

Valdosta Welcomes **Mayor John Gayle**

Mayor and Four City Councilmen Sworn in, Jan. 5

It was standing room only in the Valdosta City Hall Council Chambers on Jan. 5 as Valdosta's 45th mayor was sworn into office by Superior Court Judge Richard M. Cowart.

"I'm honored to represent the Valdosta citizens as their mayor and look forward to the opportunities ahead," said Mayor Gayle. "I encourage citizens to get involved with the local government, so that together we can make this community stronger."

Also sworn in at the meeting were City Councilman Ben Norton, who was re-elected to serve At-Large; and City Councilman James Wright, District 1; City Councilman Joseph "Sonny" Vickers, District 3; and City Councilman Tim Carroll, District 5; each retaining their seats representing their respective districts.

Councilman Alvin Payton was elected by the Mayor and Council by a unanimous vote to serve his second term as the Mayor Pro Tem, fulfilling the role of mayor in the mayor's absence. Citizens may find City Council agendas and meeting minutes at the City of Valdosta website, www.valdostacity.com. Meetings are held on the first and third Thursday of each month, following the first Sunday, at 5:30 p.m., in the second floor Council Chambers of the Valdosta City Hall. For more information, contact City Hall at (229) 259-3500.



John Gayle, with his wife Peggy nearby, is sworn in as Valdosta's 45th mayor by Superior Court Judge Richard M. Cowart at the Jan. 5 Valdosta City Council meeting.

Have You Tuned in Lately?

Tune into Metro Valdosta 17, the city's government access channel on Mediacom, for the biweekly news magazine show City Focus which showcases community events, public information and the City of Valdosta. City Focus airs six times a day at 4 a.m., 7 a.m., noon, 5 p.m., 7 p.m. and 11 p.m., along with other informative programming on the channel.

The Metro Valdosta 17 office is always interested in citizen feedback. To submit a news tip or suggestion, contact Shemeeka Johnson at (229) 671-3617 or by email at scjohnson@valdostacity.com. To access the weekly program guide, visit www.valdostacity.com.



Opportunity Zone Certification

Provides Tax Credits for Local Businesses

Businesses located in any of Valdosta's designated Opportunity Zones may qualify for job tax credits that benefit the individual businesses, as well as contribute to positive growth in some of the city's underdeveloped areas.

These tax credits are offered to businesses that are certified through the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) Opportunity Zone Certification program—a program that targets community areas in need of redevelopment and revitalization. Valdosta businesses certified through the Opportunity Zone Certification program may be eligible for job tax credits of \$3,500 per eligible new job created and may use the tax credit against 100 percent of Georgia income tax liability and payroll withholding.

Baha Zeidan, owner of Azalea Health Innovations, Inc., said the program could save his company an estimated \$24,500 a year, for as long as the City of Valdosta maintains the Opportunity Zone designation. Azalea Health Innovations, Inc. is a provider in cloud-based electronic health records software, practice management software, and revenue cycle management services, with offices in downtown Valdosta—which is one of the city's designated Opportunity Zones. Zeidan recently received his certification from DCA, qualifying him to take the credits in the 2011 tax year if he meets all other criteria. Azalea Health Innovations, Inc. is responsible for creating seven new jobs in downtown Valdosta during 2011.

"As we wait for the economy to turn in our favor, we are grateful for the assistance available to us through the City of Valdosta and the Georgia Department of Community

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More Than Just an Eyesore



Litter is more than just an eyesore; it's a major contributor to stormwater pollution. When it rains, litter and other debris wash into the storm drain system, and lead to flooding or end up in area streams. In addition, litter can impair water quality and have a significant impact on the aesthetic and recreational value of our area waterways and remain there for a long time.

Did you know that cigarette butts can take up to 25 years to break down or that plastic six-pack rings can take up to 450 years? It's important that future generations have the same opportunity that we have had to enjoy our abundant waterways and wildlife. As good stewards of the environment, we need to do our part to ensure that this opportunity remains.

Please don't litter, make Valdosta glitter! Place all trash in appropriate containers and while enjoying the outdoors, remember to always leave the area just as it was when you arrived, if not better. When carrying trash and other debris in the backs of trucks, make sure the load is secure so litter will not be blown from the truck bed. Lastly, get involved in local cleanup efforts when the opportunity arises and/or lead a cleanup effort in your neighborhood.

For more information, contact the Stormwater Division at (229) 259-3530. Remember, only rain goes down the storm drain!

Opportunity Zones

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Affairs," said Zeidan. "These tax credits spur us to look for more ways to create jobs in the new year, and it also rewards us for expanding our business in parts of the community where there is a specific need for growth. We are fortunate to be able to help the community, while helping our business grow at the same time."

