



5 years

**GEORGIA HEIRS PROPERTY
LAW CENTER**
EST. 2015

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Dear Friends, Partners, and Colleagues,

The Georgia Heirs Property Law Center advances systemic change by unlocking equity. As Georgia's communities felt the economic and health impacts of the pandemic, the Georgia Heirs Property Law Center, Inc. ("the Center") responded with legal tools, educational resources, and new ways to serve and be present in communities throughout the state.

Equity is at the heart of the Center's work because the Center resolves heirs property - an unstable and pervasive form of real property ownership; prevents heirs property through estate planning; and provides asset education to increase generational wealth, economic value, and community stability by securing and preserving property rights.

Representing \$34 billion dollars in tax-appraised value in Georgia, heirs property is like a huge glass box full of money that Georgians can see but can't use. The Center's staff works hard to remove the glass box so families can build generational wealth. The "clear title" allows participation in housing rehab, disaster recovery, farming, and economic development programs. The "money" (equity) can be leveraged as collateral to access bank loans to further a child's education, make asset improvements, or start a business.

Thus, when heirs property is unresolved or not prevented, it undermines Georgia's families, their equity, and Georgia's economy. The negative impact of unresolved heirs property affects families and every aspect of community including the functioning of local government, court systems, state departments, banks, businesses, and nonprofits. When heirs property is resolved or prevented, the positive impact is felt as a return on investment across individual, neighborhood, and state indicators.

As FY2020 unfolded, partners and clients of the Center asked deeper and more profound questions about how, exactly, prevention and remediation of heirs property impacted their lives, and what, exactly, heirs property does to diminish equity within our communities. We heard the heartbreaking stories of the sudden loss of family and friends to the pandemic and the resulting financial fallout caused by a lack of estate planning. We also heard stories of strength and resiliency as people demanded to know what should be done to both prevent and resolve heirs property in Georgia and nationally.

The municipal, legal, financial, governmental, and nonprofit sectors are integral to systemically addressing heirs property. Partners from these sectors and their common goals were the impetus for the Center's Heirs Property Forum, which brought 50 thought-leaders together at the Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta to develop a common understanding of heirs property, the tools available to address it, and a comprehensive action plan that grows Georgia's economy through property rights. The overarching consensus was that heirs property impacts every level of Georgia's economy and that community revitalization cannot be successful without access to legal services and heirs property education.

Building on the Center's expertise and state-wide listening sessions, staff rolled-up their sleeves and rolled-out technical assistance via webinars, web-based educational materials, and client services by phone to cover even more ground via technology. The Center's Board incorporated lessons from the changing landscape into a new Strategic Plan and created an Advisory Committee to gain additional input from our state partners - the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, the Georgia Department of Agriculture, and the Georgia Forestry Commission.

In times of uncertainty, there is great opportunity. This FY2020 Annual Report highlights the ways the Center and the families and communities we work with are transforming these difficult times into equity. I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as we, the Center's staff, enjoyed pulling together our collective stories during a historic time.

There is a direct line between addressing heirs property and increasing economic opportunities and securing generational wealth. Please join us in revitalizing our communities and advancing economic equity.

With gratitude for your support and leadership,



Skipper G. StipeMaas, J.D.

Executive Director



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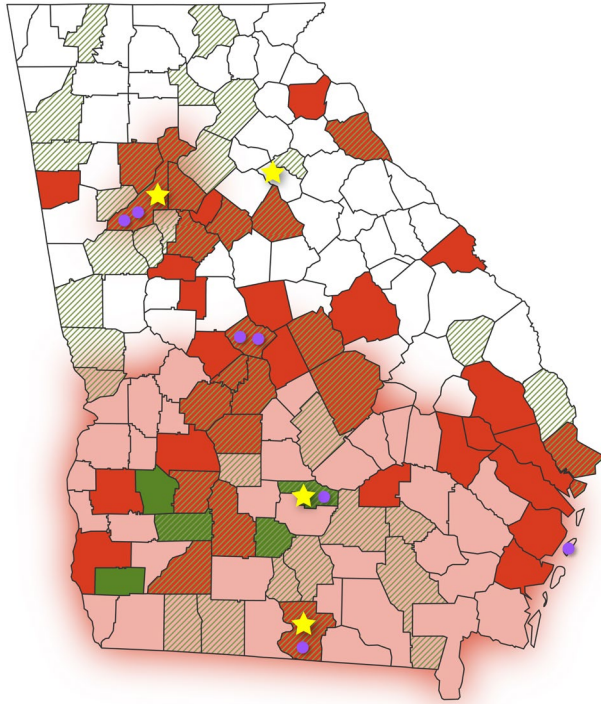
OUR MISSION

The Georgia Heirs Property Law Center increases generational wealth, economic value, and community stability by securing and preserving property rights of low- and moderate-income Georgians.

*GROWING GEORGIA'S ECONOMY
THROUGH PROPERTY RIGHTS*

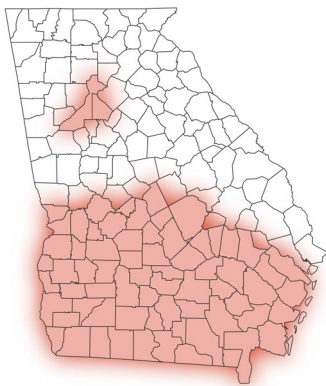
ON THE MAP

As of June 30, 2020

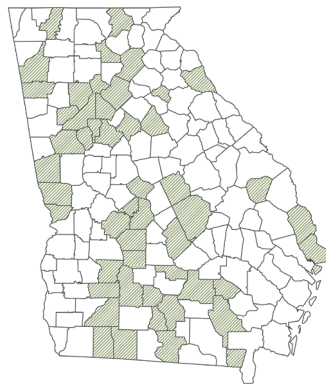


- Target Areas
- Outreach, Workshops & Webinars
- Landowner Academy
- Heirs Property Cases
- GHPLC Offices
- Estate Plans & Wills Clinics

