

# Senior News

## Georgia

*Providing Helpful Information for Mature Adults in GEORGIA!*



March 2026  
Volume 40, No. 3

# New Consumer Protection Legislation Seeks to Require New Levels of Transparency in Senior Living Referral System in Georgia!

*SB 439 to Require Full Disclosure of Financial Interests and Options to Consumers by Currently Unregulated Referral Industry!*

Submitted by Dan Curran, Curran Public Relations, LLC, Strategy - PR - Reputation Management  
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Atlanta, Georgia (February 17, 2026)

Selecting an appropriate senior living option for a loved one can be an emotional and somewhat confusing process. It often has to be done quickly, the terminology can be puzzling, and, in some cases, not every consumer resource is what it appears to be. Many people turn to what are known as “senior living referral agencies” believing them to be impartial sources of information. Unfortunately, some referral agencies do not fully disclose the true nature of their relationships with providers, or what happens to their personal data, when sharing information with vulnerable consumers.

Now, new bipartisan legislation introduced in the Georgia General Assembly (Senate Bill 439, (<https://www.legis.ga.gov/api/legislation/document/20252026/240904>))

would establish consumer-first standards and require new levels of transparency for companies operating as senior living referral agencies, according to the Georgia Senior Living Association.

Families often believe they are contacting an independent advisor when they, or their friends and relatives, reach out to senior living referral agencies for information.

Unfortunately, they are often not clearly told two critical things. First, their name and personal information are shared broadly with a network of senior living providers.

Second, they are only being shown communities that have a paid relationship with the referral agency.

This confusion most often arises through heavily advertised national online referral platforms that function primarily as lead-generation services rather than personal advisors. In contrast, families who work with local referral agencies often build meaningful, personal relationships. However, even in those cases, families frequently do not realize that the relationship is a paid referral arrangement. As a result, residents and their families may not fully understand the role of the referral agency, the nature of its financial interest, or even when it became part of the decision-making process.

In addition, many residents and families later realize they found and vetted communities largely on their own, only to learn that a significant fee was still charged behind the scenes. Families often express discomfort or embarrassment when they realize their information was shared widely without their full understanding, and frustration that communities absorbed a cost they did not expect or authorize.

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Situations also arise where someone other than the senior or their legal representative, often an out-of-state family member, submits an online inquiry on a loved one's behalf and unknowingly initiates a contractual, referral relationship.

If a resident ultimately moves into any community that contracts with that agency, the agency receives a fee, regardless of whether they meaningfully contributed to the decision or not. Those fees typically range from 75 percent to more than 115 percent of one month's rent, care level, and services. Most consumers do not understand this structure until after move-in, if they learn it at all.

Senate Bill 439 seeks to close these transparency gaps by requiring clear, upfront disclosure when a referral agency presents only paid network options, clarity around the role of designated decision-makers, and a more transparent connection between referral agencies and the move-in, or selection, process.

SB 439 limits how long an agency can collect a referral fee to 24 months. This is a generous window, particularly given that A Place for Mom's own November 2025 white paper, Senior Care Search Trends: Navigating Options in the U.S., shows that 90 percent of placements occur within 12 months.

Concerns about deceptive practices are not hypothetical, according to Georgia industry representatives. They have surfaced across multiple states and are now being examined in federal court.

In Cedar Communities at Commerce, LLC v. Caring, LLC (Case No. 1:25-cv-00922-JPB), involving a Georgia-based senior living community, a federal judge has indicated that [Caring.com](https://www.caring.com) has likely violated existing federal and state laws related to deceptive business practices. The pending litigation alleges that families were misled about the nature of the services being provided, reinforcing the very transparency concerns Georgia lawmakers are attempting to address through SB 439.

These issues were also raised during a Senate Health and Human Services Committee hearing (February 9, 2026), when senior living providers, including members of the Georgia Senior Living Association, testified about abusive practices they have experienced from referral agencies. One provider described a situation in which a referral agency attempted to collect a referral fee for a resident who had moved in three years earlier, following the publication of the resident's obituary.

