



the signal

January 2026

A New Year, a Fresh Start – Together

A new year is the perfect time to reset, reflect, and think about the small ways we connect with the people we live alongside.

Each year gives us the chance to be a little better than we were the year before. Sometimes that means a wave instead of a hurried walk. Sometimes it's introducing yourself, showing up to an event, or saying yes when you might normally say no.

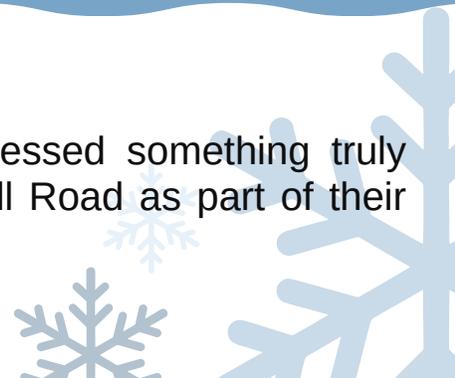
Being a great neighbor doesn't require a big commitment or a certain personality. It starts small: a smile, a conversation, a shared laugh. Taking that tiny risk to connect can lead to friendships, memories, and a sense of belonging that turns a neighborhood into a true community.

This year, let's challenge ourselves to step just outside our comfort zones — to meet new faces, make new friends, and discover how amazing our neighborhood really is. The best part? You don't have to do it alone.



A Peaceful Moment in Tucker

On the morning of December 31, residents of Tucker witnessed something truly special as Buddhist monks quietly walked along Hugh Howell Road as part of their months-long Walk for Peace.



The monks are on a historic journey from Fort Worth, Texas to Washington, D.C., sharing a message of peace, forgiveness, and unity along the way.



Their path brought them through Tucker, where residents of all ages and backgrounds gathered in quiet reflection.

Many described the walk as a powerful and inspiring way to close out the year — a reminder to slow down and lead with kindness. A beautiful, peaceful moment our community won't soon forget.

A Sweet Success: Smoketree Delivers Holiday Cheer to Our Local Precincts

The holiday season was a time for gratitude, and our neighborhood truly stepped up to show our appreciation for those who keep us safe year-round.

In December, quite a few Smoketree residents came together for our annual "Cookies for Cops" drive. The goal was simple: collect homemade and store-bought cookies to deliver a little festive joy and a heartfelt "thank you" to the brave officers and staff at the Gwinnett Westside Precinct.

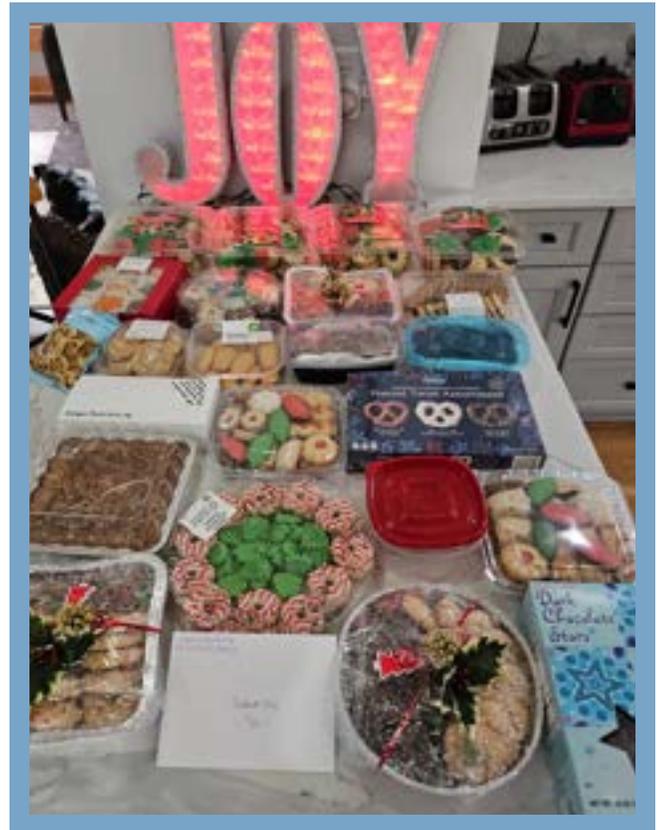
And what a success it was!

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our neighbors, we even had enough to drop off at our Gwinnett Fire Precinct as well. They were thrilled to receive a box overflowing with treats.

We extend our sincere thanks to every single person who baked, donated, packed, and helped deliver these thoughtful gifts. Your participation made this event possible and showed the true community spirit of Smoketree.

"The officers were so grateful," said Jayne Rauser, Smoketree Swim and Rec Club President. "It was a small gesture, but seeing their smiles made all the effort worthwhile."

Thank you again, Smoketree! Wishing you all a happy and healthy new year!



January Board Meeting

Join us virtually on January 29th from 7:00–8:00 PM for our first board meeting of 2026. This is a great opportunity to hear community updates, be part of upcoming planning, share ideas, and voice any questions or concerns.

A meeting link will be sent out via email.

All SSRC members are welcome — we'd love to have you join the conversation!



Local Happenings:

There's plenty of fun and community spirit to look forward to in our neck of the woods this winter and beyond!

Tucker Events

Tucker's calendar is kicking off 2026 with live music and community gatherings. Don't miss the Winter Concert Series at the Tucker Recreation Center with bands like Emerald Empire and Way Back Band — cozy evenings with great vibes and free (just preregister) on January 23rd. Plus, on January 19th, join the city's MLK Day of Service to give back to local parks and spaces.