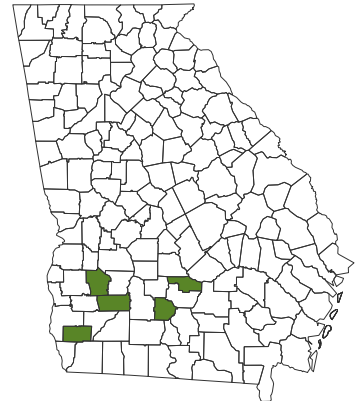
TARGET AREAS



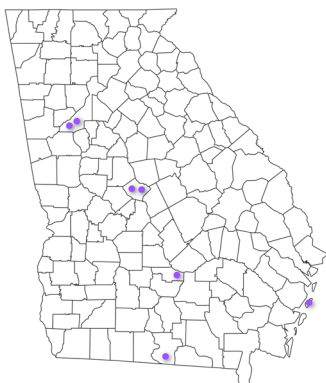
OUTREACH, WORKSHOPS & WEBINARS



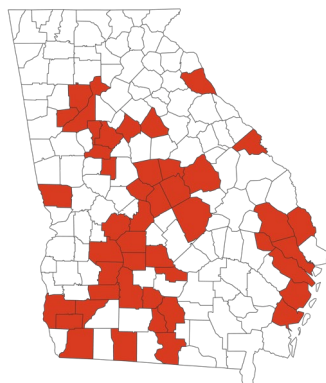
LANDOWNER ACADEMY



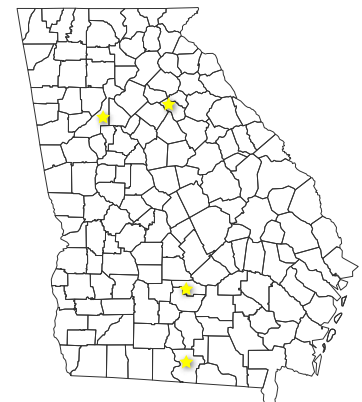
ESTATE PLANS & WILLS CLINICS



HEIRS PROPERTY CASES

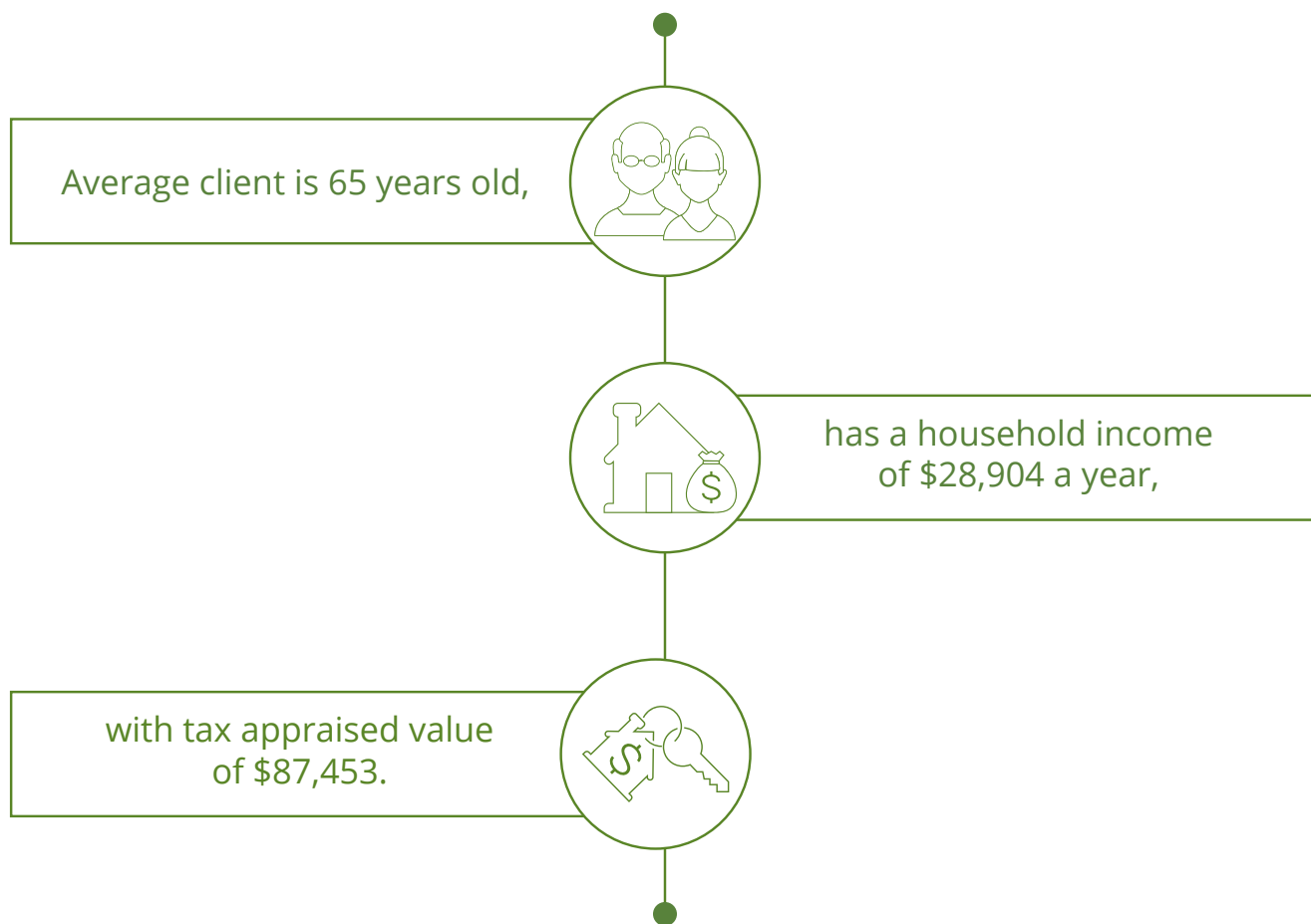


GHPLC OFFICES



OPPORTUNITY

The Math: The total tax appraised value of probable heirs property undermining Georgia's economy is over \$34 billion.



WHO OWNS HEIRS PROPERTY, WHERE IT IS LOCATED AND HOW DOES IT IMPACT GEORGIA'S ECONOMY?

Myth:

Heirs property is only found in one area of Georgia.

Fact:

Heirs property is found all across Georgia and all over the country. Heirs property can be found in rural and urban Georgia and includes houses, farms, forests, and commercial properties.

Myth:

Heirs property only has negative consequences for the owners and not for me.

Fact:

Heirs property impacts all levels of community. Heirs property causes blight, which decreases neighborhoods' stability, reduces housing values, and depresses a municipality's tax base. Heirs property prevents banks from making loans and insurance companies from being able to issue policies.



BEFORE CLEAR TITLE



AFTER CLEAR TITLE

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

THE CENTER'S GROUNDBREAKING VIRTUAL ADOPTION OF AN HEIR RESULTED IN NEW CASE LAW, CLEAR TITLE, AND A NEW HOME FOR MS. SAWYER!

Ms. Sawyer* came to the Center because she lacked clear title to her life-long home, which was preventing her from participating in a home repair program in a small South Georgia town. Ms. Sawyer was raised from infancy by her aunt and uncle who called her their daughter. She was not aware that they were not her biological parents until she went to get her driver's license and needed her birth certificate. She lived in their home all of her life, taking care of them until they both passed away without any biological children and without wills.



Judge Shawn Rhodes, Ms. Sawyer* and Staff Attorney Wanda Strickland

Over the years the home fell into disrepair, which made the home repair grant program critical. The program required Ms. Sawyer to have clear title to the property and her name on the deed, but the title was still in her deceased aunt and uncle's names. Since Ms. Sawyer was raised by her aunt and uncle and was not adopted by them in their lifetime, the Center's staff filed petitions in the Probate Court and proved her virtual adoption by her aunt and uncle, which made her the only heir to their estates. Once the Center's attorneys completed the virtual adoption and settled the estates, they transferred the title of the home to Ms. Sawyer.

"I WAS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO AFFORD TO FIX MY OLD HOUSE AND ENDED UP WITH A BRAND NEW ONE! I AM AMAZED AT HOW HARD MY LAWYER WORKED TO CLEAR MY TITLE AND MAKE ALL OF THIS POSSIBLE FOR ME. THANK YOU!"

-MS. SAWYER

In addition, the federal funds, which were passed down by the state to the local municipality for this housing program, were expended and did not have to be returned, as they sometimes are if title issues are not resolved.

Ms. Sawyer has recently finished moving into her new home. Additionally, during the process of her virtual adoption, she was connected with two sisters that she hadn't known. Her sisters bought her a dining table and living room set for her home.

*Names have been changed to protect client confidentiality.

