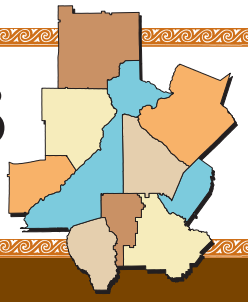
GLOBAL ATLANTA SNAPSHOTS

A LOOK AT ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN THE ATLANTA REGION



RUSSIANS

The Global Atlanta Snapshots were created to foster understanding among all people of the Atlanta region. The Snapshots show the rich ethnic and cultural diversity that our region now enjoys. The residents of Atlanta's ethnic communities may have lived in the region for a long time or may have recently arrived. They may come from cultures and have customs significantly different from each other's, and from those of the general population of the Atlanta region. What they have in common with the rest of the region is that they make it their home, and they share in and contribute to its success. The Snapshots introduce and portray selected communities in terms of their backgrounds, their customs and cultures, their roles in the regional economy, and specific local resources available throughout the region.

Russians and Former Soviet Citizens in the Atlanta Economy

Many of those coming to the Atlanta region from the former Soviet Union have strong academic backgrounds and special skills. In their former homes, they were lawyers, doctors, engineers or skilled craftspeople. But with the constraints of learning a new language and gaining new professional credentials, as newcomers they have taken any jobs that were available. Initially, they were found waiting tables, washing dishes, cleaning hotel rooms and similar basic tasks. Young people with command of English gravitated into the information technology areas and many became graduate students in computer sciences and engineering specialties. Beyond these activities, we can only infer how members of the Russian/ Soviet community make their living today. The census data provides information on occupation by ancestry, but not by foreign-born status. Therefore, we can only observe the patterns of those of Russian heritage who may have been in this country for decades or generations. As in the case of the newcomers, we see in the established community of Russian ancestry high percentages of the workforce in white-collar professional occupations, along with a strong representation in business management.

An increasing number of businesses directly serving the community also indicates the growing presence of newcomers from Russia and the former Soviet republics in the Atlanta community. Russian stores that can now be found include Golden Key on Lawrenceville Highway, Baltika near Jimmy Carter Boulevard, the Arbat grocery in Alpharetta and European Deli's 1 and 2 in Roswell. The Russian community can now access specialty foods, clothing and furniture, and there is also an increase in export/import activity with the Baltic nations and Russia.

Naming in the Russian Manner

The father's first name is very important in Russia. In addressing an older or respected person, Russians use a first name and a **"patronymic"** (a name derived from the father's first name). Traditionally, each person's full name has three parts: the first name, a patronymic, and a family name inherited from the father. A man's patronymic name would include **"ovich"** with his father's name, for example: **Davidovich (David's son)**

A woman's patronymic name would include instead **"ovna",** as in this example: **Davidovna (David's daughter)**

Other examples are **Lazaryevich** (Lazarus' son) or **Irina Pavlovna** (Irina, daughter of Pavel). Younger Russian adults now more frequently use only their first name and family name. This practice is common to most Russians in the Atlanta region.

CONTENTS

A PERSONAL STORY

As a Jew and practicing physician in Moscow, Dr. Lawrence E. Eppelbaum experienced overt anti-Semitism. He always wanted to escape Russia, but anti-Semitism was not necessarily the main reason. He wanted to leave the political and economic oppression he was feeling at home and attain his version of the American dream. In 1987 he escaped, seven months before immigration became legal. He planned to get settled and then find a way to help his wife and son escape through Canada or Mexico. He did escape to West Germany where he stayed about three months, spending his nights sleeping at a train station. He managed to get a job as a massage therapist until he was granted the political asylum he was hoping for. He left Germany for Texas, was reunited with his family, and ended up living there for almost four years.

The years Dr. Eppelbaum spent in Texas were very difficult. At first, he spoke no English. He found a job at an optical factory performing hard work that left him extremely exhausted. Despite his exhaustion and poor English, he found the will and energy to study for the medical boards with the help of a dictionary. He passed. Although he had already been a pediatric surgeon in Moscow, he had to go through another residency. He worked in internal medicine in Austin, was an ER physician for a few years in Syracuse, New York, as well as in a number of Veterans Administration hospitals, including one in Georgia.

