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WITH EXPANDED COUNTY-BY-COUNTY COVERAGE INSIDE

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TOP LOCAL STORY FALSE CONVICTION

Fulton DA's unit has 1st exoneration

Judge finds Mario Stinchcomb acted in self-defense in 2002 shooting death of Jakesha Young.

By Bill Rankin
bill.rankin@ajc.com

Mario Stinchcomb believed the truth would come out eventually. He just never thought it would take so long.

On April 14, after more than 18 years in prison, Stinchcomb walked out of custody a free man, the first person exonerated by the Fulton County District Attorney's Conviction Integrity Unit.

"It's a blessing," Stinchcomb, 40, said in an interview. "I knew one day this would be over with. I just needed someone to look at my case."

Since his release, Stinchcomb has reunited with his fiancée, Nichole Briggins, and members of his family.

"I am so happy to be out," Stinchcomb said. "This experience has been a total nightmare. I never knew when I'd see my family again."

At a 2004 trial, a jury found Stinchcomb guilty of felony murder for the Nov. 6, 2002, shooting death of Jakesha Young. Stinchcomb said that he and co-defendant Michael Woolfolk were acting in self-defense because Young was the first person to open fire.

Attorney Leigh Schrope (left) praised DA Fani Willis and the office's Conviction Integrity Unit.

The incident happened after Young got in an argument with Stinchcomb and then ran out of the second-story apartment to get her gun out of a car. Before her driver sped off, Young fired shots at Stinchcomb and Woolfolk, who both returned fire. The only bullet fired by Woolfolk before his gun jammed struck Young in the head, killing her.

After being convicted at trial, both Stinchcomb and Woolfolk were sentenced to life in prison.

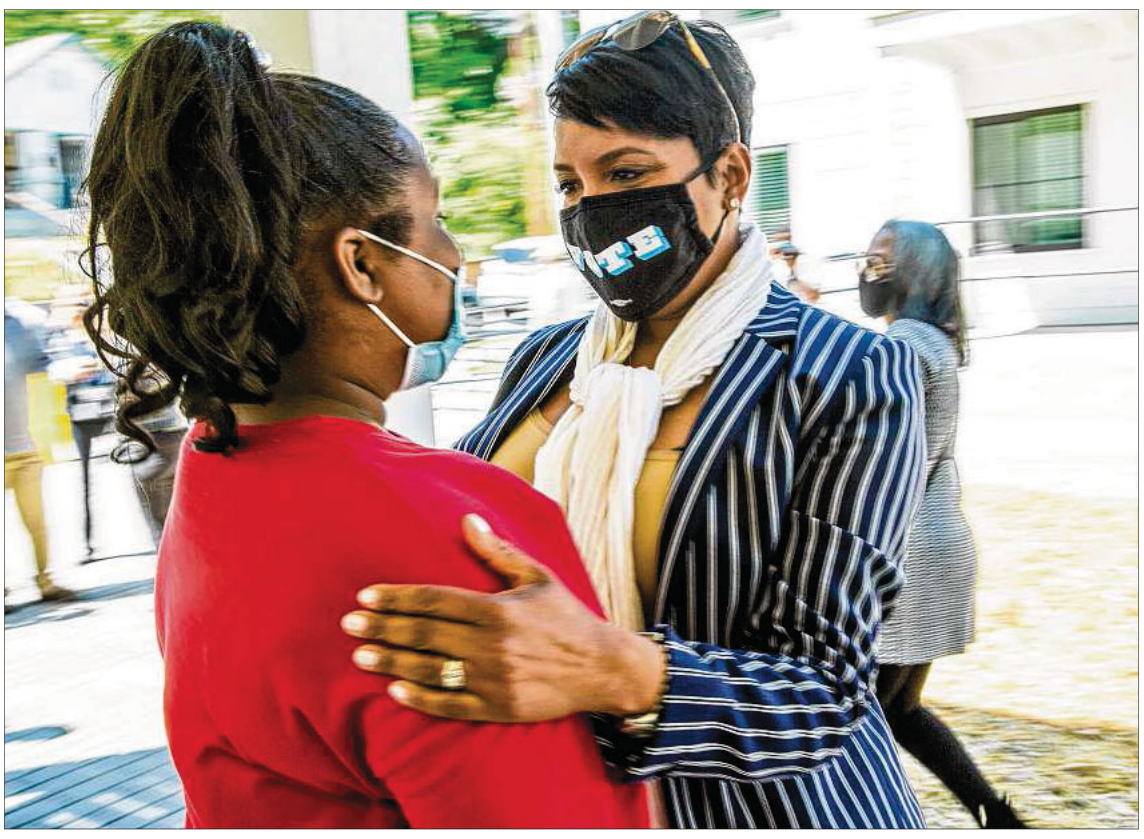
But 14 years later, Stinchcomb's lawyers found Jamario Ford, who was driving the car when Young was shot and killed. Ford did not testify at trial because Fulton prosecutors were unable to locate him.