IMPACT

BY THE NUMBERS

As of June 30, 2020



The Center has provided legal services for and closed **418 matters** - **154** title clearing matters, **90** title searches/audits, and **174** estate planning matters



Titles for **50** properties have been cleared in **12** counties valued at approximately **\$3.87 million**



The Center, in collaboration with private attorneys and pro bono title companies, reviewed titles for **250** tracts of land involving properties in **48** countries collectively valued at **\$17.89 million**



The Center, solely or in collaboration with other partners, completed **54** community outreach programs, trainings, and stakeholder meetings, reaching approximately **1,669** individuals



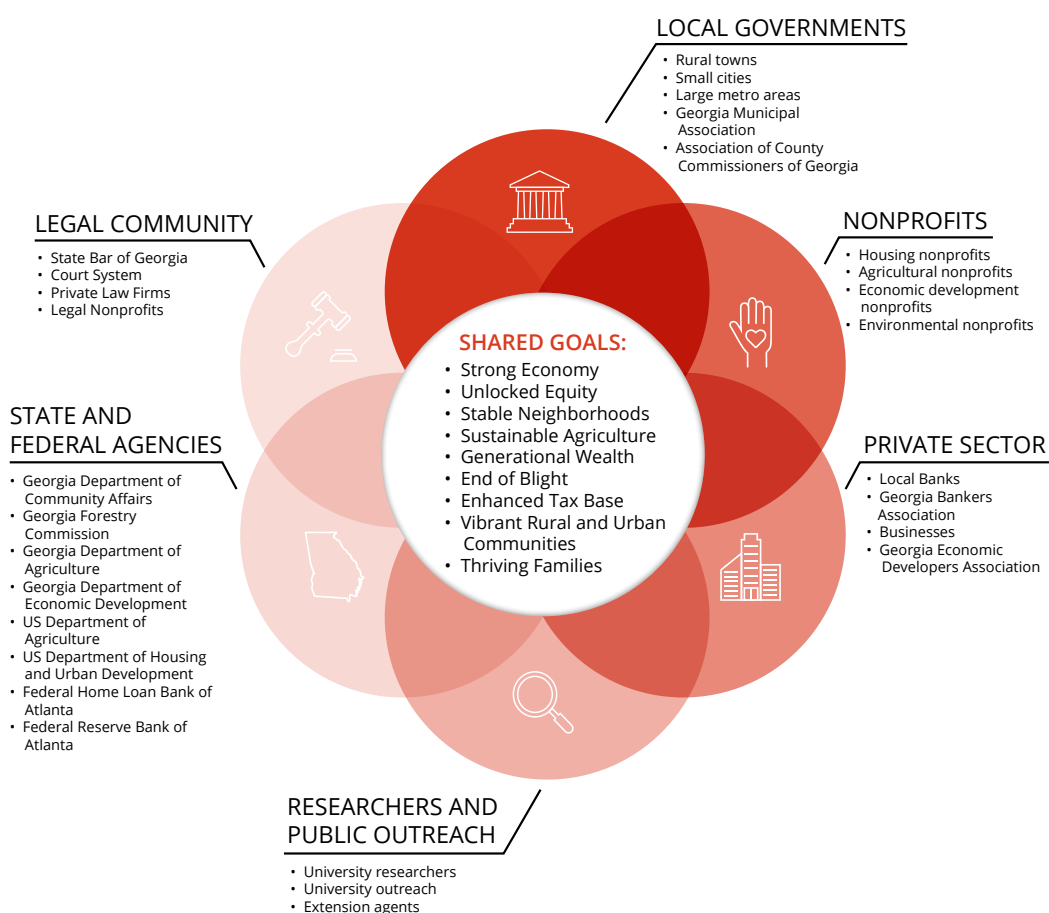
The Center, in collaboration with its partners, completed **5** webinars, reaching approximately **189** individuals from around the state and around the nation.

PARTNERSHIPS

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO UNLOCKING GENERATIONAL WEALTH

With the Center's overarching goal of growing Georgia's economy, strategic partnerships are vital to the success of the Center. Addressing heirs property demands legal services and educational outreach that advance economic justice at the micro (individual) and macro (community) level. This complex challenge requires both a commitment to providing services that meet specific and individual client needs and result in a broad economic development impact for neighborhoods, cities, counties, and regions.

Through its legal support programs, land loss prevention, and asset education, the Center has built a strong foundation to continue partnering with clients, nonprofits, and public service leaders to address heirs property and rebuild a healthy economy for Georgia.



The Center identifies potential partners -- nonprofits and community-based organizations -- who are engaging directly with residents in target areas and who are willing/able/trusted to help residents engage in the Center's processes.

These partnerships became even more vital as the impacts of COVID-19 were felt across Georgia. The pandemic raised awareness about how estate planning and clear title are key to preserving generational wealth, creating an increased demand for and interest in the Center's services. A multi-sector approach is vital to the Center's statewide and systems-based outreach to address heirs property.

The Center's incoming Board Chair Reggie O'Shields (FHLBank of Atlanta Executive Vice President, Director of Enterprise Solutions, General Counsel and Chief Compliance Officer) summarizes the opportunity: "A multi-sector approach with financial, legal, government, philanthropy, and nonprofit sectors must be implemented if resources, legal tools, and practitioners are to be widely available to address heirs property."



IMPROVING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITIES BY ADDRESSING HEIRS PROPERTY

THE FEDERAL HOME LOAN BANK OF ATLANTA HEIRS PROPERTY FORUM

On March 5, 2020, the Center, and the Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta, with co-sponsors Georgia Bankers Association and Georgia Municipal Association, brought together a diverse group of leaders from key sectors for the Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta Heirs Property Forum. Leveraging the Center's deep relationships in communities and industries throughout the state, the Forum brought together thought leaders from the municipal, legal, financial, governmental, and nonprofit sectors. The Forum's goal was to develop a shared understanding of heirs property, the tools available to address it, and a comprehensive action plan that grows Georgia's economy through property rights.

The 50 participants represented organizations impacted by heirs property and positioned to implement solutions that empower heirs property owners, including bankers (residential and agricultural lenders), attorneys, judges, tax commissioners, code enforcement officers, community development professionals, place-based philanthropists, state and federal agency representatives, and community-based organizations.

The negative impacts of heirs property affect families and extend to Georgia's local governments, court systems, state departments, banks, businesses, and nonprofits. The unstable form of ownership makes owners unable to qualify for bank loans, Federal housing repair, farming programs, etc. Essentially the property is "locked equity."

Arthur Fleming, FHLB Atlanta's Senior Vice President and Director of Community Investment Services, opened the Forum with the observation that addressing heirs property is "essential to the revitalization of communities."

FORUM CO-SPONSORS



Pictured Above:

Delene Porter, Joe Brannen (Georgia Bankers Association), Skipper StipeMaas, Arthur Fleming (FHLBank Atlanta), Larry Hanson (Georgia Municipal Association), Reggie O'Shields (FHLBank Atlanta and Vice Chair of The Center)

The Forum provided an opportunity to see heirs property through several lenses, including how it impacts banks, the court system, Georgia's agricultural and forestry sectors, local governments, and housing programs. Attendees discussed how they could move beyond their lenses and collectively address heirs property moving forward. Heirs property is a cross-cutting issue in Georgia, and Georgia has the only state-wide Center in the United States.

Tommy Lowman, Director of Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Relief for the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, said, "heirs property drives bad community revitalization and development practices. If there is a huge heirs property issue in one neighborhood, efforts are usually just moved to different communities."

