

**SCATTERED PM STORMS**

High: 85  
Low: 70  
40% chance  
of rain



**Tuesday:** Storms, 80/68  
**Wednesday:** Cloudy, 83/64  
**Thursday:** Storms, 85/66

Details on the back of Metro

# The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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LIVING, D1

**WHERE TO CATCH FREE MOVIES THIS SUMMER**

METRO, B1

**MARTA COMPUTERS: WHY AUDIT CALLED THEM 'VULNERABLE'**



SPORTS, C1

**TERRIFYING CRASH, DRAMATIC WIN AT INDY**

## MEMORIAL DAY CAMP TOCCOA REBORN



Patrick Hall stands inside the remaining building at Camp Toccoa on the side of Currahee Mountain. Hall and his small band of colleagues, a nonprofit known as the Camp Toccoa at Currahee Project, want to turn it into an exhibit area, office and gift shop in Toccoa.

## ELECTION 2018

# Ga. gov. race already feels Trump effect

Hopefuls on both sides shape messages with the president in mind.

**ALSO INSIDE**


» Senate Republicans confront the many challenges of creating health care legislation, A4

By Greg Bluestein  
gbluestein@ajc.com

President Donald Trump is shaking up the emerging race for Georgia governor, forcing Republicans to establish a

the swamp" vying against more mainstream Republicans with long records of experience in public office who aren't tying themselves directly to Trump's presidency.





Patrick Hall stands inside the remaining building at Camp Toccoa on the side of Currahee Mountain. Hall and his small band of colleagues, a nonprofit known as the Camp Toccoa at Currahee Project, want to turn it into an exhibit area, office and gift shop in Toccoa. HENRY TAYLOR PHOTOS / HENRY.TAYLOR@AJC.COM

# Reviving one of state's greatest WWII legacies

Group restoring site where 'Army's toughest soldiers' trained to fight.

By Tyler Estep  
tyler.estep@ajc.com

TOCCOA — The decades-old war plane, the kind that dropped American paratroopers behind the beaches of Normandy, is not much to look at.

It lies in dirty disrepair in a grassy field in this tiny northeast Georgia town, wings in one place, dented fuselage in another. Every single window is busted. Rust is a recurring theme, and the dull silver metal is grimy.

But the plane, Patrick Hall says with a grin, will eventually be reborn, given new life as a beautiful, dramatic display of one group's dedication to keeping the memory of Camp Toccoa alive.

The camp on the side of Currahee Mountain and the men who trained there are perhaps



This is inside the cabin of a C-47 that the Toccoa site recently acquired from a man in Alabama. Planes like this were used to drop American paratroopers during World War II.

Georgia's greatest World War II legacies. They were an experiment, hardy volunteers destined to become a new kind of American soldier: the paratrooper.

Their daring exploits would help break Hitler's back in Europe and gain them worldwide fame,

Camp continued on A6

myAJC

Visit myAJC.com for video and a photo gallery of Camp Toccoa, past and present.

IN LIVING

» Remembering Ga. airman's amazing story of survival, D1

By Greg Bluestein  
gbluestein@ajc.com

President Donald Trump is shaking up the emerging race for Georgia governor, forcing Republicans to gamble on how closely to tie themselves to his presidency — and speeding up plans for Democrats who think they have a tantalizing opportunity to exploit his setbacks.

A fight is already under way on the GOP side of the ticket between candidates pledging to “drain

the swamp” vying against more mainstream Republicans with long records of experience in public office who aren't tying themselves directly to Trump's presidency.

The battle lines have already been drawn: Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle didn't mention Trump at his campaign kickoff, while Secretary of State Brian Kemp's official announcement practically oozed Trump-ian themes. More Trump

Governor continued on A4

COURT RULING

## 'Super liens' no longer a threat

Georgia homeowners now protected from devastating loophole.

By Johnny Edwards  
jredwards@ajc.com

Georgia homeowners who fall behind on their property taxes now have a new protection. No longer can cunning investors quickly snatch away their homes and everything the owners had paid on it.

For years, such investors and

their attorneys, armed with only a piddling second unpaid bill, used a loophole in Georgia law to override safeguards designed to help struggling taxpayers. The maneuver was so powerful it was dubbed a “super lien.”

But this month, a Georgia Supreme Court decision stripped the super lien of its super powers. Homeowners still gripped in the process may get immediate relief.

“I think this party's over,” said Hugh Wood, a real estate attorney.

Liens continued on A11

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

## White House pushes back on reports





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## Camp

continued from A1

both then and now – and it all began here, in Toccoa, where Hall and his small band of colleagues, a nonprofit known as the Camp Toccoa at Currahee Project, are gunning to give them the revival and reverence they deserve.

A plane is only part of the plan.

One original building on the site is being renovated, and a sizable pavilion will be completed soon. A group of barracks-style buildings should be completed by the fall. Bigger projects are still in the hope-and-wish phase.

They want to give people a place to come, and a reason to stay awhile. They want to make sure the world doesn't forget the men who trained here, who were part of a seismic shift in American military strategy, who fought and – in many, many cases – died.

This place is tiny, but its part in history is huge.

"You can't put people on this mountain and not have them affected by what happened here," another leader of the project, Cynthia Brown, said on a recent morning here, with Memorial Day less than two weeks away. "If you walk that mountain by yourself, you're gonna hear the boots. You're gonna hear the sounds. You're gonna be so close."