In a sworn statement signed March 2, 2018, Ford said that when Young got her gun out of his car, she fired once at the direction of the apartment's upstairs porch. When Ford told Young he was leaving, she got in the car and fired another shot out of the window at someone on the

Stinchcomb continued on **B6**

Mario Stinchcomb, freed from prison last week after 18 years behind bars, with his fiancée, Nichole Briggins. COURTESY OF FAMILY

LOCAL IN-DEPTH WESTSIDE APARTMENTS



Ke'Avin Mincey (left), 12, gets a hug Wednesday from Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, who told her, "Let me know if you need anything," after the ribbon-cutting at an affordable apartment complex that's part of the Westside Future Fund's "Home on the Westside" initiative. JENNI GIRTMAN FOR THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

Affordable complex opens on Westside

Atlanta mayor, Westside Future Fund nonprofit hold ribbon-cutting.

By J.D. Capelouto
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What was once a collection of boarded-up buildings on Atlanta's Westside is now a community of affordable apartments designed for people with ties to the area.

Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms and the Westside Future Fund nonprofit held a ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday at the organization's newly renovated complex in the English Avenue neighborhood.

"This is what happens when you dream big," Bottoms said at the event. She made housing a centerpiece of her 2017 mayoral campaign and has pledged to put $1 billion in public and private funds toward affordable housing.

The 31 units at 395 James P. Brawley Drive are priced at $950 for the one-bedroom units to $1,350 for three-bedrooms. If tenants can't afford those rents, they only need to pay what they can based on their income, and the city will subsidize the rest. The city committed $2.13 million to the project over the next 20 years.

"It's been a long road for me and my kids," said Nicole Mincey, a new tenant at the complex. "I don't have to wander no more. I feel so good that my little ones have somewhere to play, call home."

The property underwent a $5.5 million renovation after the Westside Future Fund, a nonprofit focused on community revitalization, bought it in 2017. The three two-story buildings have balconies, green space, on-site laundry and Wi-Fi access, an upgrade from the old apartment complex, which was one of the largest in

Westside continued on **B6**

DIGGING DEEPER EARTH DAY

Students' interest in environment excites researcher

She pushes awareness to prevent a repeat of Westside lead levels.

By Tim Darnell
tim.darnell@ajc.com

The Emory professor whose research led to the discovery of lead deposits in Atlanta's Westside is now sharing her passion for environmental awareness with metro area students.

Dr. Eri Saikawa is heading up the Georgia Air Quality Challenge, an experimental design challenge, in which student finalists will be announced today, on Earth Day. The students, in grades 6-12, partner with Emory's air quality network to determine the placement of sensors in communities to fill in the gaps in Georgia's air quality data.

"We want young people to understand the importance of monitoring air quality," she said. "We also hope they learn more about sources of air pollution, who may be more vulnerable, and think about ways we might mitigate pollution."

Through local and federal funding, students received access to lessons about sources of pollution, current data for Georgia and how air sensors can measure air quality. Saikawa said more than two dozen submissions came in from schools in Fulton, DeKalb, Cherokee and Atlanta.

Eri Saikawa, associate professor of environmental sciences at Emory, found the pandemic helped her research, as more residents participated. COURTESY OF JACK KEARSE

ajc.com

Visit AJC.com for tips on how you can observe Earth Day and how the planet's health is related to your own.

This year's international Earth Day observance, themed "Restore Our Earth, features three days of streamed events, including a global youth summit held this

Environment continued on **B8**

CONTINUING COVERAGE SECRETARY OF STATE RACE

Probate judge to take on Raffensperger

T.J. Hudson resigned his Treutlen County post this week to enter race.