SESSIONS AND SPEAKERS INCLUDED:

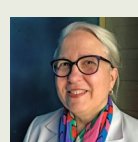
WELCOME AND OVERVIEW OF ADDRESSING HEIRS PROPERTY IN GEORGIA PROVIDED BY



ART FLEMMING,
Senior Vice President,
FHLBank Atlanta



KITTY COHEN,
Of Counsel,
Eversheds Sutherland



SKIPPER STIPEMAAS,
Executive Director,
Georgia Heirs Property Law Center, Inc

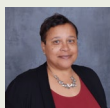
PANEL: DEFINING THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF HEIRS PROPERTY

MODERATOR:



ANN CARPENTER,
Director of Policy and Analytics, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta

PANELISTS:



VANASSA FLUCUS,
Neighborhood Dev. Dir.,
City of Valdosta



CASSANDRA JOHNSON GAITHER,
Research Social Scientist,
USDA Forest Service



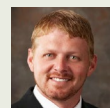
RHONDA GORDON,
Executive Director,
Golden Triangle RC&D



JUDGE ATHA H. PRYOR,
Associate Judge,
Clayton County Probate Court



SHANA JONES,
Faculty,
UGA Carl Vinson Institute



TOMMY LOWMAN,
CDBG-DR Program Manager,
Georgia DCA



EULA PARK,
Senior Vice President,
South State Bank

PANEL: SHORING UP AN ACTION PLAN AND IDENTIFYING RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

MODERATOR:



TIM CRIM,
President,
Georgia Bar Association

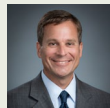


DELENE PORTER,
Chief Operating Officer,
Georgia Heirs Property Law Center, Inc.

PANELISTS:



LAUREL BRIGLEVICH,
Sr Community Dev Officer,
Wells Fargo



NIKOLA R. DJURIC,
Shareholder,
Djuric Spratt P. A



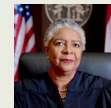
LARRY HANSON,
Executive Director,
Georgia Municipal Assoc.



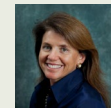
NEIL KINNEBREW,
Assistant General Counsel,
Synovus



MARC THOMAS,
Director, Cooperative
Extension, Ft. Valley SU



JUDGE PINKIE TOOMER,
Probate Judge,
Fulton County Probate Court



ALSTON WATT,
Director,
Williams Family Foundation

STRATEGIC DISCUSSION OF NEXT STEPS AND CLOSING FACILITATED BY



REGGIE O'SHIELDS,
Executive Vice President,
FHLBank Atlanta



JOE BRANNEN,
President,
Georgia Bankers Association

PRIVATE SECTOR

The Center's private sector partners leverage their expertise to address heirs property and invest in revitalizing communities. The private sector partners also play a vital role in educating and advocating within the business community. From local banks to the Georgia Economic Developer's Association to the Georgia Banker's Association, private sector partners create a framework through the state to expand the work of the Center both in rural and urban areas.



Joe Brannen, President and Chief Executive Officer, Georgia Bankers Association, and Board Member of the Georgia Bar Foundation shared at the Forum that the banks represented by GBA are always working to improve their communities and that a clear title is needed for capital investments. He challenged the attendees to collaborate across sectors to unlock Georgia's economic potential.

The Georgia Bankers Association (GBA) is the trade and professional organization representing the interests of banks and thrift institutions in the state of Georgia. After meeting with GBA Executive Director, Joe Brannen and GBA Legislative Director Elizabeth Chandler about the Center's role in helping families transform their heirs property into marketable title and its alignment with the bank's double bottom line of creating access to financing and supporting community development, GBA became a co-sponsor of the Federal Home Loan Bank's Heirs Property Forum.

The Forum led to a follow-up presentation, **Growing Georgia's Economy through Property Rights: Removing Barriers to Lending**, by Skipper at the GBA's Rural Development and Lending Conference in May 2020 via webinar.

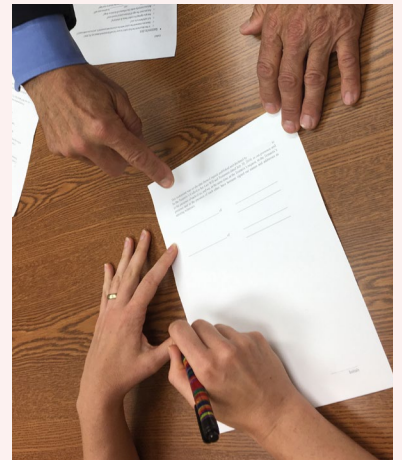
WHO IS AN HEIR?

Myth:

Heirs property is a family problem and they are solely responsible for solving it.

Fact:

To resolve and prevent heirs property, it takes a wide set of skills and people, ranging from attorneys to genealogists, elected officials, government employees, non-profit employees, and bankers.



LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Heirs property negatively impacts every municipality and county in Georgia. From rural to urban, coastal to inland Georgia, local governments are grappling with heirs property and its lasting impact on their local economy. The Center works with local governments to provide title audits for pre-grant planning; title clearing as part of rehabbing programs; estate planning for heirs property mitigation; and training workshops for local leaders and low-income homeowners on heirs property services.

COLUMBUS LAND BANK AUTHORITY



COLUMBUS
LAND BANK AUTHORITY
LOTS OF GOOD USE.

Through discussions with Columbus's Community Reinvestment Office, Land Bank Authority, Tax Commissioner and Code Enforcement Offices, as well as local nonprofits, the Center identified two neighborhoods for heirs property prevention and remediation services: the Mill District and Wynnton area. The Center conducted educational workshops on December 2, 2019 at the Columbus Main Library and on December 11, 2019 at the Fox Senior Center. These workshops were aimed at residents of East Wynnton; Lawyers Ln; Briarwood; Lindsay Creek; Boxwood; East Carver; Carver Heights; Ewart Park; Radcliffe; The Bottoms; Meelers Hill; Mill District; North Highlands; Anderson Village; City Village; and Bibb City. The City of Columbus Land Bank Authority and Wells Fargo provided funding. Additional outreach was provided by Delta Life Development Foundation and the Economic Development Committee of the Columbus Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.



"LEARNING ABOUT HEIRS PROPERTY PRESERVATION HELPED US SHIFT OUR FOCUS FROM THE PROJECT LEVEL TO WHAT WORKS BEST FOR PEOPLE. YOU CAN HELP A NEIGHBORHOOD BY BRINGING A PROPERTY TO FORECLOSURE AND RESALE. OR YOU CAN HELP THE NEIGHBORHOOD BY HELPING FAMILIES OVERCOME LEGAL BARRIERS TO HOMEOWNERSHIP. OFTEN, THE SECOND OPTION IS NOT ONLY MORE COST-EFFECTIVE BUT POWERFUL. IF YOU ARE COMMITTED TO BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC MOBILITY, THEN RESOURCING HEIRS PROPERTY IS AN ELEGANT STRATEGY."

– COLUMBUS LAND BANK AUTHORITY STAFF

CITY OF VALDOSTA AND GEORGIA MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION

VALDOSTA
A City Without Limits

Partnerships provide a variety of resources to the Center. The City of Valdosta provides office space for the Center. In addition, the Center continues conversations with the City of Valdosta, including Home Start LLC and the City's Neighborhood Development/Community Protection team, on outreach events. In January 2020, the Center presented to the City of Valdosta's Affordable Housing Summit.

The City of Valdosta connected the Center with new partners. Valdosta's Mayor Gayle hosted a meeting between Center staff, Center Board Member Russ Henry, and Larry Hansen, the Executive Director of the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA). GMA is a membership organization focused on Hub Cities as well as smaller municipalities throughout the state. The meeting resulted in a positive response from the GMA team with Larry acknowledging the impact of heirs property on GMA members and seeking ways to include the Center in GMA's training and technical assistance programs.