**'The Army's toughest soldiers'**



Cynthia Brown and Patrick Hall walk toward the C-47 airplane their group purchased recently. The plane is only part of the plan the nonprofit has for Camp Toccoa. One original building on the site is being renovated, and a pavilion will be completed soon. Some barracks-style buildings should be done by the fall. HENRY TAYLOR PHOTOS / HENRY.TAYLOR@AJC.COM



**'You can't put people on this mountain and not have them affected by what happened here.'**

"The place has almost mystical significance," he says, "because of the legends around it."

Many of the men who trained here died in battle, and few of the men who made it through the war are still alive – but, even without a formal revival, their legacy survives. In recent years alone, Toccoa and Currahee have had visitors from all 50 states and roughly 80 countries.

On a sunny Friday earlier this month, a crew of five paratroopers from the British Army is among those that stop by. They don navy blue shorts and sprint up the mountain and back.

"It's the history," Staff Sgt. Dave Nichols says. "It's the whole history and the ambiance and what's happened before."

Less than an hour earlier, a man from the Netherlands makes the same trek. It's the 17th time he's run up and down Currahee, a sort of repayment for the role of Toccoa men in liberating Europe – and family members whose hometowns were occupied by German forces.

"For me, it's a very special place," Flores Hopman says. "Teetering on emotional."

### 'The small things'

In the early days of the project, Brown says, the group had a "world-renowned architect" come and draw up plans for the Camp Toccoa site. "Disneyland," Brown now calls the \$3.4 million vision that was created – a beautiful



rial Day less than two weeks away. "If you walk that mountain by yourself, you're gonna hear the boots. You're gonna hear the sounds. You're gonna be so close."

### 'The Army's toughest soldiers'

What became Camp Toccoa was born as a training ground for Georgia's National Guard. The federal government and United States Army took over in 1942, with a war underway and a special soldier in mind.

The men of the 501st, 506th, 511th and 517th Parachute Infantry regiments did not win World War II themselves, but they played a decisive and dramatic role.

They were dropped behind enemy lines to infiltrate and liberate Axis-occupied countries. They were the first Americans into France on D-Day, they fought through the Netherlands and they battled at the Bulge. Decades later their stories, and specifically those of the Easy Company of the 506th of the 101st Airborne Division, would be immortalized in a book and then an HBO miniseries, both called "Band of Brothers."

But first, Toccoa.

Throughout the war years, some 18,000 men were sent to the "little camp outside a little town far off the beaten path" to begin their training: "weeks (of) running up and down and 'round Currahee Mountain, up and down the obstacles courses, working judo on one another with no punches barred or pulled," according to a 1943 article in *The Atlanta Constitution*.

They'd get more training to leap from actual planes elsewhere, including Fort Benning. But Toccoa – and



Patrick Hall (right) describes the plans for future construction on the Douglas C-47 to Cynthia Brown and Gary Bellamy in Toccoa. The project was jumpstarted by a \$25,000 donation from the Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson Foundation.



Adam Bannister (right) points to the North Georgia countryside while talking to Dave Nichols after running up the hill World War II soldiers once trained on at Camp Toccoa at Currahee. Both men are members of the British 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment.

the mountain, "three miles up and three miles down," the cry went – are where the foundation was laid, where their reputation, even then, as "the Army's toughest sol-

diers" was earned.

Only about one-third of the recruits who began training at Toccoa made the final cut.

"You guys are so rugged," entertainer Bob Hope told

## You can't put people on this mountain and not have them affected by what happened here.'

Cynthia Brown

wanted to do.

That's no longer an issue.

The last original building, the initial purpose of which is unclear, is being renovated as a "regimental headquarters." It will eventually hold a gift shop, a history center and serve as a sort of starting point for visitors to the camp.

Next door, a pavilion fit to hold 400 or 500 people is nearly complete, roughly 95 percent of the construction materials donated, Hall says.

To the west of that, a set of four barracks-style buildings will go up, their exteriors covered in original materials from the camp. The goal is for veterans or military groups – or Boy Scouts, or re-enactors, or anyone, really – to be able to stay the night and enjoy the history.

"We want to try to make that Toccoa experience everything it can be," says Gary Bellamy, the president of the project. "Because they'll come back. And their relatives will come back and their friends will come back. And that's what we want."

### 'What's happened before'

John O. Lally is a Vietnam veteran and the chairman of the board of directors of the 506th Airborne Infantry Regiment Association. He visited Camp Toccoa last fall.

In the early days of the project, Brown says, the group had a "world-renowned architect" come and draw up plans for the Camp Toccoa site. "Disneyland," Brown now calls the \$3.4 million vision that was created – a beautiful, expensive project that just didn't feel right.

What they're doing now, piecing everything together bit by bit and donation by donation, does.

After the Dutchman departs, Brown, Bellamy and Hall gather just outside the gate to the camp, looking up at the recently installed archway. "Camp Toccoa at Currahee," reads the iron sign. It was created, and essentially donated, by a local craftsman.

For the first time, the trio tests the floodlight perched on top of a nearby pole. It works. They cheer.

"We celebrate the small things, y'all," Brown says.

Later this year, Brown and her clan hope to meet again with Pacolet Milliken Enterprises, which donated their initial land and still owns hundreds of adjacent acres. The nonprofit has dreams of getting its hands on 14 more acres, land that does or could include a natural amphitheater, a more formal camping area, a parade field and a chapel.

It will never be Disneyland. But, then again, that was never the goal.

"What can John Q. Public do to honor these men, to celebrate their lives?" Brown says. "You can celebrate their lives with a genuine appreciation for what they've done. ... It's the love and respect for them. It's their story that needs to be honored."