



# Signs of the times

BARRY WILLIAMS/Special

A driver on Buford Highway in Doraville can see signs in many languages, including Spanish, Korean, Chinese and Vietnamese. The Buford Highway corridor in DeKalb and Gwinnett counties is just one of metro Atlanta's many clusters of diversity.

As metro Atlanta continues to grow, clusters of diverse populations give the area a rich landscape of residents

By Clare Morris  
For *Celebrating Diversity*

Atlanta, a city that draws hundreds of newcomers every day, has not only been growing and sprawling geographically. The same magnetic forces that draw relocating residents from around the country also attract a diverse population that feels right at home in the city's array of ethnic communities.

It wasn't long ago that these communities didn't exist. But today's metro area is dotted with pockets of ethnic culture that draw newcomers who bond quickly with other immigrants who have made Atlanta their home.

Darlene Daly, the project coordinator for the Atlanta Regional Commission's Global Atlanta Snapshots, has experienced this in her own community. A transplant from the Caribbean, Daly lives in an area of Lithonia in DeKalb County populated by other families from that region of the world.

"I can tell you that many people from the Caribbean community are heavily concentrated in south DeKalb because it's where the first people from that area settled," she said. "When we first come [to the area], a lot of us try to find where other people like ourselves are associat-

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ing and gathering and we tend to settle around those areas.

"For us, the word of mouth is Stone Mountain, Lithonia and Clarkston as well. These are parts of DeKalb that are already very mixed, and close to employment centers and public transportation. Naturally, people will move to those areas first."

The trend of immigrants putting down roots in well-established ethnic neighborhoods is perhaps best seen along the Buford Highway corridor, from the northeast edge of the city line through Chamblee and Doraville, and out to the edge of Norcross in Gwinnett County.

The grapevine among newcomers establishes this area as a community where those of Asian and Hispanic descent will hear a familiar language spoken or find a favorite ethnic dish that reminds them

of home.

Within a few blocks of the busy stretch, those lonesome for home will find groceries that specialize in Vietnamese noodles, stores of imported bamboo furniture and Oriental rugs and nail and beauty salons, all mingling with the aroma of freshly-baked tortillas and the spicy scents of Thai cooking.

Plans are under way in the next two to three years to bring this melting pot of Hispanic and Asian cultures under one roof at the International Village, a mélange of stores with goods from Asia, Latin America and Mexico, to name a few. The complex, not far from DeKalb-Peachtree Airport, is also slated to have a hotel.

The southeast quadrant of DeKalb County has been a magnet for African-American newcomers, who flock to the community noted for its schools, shopping, interstate access and abundance of upscale residents.

"Particularly for the African-American community,

DeKalb has been a mecca of growth," said Leonardo McClarty, an Atlanta native who heads the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce. "It's a plus that you can move into an area where you're not in the minority but where you can find people who are your professional counterparts.

"People who come here from out of town and see this area say, 'It's all black people? It's not that way in other areas of the country.'"

McClarty believes that in the last five to seven years, south DeKalb has outpaced the long-established Cascade corridor in southwest Atlanta as the most desirable area for African-Americans.

"There's been more growth here in DeKalb because there is more land," he said. "There is new housing in neighborhoods such as Lion's Head, Sandstone Estates, Water's Edge and Deer Creek. We're starting to see more and more

executive houses — gated communities of homes from \$500,000 to \$700,000 along Evans Mill Road. More entertainers and sports figures are moving out there, along with successful business men and women.

"There is new shopping at Stonecrest Mall that is also working as a catalyst for new development along Panola Road," McClarty added. "A hospital was recently built off Hillandale Road, and we're starting to see more doctors and health-related businesses coming into the area. That's a big attraction to a professional, upwardly-mobile person who wants a nice home in an area of folks who have shared experiences."

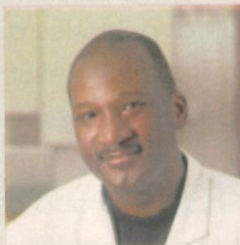
But the trend that analysts such as Daly see is more minority groups leaving their established ethnic communi-



Leonardo McClarty

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ties and spreading out into the metro area.

"For instance, along Buford Highway, many of the people and businesses concentrated in that area were the first generations who settled there," she said. "They were followed by a concentration of Asian, Chinese and Hispanics in a wave of relatives who moved to be near their families.

"But we're now beginning to see people move out away from those areas and become a bit more independent. They've assimilated and are moving out beyond those bases to places such as Conyers, Alpharetta and Gwinnett."

A good example of that transition from a cultural base into the broader community has already taken place among Atlanta's gays and lesbians. For years, the hub of the gay life was considered Midtown; today, gay singles, couples and families can be found across the city.

During several of her election campaigns, Cathy Woolard, former president of the Atlanta City Council and longtime activist for gay rights, collected data on where gay residents are most apt to live.

"I found people clustered around Decatur as well as in several precincts in south DeKalb," she said. "In fact, it's interesting that there are several precincts with the same intensity [of gay residents] as Midtown Atlanta."

Woolard, who now lives in Glenwood Park, has been in the city for about 25 years and remembers a time when Midtown was not a neighborhood where anyone wanted to live.

"There were a number of gay and drag bars that are gone now, but I think that's how Midtown became associated with the gay community," she said. "Of course, there are still plenty of gay people who live in Midtown and are part of the culture and atmosphere. It's a great place, particularly for younger people who are drawing clothing and furniture stores that clearly cater to young male homosexuals and metrosexuals."

Gay residents are also found in the suburbs, for the same reasons anyone heads there, added Woolard.

"People are looking for amenities and particularly schools," she said. "When I meet [gay] people who live farther out, it's often because they have children or need to have a different commute.

"I think it's really interesting that we're not all in Midtown anymore. The gay community exists in all areas; we're every kind of people."



Former Atlanta City Council President Cathy Woolard has seen the influence of the gay and lesbian community grow in the 25 years she has lived in Atlanta. "I think it's really interesting that we're not all in Midtown anymore. The gay community exists in all areas; we're every kind of people."



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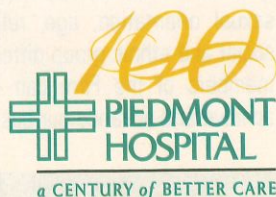
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