Dr. Eppelbaum moved to Atlanta in 1995. He now lives here with his wife, children, and many pets. His mother and her second husband (an American), as well as some distant relatives, also live in Atlanta. His mother's English is perfect and she is fully assimilated. Dr. Eppelbaum acknowledges that such successful assimilation is unusual, especially among her age group. But, he says, "She is an unusual woman."

At the time Dr. Eppelbaum arrived in Atlanta there was a growing community of Russian immigrants and no Russian doctors who were catering specifically to them. He established his clinic, which from the start aimed to be a one-stop shop type of clinic, providing a diverse array of services. The clinic has since become a busy medical center offering primary care, testing, physical therapy, cosmetology, pain management, and surgery. In addition, the clinic provides transportation to and from visits, as well as translation services for those patients who need them. The clinic has about 7,000 patients and thirty-five staff members. The patients are Russian, Eastern European, Hispanic and Latino, Muslims from various countries, and African American. The translators at the clinic are proficient in the Slavic languages, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic.

Dr. Eppelbaum, in addition to being the president of his clinic, the Atlanta Institute of Medicine and Rehabilitation, serves as vice president of the newly formed Russian-American Federation, which is based in Atlanta. The doctor intends to practice medicine and expand his clinic and its services until his son is ready to take over. Then he plans to focus full time on a political career. Dr. Eppelbaum jokes that "if Arnold Schwarzenegger can become successful in spite of his accent, then I can too."

Who are the Russian-Americans?

The Soviet Union, born in 1917 out of the turmoil of the Communist Revolution, officially came to an end on December 25, 1991. With the resignation of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev on that date, the Soviet empire, which extended from Eastern Europe to Central Asia and the shores of the Pacific Ocean, faded into history. In place of the defunct union was the new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), consisting of 12 of the 15 former Soviet republics. The three Baltic nations – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – decided on a path of complete separation from their Soviet past. Included among the newly independent states of the CIS were Russia and Ukraine. The latter two nations are the native lands of most of the former Soviet citizens who now make their homes in metropolitan Atlanta.

Russia

Stretching for 5,400 miles from its western frontier in the Baltic region across Siberia to the Bering Strait, Russia is the world's largest nation, with a land area of 6.6 million square miles. Its population of 145 million (2000 estimate) is aging, with declining fertility rates, and is projected to drop to 137 million by 2010. Its population is composed of many European and Asian ethnic groups and nationalities, with the largest being Russian (81.5 percent), Tatar (3.8 percent), Ukrainian (3 percent) and Chuvash (1.2 percent). Those emigrating from Russia to the United States can come from anywhere in its vast expanse, but most are from the European region west of the Ural Mountain range and, in particular, from the major metropolitan areas of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Ukraine

Although its independence was proclaimed only in 1991, Ukraine has a history many centuries long. With independence its name changed from "The Ukraine", designating a region of land within the Russian

Continued inside

Russian/Former Soviet Citizens in the Atlanta Region: By the Numbers

Cherokee: 70
Cobb: 655
Douglas: 212
Fulton: 1,701
Henry: 76
Clayton: 17
DeKalb: 796
Fayette: 19
Gwinnett: 1,650
Rockdale: 50

Total 10-county Region: 5,246
(Due to Census categories, here the Russians/Former Soviet Citizens refer only to the countries of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus)

- **Fulton** (1,701) and **Gwinnett** (1,650) had the majority of the Russians/Former Soviet population in the region. Together, these counties account for **64 percent** of the Russian/Former Soviets in the region.
- The 10-county Atlanta region is home to approximately **42 percent of Georgia's total population,** but represents **84 percent of the state's Russian/ Former Soviet population.**
- In all, **18,959 Eastern Europeans** live in the Atlanta region. This is **higher than the numbers of both Chinese and Koreans.**
- The Russian/Former Soviet population is concentrated **almost exclusively in the northern portions of the region,** with one notable exception. One of the largest concentrations is found in **unincorporated Douglas County,** south of I-20 along the Fulton border.