Opportunity Zones exist for a period of 10 years from the date of designation or for the life of the city's redevelopment plan. The City of Valdosta received its Opportunity Zone designation from DCA in 2009. This business incentive is also part of the comprehensive package offered through the Main Street Program to facilitate development in the historic downtown districts. Other incentives include low-interest loans and historic preservation tax credits.

Call Assistant to the City Manager Mara Register for more information at (229) 259-3571.

Proper Method of Tree Pruning

Winter is the best season for pruning many types of trees and other aesthetic plants in the city. The City of Valdosta wants to remind commercial property owners, landscaping businesses and lawn maintenance crews of the Land Development Regulations (LDR) that protect trees within the city limits from improper pruning methods.

LDR Section 328-26 states that "No tree topping or roundovering shall be allowed on new developments, city right-of-ways, city lands, or non-residential properties." The purpose of the requirement is to protect the aesthetic value of city trees and the cooling effect provided by their canopies.

According to the city's Urban Forest Supervisor Stacey Griffin, "tree topping" is a common term among landscapers and is the procedure of simply cutting the top of the tree off. This tree pruning method provides no benefits to the tree and actually prevents the tree from maturing to natural heights and sizes and eliminates the desired shade and aesthetics that the tree was intended for when planted. "Roundovering" is the practice of cutting back a tree for a "lollipop effect" and shares the same results as tree topping.

"There is no proper way to top a crape myrtle—as they shouldn't be topped at all; however, there are several ways to improperly top them," said Griffin. "Unfortunately, each time a crape myrtle is topped it greatly stunts the growth of the tree, causes the unsightly appearance of bare nubby trunks in the landscape, and eventually leads to the death of the tree."

The LDR Section 328 addresses trees, landscaping and buffering issues and can be found on the City of Valdosta website at www.valdostacity.com/planningandzoning. For more information, contact Griffin in the city's Urban Forest Division at (229) 259-3590.



Essay Contest Allows 6th Graders to Consider Being Mayor

Local 6th graders can dream about what it would be like to be the city’s top elected official by participating in the “If I Were Mayor, I Would...” essay contest, sponsored by the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) and the City of Valdosta. The contest gives students a chance to creatively use grade-specific language arts skills and civics knowledge to express, in 350 words or less, how they would make a difference if they were mayor.



One winning essay will be selected from each of GMA’s 12 districts across the state and invited, along with their parents and a teacher, to an awards luncheon in Atlanta, Ga., in April 2012. The winners will receive a \$250 savings bond and other prizes. One overall statewide winner will also be selected from among the 12 essay winners and will receive an additional \$250 savings bond.

Local 1st, 2nd and 3rd place essay contest winners will be recognized by the Valdosta Mayor at an April City Council meeting. Top essays will be displayed at the Valdosta Customer Service Center during Georgia Cities Week, April 22-28, and at Valdosta City Hall.

All area 6th graders—from public, private and home schools—are eligible to compete in the essay contest. Entry forms may be downloaded at www.valdostacity.com/publicinformation. Individuals or class groups should submit their entries to the City of Valdosta Public Information Office, “If I Were Mayor Essay Contest,” 300 N. Lee Street, # 206, Valdosta, GA 31601 by the March 2 deadline.

For more information, contact Public Information Officer Sementha Mathews at (229) 259-3548, or at smathews@valdostacity.com.

Resolutions to Serve the Community In the New Year

If your New Year’s resolution is to get more involved with the community and your local government, consider a position on one of the city’s 18 different boards, commissions, authorities and advisory committees. The city has announced the following openings:

Historic Preservation Commission (3 positions open)

Valdosta-Lowndes County Land Bank Authority (2 positions)

Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority (1 position)

The city’s appointment process ensures that all citizens have the opportunity to serve. Interested applicants must review the Membership Requirements and Code of Ethics Booklet, complete a General Board Application, and sign a Code of Ethics form. The deadline for submitting the General Board Application and Code of Ethics form to the City Clerk for the current vacancies is Wednesday, Feb. 1.

The Mayor and City Council will evaluate the applicants and appoint individuals to the vacancies listed above at the Feb. 9 City Council meeting.

For information or to get a copy of these documents, contact City Clerk Teresa Bolden, at Valdosta City Hall, at 216 East Central Avenue, or at (229) 259-3503, or at tbolden@valdostacity.com. All documents are also available at www.valdostacity.com.

Mission

To be known by our customers and others for high quality municipal services.

Purpose

To provide public services that meet or exceed the expectations of citizens.

To improve the quality of life in the community by a sincere commitment to the ideals of public service.

To be creative and innovative in our approach to the needs of citizens, recognizing the trust and confidence that our citizens place in us as caretakers of governmental services.

To be efficient and effective and use wisely the public resources we are entrusted to manage.