Norcross & Surroundings

While Norcross itself has a rich tradition of festivals — from art walks to cultural celebrations on Main Street — keep an eye out for upcoming community events and seasonal happenings throughout the year, including Norcross Irish Fest and local pop-up markets (dates TBA).

Stone Mountain Park Adventures

Just minutes away, Stone Mountain Park is gearing up for some exciting seasonal fun. After the winter holidays, the park will celebrate Lunar New Year with cultural activities, parades, drone light shows, and more Feb. 14–Mar. 1, 2026 — a vibrant way to welcome the Year of the Horse. Longer-term thrills include Dino Fest in spring and other family-friendly festivals throughout the year.

Whether you want music and connection in Tucker, seasonal fun near Stone Mountain, or community spirit in Norcross, there's something for everyone not far from home!



New Year, New Home Energy

New year, same house — but let's do things a little differently this time, Smoketree. Here are some homeowner resolutions that are realistic, useful, and just simply enough to stick.

Stop pretending clutter will “organize itself.”

If you haven't used it in a year, it's not a sentimental item... it's a hostage.

Fix the small thing already.

That loose cabinet hinge has been testing your patience since 2023. This is your sign.

Touch grass (your own).

Trim the bushes, pull one weed, wave at a neighbor. Boom — curb appeal and community.

Spend smarter, not bigger.

Replace a lightbulb. Seal a draft. Your energy bill shouldn't be jump-scaring you every month.

Actually meet your neighbors.

You don't have to be best friends — just learn names and borrow sugar like adults.

Use the patio more.

Even if it's just wine on a Tuesday. Especially if it's wine on a Tuesday.

Here's to fewer “we'll get to it” projects and more “wow, we actually did that” moments in 2026

Don't Forget! Bulk Pickup = FREE

Living in unincorporated Gwinnett County has its perks — and this is a good one!

Did you know you can place up to **TWO** bulk items at the curb each week for **FREE**? Think old furniture, mattresses, or that chair you've been meaning to say goodbye to.

One important step:

You do need to schedule your pickup in advance.

It's quick and easy — just visit [GwinnettCounty.com](https://www.gwinnettcountry.com) and book it.

Set it out. Schedule it. Done.



Plant of the Month: Hellebores

Just because it's winter doesn't mean your garden has to be boring. Hellebores, also known as Lenten Roses, are January's quiet overachievers — blooming right when everything else is still asleep

Why we love them:

- Bloom in the middle of winter
- Long-lasting flowers in soft pinks, whites, and purples
- Thrive in partial shade (hello, Georgia yards)
- Deer-resistant and low-maintenance

Care tip:

Plant hellebores in well-drained soil and leave last year's foliage until new growth appears — they like a little protection from the cold.

Perfect for adding life and color when your garden needs it most. Winter glow-ups are a thing



Slow Cooker Crispy Chicken Carnitas

4-5 pounds boneless skinless chicken breasts*

1 bottle beer (or chicken stock, if you do not like to cook with alcohol)

1 small white onion, diced

4 cloves garlic, peeled and minced

1 tablespoon chipotle powder (or 1 chipotle in adobo sauce, minced)

2 teaspoons cumin

1 teaspoon black pepper

1 teaspoon chili powder

1 1/2 teaspoons salt

2-4 fresh limes



Add the chicken, beer, onion, garlic, chipotle, cumin, black pepper, chili powder, and salt to a slow cooker and toss to combine. Cook on low for 6–8 hours or high for 4–5 hours until the chicken is tender and easy to shred.

Shred the chicken, then spread it on a greased baking sheet. Broil for 5–6 minutes until the edges crisp. Spoon about ½ cup of the cooking juices over the chicken, toss, and broil again for 5 minutes. Repeat once more with another ½ cup of juices, then toss with remaining juices and fresh lime juice.

Serve in tacos, burritos, or salads. Store refrigerated up to 3 days or frozen up to 3 months.

[Link](#)

The Benefits of Getting Crafty

Crafting isn't just about making something cute — it's good for you, too. Taking time to create helps reduce stress, boost creativity, and give your brain a break from screens and busy schedules.

For kids, crafts build confidence, fine motor skills, and imagination. For adults, they're a great way to unwind, feel productive, and even reconnect with a sense of play we don't always make time for.

Best of all, crafts bring people together. Whether you're making something solo or side-by-side with family or neighbors, creating is a simple way to slow down, connect, and enjoy the moment.

Easy DIY Craft: Mason Jar Luminary

A quick, cozy craft you can make in 15 minutes.

You'll need:

- Mason jar
- Tea light (real or LED)
- Twine or ribbon
- Optional: paint, glitter, stickers, or pressed leaves

How to make it:

1. Decorate the outside of the jar however you like.
2. Tie twine or ribbon around the neck of the jar.
3. Drop in a tea light and enjoy the glow

Why we love it:

- Cheap, easy, and kid-friendly
- Great for winter nights or gifting
- Looks cute indoors and outside

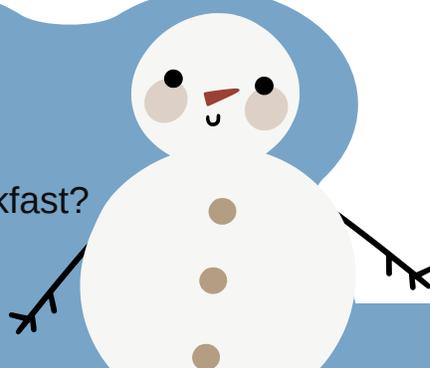
Instant charm, zero stress



Kid's Corner

Q: What do snowmen eat for breakfast?

A: Frosted Flakes!



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