Holidays Celebrated

In addition to other Western holidays, Russians and former Soviet citizens may celebrate the holidays below. Russian Orthodox holy days are still based on the Julian calendar. Jewish and Muslim holy days are observed according to the lunar calendar:

Russian Orthodox Christmas (Rozhdestvo)
January

Easter (Paskha)
March or April

Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year)
September or October

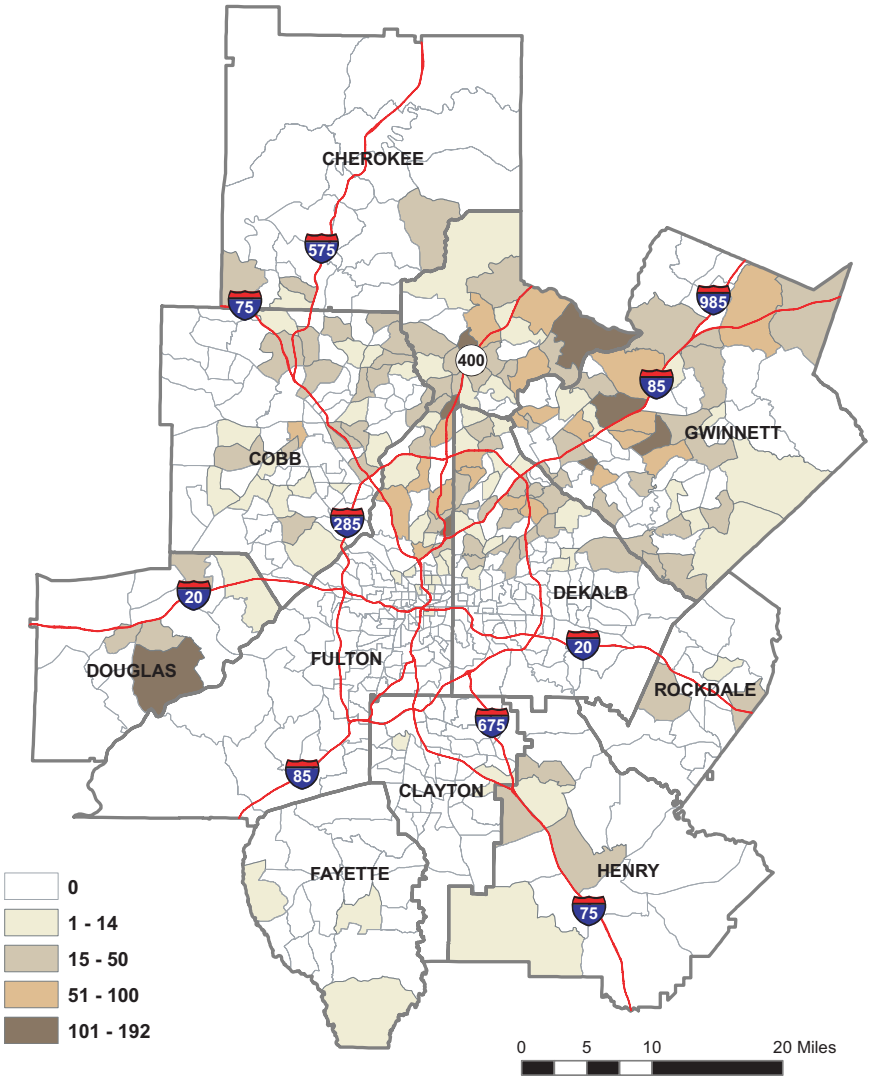
Yom Kippur (Jewish Day of Atonement)
September or October

Ramadan (month-long Muslim period of observance)
October-November

Russian New Year
December/January

RUSSIAN-BORN* POPULATION IN ATLANTA

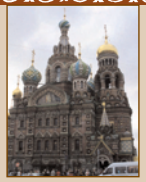
Atlanta Region, 2000



Source: 2000 Census Data on Foreign-Born Population by Region, Country or Area or Area of Birth

**Due to Census categories, here the Russians/Former Soviet Citizens refer to only the countries of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*

Cathedral in St. Petersburg



St. Petersburg was the capital of Russia until the Soviet Revolution. After 1917, Moscow became the capital of the Soviet Union, and St. Petersburg was renamed Leningrad, in honor of the leader of the revolution, Vladimir Lenin.

