

Atlanta's Young Altruists

As these six do-gooders prove, giving back is more fashionable than ever.

As Atlantans deck the halls and pick out presents for their near and dear, this vanguard of young humanitarians is busy beautifying the city in ways that have nothing to do with garland or colored lights. Whether starting organizations of their own or thriving in more established realms of do-gooding, they have committed their lives to human rights, cancer support, childhood literacy and the environment. Read on and be inspired.

BLAKE WATKINS

If you've spotted a roving band of hungry goats in your neighborhood, you can thank Blake Watkins, forest restoration coordinator for Trees Atlanta. Besides orchestrating the planting of 1,900 new trees this year, Watkins works to rid city parks of invasive plant species like kudzu and Chinese privet.

His most exciting project involves a herd of 34 goats charged with clearing rogue foliage in Boulevard Crossing, a new BeltLine park south of Grant Park. "We believe using fewer pesticides is always a good thing," says Watkins, who hopes to streamline the program until goat removal is as cost effective as pesticides.

The goat grazing experiment is a preamble to the biggest project Watkins and his colleagues at Trees Atlanta have ever tackled. Partnering with the BeltLine, the organization will forest parks and walkways along the 22-mile BeltLine loop, creating the longest linear arboretum in the world.

"Trees cool the city down, improve air quality and cool buildings and pavement to reduce heating and cooling costs," says Watkins, who loves the city's native sycamores best. When he's not minding goats and planting trees, Watkins plays ultimate Frisbee and keeps his carbon footprint low by biking just about everywhere. treesatlanta.org

CAITLIN MARTIN

When a beloved sorority sister passed away after graduation, Caitlin Martin became aware of the 10,000 people who die each year waiting for bone marrow matches.

Now, as a regional recruitment and community development account executive at Be the Match, operated by the National Marrow Donor Program, Martin organizes bone marrow drives for people just like her friend—patients with blood diseases and blood cancers like leukemia and lymphoma.

"We currently have 9 million people on the registry," says the plucky University of Florida graduate with a sports business background. Since only 30 percent of people are able to find bone marrow matches within their families, Martin holds bone marrow drives on college campuses, churches and venues all over Georgia.

"You're literally giving someone a chance at life again, and a little part of you is always with them," says Martin. "It's so easy to join and a simple cheek swab can really save a life. With every swab I do, I wonder if that could be the one that will save someone's life. I get goose bumps because people have a chance at getting a cure." marrow.org

Blake Watkins



Caitlin Martin



Doug Shipman

Lisa Vingerling

Krista Gilliam

Bilal Sarwari

Photo by Austin Pratt

DOUG SHIPMAN



When then-Mayor Shirley Franklin asked Doug Shipman to work on a special project for the city, he jumped at the chance. An Emory graduate with master's degrees in theology and public policy from Harvard, Shipman was just the sort of CEO who could get the National Center for Civil and Human Rights off the ground.

Opening in 2013 on land adjacent to the World of Coke, the center will be the first museum of its kind, displaying exhibits on the Civil Rights Movement, as well as lectures, exhibits and films about contemporary human rights struggles around the world.

As "chief juggler," Shipman has recruited a world-class architect and raised \$80 million for the Center, which will also house the King Papers Collection. "It will be the premier place where the public engages in discussions on what human rights are," says Shipman. "Atlanta was at the heart of the Civil Rights struggle, and the Center will bring the city back to that place of prominence."

When he's away from the office, Shipman likes to run from one Nobel Peace Prize winner's house to another—an honor, he is quick to say, Atlanta shares with no other city in the world except Johannesburg. cchrpartnership.org

LISA VINGERLING

By her 31st birthday, Lisa Vingerling had undergone drastic surgery and chemotherapy for an aggressive form of breast cancer. When her battle ended in victory, Vingerling was surprised to find she was still stuck in "Cancerland," coping with an altered body image and a wildly different outlook on life. "For a while after my treatment, I went to work every day and came home and went to bed," she says. "When you're in that space, it's hard to imagine you're ever going to get out of it."

One day, while listening to an upbeat salsa song, Vingerling realized how much she wanted to take salsa lessons, and thought other young survivors probably would too. Soon, the Pink Heals Foundation was born. Partnering with Cancer Wellness at Piedmont, Pink Heals began hosting "Back in Your Heals" events like salsa and Zumba classes for young female cancer survivors. "The goal is to provide fun events to help young women feel normal and remind them they have a great big life to live," says Vingerling, who is happy to have escaped "Cancerland," and even happier to lend a hand to other young women still finding their way back to normal. pinkheals.org



BILAL SARWARI

Bilal Sarwari entered Emory University as a pre-med major, but graduated a hipster gardener. Receiving an education in sustainability while at Emory's Oxford College, Sarwari is an urban agriculture consultant and author of the Hipster Gardener blog and Twitter feed.

Currently operating an urban agriculture therapy program for Viewpoint Health's teenage crisis stabilization unit, Sarwari declares he has "the best job in the world." "A lot of the kids have never seen a working farm before," says Sarwari, of his two-acre plot. "I've found that just getting them to focus on the soil's health can really help them make a connection. They've had such rough pasts and taking ownership of something is really therapeutic for them."

After Sarwari began cultivating land for Empire State South restaurant, his friends began calling him for help with growing vegetable plots and patio gardens. Soon, the Hipster Gardener was cultivating land all over Atlanta, including Piedmont Park. "I really enjoy educating people on where their food comes from," says Sarwari, who hopes to obtain a master's degree in environmental health and public health. "I want to get this knowledge out there so it can help as many people as possible."



hipstergardener.wordpress.com, [@HipsterGardener](https://twitter.com/HipsterGardener)

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KRISTA GILLIAM

When Krista Gilliam set foot in Decatur's picturesque Little Shop of Stories, she instantly knew she belonged there. Luckily, the owners agreed and Gilliam became store manager, with responsibilities ranging from children's story time to ordering new books and dining with high-profile authors and publishers.



As if running a bookstore weren't enough of a challenge, this fall Gilliam launched On the Same Page, a community reading program whose inaugural book, *The Phantom Tollbooth*, is celebrating its 50th year of publication. Working with local schools, libraries and civic organizations, Gilliam secured funding to ensure that kids of all economic levels received books and could participate in the program. After hosting movie screenings, developing teacher packets and training more than 30 volunteers to lead book discussions, Gilliam's pet program culminates in a visit from author Norton Juster this month.

"Reading helps you see many perspectives and experience different lives," says Gilliam. "Kids who get involved in community reading programs end up being more involved in government and bettering their communities as adults. It seems like a good idea to invest in those who will invest in the community in the future."

littleshopofstories.com/same-page.php

—LAURA NEWSOME