By Greg Bluestein
gbluestein@ajc.com

A rural judge became the latest Republican candidate to join the race to unseat Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger with a campaign that will emphasize his experience supervising local elections.

T.J. Hudson resigned as Treutlen County's probate judge this week and formally announced his race for a statewide post, joining U.S. Rep. Jody Hice and former Alpharetta Mayor David Belle Isle as candidates in the GOP primary.

"Experience matters, and I've had 17 years of election experience," T.J. Hudson said.

"Experience matters, and I've had 17 years of election experience," Hudson said. "The chief elections officer in the state of Georgia should have this type of experience."

Hudson is a long-shot contender in a contest where even the incumbent is an underdog. Hice, a four-term congressman, entered the primary in March with former President Donald Trump's endorsement, making him the favorite to oust Raffensperger in the primary.

Trump and his allies have promised to exact revenge against Raffensperger after he rejected falsehoods about widespread election fraud and defied the then-president's demand to "find" enough votes to overturn the election.

The eventual GOP nominee is likely to face a tough Democratic challenge. State Rep. Bee Nguyen, an Atlanta Democrat and outspoken advocate for expanding voting rights, is widely expected to launch a campaign for the seat.

Hudson declined to say in an interview whether he would have backed Trump's false claims of systemic voter fraud or pushed to invalidate the outcome of the state's election, which was confirmed in three separate tallies. But he said "much could have been done better" to prepare

Race continued on **B6**

OPINION

Consistently bleak statistics: 1,000 dead by police each year

Bill Torpy
Only In The AJC

For more than six years, The Washington Post has compiled data on fatal police shootings of civilians.

The project started after the case of Michael Brown, the 18-year-old Black man who was shot to death by an officer in Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014. That incident kicked off protests, the Black Lives Matter movement and much debate about policing.

With the guilty verdicts Tuesday against former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin in the killing of George Floyd, I decided to look into the Post's figures.

Since the start of 2015, the newspaper has published a disquieting annual tally – nearly 1,000 people are shot to death by police across the United States.

In 2015, the Post counted 993. The next year it was 960, then 986 in 2017. It was 990 in 2018, 999 the year after that, and 1,021 last year. And this year is on pace for 900-something deaths. It's almost like knowing it'll be 89 degrees in Atlanta on a mid-July afternoon.

This is despite studies to reimagine policing and President Barack Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. There has been training and retraining, the implementation of body cameras on police, a rush to bring more Black and brown cops onto forces. All this and ... nada.

Torpy continued on **B7**

METRO

SOUTHWEST GEORGIA

Last defendant in meth ring bust sentenced

All 79 involved have now been convicted at the federal level.

Thomasville Times-Enterprise

ALBANY — The seventy-ninth and final defendant connected to a major methamphetamine distribution ring supplying illegal drugs across the southeastern United States has been sentenced to serve 96 months in federal prison.

Kim Wesley, 48, of Nashville, Georgia, was sentenced to prison by U.S. District Judge Leslie Gardner, to be followed by eight years of supervised release.

Wesley previously pleaded guilty to one count of distribution of methamphetamine and is one of the many defendants in the 2016 Boris Fuller methamphetamine distribution wiretap investigation. All 79 defendants have been charged, convicted and sentenced at the federal level. There is no parole in the federal system.

The Grady County Sheriff's Office and Cairo Police Department assisted in the investigation in the multi-jurisdictional case.

"It was a very long investigation," said Capt. Daniel Singletary, Grady sheriff's office chief investigator.

Grady and Cairo assisted in the monitoring of wiretapping cellphone calls and texts.

Singletary said several people were arrested and search warrants executed in Cairo and unincorporated Grady County. Moultrie was the Southwest Georgia hub of the methamphetamine operation, he added.

Methamphetamine also was coming into Grady County and Florida, Singletary said.

"Everybody was working to reach a common goal to get the drugs and drug dealers off the streets, hold them accountable," the officer said.

The investigation to bring down a significant drug trafficking organization operating from a small Southwest Georgia community began four years ago, said Peter Leary, acting Middle District U.S. Attorney.

Between May 17, 2016, and Aug. 2, 2016, state and federal search warrants authorized investigators to obtain text messages and other electronic content from relevant cellphones.

"A review of the communications revealed the known leader of the methamphetamine distribution ring, Boris Fuller, 42, of Moultrie, and his co-conspirators were distributing approximately 4 pounds of methamphetamine a week to customers in Georgia, Florida, Kentucky and South Carolina," Leary said.