The former capital is still the site of some of Russia's grandest architecture, including many palaces of the czars and other members of the nobility, as well as great cathedrals. Pictured is the Church on Spilled Blood, so named because it was built on the spot where an earlier revolutionary group assassinated Czar Alexander II in 1881. The church, with its magnificent multi-colored domes, was designed in response to an architectural competition commissioned by Czar Alexander III and was completed in 1907.

Today, the city that was once home to the czars is once again named St. Petersburg and is the heart of a major metropolis of about 5 million people.

Russian Life in Metro Atlanta

Most former Soviet citizens who arrive in the Atlanta region have refugee status. Many come to this region to join other (usually, younger) family members who immigrated to Atlanta in earlier years. The Russian community is scattered all over the Atlanta region, but there is some clustering in the Alpharetta area. The Brookhaven area, with a cluster of seniors living in high-rise apartments, is another local Russian immigrant enclave. Other members of the community can be found in Duluth, Lawrenceville, Marietta, Dunwoody, Roswell and Doraville. The attached map displays the year 2000 residential pattern, by census tract, for the combined population of foreign-born residents from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

Many people in the Russian community now speak English, tend to own their own homes and cars, and work in the general community. However, a large portion of the community is elderly. They struggle with the English language and are in need of translators. Transportation is another significant barrier for this community. Most never had occasion to drive in the Soviet Union and seniors cannot easily get around on their own in metropolitan Atlanta. No transportation services are targeted directly to this problem. Many people who immigrate to Atlanta receive government assistance. Those who are age 65 or older are eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

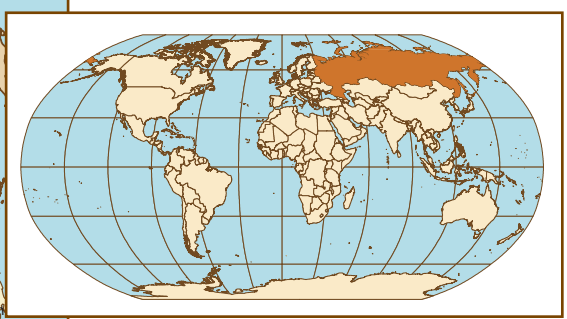
> "A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE ELDERLY POPULATION LIVES IN ISOLATED CONDITIONS. EVEN GOING TO THE GROCERY STORE CAN BE DIFFICULT..."

A significant portion of the elderly population lives in isolated conditions. Even going to the grocery store can be difficult for them. Many are poor and their children can't support them adequately. Some compare their life and its limitations to the life of the Russian immigrants living in the "little Odessa" neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. Although there are no definitive numbers on the religious affiliations of the Atlanta region's Russian immigrant community, some suggest that Russian Jews may represent as much as 80 percent of the total.

Both Jewish and non-Jewish Russians receive assistance from a number of local religious institutions. Churches that have played an important role in serving Russian immigrants include First Alliance Church on N. Druid Hills Road in Atlanta, First Atlanta Russian Baptist Church in Norcross, and St. Mary of Egypt Russian Orthodox Church, currently in Lilburn. Jewish organizations providing services include the Atlanta Jewish Federation, Beth Jacob Synagogue, Jewish Family and Career Services, and the Marcus Atlanta Jewish Community Center. The services include financial assistance, case management, employment, computer and English language training, and citizenship classes, as well as religious, social and cultural programs.

The newly formed Russian-American Federation is involved in creating ways to benefit the local Russian community, such as providing buses to medical appointments for elderly patients who do not have a car. Atlanta is a member of Local Russian Émigré Organizations (LOREO) which is an extension of HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), a New York- based organization. With funding assistance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement, LOREO will work to organize the Russian community better and to access social services more effectively. There are also plans to create a private school in Atlanta that, while open to everyone, will have an emphasis on Russian language, literature, and history.

Some Russians, even those living here for a decade or more, feel that there is no real Russian community in Atlanta. Some yearn for Russian cultural events, for example; however, at the same time, they "want to be Americans." Atlanta's Jewish Community Center has developed cultural programs for the Russian community, including concerts, plays and art shows. There are some "targeted" cultural events, such as the Russian plays performed at the "Russian Stage", but the audience that goes to see plays there will also go see plays at the Fox Theater. The community clearly continues to struggle with the creation of a balance between total assimilation, which some see as necessary and even ideal, and the preservation of Russian identity and culture.