Supporters of SB 439 emphasize that the bill does not legislate the outcome of any lawsuit, nor does it create a contract for consumers. Instead, it establishes clear, consumer-first standards so families understand who they are working with, what options are being presented, and when financial interests are involved.

Despite this focus on transparency and consumer protection, national referral agencies are lobbying against the bill.

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**About the Georgia Senior Living Association**

The mission of the Georgia Senior Living Association (GSLA) is to promote the quality of life for Georgia seniors by leading the senior living industry through education, advocacy, and partnerships.

Founded in 1998, GSLA is a non-profit, member-based, 501(c)6 trade association representing Georgia's senior living industry and the growing population it serves.

Members range from state-licensed assisted living communities (ALC), personal care homes (PCH), Memory Care Communities (MC), and retirement campuses where assisted living, personal care, and memory care may be a component (CCRC), as well as Industry Partners (IP) that provide products and services for the senior living industry.

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## Taking Care!

# Living well with low vision! Strategies to help with adjustment!

By Lisa M. Petsche – [lmepsche@gmail.com](mailto:lmepsche@gmail.com)

Approximately 12 million Americans aged 40 and up have impaired vision, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The American Foundation for the Blind defines visual impairment as “any vision problem that is severe enough to affect an individual’s ability to carry out the tasks of everyday living.”

A number of eye conditions are associated with the aging process; the most common are macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataracts and diabetic retinopathy.



Lisa Petsche

Visual impairment can negatively affect one’s ability to read, write, mobilize, socialize and engage in activities that provide purpose or pleasure. Eventually routine household and self-care activities may also become difficult. It’s normal to experience frustration and grief along the way.

If you are living with decreased vision, read on for strategies that can help with the adjustment process.

## Coping Strategies

- Find an outlet for expressing your thoughts and feelings.
- Learn as much as possible about your condition and its management. Share this information with those close to you.
- Concentrate on what you can rather than can’t do. Be open to learning new ways of doing things and finding substitutes for activities in which you can no longer participate.
- Maintain important relationships to prevent isolation.
- Allow plenty of time to adjust to your situation and any lifestyle changes it necessitates.
- Seek counseling if you continually feel angry or sad.

## Practical Tips

- Although age-related eye disease most often is chronic, there are many ways to compensate for deficits and make the most of remaining vision. Here are some practical strategies for empowering yourself.
- Ensure regular exams by an eye care professional, and enlist a relative or friend to accompany you to appointments. Take an active role in your treatment.
- Don’t request or accept more help than is necessary. Independence contributes to self-esteem and quality of life, and helps ward off depression.
- Seek a loved one’s help with relabeling frequently accessed containers with large print.
- Ensure adequate lighting in every room, distributing it as evenly as possible. Devote special attention to task lighting – swing-arm lamps, for example – and lighting in dark spaces such as closets and stairwells. Outdoors, install sensor lights that illuminate walkways and entrances.
- Minimize glare from reflective surfaces. For example, ensure windows have coverings. Cover or, better yet, replace glass tables.
- Use color contrast to make objects easy to distinguish. For instance, use a dark tablecloth with light-colored dishes, and place contrasting tape on light switches.
- When you go out with a companion, ask them to describe unfamiliar environments. Let them know what you can and cannot see. You may wish to hold on to their elbows and walk half a step behind them, so they can lead the way.

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- Obtain a lighted magnifier for reading.
- At home, ask others in your household and any visitors to leave doors fully open or completely closed, and put items back where they belong. Request that they consult you before rearranging or adapting the environment.
- Get help in conducting a home safety assessment to identify potential hazards – for example, clutter and lack of proper stair railings – and do what you can to rectify them.
- Arrange for an assessment by a low vision specialist who can recommend adaptive techniques and devices.
- The latter include large-button phones with speed dial, large-print calendars and “talking” watches and clocks.
- Find out about organizations in your community that assist those with low vision. Consult your eye doctor or local office on aging, or call Prevent Blindness toll-free at 1-800-331-2020. Even if you’re managing adequately right now, it’s a good idea to start learning about resources that may be of help in the future.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Lisa M. Petsche is a social worker and freelance writer specializing in boomer and senior health matters.*

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**Image:** Gala Raffle item: John Petrey, *Susan*, Green patina on textured copper, steel base, 19" tall. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery 1401. © John Petrey.