The communications also showed Fuller controlled a network of couriers traveling to Atlanta to acquire bulk quantities of methamphetamine.

Fuller was sentenced Oct. 26, 2018, to serve 30 years in a federal prison, to be followed by 10 years of supervised release, after pleading guilty to conspiracy to possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine.

Leary said authorities estimate an organization of 79 individuals regulated by Fuller was responsible for the distribution of more than 20 kilograms of methamphetamine in and around Moultrie from May until November 2016.

Grady County and Cairo law enforcement agencies joined the DEA, GBI, Georgia Department of Corrections, Georgia Department of Community Supervision, Mid-South Narcotics Task Force, Colquitt, Crisp, Tift, Henry, Berrien, Cook and Leon County (Florida) sheriffs' offices, Volusia County (Florida) Bureau of Investigation and Moultrie Police Department in the investigation.

Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms finishes remarks at Wednesday's ribbon-cutting at an apartment complex built for longtime Westside residents who need affordable housing. The Westside is seeing a wave of new development that threatens to drive out longtime, low-income residents. JENNI GIRTMAN FOR THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

Westside

continued from B1

the neighborhood.

"I wish we had a picture next to us of what this looked like," Bottoms said.

The mayor said she has fond memories of the area from when she was younger, including taking ballet classes at the former John F. Kennedy Middle School in Vine City.

The new community is part of the Westside Future Fund's "Home on the Westside" initiative, which preserves affordable housing for people from Westside neighborhoods, including English Avenue, Vine City, Ashview Heights and Atlanta University Center. The nonprofit, funded by public and private philanthropic sources, previously opened 150 affordable units and has more in the pipeline.

The Westside has historically suffered from a lack of public and private investment but is now seeing a wave of new development that threatens to drive out longtime, low-income residents.

The median household income in English Avenue is about $24,000, but the typical rent in metro Atlanta is as high as $1,610 per month, according to Zillow.

"What I've learned, working on the Westside, is you have lots of hardworking families and individuals," Westside Future Fund President and CEO John Ahmann said, "but they work for lower wages, and they can't sometimes afford the market rents."

Race

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local officials for the election.

"Elections officials weren't given a fair chance. There was a lack of preparation for the brand-new voting system," he said of the new voting machines that debuted in the last cycle, "and I'd do a better job of getting them prepared."

In many larger counties, full-time managers are hired to supervise elections. But in rural areas such as Treutlen, a southeast Georgia county of roughly 7,000 people, probate judges serve as the supervisor of elections and carry out other duties, such as administering wills and issuing marriage licenses.

Hudson said the broad scope of responsibilities has given him a fundamental understanding of the statewide post, which oversees Georgia's elections, grants professional licenses and maintains public records.

"I'm going to get out and let Georgians meet me and decide for themselves," Hudson said. "If they meet me, I know I'm going to be their clear choice."

Stinchcomb

continued from B1

porch, he said. Only after Ford sped away did he hear another gunshot and realize Young had been hit, his affidavit said.

Stinchcomb's lawyers filed an extraordinary motion for new trial based on Ford's statement, but a judge dismissed it. In June 2020, however, the Georgia Supreme Court reversed that decision.

Ford's statement "offered several facts that lend significant support to Stinchcomb's claim of self-defense," Justice Carla Wong McMillian wrote for a unanimous court.

With that in hand, Stinchcomb's lawyers approached the Conviction Integrity Unit overseen by Aimee Maxwell, who once headed the Georgia Innocence Project. The Fulton DA's office investigation culminated in an order signed last week by Superior Court Judge Shukura Millender granting Stinchcomb a new trial.

On Wednesday, during a virtual hearing, Millender signed an order dismissing the charges because Stinchcomb "acted in self-defense." He walked out of prison that day.

"This case is another example of an innocent person having to wait a long time for justice," said Leigh Schrope, Stinchcomb's lawyer. "We are so happy that Mr. Stinchcomb has been exonerated and that he has been reunited with his loving family."

Woolfolk, the co-defendant, remains in prison, but his lawyer is trying to get a similar result, Schrope said.

Both Stinchcomb and Schrope praised DA Fani Willis and the office's Conviction Integrity Unit, founded in 2019. The unit is helping Stinchcomb with his transition back to society by assisting him to get a new driver's license.