Quality Service by Quality People



City Council

- John Gayle.....Mayor
- James R. Wright.....Councilman, District 1
- Deidra White.....Councilwoman, District 2
- Joseph Vickers.....Councilman, District 3
- Alvin Payton, Jr.....Councilman, District 4
- Mayor Pro Tem
- Tim Carroll.....Councilman, District 5
- Robert Yost.....Councilman, District 6
- Ben Norton.....Councilman At Large

Editorial Staff

- Larry H. Hanson.....City Manager
- Sementha Mathews...Public Information Officer

City Beat is a quarterly newsletter for the citizens of Valdosta and is written and published by the City of Valdosta Public Information Office. For more information, contact Sementha Mathews at (229) 259-3548.



Efficient Travel throughout the City

With over 125 traffic signals in the city limits, it's no wonder that some motorists may ask why the traffic lights in particular locations appear to take longer to turn "green" than in other locations. The staff at the city's Traffic Management Center (TMC) manages the efficiency of the city's traffic lights for the safety and pleasant traveling experiences of our citizens and guests and offers a few reminders to motorists to make their travels throughout the city more efficient.

When stopping at a red light, motorists are reminded to stop just short of the wide white stop bar painted on the road near the intersections. Do not pull ahead of these bars, or the magnetic field in the inductive loops below the pavement will not identify the car upon it. When stopped properly before this bar, the magnetic field in the pavement below sends a signal to the traffic signal cabinet that a car is waiting for a green light.

Once the green light appears, enough time is allocated to serve the number of vehicles waiting, provided the vehicles follow promptly through the light within 4 seconds of each other. However, when drivers are distracted and allow large gaps to form between the vehicles, the signal "gaps out" and begins the yellow and red light rotation.

Often citizens will notice the light changing to yellow while traveling through the intersection. This often occurs because the intersection is working properly and is ready to give time back to the traffic waiting on the main street. The main street, by definition, has more traffic and hence more green time than the side streets. However, motorists on side streets can expect a 100- to 150-second cycle for their red light to turn green once again.

Some intersections within the city limits may have different cycles due to the size and shape of the intersections and which through movements and/or turn movements can be handled simultaneously. A few others—Ashley Street, Patterson Street and Inner Perimeter Road between VHS and N. Valdosta Road—are coordinated on signal loops to allow traffic to flow more efficiently due to the anticipated traffic volume. If motorists travel the designated speed limit, they should be able to travel the distance on green lights.

The city follows federal and state guidelines for all signal designs. Citizens may call the TMC at (229) 259-5431 for more information or to request a group tour of the facility.

Free Tax-Preparation Services

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) provides free tax-preparation services for qualifying individuals and/or households with incomes of less than \$49,000. VITA staff helps individuals file a tax return and are trained in helping individuals apply for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a refundable federal income tax credit for low to moderate income working individuals and families, as well as other tax credits.

The Money Empowerment Day kick-off event is Saturday, Feb. 4, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., at the Parks and Recreation Community Center, located at 1901 N. Forrest Street.

The VITA sites in Valdosta are open January 15 through April 15, 2012. For information about the site locations or for a list of the items citizens should bring to their visits, contact JaTaryia Thomas with Georgia Legal Services Program at (229) 234-2364 or at jthomas.valdosta@gls.org.

Homeownership Education

Make your homeowner dreams come true with a variety of educational classes offered by Habitat for Humanity.

A Home Buyer Education Workshop will be held on Saturday, Feb. 18, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The following Homeownership Skills classes are also offered free to the public. All sessions must be attended to qualify for Habitat for Humanity's program.

Tues., Mar. 6, 5:30–7:30 p.m.
 Thurs., Mar. 8, 5:30–7:30 p.m.
 Tues., Mar. 13, 5:30–7:30 p.m.
 Thurs., Mar. 15, 5:30–7:30 p.m.
 Sat., Mar. 17, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

All classes are held at the Habitat for Humanity facility, at 2010 E. Cypress Street. Pre-registration is mandatory for all classes. Call Carolyn at (229) 245-1330, ext. 22 for more information.

Citizens Register for Government 101

Applications are now being accepted for the third annual Government 101 Citizens Orientation Program, which begins April 2, 2012. The program will meet on Mondays, from 5:30 – 8:30 p.m., for six weeks, and is designed to give Valdostans age 21 and older a deeper understanding and appreciation of their local government. Participants will be exposed to all city departments--such as Fire, Police, Municipal Court, Engineering and Finance--and will get an inside look at how the city operates daily.

A maximum of 25 people will be selected for the class from citizens who submit a completed application by the March 2, 2012 deadline and pass the required background checks. If more than 25 people apply, the city will give preference to the applications on a first-come, first-served-basis. **You MUST be a City of Valdosta resident in order to apply.**

Government 101 Citizens Orientation is an initiative of the Mayor and City Council. Citizens can receive more information at www.valdostacity.com or by calling (229) 259-3522.