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# At Last We Get to Explore the Entertainment on the Cruise!

By Carolyn Brenneman, Columnist

COVER: Beauty of the classical pianist!

Last month we explored the Royal Caribbean cruise ship's atmosphere and culinary journeys. Now we will share some of the immersive entertainment, activities, ice skating, and dance shows!

We like cruising a lot. A cruise adventure is like staying at a sleek resort where plush accommodations, gourmet dining, and immersive entertainment come together in one destination.

Nothing more than we'll delve into the ship's entertainment and activities. And did I mention – it's an elegant ship?

Yes! Well onboard, the ship offers us a wide range of activities including many different genres of live music to enjoy throughout the day, wellness classes at no charge, giveaways for complimentary massages and artwork, sport activities, splashing down the waterslides and rockclimbing for all ages (even 76 year olds), ice skating shows, day and night dancing, musicals and dance performances by professionals, and more.

Free and free. That's what we like, and as far as physical activities, there is rock climbing, archery, pingpong, mini golf, complimentary massage tasters, ice skating sessions, cart racing, track walking and more. The ship becomes a floating playground where friendly competition follows us from one deck to another.

We first try our hand at archery, quieting the world for a perfect shot. Well, the free lessons make me an amateur. Then our energy builds with fast rallies between my



Jed loves the attention at karaoke!

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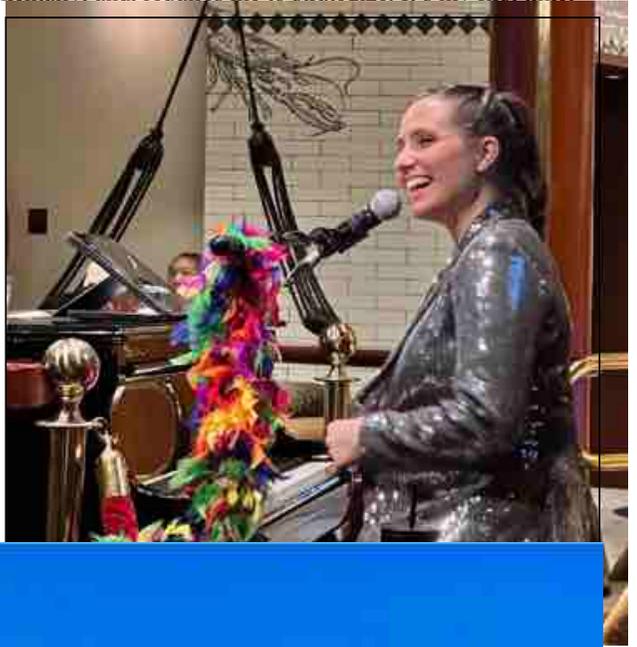
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traveling companion, Marie, and I (both of us are fairly experienced in this sport). Now onto the ping-pong table where we both engage in sharp, rhythmic exchanges back and forth at the ping-pong table. I win three; and, Marie wins four games. Rock climbing opens. I am ready for a new experience as I put on my helmet and get into my harness. Up the wall I travel aiming for the blue color bolted-on hand and foot holds that will lead me to the top. I'm determined to make it to the top, yet it is very challenging mentally; and, requires me to strategize. It's my first time; and, well, I only make it up a foot. Okay. That's not too bad. But it is possible for seniors to climb the wall; as I witnessed my neighbor, who at age 75, climb up to the top to ring the bell.

So now, to slow our pace down, off to miniature golf with Marie and my putters clicking as we giggle and enjoy the carefree fun under the open blue sky.

In the evening, there is ice skating. Yes, a genuine ice rink on a cruise ship. Well I was a little skeptical when I first heard about SOL, the ice-skating dance show that's put on nightly at the ship's ice-skating rink. At first I thought, would it be a snoozy set of ice dancing? Well, it didn't take long for me to realize this was definitely not the Ice Capades show of my dreams, but it is very entertaining.

There is choreography, immersive effects and visuals, and a thematic journey of skating by this group telling us an exciting story. So inspiring that the next morning I sign myself up to try out an ice skating session for 30 minutes.