NONPROFITS AND GRASSROOTS

DEWEY CITY NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH, COMMUNITY OUTREACH TRAINING CENTER, CITY OF THOMASVILLE, AND DOUGLAS HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Community collaboration between Dewey City residents, city leaders, the Williams Family Foundation, and nonprofits laid the groundwork for a three-year, innovative, place-based program to address heirs property in Thomasville's District 1 and Dewey City Neighborhood. This Education and Title Remediation Program is being delivered in partnership with the Dewey City Neighborhood Watch Association, Community Outreach Training Center, Douglass High School Alumni Association, Thomas County Public Library, and the City of Thomasville.

Community Outreach Training Center, Inc. and the Williams Family Foundation hosted several meetings with community leaders in 2019 to learn more about the Center's Services. Undaunted by COVID-19, the Center continued remote education by providing 1,000 copies of its brochure, "Do You Own Heirs Property," for a mass mailing to Dewey City residents. Through the convenience of Zoom meetings, Center staff met regularly with neighborhood leaders and local service providers.



PROPERTY TAX MYTHS

Myth:

- I have a greater ownership interest than others because I pay the property taxes.
- If I pay the property taxes, I own the property outright.

Fact:

Paying current or back taxes does not increase your legal ownership of any real property, including heirs property.

NONPROFITS AND GRASSROOTS

The connections with nonprofits and grassroots groups from various sectors allow the Center to communicate and educate a wider audience across the state. Partnerships create a web of resources within and across communities. To tackle heirs property, communities need sustained efforts over the long-term, which can be supported by local and statewide nonprofits.

“BY WORKING WITH THE CENTER, GOLDEN TRIANGLE’S CLIENTS- EVERYONE FROM LANDOWNERS, DISADVANTAGED FARMERS, AND VETS TO COUNTY COMMISSIONERS- LEARN HOW HEIRS PROPERTY STANDS IN THE WAY OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES IN SOUTHWEST GEORGIA. GOLDEN TRIANGLE LEVERAGES TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND RESOURCES TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE; THE CENTER’S SERVICES ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF CLEARING THE PATH FOR OUR CLIENTS TO FULLY BENEFIT.”

– RHONDA GORDON, ED, GOLDEN TRIANGLE RC&D

RESEARCHERS AND COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Public Service Faculty and Cooperative Extension Agents help farmers, timberland owners, and homeowners connect with the Center’s services. They also help the Center analyze heirs property data to better target outreach throughout Georgia. This data can help policymakers, funders, and other partners decide how to provide support as it allows them to see the spatial and geographical impact of heirs property on the state of Georgia.

- Ft. Valley State University Cooperative Extension- The Center has a longstanding partnership with Ft. Valley’s Cooperative Extension Agents, creating workshops that help landowners develop land/ timber management plans; create conservation plans; complete conservation easements; apply and qualify for USDA, FEMA, Georgia Forestry Commission, Georgia Department of Agriculture programs; address heirs property; and prepare estate plans.
- University of Georgia, Carl Vinson Institute of Government- As a Public Service and Outreach Unit at the University of Georgia, Carl Vinson Faculty research heirs property to better understand how it impacts local governments and the entire state. Data showing that 11-25% of the parcels in each county are probable heirs property is critical information that County Tax Assessors, City Commissioners, and State leaders need to support economic development and community revitalization.
- University of Georgia, Georgia Initiative for Community Housing- As an outreach program through Financial Planning, Housing and Consumer Economics, the Center is able educate community leaders about heirs property as they design locally-driven housing and revitalization strategies.

STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES

State and Federal Agencies want to deploy resources to support communities and homeowners, but their efforts are stymied by heirs property. The Center's services are the key that unlocks access to state and federal resources and expertise. These agencies can also help as the Center looks at statewide policy changes to make heirs property remediation easier. Key state and federal agencies that assist the Center include:

- Georgia Department of Community Affairs/HUD - Disaster Recovery
- Georgia Department of Agriculture
- USDA Forest Service
- Georgia Forestry Commission
- USDA NRCS
- USDA Farm Services
- USDA Rural Development

Families often discover they own heirs property when they apply for Disaster Recovery Programs following a hurricane or other natural disaster. The Center has a strong partnership with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) that allows the Center to help the hardest-hit areas of Georgia gain access to needed funds.

The Center trained new Disaster Relief Coordinators in Albany, Brunswick, and Kingsland on how to identify heirs property owners and refer heirs property owners to the Center for title clearing services. The Center's services will support heirs property owners recovering from 2017's Hurricane Irma and 2017's tornadoes in Albany. The Center will continue to work with DCA to provide Resiliency Planning and Legal Services.



LEGAL COMMUNITY

The legal community is on the frontlines with the Center unlocking generational wealth and preventing future heirs property. Legal tools in the hands of committed attorneys can resolve and prevent heirs property so that generational wealth is unlocked, and community revitalization efforts can succeed.

- Bar Foundation of Georgia
- Georgia Council of Probate Court Judges
- Fiduciary Law Section of the State Bar of Georgia
- Probate & Estate Section, Atlanta Bar Association
- Atlanta Legal Aid Society
- Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta

"THE FIDUCIARY LAW SECTION OF THE STATE BAR IS PROUD TO BE A PARTNER WITH THE CENTER. THE CENTER DEALS WITH ISSUES THAT GEORGIA FIDUCIARY LAWYERS HANDLE EVERY DAY—BUT IN THE CONTEXT OF SECURING AND PRESERVING PROPERTY RIGHTS OF LOW AND MODERATE INCOME GEORGIANS TO INCREASE GENERATIONAL WEALTH, ECONOMIC VALUE, AND COMMUNITY STABILITY. AND THE PUBLICATION OF THE GEORGIA ESTATE PLANNING FORMS HANDBOOK FOR NONPROFIT LAW FIRMS AND THEIR PRO BONO ATTORNEYS IS A SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT THAT OUR SECTION WAS PLEASED TO SUPPORT."

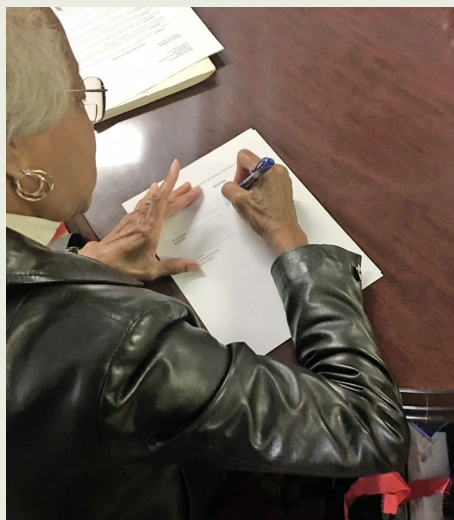
- PATRICIA FRIEDMAN, SECTION CHAIR

Fiduciary Law Institute



The Fiduciary Law Section educates its members on issues related to wills, trusts, estates, and elder law. Through a partnership with the Center, the Section is able to leverage its expertise to improve access for low- and moderate- income Georgians to estate planning that intentionally prevents heirs property. The Section invited the Center to share information about its Estate Planning Forms Project with attendees of the Fiduciary Law Institute July 11-13, 2019, and provided a sponsor table during the Institute's Continuing Legal Education (CLE) sessions.

CLIENT STORY



In 2018, Ms. Apple* came to the Center as a defendant on a Quiet Title Action brought by two of her sisters who were left off the deed when her mother, Mrs. Timmon* passed away intestate in 1997. The administrator's deed improperly placed title in the name of only one of Mrs. Timmon's daughters and five great-grandchildren. The property, which was in the process of being sold, should have been deeded to Mrs. Timmon's four daughters (including Ms. Apple) and three of her granddaughters.

