 17. The regular season ends with two games at Twin City on April 16 and 17.

THE LEAGUE AND THE DIVISION

The FPHL has 17 teams this season, split into two conferences and four divisions. Columbus plays in the Western Conference's Delta Division with the Mid-South, Monroe and Baton Rouge teams. Half of Columbus' schedule, 28 of 56 games, comes against those three division rivals.

Full story: ***columbustimes.com/story/414***

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