**Katharine the Piano Woman!**





Fabulous Ballroom Fever dancers!



Vibrant artwork on display!



The color-coded wall for rock climbing!

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Generation Alpha (12 year olds). Well, this I have skated in 50 years. Entertainment on the ship. There are lectures, and activities. So in one afternoon, every hosts live art auctions and exhibits a range of artwork from renowned artists (made) and emerging artists. The event is very due to a complimentary glass of large free photograph and the give-away of ly wine, and other popular, maybe due to a glass of champagne, a large free photograph away of bottles of bubbly wine, and other t the auctioneer's fast, confident, and ls which tumble out in a rhythmic rush, ng and pulling listeners into a commitment ny attendees? We love the show with the dding, interesting artwork, and it provides an ucational experience for us. my favorites. At dusk when the sun slips and the chandeliers in the atrium wake up, anist arrives in one of the lounges. He sits

straight-backed, dressed in formal attire. His attention belongs to the piano keys as we listen intently to the magnificent renderings of the most intricate and difficult pieces, Sergei Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3, Chopin's Etudes, Op. 10 and 25, Paganini's Variations and many more. Years of discipline show in his wrists and his motion. The beauty of the pianist on our cruise is mesmerizing. He shows years of rigorous practice as his fingers move so fast that it seems impossible. For 2 evenings we attend all his performances, determined not to miss a moment of magnificence. Yes, we are enraptured and transfixed by the ability and passion of the artist.

Just the opposite of traditional classical music, we find

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The Royal Theatre for all the shows!

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another piano entertainer performing popular piano with vocals, Katharine. She is a highly popular singer and pianist on Royal Caribbean ships, and performs interactive, high-energy piano bar performances, and is recognized for her engaging performances in the Schooner Bar on this ship. She takes requests and has incredible vocal agility equal to Beyonce.

Such showmanship. She entertains us for hours with pop, musical, rock and country tunes. The audience is charmed by her ability to create a fun and interactive atmosphere with her wide repertoire – renditions of Bruce Springsteen, Elton John, Beyonce, Cyndi Lauper, and many more.

There is so much more entertainment... an 8-member jazz band, rock dancing in the atrium with our DJ, dazzling Broadway musicals, trivia games, origami, name that tune, adult karaoke, and more.

In the evening, one of our favorites is the production show, "Ballroom Fever!" When we wander into the Royal Theater on the cruise we were expecting a pleasant diversion, maybe a few dance tunes but what I didn't expect was Ballroom Fever to grab us and show us tangos with dramatic pauses, hips snapping into time with the percussion, in that unmistakable flirtation between the dancers and audience. A foxtrot becomes a gentle romance, a quickstep turns playful and mischievous. Each dance is dramatic, intense, romantic and full of emotional display. That night, we find ourselves swept into a Broadway-style spectacle and so Marie and I spend two evenings immersed in this ballroom fever inspired performance.

So, seniors, let's think about cruising with friends or family. It is a splendid experience that feels both magical and luxurious.

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## Vintage Gardens

### At Sweetwater

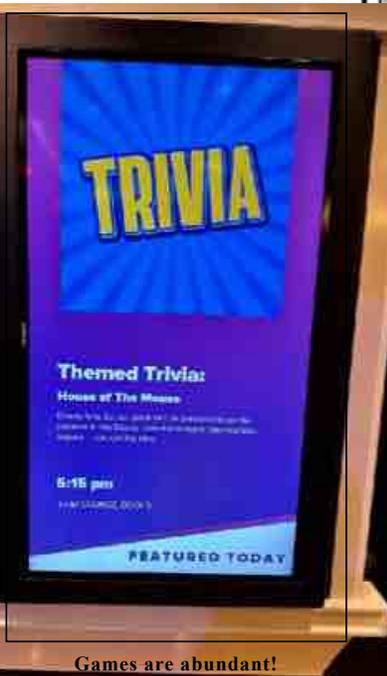
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# Opinion

## BOARD OF PEACE

by Daniel W. Gatlyn, USN Ret; Minister/Journalist  
dangatlyn@gmail.com

**O**n this Nineteenth Day of February, 2026, I watched with optimism, as President Donald Trump chaired the inauguration of the International Board of Peace. Some forty nations assembled in the special facilities as the President applauded the world effort of an unprecedented coalition of leaders in their goal to "get along!"