"They have been the greatest," Stinchcomb said. "Ms. Willis gave me a chance when she looked into it. She saw we were telling the truth."

Stinchcomb has his sights set on getting a commercial driver's license so he can drive 18-wheelers across the country, a striking difference from being confined in a prison cell for 18-plus years.

So far, it's been quite an adjustment, he said. "I've been gone for so long, a lot of things sure have changed."

OBITUARIES

In Memoriam

For more information call the Obituary desk at **404.526.5271**

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Woodstock Funeral Home; POWELL, Marian

ALICEA, Julio Ceasar

Age 61, of Marietta, passed Apr. 19, 2021. Services entrusted to Gregory B. Levett & Sons Funeral Home, Decatur, GA.

AZAR, Jacqueline Martha

Age 80, of Atlanta, passed away Apr. 16, 2021. A graveside service was held at Westview Cemetery. A.S. Turner & Sons Funeral Home and Crematory, Decatur, GA.

BROWN, Crosby

Mr. Crosby Alexander Brown, age 69, of Lithonia died April 9, 2021. Celebration of Life will be held Friday, April 23, 2021 11:00 AM at Grissom-Clark Eastlake Chapel. Interment: Georgia National Cemetery. Visitation TODAY 12 noon-5 PM at Grissom-Clark FH. Service will be live streamed at www.grissom-clarkfh.com, 404-373-3191.

DUNN, Ida Kate

Age 89, of Atlanta, GA, passed April 19, 2021, Funeral service will be held Friday, April 23, 2021, at 12 noon at Goolsby Mortuary Chapel, Atlanta, GA.

HOLLIS, Renee J.

Age 61, of Atlanta, GA, passed on April 16, 2021. Knox Funeral Home, Atlanta.

JOHNSON, Jr., William Wesley "Bill"

William "Bill" Wesley Johnson Jr, 83, of Cumming, Georgia, passed away Friday, April 16, 2021.

Bill was born May 15, 1937 in Atlanta, Georgia, the son to the late Alma Ruth and William W. Johnson Sr.

Bill attended O'Keefe High School in Atlanta, Georgia. After a brief career in the United States Army, before attending JATT Apprentice School for five years. He devoted more than 60 years as a Journeyman Plumber and was a dedicated member of the Plumbers and Steamfitters Local Union #72. During his union career, Bill served in several offices.

He enjoyed traveling, golfing, reading and socializing with friends and neighbors. Bill was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather and friend.

Along with his parents, Bill was preceded in death by his brothers Ronald and Jack Johnson and sister, Marie Johnson. William "Bill" Wesley Johnson Jr. is survived by his loving wife, Carlene; step- son, Brad Belew (Barbara), step- daughters: Toni Belew Samples and Carla Belew; brothers, Ray Johnson (Donna), and Jimmy Johnson, five grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren.

A Visitation will be held from 6-8 PM at Roswell Funeral Home on April 22, 2021. The Graveside service will held at Green Lawn Cemetery on April 23, 2021 at 11 AM.

In lieu of flowers, the family has requested that donations be made to the COPD Foundation and Christian City Children's Village in Union City, Georgia.

NELSON, Scott Brian

Scott Brian Nelson passed away on April 16, 2021, after a brief illness. A beautiful spirit beloved by his family and friends, he will be sorely missed by all who knew him. He leaves to mourn him: Parents Clara Nelson Brothers and Javon Brothers of 212 Trotters Walk, Covington, GA 30016, Sister Nicole Nelson of California, and a host of loving family members and friends. Visitation will be Saturday April 24, 2021 from noon until 3 PM, followed by a brief service at Gregory Levette & Sons Mortuary.

POWELL, Marian

Marian Hope Powell, 89, of Decatur, GA passed away April 18, 2021. Marian was born September 11, 1931 in Elizabeth, NJ to the late Lillian and Roy Brock. She grew up in Ware Shoals, SC and Due West, SC before moving to Atlanta in the 1960s.

Marian was a very strong, independent woman. Marian retired from Blue Cross Blue Shield as a claims adjuster. In her spare time, she enjoyed traveling, reading and volunteering. Marian was extremely proud of her grandchildren and was a very loving and attentive grandmother. Her family will miss her fiery spirit and quick wit.

