

History of the Gwinnett Senior Golden Games

For many years, Bob and Eileen Giselbach traveled the country attending senior Olympics. One day they wondered “Why didn’t their county, Gwinnett, have their own games.” At that time only 25 senior games existed out of 159 counties in Georgia. All their games were run by and funded by their counties and cities.

Bob and Eileen were very active in their church. On one occasion, they were carrying a basket of fruit to a new parishioner, Patti Muse, a county commissioner. As they were leaving, she asked them if there was anything she could do for them. The Giselbachs told her of their desire to start the senior Olympics in Gwinnett County. Within two days, Phil Hoskins, Director of Community Services, set up an appointment with Sharon Plunkett, and they offered their plan to her. The County would supply the facilities, but the rest was up to us. We were on our own for all supplies, donations, setting up, printing, etc. This was 1999.



Eileen Giselbach, Sharon Plunkett, Bob Giselbach

Bob and Eileen immediately set up a Board of Directors, Bob Giselbach - president, Bob Elliott - vice president, Carol Elliott - secretary, Jim Crowe - treasurer, Eileen Giselbach - Assistant Treasurer. Dana Dow and Dave Gaddis were on the board.

We put our feet to the ground, knocking on doors, begging people for donations, and calling friends who were interested in sports. Jennifer Thilo, from Delmar of Gwinnett, was our first donor with a generous gift of \$1000. Jennifer is now the Regional Vice President of Delmar and has supported the Games for 20 years as of 2019. We set up a telephone line to contact other sports enthusiasts. A big help to us was Sandra Johnson of the Cobb County games. She provided assistance in establishing the games and advice on how to reach the community of seniors.

Our senior movement was founded to provide senior residents the opportunity to participate in a social, competitive, recreational and athletic environment.

2000

Participants: 76

Officers: Bob Giselbach - president, Bob Elliott - vice president, Carol Elliott - secretary, Jim Crowe - treasurer, Eileen Giselbach - Assistant Treasurer, Dana Dow and Dave Gaddis – at large.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bogan Park.

Our first games were held in May and offered 15 events and were held for a week at Bogan Park. Lunch was supplied by Blake Hawkins. A few of the events were apple peeling, corn shucking, fishing, archery, basketball throw, billiards, golf, holey board, horseshoes, clock golf, race walk, running, shuffleboard, swimming, table tennis, tennis and walking. The fee was \$15.00 including 2 meals, and all events, except bowling and golf which required facility fees for use.

2001

Participants: 165

Officers: Bob Giselbach - president, Bob Elliott - vice president, Carol Elliott - secretary, Jim Crowe - treasurer, Eileen Giselbach - Assistant Treasurer, Dana Dow and Dave Gaddis – at large.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bethesda Senior Center.

The second annual Senior Olympics were held in April.

This was election year for 2002.

2002

Participants: 192

Officers: Al Sandham - president, H.D. Jones - vice president (H.D. continues to participate as of 2019), Joan Scales - secretary, Eileen Giselbach – treasurer (Eileen. continues to participate as of 2019), Chris Moore and Dana Dow - at large, Susie Dodson - historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bethesda Senior Center.

Larry Hannah was our computer guru. Al Sandham was very knowledgeable in legalities and much was done to improve our organization with non-profit status and by-laws. At this time, the name was changed from Gwinnett Senior Olympics to Gwinnett Senior Golden Games. This was done to not conflict with the Georgia State Olympics.

The Games started in May and continued through June and had 22 events. Added events were cycling, darts, frisbee throw, baseball throw, football throw and discus.

2003

Participants: 256

Officers: Al Sandham - president, H.D. Jones - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Eileen Giselbach – treasurer, Chris Moore and Dana Dow - at large, Susie Dodson - historian.



Bob and Eileen Giselbach, Susie Dodson, H.D. Jones, Marie Hickman, Al Sandham

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bethesda Senior Center.

The Games were held from April to May.

Due to increased numbers, medals were awarded at the closing ceremony.