The City of Valdosta Government 101 Citizen Orientation Program

Registration Form

Applicants for the Government 101 Citizen Orientation Program must be at least 21 years of age, be a legal resident of the United States and a resident of the City of Valdosta. Applicants will undergo a background investigation as part of the application process. Applicants must complete a separate Criminal History form that may be obtained from the Assistant to the City Manager's office located on the second floor of the City Hall Annex, 300 N. Lee Street. Please be aware that a felony conviction or recent serious misdemeanor conviction may result in an applicant's exclusion from participation. Personal information given will be kept strictly confidential.

Name: _____ SSN _____ - _____ - _____
Address: _____
E-mail: _____ Phone: _____
Occupation: _____

Why do you want to participate in the Citizen Orientation Program?

Will you be able to attend all classes (if not, you will not graduate)? Yes / No

How did you hear about the Citizen Orientation Program? (Circle One)

Metro Valdosta 17 Publications Radio
Newspaper www.valdostacity.com/E-news Other _____

Are you a City of Valdosta resident? Yes / No

By signing this form I give the City of Valdosta Police Department permission to obtain any criminal history record information pertaining to me, which may be in the files of any state or local criminal justice agency in Georgia. I understand that a felony conviction or recent serious misdemeanor conviction may result in my exclusion from participation. I also understand that the class is limited to 25 participants selected from all of the applicants.

Signature _____ Date ____/____/____

Closing Date: March 2, 2012

Return this form to: Public Involvement Department, City Hall Annex, Room #202, N. Lee Street, Valdosta, GA 31601.

4th Annual

Valdosta People's Choice Photo Contest

The Magic of Cities is the theme for the 4th Annual Valdosta People's Choice Photo Contest, sponsored by the City of Valdosta and the Annette Howell Turner Center for the Arts. Citizens are invited to submit their original photos in five categories by the May 31 deadline:

Lights, Camera, Action
Animal House
Over the Rainbow
It Takes a Village
Taking Care of Business



Entries may be mailed or hand-delivered to: Valdosta People's Choice Photo Contest, 527 N. Patterson Street, Valdosta, Ga, 31601. All entries will be displayed in the Tillman Gallery from June 11 – Aug. 1.

People are encouraged to cast their votes, from June 11-July 18, for their favorite photos in the five categories, as well as Best in Show overall. This year, an honorable mention in each category will also be selected from photographs taken by youth ages 14 and under. An awards reception at the arts center, on Friday, July 20, will honor the photo contest winners.

For more information and an application, contact the city's Public Information Office at (229) 259-3548, the arts center at (229) 247-ARTS, or visit www.valdostacity.com/publicinformation.

One Year Anniversary of Fire



Above: The Jan. 26, 2011 fire left Valdosta's oldest home roofless.

Right: VFD Fire Marshal John Wisenbaker surveys the inside damage, following the morning fire.

Rebuilding efforts on the J.T. Roberts House located at 206 Wells Street, which suffered a devastating fire on Jan. 26, 2011, have been underway since August 2011.

A year after the fire, the house has a new roof and new framing. However, future plans to fully restore this historic landmark are uncertain at this time due to lack of funding.

Donations to rebuild Valdosta's oldest house can be sent to the Valdosta Heritage Foundation, P.O. Box 1792, Valdosta, GA 31603, or can be made via PayPal at www.valdostaheritagefoundation.org.

For more information, call Special Projects/Historic Preservation Planner Emily Foster at (229) 259-3563.



The Roberts House is shown in this January 2012 photo with a new roof and framing.



Valdosta Honored as a Tree City U.S.A. Community

The Valdosta Tree Commission will host the annual Arbor Day ceremony, on Friday, Feb. 17, at 10 a.m., on the front lawn of Valdosta State University. The City of Valdosta will be honored as a Tree City U.S.A. community for its 26th consecutive year and VSU will be certified as a "Tree Campus U.S.A."

Valdosta is recognized for meeting four standards including designating a Tree Commission, passing a tree care ordinance, establishing a comprehensive community forestry program, and proclaiming and hosting an Arbor Day celebration. This award further demonstrates the city's management in the planting, maintenance, and removal of trees in Valdosta's urban forest.

Mayor John Gayle is expected to accept the Tree City U.S.A. designation from the Georgia Department of Forestry and the Arbor Day Foundation.

The Tree City U.S.A. program was established by the Arbor Day Foundation, along with the National Association of State Foresters and the USDA Forest Service, to improve community forestry. There are more than 3,400 Tree City U.S.A. communities across the nation, representing 135 million citizens.

A limited number of tree seedlings will be given away to guests at the event. For more information about the Arbor Day activities, contact Kevin Conrad, Chair of the Valdosta Tree Commission, at (229) 242-7600.