The Center filed an answer and appeared with Ms. Apple before a special master. The special master submitted a report and recommendation to the judge that reformed the deed to include our client and the other proper grantees. The deed was corrected, and Ms. Apple was able to receive proceeds from the sale of the property.

*Names have been changed to protect client confidentiality.

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

705 Marketing

Advocates for Better Communities, Inc.

Alston & Bird

American Bar Association

Association of County Commissioners

Atlanta Bar Association Public Interest Section

Atlanta Beltline

Atlanta Legal Aid Society

Atlanta NPUs

Atlanta Regional Commission

Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation

Auburn Recreational Commission

Bar Foundation of Georgia

Baker Donelson

Ben Hill Family Connection

Berrin County Family Connection

Bonderant Mixon & Elmore, LLP

Brunswick Land Bank Authority

Carl Vinson Institute of Government

Cascade Corridor, Atlanta

Cathedral of Faith

Center for Community Progress

City of Atlanta Office of Housing and Community Development

City of Brunswick

City of Fitzgerald

City of Thomasville

City of Valdosta

Columbus Alumni Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Society, Inc.

Columbus Community Reinvestment Office

Columbus Land Bank Authority

Columbus Tax Assessors Office

Collier Heights Neighborhood Association

Community Outreach Training Center, Inc.

Community Reinvestment for the City of Columbus

Counsel on Aging

C.T. Martin Recreational Center

Dewey City Neighborhood Watch

Dogwood Senior Center

Douglass High School Alumni Association

DLA Piper

Emory Law School

Equal Justice Works

Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta

Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta

Fort Valley State University

Georgia Advancing Communities Together, Inc.

Georgia Appleseed

Georgia Bankers Association

Georgia Council of Probate Court Judges

Georgia Council on Aging

Georgia Department of Agriculture

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Georgia Department of Natural Resources

Georgia Economic Developer's Association

Georgia Forestry Association

Georgia Forestry Commission

Georgia Initiative for Community Housing

Georgia Latino Law Foundation

Georgia Legal Services Program

Georgia Municipal Association

Georgia Organics

Georgia State Law School

Golden Triangle Resource Conservation & Development Council

Grant Park Recreational Center

Grant Specialists of Georgia

Grove Park Foundation and Neighborhood

Gwinnett Bar Association

Gwinnett Kiwanis

HouseProud Atlanta

Junior League of Atlanta

Macon-Bibb County

Mechanicsville Civic Association

Metro Fair Housing

Neighborworks Columbus

New Horizon Senior Center

Oakland City Community Organization

Old Adamsville Center

Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta

Pro Bono Roundtable of Atlanta

SE Neighborhood Senior Center

Showers of Blessings Ministries

South State Bank

State Bar of Georgia

State Bar of Georgia Fiduciary Law Section

State Bar of Georgia Probate Law Section

Sustainable Forestry Initiative

Synovus

The Community Foundation of South Georgia, Inc.

Thomasville Habitat for Humanity

Thomasville Land Bank

Thomasville Landmarks, Inc.

Truist

UGA Cooperative Extension Services

UGA Warnell School of Forestry

United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service

USDA Farm Services

USDA Forest Service Southern Research Station

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

USDA Rural Development

USDA SARE (Southern Agriculture Research and Education)

Ware County Public Library

Washington Park Natatorium

Wells Fargo

Williams Family Foundation

LEGAL TOOLS

LEGAL TOOLS TO INCREASE EQUITY

The Center is the premier law center in Georgia positioned to meet heirs property's challenges and help resolve heirs property related issues. The Center's ability to resolve heirs property allows property owners to build generational wealth. With the Center's assistance, homeowners can obtain needed repairs contributing to neighborhood revitalization and landowners can manage their natural resources contributing to economic environmental sustainability.

TITLE REMEDIATION SERVICES

Clearing title to heirs property is a lengthy and complex legal and emotional process for any family. Working with families is a priority of the Center's, and each stage builds on the last. After the condition of title is understood through a title search, the Center's legal team supports heirs property owners as they fill out an Heirs Determination Form, contact relatives with an ownership interest in the property, determine their goals for their land and/or homes, and work to clean up the titles through negotiated agreements, probate, quiet title actions, and other legal strategies.

EACH CASE WILL BE DIFFERENT. THERE ARE MULTIPLE STEPS IN THE PROCESS OF CLEARING A TITLE AND MAY INCLUDE:



**TITLE
SEARCHES**



**DETERMINING
HEIRS**



**PROBATING ESTATES
OF DECEASED HEIRS**



**CONSOLIDATION OF TITLE
USING APPROPRIATE LEGAL
STRATEGIES**

ESTATE PLANNING SERVICES

Proper estate planning is critical to preventing heirs property, yet only 35% of individuals have an estate plan. The Center's estate planning services are offered to Title Clearing Clients as well as participants in enhanced Heirs Property Educational Programs like the Georgia Landowner Academy. Services for each household are determined on a per client basis, but typically include a last will and testament, advanced directive for healthcare, and a financial power of attorney. More complex estate plans might include establishing a trust, LLC, tax-deductible contribution, or other property management plan.

BUILDING LEGAL CAPACITY TO INCREASE EQUITY

WITH THE WORKPLACE CHANGES DUE TO COVID-19, THE CENTER WORKED CLOSELY WITH ITS LEGAL PARTNERS TO CONTINUE CONNECTING WITH CLIENTS STATEWIDE.

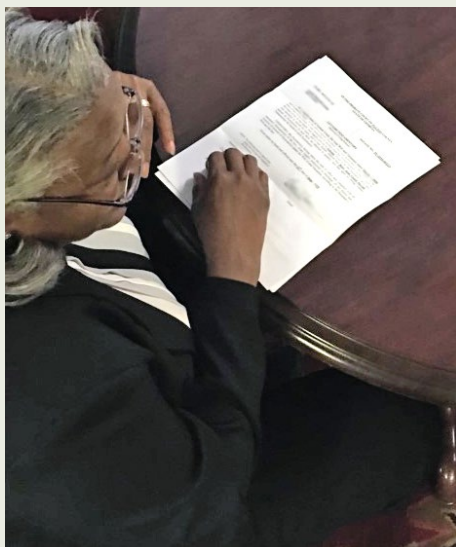
PRO BONO VOLUNTEER OUTREACH:

The Center continues to be contacted by an increasing number of attorneys interested in providing pro bono services related to heirs property. The Center provides pro bono volunteers with legal education on best practices in estate planning to prevent the creation of heirs property.

- The State Bar of Georgia provides connections to pro bono attorneys throughout the state. In FY20, Center staff worked with Jeff Davis, President of the State Bar, and Christine Butcher-Hayes, Director of Government Affairs for the State Bar to identify opportunities to support and partner with the Private Bar.
- The Center also works with the Public Interest Executive Roundtable (“PIER”), an Atlanta based group comprised of representatives from legal-based nonprofits, to garner insight on how best to work with both private and public interest attorneys.



CLIENT STORY



Mrs. Zimmerman* assumed that she became the sole owner of the home she and her husband purchased in 2001 when her husband passed in 2019. However, when the mortgage company refused to talk to her about the final five months’ payments remaining on the mortgage, Mrs. Zimmerman learned that she co-owned her home with her four stepchildren; her home was now heirs property. The Center filed a Year’s Support for Mrs. Zimmerman, which was awarded and conveyed ownership of the house to Mrs. Zimmerman.