An impressive array, of a somewhat swelling stream of commentary, emanated from the POTUS, as introductions to one after another graced the assembly. To be sure, the timely gathering of forces for this "first of thirst" for a settled planet drew attention from all quarters.

Drawing from an undeniable roster of worldwide celebrities, a summary of feats and accomplishments by each, including Peace Envoys Steve Wyckoff and Jared Kushner, along with Vice President J.D. Vance, were announced with enthusiasm; as well as along with the generous contributions by the several nations, both diplomatic and monetary.

There was also little doubt that this stately gathering set the pace and posture for subsequent actions toward global achievement. With minimal exception, this liberal stance of international affairs merited favor and commendation. Without question, the pursuance of a neutral turf of Peace has been the aim of benevolent minds "since the Garden!"

Supporting and prejudicial comments to these sequential moments will be made; in that an entrance to all scenarios include "a plus and minus." Wars, battles and skirmish are waged in the price of liberty

But know this: The ultimate goal of every Warrior is that of Peace!

Along with Freedom, no greater plateau is achieved than that of tranquility! Many will also remember the Scriptural phrase: "Men shall cry peace, peace... when there shall be no peace."

But one can also bring to mind that we are admonished by the Word: "Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall see God!"

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# Sailing on Red Sail Sports' 65-foot Catamaran in the Cayman Islands!

by Fyllis Hickman, Travel Columnist! Photo courtesy of Red Sail Sports!

## Cavorting with Sting Rays and Coral Reefs on Grand Cayman in the Caribbean!

He was a smooth operator, this one – his silky body caressing mine in most provocative ways. But I knew we wouldn't be leaving together as his home was a large sandbar he shared with several of his wingmen – very large wingmen actually – emphasis on wing... Although we're visiting their habitat in the wild, let's be clear here. They know where their next squid meal is coming from.



Fyllis Hickman  
Travel Columnist

## Getting Up Close and Personal with a Sting Ray on Grand Cayman is a Memorable Experience!

But Midnight and I made close eye contact – and I mean close – his eyes were huge. We were so *sympatico*, as I held his huge slinky body in my outstretched arms, that I kissed him on the nose, which I later learned guaranteed me seven years of good luck. A totally unexpected bonus.

As a plus, it's a very easy and safe excursion for seniors – after all, you're basically standing in waist-high water – and there are crew members all around to help, if needed. And none of the sting rays are remotely ageist...



Catamaran at the Sandbar! Courtesy of Red Sail Sports.

A sting ray nestled in your outstretched arms makes for a very up close and personal experience! Photo courtesy of Red Sail Sports. Such was my introduction to the seductive appeal of sting rays as part of Red Sail Sports Sting Ray City and Snorkeling excursion near Rum Point on Grand Cayman, where my husband and I were spending two weeks. As we sailed to our next adventure, just being out on the open water in a 65-foot catamaran full-speed ahead is its own exhilarating experience.

In vivid contrast to the expansive grayness of the world of sting rays is the added snorkeling outing, also offered by Red Sail Sports. The cacophony of color of the myriads of itinerant fish exploring their coral reef home is a memory you'll return to over and over again – an experience words cannot adequately convey.

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Cavorting with sting rays at Sting Ray City in the Cayman Islands! Photo by Victor Block.



Sting Ray City!  
Photo courtesy of Red Sail Sports.

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## **Snorkeling in the Cayman Islands is Another Memorable Experience!**

**Snorkeling on a Red Sail Sports' excursion on Grand Cayman in the Caribbean! Photo courtesy of Red Sail Sports.**

But the warnings before entering the water – Red Sail provides all the snorkeling equipment, including vests to keep you afloat, if necessary – to avoid any contact with the reef made me feel almost homicidal if I were to even come too close. Coral reefs are very fragile and die from human contact.