2004

Participants: 260

Officers: Al Sandham - president, H.D. Jones - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Eileen Giselbach – treasurer, Chris Moore and Dana Dow - at large, Susie Dodson - historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bethesda Senior Center.

The Games were held April to May. Card games were added.

2005

Participants: 270

Officers: Al Sandham - president, H.D. Jones - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Eileen Giselbach – treasurer, Chris Moore and Dana Dow - at large, Susie Dodson - historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bethesda Senior Center.

Event managers were added since participation had increased.

2006

Participants: 305

Officers: Al Sandham - president, H.D. Jones - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Eileen Giselbach – treasurer, Chris Moore and Dana Dow - at large, Susie Dodson - historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bethesda Senior Center.

As our numbers grew, so did our events. Badminton was added and race walking was eliminated. The time frame was also extended. A change was made in our t-shirts, which were gray, with the large full front logo changed to a small upper left front logo. Entertainment was provided by Emily Sheffield with her rendition of Ray Stephens.



**Torch bearer: Ruth
White, 86**

2007

Participants: 349

Officers: Al Sandham - president, H.D. Jones - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Eileen Giselbach – treasurer, Chris Moore and Dana Dow - at large, Susie Dodson - historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bethesda Senior Center.



**Torch bearer: Colonel
Lowell Gornall, Retired**

2008

Participants: 409

Officers: Al Sandham - president, H.D. Jones - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Eileen Giselbach – treasurer, Chris Moore and Dana Dow - at large, Susie Dodson - historian.



**Susie Dodson receiving award from
Bob Giselbach**

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bethesda Senior Center.

This year we picked up another big sponsor – Humana who continued to sponsor at least through 2019.



**Torch bearer: Marie
Joseph, 88**

2009

Participants: 364

Officers: Bob Giselbach - president, H.D. Jones - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Eileen Giselbach – treasurer, Chris Moore and Dana Dow - at large, Susie Dodson - historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Rhodes Jordan Park.

The location changed because of the number of athletes.

Entertainment was provided at closing by Peter Goerissen, guitarist/singer.



**Torch bearer: Frances
Thuat, 84**

2010

Participants: 329

Officers: Bob Giselbach - president, H.D. Jones - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Eileen Giselbach – treasurer, Chris Moore and Dana Dow - at large, Susie Dodson - historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Rhodes Jordan Park.

The 9-hole, par 3 golf was eliminated and demonstration disc frisbee and croquet were introduced. Elections were held for new officers for 2011.



**Torch bearer: John Drake, 88, with
Lowell Gornall**

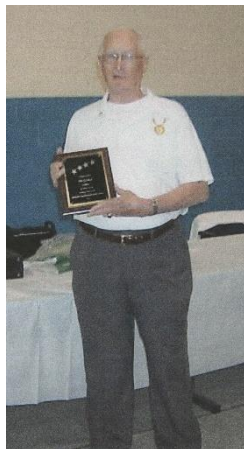
2011

Participants: 270

Officers: Alan Villavasso - president, H.D. Jones - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Elaine Shiver – treasurer, Chris Moore and Hank Duren - at large, Susie Dodson – historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Rhodes Jordan Park.

Entertainment was provided by the Hi-Lows sponsored by Eastside Medical Hospital. Medals were awarded at the end of each event because of the number of athletes.



**Bob Giselbach
receiving service award**

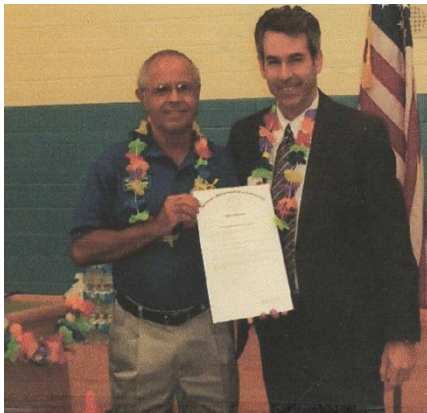


Torch bearer: Irene Rice, 84

2012

Participants: 316, 37 out of county.

