

# THE CITIZEN ADVOCATE

CHATHAM-SAVANNAH

## Citizen Advocacy

Savannahians helping Savannahians  
for more than 35 years...

Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy is a 37-year-old community-based non-profit organization that recruits, matches and offers support to over 100 local citizens in voluntary citizen advocacy relationships.

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Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy Newsletter  
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DECEMBER  
2016

## Building a Bigger We...

by Tom Kohler, Coordinator

Well, it's been an interesting several months in America. We have seen a presidential election that has many people's heads spinning. No matter where you place yourself on the political spectrum, I think it's safe to say that the times they are a changing. And, that's not going to stop. Change is with us.

With that said, we will stand by the mission of citizen advocacy - bringing people who would not ordinarily meet into respectful and helpful personal relationships with one another - to be something that people from many walks and wheels of life can embrace.

Here's one very recent example of bringing people from different walks and wheels of life together around a common good. Chatham Savannah Citizen Advocacy Board member Billy Robinson invited a good friend of his, Mike Carbo, to learn more about citizen advocacy. Both of these guys are Benedictine boys, and each owns a business here in Savannah.

We met, shared some ideas about citizen advocacy and about Savannah, and at Mike's invitation I called him back a couple of months later to invite him to consider becoming an advocate. He was agreeable, as was the gentleman who was looking for someone to help him with some personal and financial matters that being blind make hard to do.

Now here, for me, is the fun part. After a couple of months, I met with Mike to hear how it was going. All good, it turns out. And then he says, "Well, I just tell people that a fuzzy faced Jewish guy introduced an Irish Catholic guy to an African American Muslim guy and that we are all better for it."

Let's keep building a bigger "we" here in Savannah.



# Our mission remains focused

on finding people who are at the margins of our community due to how we historically and currently think about people who have disabilities. We go into personal care homes, group homes, the streets, nursing homes, and the trailers behind schools to see how people are living. We ask people to take a chance. To take a chance on the idea that another member of our community will step forward and create a relationship that will be the foundation for change.

Then we look for local citizens to step up and into people’s lives as citizen advocates and we support them to question, challenge, and change what they see. We encourage citizen advocates to involve their family and friends and to use the contacts and connections they have throughout our community to create change. Please take some time to read the three short citizen advocacy stories in this edition of The Citizen Advocate. We have hundreds of stories about citizens finding ways to help fellow citizens.

If you know people who would be attracted to our mission and to the stories it creates, please share these stories and this newsletter.

We want to thank everyone who gives moral and financial support to citizen advocacy and we hope we will earn your support this year.

*Tom, George and Ashley*

*I do not think of political power as an end. Neither do I think of economic power as an end. They are ingredients in the objective that we seek in life. And I think that end or that objective is a truly brotherly society, the creation of the beloved community.*

*— Martin Luther King, Jr.*

## A Snapshot of Our Work this Year

**3** STAFF      **13** BOARD MEMBERS

**20**  
NEW CITIZEN ADVOCATES ARE ORIENTED, MATCHED AND SUPPORTED TO BEGIN THEIR ADVOCACY JOURNEYS.

**100**  
CONTINUING CITIZEN ADVOCATES ARE PROVIDED STRATEGIC, INFORMATIONAL AND MORAL SUPPORT.

**400 +**  
GRASSROOTS DONORS

**=**  
**\$270,000**  
BUDGET.

# Please consider supporting citizen advocacy action in Savannah!

We continue to bring local citizens into many kinds of voluntary personal relationships with people who are excluded from ordinary community life because of disability. Ask yourself, "Are these the kinds of efforts I want to encourage from citizens in Savannah?" If so, we welcome your membership and financial support!

If you have not renewed your support for this year or you would like to make a first time donation, please consider doing so by using the enclosed envelope or donate securely online at [www.savannahcitizenadvocacy.org](http://www.savannahcitizenadvocacy.org).

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# Question, Challenge, Change...