Who are the Russian-Americans? (cont'd)

Empire, and its capital city, Kyiv, dropped its former Russian spelling of Kiev, along with many similar place name changes in the new nation. In 2000, Ukraine had an estimated population of just under 50 million, projected to decline to 45 million by 2010. Ukrainian is the official language of the country, but Russian is also spoken by 22 percent of the population. Romanian, Polish and Hungarian are also spoken by significant segments of the population. Most of those emigrating from Ukraine to the Atlanta region are Russian-speaking.

Other Regions of the Former Soviet Union

The former Soviet Union included five republics with predominantly Muslim populations in South Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. While U.S. census data is not sufficiently detailed to identify migrants from each of these now independent nations, local reports indicate that several hundred Jews, consisting of 150 families, have migrated to Atlanta from the Bukharian region of Uzbekistan.

Other former Soviet citizens have found their way to Atlanta from Russia's western frontiers, including Belarus (formerly Byelorussia), Moldova, Latvia and Lithuania.

While the break-up of the Soviet Union brought a measure of new freedoms for many of its people, the political changes also resulted in emerging threats and overt persecution of ethnic and religious minorities. The result has been a stream of out-migration to western countries on the part of former Soviet Jews, Pentecostal Christians and others targeted by these new ethnic tensions. The Atlanta region has welcomed some of these migrants who have resettled in the United States. The 2000 census recorded some 3,100 Russians and 2,000 Ukrainians among greater Atlanta's foreign-born population. Another 2,600 Atlanta region residents were born in Belarus and other eastern European lands, including Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Moldova. Many of these foreign-born residents are relatively new arrivals, joining larger communities that have resided in Atlanta over a longer period of time. The latest census also recorded over 26,000 individuals with Russian ancestry (both native and foreign-born) and another 7,000 with Ukrainian ancestry. Some in the community suggest that the Russian-speaking population in greater Atlanta may be approaching the neighborhood of 50,000. Growth from immigration, however, has slowed noticeably since the tragic events of September 11, 2001.

What are Russian Customs and Culture?

The former Soviet Union was a vast empire, extending across the Eurasian landmass, and embracing a wide variety of ethnic groups, religions and linguistic groups. Still, some common features are a strong emphasis on individualism and a determination to stand up for one's rights.

Members of the current Atlanta Russian community may belong to one of five distinct religious groups: Jewish, Roman Catholic, Christian Protestant (Pentecostal), Christian Orthodox (Russian or Ukrainian) and Muslim. As refugees from religious persecution, many members of the community have found comfort and solace in Atlanta's religious institutions. They have found a kind of community and fellowship that they have never known before in the Atlanta area churches, synagogues and mosques that have offered aid. In the case of the Russian Jewish immigrants, their religious identity was typically very constrained by the restrictions of Soviet life. Upon arriving in Atlanta, some of the Jewish young adults have been attracted to Orthodox Judaism (the most observant branch of the religion), at times to the consternation of their non-observant parents.

The whole idea of volunteerism (as mainstream America knows it) was long lost in the Soviet Union, where the state took care of everyone's needs. Russians who become part of a local religious institution are fast learning the value of this aspect of the American way of life.

One of the most difficult things for Russian newcomers to become accustomed to is American-style economics. Under the Soviet government, everyone worked for the state and all property was owned by the state. Housing, always in short supply, was still provided by the state. Other rudimentary needs were also met by the state, but luxury items and certain services were available only on the black market.

When former Soviet citizens arrive here, they must become accustomed to working for a private employer and paying for such basic services as medical care and housing. Our familiar free market economy may be very confusing to those who did not grow up with it, although this may now be less of an issue for more recent arrivals with experience in the post-Soviet market economy. For instance, the notion of credit cards was unknown in communist countries. Most insurance was also unknown and unnecessary. For these reasons, entrepreneurism, while it is taking hold now, emerged rather slowly in this community compared to other new ethnic groups in the Atlanta region.