**Both fish and reef provide explosions of color while snorkeling in the Cayman Islands! Photo courtesy of Red Sail Sports.**

But the fish are a different story – not that there's actually any fear of human contact. But they are glorious as they flit all around you – and I was told, if you get really lucky, you may even see a turtle or a huge grouper. I settled for a whole lot of blue and yellow darlings, among their other colorful brethren. To add to the fun, you can check the fish guide on board to help identify the denizens of the deep with whom you've just communed. And even more fun – there's a bar on board to reward you for all your water-based efforts.

## **Chaise Lounges that more Resemble Beds on Grand Cayman give a Whole New Dimension to Lying on a Beach!**

**The bed lounges at Kaibo Beach on Grand Cayman offer an incomparable beach experience! Photo by Victor Block.**

Later, lying on a wide cushiony chaise lounge that more resembles a bed than a beach chair at Kaibo Beach, staring up at lofty palm trees swaying in the breeze, my foot pumping to the reggae music gently piped in and sipping on a Pina Colada, my mind occasionally focused on the sub-freezing temperatures back home. Yup – I wouldn't want to be anywhere else – ex-



**Bed Chaise Lounges at Kaibo Beach! Photo by Victor Block.**



**Coral reef snorkeler! Courtesy of Red Sail Sports.**



**Snorkeling with Red Sail Sports!**

# Columbia County Chamber Announces Award Winners at 21st Annual Banquet!

Submitted by Jamie Miller, Communications Manager, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce  
jamie@columbiacountychamber.com

Evans, Georgia • February 13, 2026

The Columbia County Chamber of Commerce hosted its 21st Annual Banquet, presented by SouthState Bank, on Thursday, February 12th at the Columbia County Exhibition Center. More than 500 Chamber members, local leaders, community officials, and state representatives were in attendance. The Chamber honored outstanding individuals and businesses during its annual awards ceremony, celebrating their achievements and contributions to Columbia County and the Greater Augusta Region.

Tiffany Heitzman, Executive Officer at Home Builders Association Greater Augusta-Aiken Region, received the Leadership Columbia County Alumni Award. The Ambassador of the Year Award was presented to Janet Mueller, Realtor & Associate Broker at Heartland Real Estate, and Jamie Wier, Director of Marketing at Blanchard & Calhoun, was honored with the Volunteer of the Year Award, sponsored by First Community Bank.



## 2025 Lifetime Achievement Award



**Tammy Gibbs Shep**

President-SOAR  
Nonprofit Solutions, L

Retired President & C  
Columbia County  
Chamber of Commer

2025 Lifetime Achievement Award!

Tammy Gibbs Shepherd, President-SOAR Non-Profit Solutions, LLC  
Retired President & CEO, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce!

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The 21st Annual Banquet Celebration was made possible through the support of various sponsors. SouthState Bank served as the Presenting Sponsor, while Georgia Power, Savannah Nuclear Solutions, and Security Federal Bank were the Premier Sponsors. Executive Sponsors included Allegra Print & Marketing, DIYscapes, and Southern Oral Surgery & Implant Specialists. Additional sponsors included Augusta Technical College, C&C Automotive, Jordan Trotter Commercial Real Estate, Lamar Advertising, Beachview Events, F&M Bank, and Ballooneers. To learn more about the Columbia County Chamber, visit [ColumbiaCountyChamber.com](http://ColumbiaCountyChamber.com).



2025 Small Business of the Year

Ambassador of the Year

COLUMBIA COUNTY CHAMBER



2025 Volunteer of the Year



**Jamie Weir**  
2025 Leadership Columbia County Alumni Award!  
Director of Marketing  
Tiffany Heitzman, Executive Officer  
Home Builders: Greater Aiken • Augusta Region

2025 Volunteer of the Year Award!  
Jami Weir, Director of Marketing  
Blanchard and Calhoun Real Estate Company





 SouthState

SouthState Bank



2025 Non-Profit Member of the Year Award – Home Builders Association, Greater Augusta-Aiken Region!

 HOME BUILDERS  
GREATER AIKEN-AUGUSTA REGION

Home Builders Association  
Greater Augusta-Aiken Region