While the Year’s Support Petition was being processed, the Center filed a petition to have Mrs. Zimmerman appointed as temporary administrator of her husband’s estate so that she could communicate with the mortgage servicer.

Mrs. Zimmerman was able to completely pay off the loan by the maturity date. Mrs. Zimmerman sold the home for \$120,000 free and clear of any mortgage and reimbursed the Center for case expenses.

*Names have been changed to protect client confidentiality.

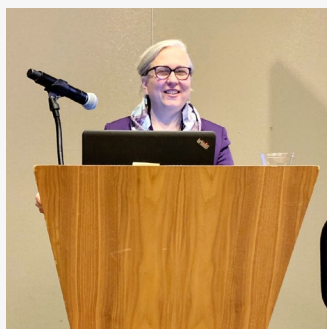
LEGAL EDUCATION

MARCH MADNESS CLE

“Unlocking Heirs Property in Georgia,” a March Madness CLE sponsored by the Atlanta Bar Association, provided the opportunity to help spread the word about the Estate Planning Forms Project and inspire crucial feedback from private and nonprofit attorneys to continue developing materials and resources to fit their needs.



ABA PRESENTATIONS

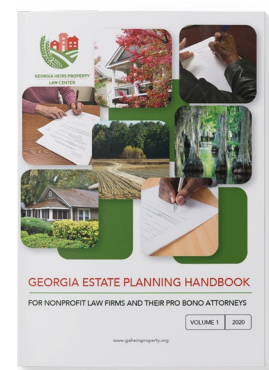


On February 14, 2020, the Center participated in the American Bar Association Mid-Year Meeting on a panel, “Legally Stolen Lands: Impacts and Remedies for Historically Disadvantaged People.” This panel explored the highly vulnerable forms of home ownership and land ownership and how heirs property plays a role in both the creation and resolution of blight, and stabilizing home ownership, building generational wealth, and lessening foreclosures.

In addition, the Center presented at two ABA CLE webinars: “Not Mine, Not Yours, Heirs: Exploring the Movement to Transform Heirs’ Property Laws” on June 23, 2020, and “Natural Disasters and Abandoned Real Property - Part II” on June 30, 2020. The combined presentations had 125 participants.

ESTATE PLANNING FORMS PROJECT

Education on heirs property for legal nonprofits and pro bono attorneys is an essential part of the Center’s work to eradicate heirs property. The 2020 Georgia Estate Planning Handbook for Nonprofit Law Firms and their Pro Bono Attorneys is the result of partnership with the Center, Fiduciary Law Section of the State Bar of Georgia (“the Fiduciary Section”), and ALAS to make a comprehensive and uniform set of estate planning forms and training materials available to nonprofit law firms and their pro bono attorneys throughout Georgia. These materials are presented in two volumes - Georgia Estate Planning Handbook for Communities and Georgia Estate Planning Forms Handbook for Nonprofit Law Firms and Their Pro Bono Volunteers.



The Handbook for Nonprofit Law Firms and Pro Bono Volunteers is a response to the need for standardized, easy to use forms and training materials in light of the fact that pro bono attorneys have varying degrees of estate planning experience, and each nonprofit law firm and program differs depending on the clients being served. Also included are the new protocols about executing wills via video conferencing.

As the Center looks for ways to build capacity statewide, the Handbooks offered the opportunity to connect with Georgia’s critical legal service providers including Georgia Legal Services Program. The Fiduciary Section provided volunteers and financial support for this Handbook over many years. The Handbooks will be maintained by the Center and updated periodically.

GEORGIA COUNCIL OF PROBATE COURT JUDGES

The Georgia Council of Probate Court Judges supports, informs, and speaks for Georgia's probate court judges. The Center was invited by Probate Council President- Judge T.J. Hudson (Treutlen Co.), to present at the Executive Council meeting on October 14, 2019, in Savannah. Building on conversations with Probate Judge working group members Judge Melanie Bell (Newton Co.), Judge Amber Holloway (Crisp Co.), and Kevin Holder (E.D. of Council), as well as additional meetings with Judge J. Mike Greene (Jones County) and Judge Pinkie Toomer (Fulton County), the Center was asked to work on a Best Practices Guide for Probate Judges.

CLIENT STORY

Although Mr. and Mrs. Carol* told all seven of their children that they wanted one particular child, John*, to inherit their home, they did not have wills, which meant that the property became co-owned by all seven children and thus was heirs property. The Center's staff worked with all seven children to get unanimous consent from all to file probate petitions for orders that no administration was necessary for both Mr. and Mrs. Carol's estates. The Court entered the orders within 10 days of the petitions being filed, and John is now the sole owner of the property. This is one of many examples of multiple siblings coming together to resolve heirs property quickly and smoothly.

*Names have been changed to protect client confidentiality.



HEIRS PROPERTY, WHEN BOILED DOWN TO ITS BARE ESSENCE, IS ABOUT FAMILY AND LAND, THE TWO MOST COMPLEX ASPECTS OF ALL OF OUR LIVES AND FUNDAMENTAL COMPONENTS OF OUR ECONOMIC SYSTEM.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

IMPROVING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY IN GEORGIA'S COMMUNITIES

Heirs property affects every socioeconomic segment and every geographic region of Georgia and is created every day. The impact of COVID-19 on the heels of natural disasters in Georgia has increased the demand for the Center's educational resources and the need for innovative ways to connect with clients. Outreach and education are key components to remediating, preventing, and ending heirs property.

COVID-19 created challenges and opportunities for the Center in the delivery of its educational resources and materials. While onsite events were postponed, webinars allowed the Center to reach a larger audience throughout Georgia and beyond.

CAPACITY BUILDING TO EXPAND THE CENTER'S REACH



The Center was awarded a two-year USDA Rural Community Development Initiative Grant. Through educational Workshops and Consultations, the Center will build Golden Triangle RC&D (Golden Triangle) and Community Outreach Training Center (COTC)'s capacity to help residents (in the 15 rural counties they serve) be prepared to work with the Center on title



clearing and estate planning. This train-the-trainer grant will provide "technology transfer" and technical assistance to Golden Triangle staff and Board of Directors including officials from Baker, Calhoun, Clay, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Grady, Miller, Mitchell, Randolph, Seminole, Stewart, Terrell, and Worth Counties and COTC staff which serves Thomas County.



The Center developed heirs property education for timberland owners to help the Georgia Forestry Commission, Coastal Regional Commission, and the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust serve their clients. The Center's technical assistance and information transfer helps Georgia's organizations better serve Georgia's families.

CLIENT STORY

Mr. Folsom's* father died in 2019 without a will and his uninhabitable house in Dekalb County became heirs property. Mr. Folsom came to the Center with the goal of opening an estate for his father so the house could be sold to someone who wanted to fix it up and so the proceeds could be shared with his brother and sister. Center staff helped Mr. Folsom be appointed as Administrator and provided him with a list of realtors. Mr. Folsom selected a realtor and, when he entered into a contract with a buyer for a good price, the Center's staff attorney petitioned the Court for leave to sell real property. Mr. Folsom set up a family meeting so the Center's staff attorney could explain the legal process of selling the property to Mr. Folsom's siblings. Everyone was able to ask questions and share their concerns; resulting in agreement and excitement about consenting to the petition to sell. After the realtors' fees, property taxes, and attorneys' expenses were paid, each sibling received approximately \$40,000. With her inheritance, Mr. Folsom's sister plans to leave subsidized senior housing and fix-up the home she shared with her late husband.

