Downtown Senoia

SENOIA AND HARALSON 'GET IT RIGHT'

By W. Winston Skinner, Photos by Bob Fraley

Red, white and blue.

Military green.

Fluttering flags, smiling children, bands playing, classic cars.

This past Memorial Day brought a surge of patriotic pride and color to downtown Senoia. The day was filled with events to recall the valor of America's soldiers — past and present. Col. Brent Bracewell, commander of the 78th Aviation Troop Command of the Georgia Army National Guard, brought the keynote address at the noon memorial ceremony.

Then came the parade. There were almost 70 entries which included the U.S. Army Ground Forces Band, the East Coweta JROTC and drill team and veterans — and more veterans. Paul McKnight Jr., who grew up in Senoia and left its safe enclave to fight in World War II, provided a tram on which many of his fellow military vets rode.

After the parade, there was a moment of silence and the playing of "Taps." Senoia resident Larry Clarke, in a letter to The Times-Herald, noted the "town became so quiet it was almost scary." The afternoon included a concert by the Army Band and several songs by country singer Doug Stone, who grew up in Coweta County.

The focus, however, was on those who fought for American freedom, past and present. As Clarke concluded in his letter to the editor, "Senoia got it right."

Senoia and Haralson, its neighbor to the south, have been getting it right for a long time. Though the towns offer differences in ambience, both have been — and remain — good places to live, places where people know their neighbors, places that attract new residents as Coweta County grows.

Senoia's population at the 2000 census was 1,738 — a number that had jumped to 2,719 according to estimates in mid-2005. Senoia has annexed some

of the area around the old city limits. A modern post office serves the town, and a new library is planned. Retail businesses have located in the downtown area, at the Highway 16/Highway 85 intersection and on the west side of town on Highway 16.

The community grew up in the mid-1850s. The first post office in the area was called Willow Dell, but the name was changed to Senoia in 1864, a few years after Rev. Francis Warren Baggarly, a Methodist minister, bought the land on which the town was to be built.

His descendants still live in the area. His youngest sons, twins named Walter and Warren, started the Baggarly Brothers Buggy Company in Senoia. Items passed down through the family form the nucleus of the collection at Senoia's Buggy Shop Museum. The Senoia Area Historical Society also has a museum — in a historic home.

The town's name most likely comes from Senoya Heneha, the Creek "princess" who was the mother of Chief William McIntosh. McIntosh — half Creek and half Scottish — was prominent in what became west central Georgia in the early 1800s. He signed the Treaty of Indian Springs which opened the area to settlement. He was seen as a hero by the settlers, and Coweta County was named in his honor as chief of the Cowetas. Many Creeks saw him in a different light, and he was murdered in 1825. His daughter, Croesy, is buried in the town named for his mother.

Senoia's city government has protected the historic areas of town and sought to bring development to Senoia. The town has experienced some growing pains. There have been some disagreements about what direction the town should take in the future.

Whatever the future holds for Senoia, there is an optimism about what lies ahead. New homes are going up. Restaurants offer Southern fare, pizza and Mexican and Chinese delicacies. Hollberg's Furniture draws customers from a broad geographic area, and antiques are also a draw.

The town's churches also are a vital part of life in Senoia. The building that now is the Church of God of Prophecy has a unique history. The gothic building was constructed for St. Philip's Lutheran Church, an outgrowth of Mt. Pilgrim Lutheran Church at Haralson.

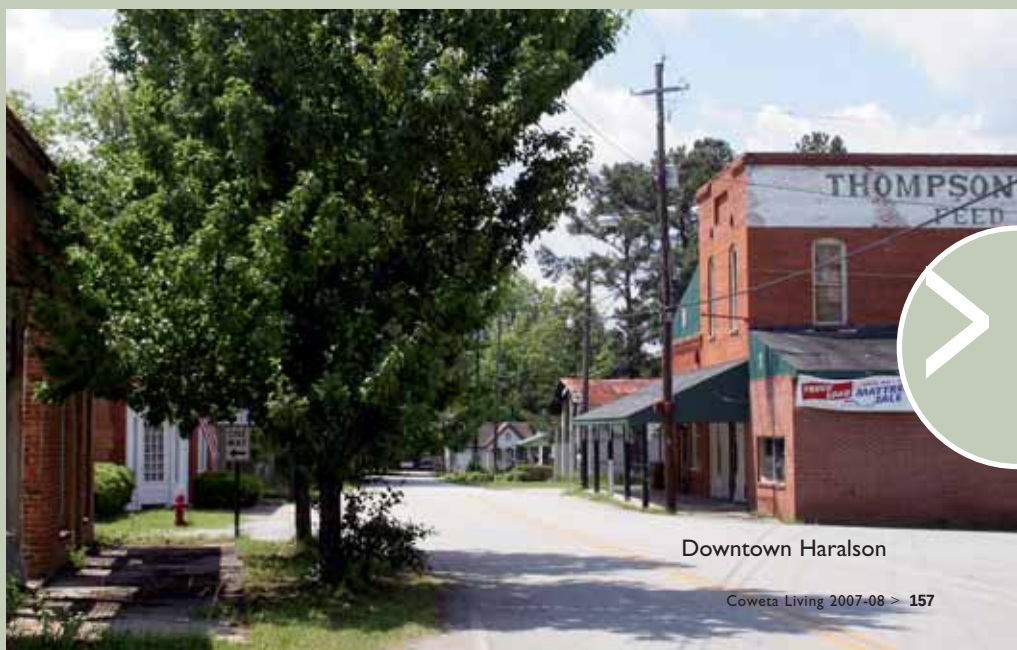
While St. Philip's has come and gone, Mt. Pilgrim remains, anchoring a corner in Haralson, where there also are active Baptist and Methodist churches. Mt. Pilgrim was founded in 1839 by members of seven families — many of whom have descendants in Coweta County today.

Haralson remains more rural than Senoia, though there is growth along the byways around the town. Haralson had a population of 144 in 2000, and the town limits include a sliver of Meriwether County.

Haralson has a modern post office, town offices and the Community Action for Improvement Head Start program in the old school. Williams Grocery remains a commercial center in the town. The grocery is known around the world for its sausage, a favorite of Pres. Jimmy Carter and family during his years in the White House.

Riverwood Studios has a state-of-the-art production facility in Senoia. It is no surprise that moviemakers have found authentic Southern locales in both towns. Senoia welcomed Mary Stuart Masterson and Mary-Louise Parker for "Fried Green Tomatoes." The first film shot in Haralson was "Moonrunners" in 1975, followed by several others including the television film "Mama Flora's Family" with Cicely Tyson and Queen Latifah.

Both Senoia and Haralson are poised to welcome newcomers but retain the authentic charm of their unique past. CL



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