Russian Organizations, Associations and Resources

Below is a listing of selected organizations who work with the Russian Community. Additional resources are available at www.atlantaregional.com

GENERAL INFORMATION

Jewish Family and Career Services
4549 Chamblee Dunwoody Road
Atlanta, Georgia 30338

International Services:
Irina Nikishin
Resettlement Program Manager
(770) 677-9347
e-mail: irina@jfcs-atlanta.org

Nancy Yarova, Citizenship Coordinator
(770) 677-9346
yarova@jfcs-atlanta.org

Nada Karaula, Employment
(770) 677-9447
e-mail: nada@jfcs-atlanta.org

Local Russian Émigré Organizations
(LOREO)
www.loreo.org

Marcus Atlanta Jewish Community Center
5342 Tilly Mill Road
Dunwoody, Georgia 30338
Ha'Or outreach to the Russian Community department
(770) 395-2626
Contact: Inna Strizhevsky, Director

Russian American Federation
(770) 992-9022
Contact: Jana Katz, Secretary

ARTS

Russian Stage
(Classical Music Concerts)
(678) 352-1980
Contact: Mark and Rachel Lekherzak

ASSOCIATIONS

Atlanta Association of World War II Veterans from the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe
(404) 231-5980
Contact: Khanon Zaretsky, President
(Russian-speaking)
(678) 592-5721
Contact: Rita Ioffe, Vice President
(English-speaking)

Ukrainian Association of Georgia
Contact: Dr. Ulana Budnar, President
(404) 869-9157

Ukrainian National Women's League of America, Georgia Chapter
(770) 475-1084
Contact: Orysia Fisher

BUSINESS

RussianAtlanta.net
On-Line Business and Entertainment Links and Resources (In Russian)
www.russiahouse.net

MEDIA

Russia House Newspaper
(Bi-Monthly in Russian)
(404) 250-9422
Contact: Igor Kopmar, President
e-mail: info@russiahouse.net
www.russiahouse.net

Russianatlanta.com
On-line news, links and resources (in Russian)
www.russianatlanta.com

Russian Town
(Monthly Publication in Russian)
(770) 447-0360 or (404) 271-6711
e-mail: contact@russiantown.com
www.russiantown.com

RELIGIOUS

Atlanta Bukharian Jewish Club, Inc.
contact: Boris Nekgalov
(404) 513-0354
http://Atlanta.bukharian.com

Beth Jacob Synagogue
3778 Park Boulevard, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30329
(404) 633-0551 ext. 226
Contact: Chana Shapiro, Program Dir.

First Alliance Church
2512 N Druid Hills Rd NE
Atlanta, Georgia 30329-3297
(404) 634-1209
Contact: Pastor Peter Shirokov
Russian/Jewish Ministry
(Russian Service meets on Tuesday evenings)

St. Mary of Egypt Russian Orthodox Church
1765 Woodstock Road
Roswell, Georgia 30075-2135
(770) 640-1780
Contact: Reverend John Townsend

Contact:
E-mail: globalsnapshots@atlantaregional.com

Order printed copies from the ARC Information Center at 404-463-3102 or download free from the ARC website at www.atlantaregional.com

Atlanta Regional Commission • 40 Courtland Street, NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30303 • 404.463.3100 • www.atlantaregional.com

Charles Krautler, Executive Director **Darlene Daly, Project Coordinator**

The Atlanta Regional Commission is the official planning agency for the ten-county Atlanta Region including Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, and Rockdale, as well as the City of Atlanta and 63 other cities. ARC provides a forum where leaders come together to discuss and act on issues of regionwide consequence.

The Community Foundation • 50 Hurt Plaza, Suite 449, Atlanta, Georgia 30303 • 404.688.5525 • www.atlcf.org

Global Atlanta Snapshots are the result of past and ongoing collaborative partnerships of the Atlanta Regional Commission and many other agencies. We extend our sincere appreciation Georgia State University's Department of Anthropology and Geography and to every organization, agency and individual that participated in the research and development of this publication. This series of 10 Global Atlanta Snapshots was financed in part by a grant from the William Glenn Family Fund of The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. Recognized as one of the largest and fastest growing community foundations in the country, with more than $400 millions in assets, The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta manages and administers the charitable funds of 650 donors and their families. It serves 22 metro area counties and awards approximately $29 million a year to more than 1,300 nonprofit organizations. The Foundation educates donors and their families about critical issues facing the Atlanta region and connects them with nonprofit organizations and their interests.