Officers: Alan Villavasso - president, H.D. Jones - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Elaine Shiver – treasurer, Chris Moore and Hank Duren - at large, Susie Dodson - historian.



**Alan receiving award for Golden Games
from Commissioner Mike Beaudreau**

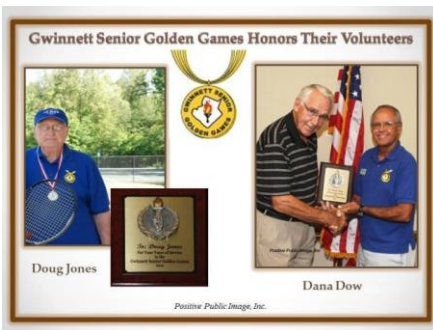
Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Rhodes Jordan Park.

At this time a new web master joined us - Richard Porter. Also joining us was Debbie Reid, data entry guru.

The participants were served two hot meals. Elections were held for 2013.



Demo at Gwinnett Braves May 11



Volunteer Awards November 7



Torchbearers: Bob and Eileen Giselbach

2013

Participants: 302, 27 out of county.

Officers: Alan Villavasso - president, Pat Harney - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Elaine Shiver – treasurer, Hank Duren and Bud Kushman - at large, Susie Dodson - historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Rhodes Jordan Park.



Chris Moore – Volunteer Award – April 3



Demo at Gwinnett Braves May 8



Torch bearer: Louise Howington, 98

2014

Participants: 283

Officers: Alan Villavasso - president, Pat Harney - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Elaine Shiver – treasurer, Hank Duren and Bud Kushman - at large, Susie Dodson - historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Rhodes Jordan Park.

Elections were held for 2015.



**Torch bearers: Alan Villavasso,
Carmen and Hank Duren**

2015

Participants: 327

Officers: Alan Villavasso - president, Pat Harney - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Elaine Shiver – treasurer, Hank Duren and Bud Kushman - at large, Susie Dodson - historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bethesda Senior Center.



**Torch bearers: Bud and
Ginny Kushman**

We had a sad loss; Susie Dodson passed suddenly. Susie was the backbone of our organization.

Kim Shealy and her crew from Parks and Recreation were tremendous help to the athletes.

2016

Participants: 283

Officers: Alan Villavasso - president, Pat Harney - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Elaine Shiver – treasurer, Hank Duren and Bud Kushman - at large, Robin Porter - historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bethesda Senior Center.



Torch bearer: Mary Luick, 87, with son Andy

2017

Participants: 293

Officers: Alan Villavasso - president, Pat Harney - vice president, Marie Hickman - secretary, Elaine Shiver – treasurer, Hank Duren and Bud Kushman - at large, Robin Porter - historian.



President's Award

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bethesda Senior Center.

Elections were held for 2018.



Torch bearer: Walter Czerniawski, 90

2018

Participants: 428

Officers: Sherman Shelby - president, Pat Harney - vice president, Glory Villavasso - secretary, Judy Payne – treasurer, Hank Duren and Charles Crowell - at large, Yvonne Davis - historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bethesda Senior Center.



Torch bearers: Yvonne and Cleo Davis

2019

Participants: 288

Officers: Sherman Shelby - president, Pat Harney - vice president, Glory Villavasso - secretary, Judy Payne – treasurer, Hank Duren and Charles Crowell - at large, Yvonne Davis - historian.

Location of opening and closing ceremonies: Bethesda Senior Center.

At this time, the entrance fee was raised to \$20. This was election year for new officers for 2020.



**Torch bearers: Pat and Stella
Harney**

2020

Officers: Kim Shealy - president, Pat Harney - vice president, Glory Villavasso - secretary, Lynn Nickerson – treasurer, Hank Duren , Charles Crowell, Yvonne Davis - at large.

An incredibly sad year for our organization:

- In April we lost Bob Giselbach, our founder and leader for many years.
- Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Games were cancelled for the first time in its history.