## Stories from citizen advocacy relationships

Geoff Tyler was a senior in the Special Education Department at a local high school when Ms. **Piper Head** and her husband met him. Piper and her husband are retired designers; both worked for Walt Disney Imagineering for many years. Piper noticed that Geoff was an imaginative artist...very artistic. The folks at school had been focusing on his autism, rather than this artistic talent. The Heads tried to help Geoff get into the Savannah College of Art and Design, but that did not pan out. Then they reached out to Armstrong State University and Geoff was accepted and is enjoying his first semester of college. He is the first person in his family to go to college. Autistic... artistic... How we see people has a lot to do with how we see what their future can hold. *We meet people who are at the margin of our community and invite people to bring them closer to the middle of our community. Question, Challenge, Change...*

**Gretchen Perez** knows what it takes to raise a child. She has wisdom that comes from doing a good job with her own children. Citizen advocacy coordinator George Seaborough invited her to meet a four year old youngster named Luis who was being expelled from the Head Start Program for being disruptive. Gretchen invited a friend who speaks Spanish to join her and together they are building a relationship with Luis and his mother. Gretchen meets with a variety of school staff, goes to Luis' doctor and Speech Therapy

appointments, and acts as a liaison to the school on behalf of Luis' mother. She has also introduced Luis and his mother to her family, and introduced Luis to the school library, which has opened up an exciting new world to him. Though there are tough roads ahead, the "want to, can do" side of Luis has begun to emerge, and the rebellious "won't do, can't do" side of this little boy is beginning to fade. *We meet people who are at the margin of our community and invite people to bring them closer to the middle of our community. Question, Challenge, Change...*

**Matt Toole**, a native of Savannah and successful teacher and sculptor has been carving out a man-to-man relationship with a 22 year old young man named Mike. Mike has

lived in a 24/7 staffed home in the past few years and on occasion, has resided in the local jail for minor infractions. We connected Matt and Mike around what they had in common. Both men are large with large personalities. Both are artists. Both like to make things. Both live on the Eastside. Matt has been able to bring Mike into his world of making things, to a "maker space" (it's the hip thing these days) that he shares with other artists and craftsmen. He invited Mike to his wedding party and to art openings. He's questioning, challenging, changing what people see and feel about Mike.

*He's creating a little bridge, a bridge that leads from the margins, back toward the middle of our community. Question, Challenge, Change...*

***The beloved community is not a utopia, but a place where the barriers between people gradually come down and where the citizens make a constant effort to address even the most difficult problems of ordinary people. It is above all else an idealistic community.***

— *The Rev. Jim Lawson*

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# Tickets on sale at [www.savannahcitizenadvocacy.org](http://www.savannahcitizenadvocacy.org)

Help us keep the "social" in "social change" and mark your calendar for our

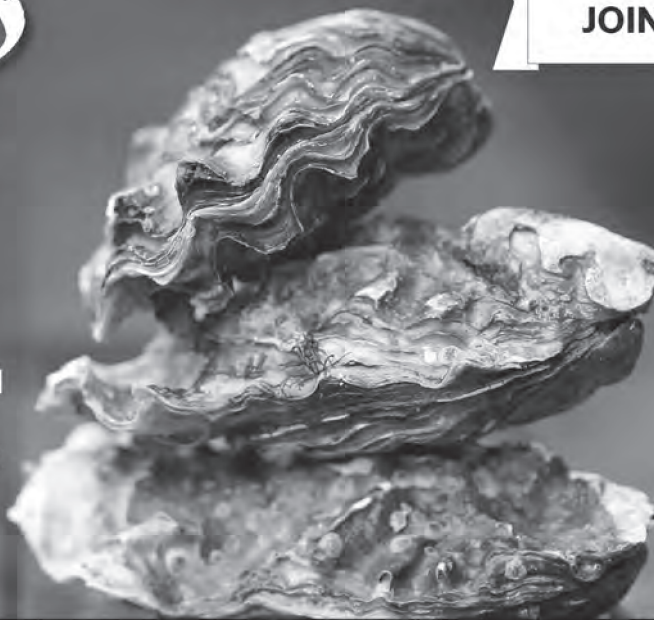
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