Marian is survived by her son, Charles Scott McDonald (Laura); grandchildren, Lillian Faith McDonald and William Alexander McDonald; and siblings, Doris "Dot" Brock, Jo Ann Burdette, Donny Ray Brock, and Roy Clark Brock. She was preceded in death by husbands, Charles McDonald and Bruce Powell.

A graveside service will be on Friday, April 23, 2021 at 2:00 PM at Arlington Memorial Park, Sandy Springs, GA. In lieu of flowers, please consider making a donation in memory of Marian to the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, https://www.redeemer.org/.

TAYLOR (PIERCE), Helen

Helen Pierce Taylor, 96, of Dawsonville, GA , passed away on Saturday April 10, 2021.

She was born to the late Charles B. and Jewel James Pierce Kitchens in Eton, Murray County, GA on July 1, 1924. Helen graduated from Murray County High School, North Georgia College and Georgia State University. In 1948 she married William Morris Taylor and with husband in the U. S. Army, lived in various places, including New York, Kansas, Germany and Georgia. She also worked in Fort Myer, Virginia during World War II. Helen was a teacher in Murray County Georgia and Atlanta public schools for 25 years, retiring in 1980. After living in metro Atlanta 23 years she and Morris retired in 1982 and moved to Dawsonville, (Morris's hometown). A lifelong Methodist, Helen was active in both Grace UMC in Atlanta and Bethel UMC in Dawsonville. She was a member of many civic organizations in Dawson County where she served as a past president of the Dawson County Woman's Club, founding member of the Historical and Genealogical Society, ambassador for the Chamber of Commerce, charter member and board of directors for the Arts Council, Senior Center Advisory Council where she also delivered Meals On Wheels for 14 years, past president of Bethel UMW, Retired Educators Association, Friends of Library where she served on the Regional Library Advisory Council, AARP, United Way Board, and columnist for the local newspapers. Helen had also been honored as a STAR teach in the state of Georgia, NGCSU Distinguished Alumnus and others. She was also preceded in death by her husband, William Morris Taylor; son, Anthony "Tony" Taylor; stepfather, H. C. Kitchens; stepbrothers, J. Paul Kitchens, Robert M. Kitchens; sisters in law, Maxine Holtzclaw, Wilda Bailey; aunts, Opal Burnside, and Sue Reed.

Surviving are her granddaughter, Jillian Taylor, Toccoa brother and sisters in law, James R. and Jeannene Pierce, Dahlonega, Nancy Kitchens, Dahlonega, Erva Pirkle, Lawrenceville; and many nieces, nephews and other relatives.

A memorial service will be held Saturday April 24, 2021 at 11 o'clock at the Bethel United Methodist Church. Dr. David Sanders and Rev. Eddie Herring will officiate.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Bethel United Methodist Church Building Fund, 100 Lumpkin Campground Road South, Dawsonville, GA 30534, or to the University of North Georgia Foundation, Inc., P. O. Box 1599, Dahlonega, GA 30533.

Condolences may be expressed at www.beardenfuneralhome.com.

Bearden Funeral Home, Dawsonville, GA.

TURNER, Juanita S.

Juanita Sumner Turner, age 96 of Snellville, GA passed away Monday April 19, 2021. Juanita was born in Atlanta in 1924 and was raised in the East Atlanta neighborhood. She married Harry Turner in 1945 and they continued to live in Atlanta until 1972, before moving to Snellville. Juanita and Harry were active members of Snellville First Baptist Church. Juanita shared her husband's love and interest in raising iris. Together they participated in the Atlanta Iris Society for many years. Juanita was preceded in death by her husband, Harry Turner. She is survived by her children and spouses, Shirley Mills, Douglas Mills, and Kim Turner; her grandchild, Turner Mills; and great-grandchild, Sumner Elise Mills. A graveside service will be held on April 24, 2021 at 11:00 AM at Snellville Historical Cemetery. COVID precautions will be observed. Condolences may be sent or viewed at www.wagesfuneralhome.com. Tom M. Wages Funeral Service, A Family Company, 3705 Highway 78 West, Snellville, GA 30039 (770-979-3200) has been entrusted with the arrangements.

WHITE, Sr., Larry James

Age 66 of Atlanta, GA passed away April 15, 2021. Celebration of life April, 25, 2021 at Stone Mountain Park at 11 AM.