*Names have been changed to protect client confidentiality.

ESTATE PLANNING BASICS WEBINAR

With COVID-19 taking the Center's outreach virtual, engaging and informative webinars became vitally important. The Center hosted a webinar through Pro-Bono Partnership of Atlanta entitled "Estate Planning Basics: What It Is and How to Talk About It," with 120+ registrants. The webinar focused on the power of proper estate planning to prevent the creation of heirs property, an unstable form of landownership that limits a family's ability to make home improvements, manage farm and timber land, and build generational wealth typically leveraged through USDA and bank financing, nonprofit home-repair programs, disaster relief, and business development.



During this webinar, the speakers helped Community Leaders, Nonprofit Staff, and Cooperative Extension Agents understand estate planning basics including the following topics:

1. How to talk about estate planning with communities and clients
2. What happens when you die with a will versus without a will
3. How estate planning can prevent heirs property
4. What decisions need to be made before meeting with an attorney and
5. How estate planning impacts Community, Nonprofit, and Cooperative Extension
6. goals.

SPEAKERS: Gentry E. Mander, J.D. and Skipper StipeMaas, J.D. of Georgia Heirs Property Law Center. **PARTICIPANTS:** Community leaders, local government officials, Cooperative Extension Agents, and attorneys attended. Registrants came from across Georgia (Adel, Alcovy, Alpharetta, Athens, Atlanta, Augusta, Bacon Co, Blariesville, Cairo, Camilla, Cedartown, Columbus, Conyers, Cordele, Covington, Dalton, Dawsonville, Douglas, Douglasville, Dublin, Eastman, Elberton, Gainesville, Griffin, Hephzibah, Hinesville, Houston, Jonesboro, LaGrange, Mableton, Macon, Madison, Marietta, McDonough, Millin, Monroe, Newnan, Peachtree City, Pine Mountain, Rome, Savannah, Smyrna, Stone Mountain, Sylvester, Thomasville, Tifton, Vienna, Warner Robins, Winder). Registrants also came from other states: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas.

ADDITIONAL WEBINARS OFFERED:

5/15/20

*Not Mine, Not Yours, Heirs:
Exploring the Movement to
Transform Heirs Property Law.*

1/29/20

*Building Generational Wealth:
Property Tax Exemption and
Appeals.*

6/12/20

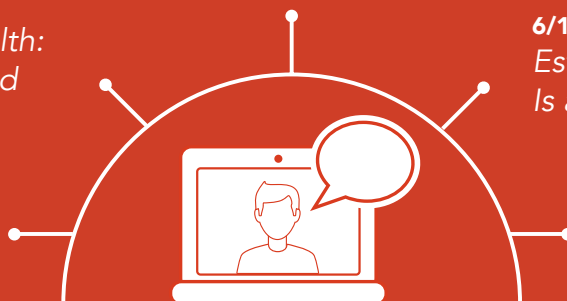
*Estate Planning Basics: What It
Is and How to Talk About It.*

12/11/19

*Building Generational Wealth:
Veteran's Benefits.*

6/30/20

*Natural Disasters and
Abandoned Real Property Part II.*



DEVELOPING EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS

COVID-19 has shown us that even though the work does not stop, information and services are hard to access. The Center has used this truth to encourage us to draft, publish, and market written educational materials to better assist the communities we serve. The Center's website has since become a robust source of information for community leaders, legal professionals, and heirs property owners alike.

MYTHS AND FACTS

On May 7th, the Center celebrated its 5-year anniversary by releasing Myths & Facts about Heirs Property in Georgia, a comprehensive guide to the misconceptions and truths about heirs property ownership. The Center was proud to use the 5-year anniversary to give this product back to the communities and partners from which so much of the information was gleaned.



GEORGIA ESTATE PLANNING HANDBOOK FOR COMMUNITIES

The Center produced the Georgia Estate Planning Handbook for Communities to help community leaders, nonprofits, and cooperative extension agents begin conversations in their communities about estate planning, a powerful tool for preventing heirs property. This Handbook is a response to the need for consistent, high quality estate planning training materials in the State of Georgia. The goal of this document is not to provide estate planning, but to familiarize community leaders, nonprofits, and cooperative extension agents with estate planning terminology and what estate planning entails.



PIVOT

PIVOTING TO SERVE COMMUNITIES IN UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

The Center has seen an increase in demand for services since the COVID-19 pandemic began. As a result, the Center positioned itself to tackle heirs property in a strategic, focused, and forward-looking manner. The pandemic raised awareness about the importance of estate planning. Fortunately, the Center can conduct a good deal of its work virtually and has the capacity to deliver services and training through online platforms. The Center is well-positioned to build upon this success by remaining flexible and responsive during the pandemic and its aftermath.



TREMENDOUS OPPORTUNITY EXISTS TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF GEORGIANS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES HOME BY HOME, PARCEL BY PARCEL.

In a rapidly changing world, the Center needs to be nimble and adaptive, but the direction forward is clear: the Center aims to increase generational wealth, economic value, and community stability by securing and preserving property rights.

MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES ON HEIRS PROPERTY

Myth:

As an heirs property owner I can sell timber or produce from the heirs property.

Fact:

A single heir does not have the right to sell timber or any other resource from the property without a written, legal agreement with the other heirs or permission from a court of law. Doing so is a form of theft.

A CAPACITY BUILDING MODEL: USDA-SARE

Through the participation of the Center in the National Conference for Outreach and Agricultural Development and was awarded a USDA-SARE grant to provide Heirs Property and Estate Planning training to Ft. Valley Cooperative Extension Agents. The first training included 14 Extension Agents and as a follow up, the Center offered to provide estate plans for each of the Extension Agents. Follow up meetings and webinars to extend the training are planned. This training will be a model for other Cooperative Extension Agents and supports the Center's capacity building with non-legal nonprofits and community leaders.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

On May 8, 2020, the Center had its first Advisory Committee meeting with Gary Black, Commissioner of Georgia Department of Agriculture; Gary White, Interim Commissioner of Georgia Forestry Commission, and Christopher Nunn, Commissioner of Georgia Department of Community Affairs. The Committee received updates on how the Center was responding to meet client needs during COVID-19 and keeping the Center on firm financial footing. Committee members recapped the FHLBank of Atlanta's Forum as well as how their Departments could amplify the Center's message statewide. Commissioner Black discussed an educational series, as well as support for outreach events. Commissioner Nunn thanked the Center for its work with DCA's CDBG-DR program and encouraged work with additional DCA units. Interim Commissioner White provided an update on the support the Center is receiving to provide outreach to timberland owners. The Committee discussed the need for title clearing efforts and prevention statewide and provided an overview of the programs their agencies have available to Georgians with clear title.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Center strives to understand, resolve, and shape solutions to heirs property in Georgia and is engaged in continuous dialogue with clients, partners, and stakeholders. To develop a strategic plan that meets this objective, the Center conducted a series of formal Listening Sessions in Metro Atlanta and throughout Georgia in 2015 and again in 2018. Stakeholder Listening Sessions included meetings with municipalities/local governments, nonprofit partners, government agencies, and the legal community. Staff provided input through one-on-one and group meetings throughout FY19. Board Interviews were conducted in FY19 and the Board reviewed the results at the beginning of FY20.



These Listening Sessions combined with the staff and board input laid the foundation for the development of a strategic plan representing the Center's goals and aspirations. The Center must build this vision home by home, parcel by parcel, block by block, and community by community.

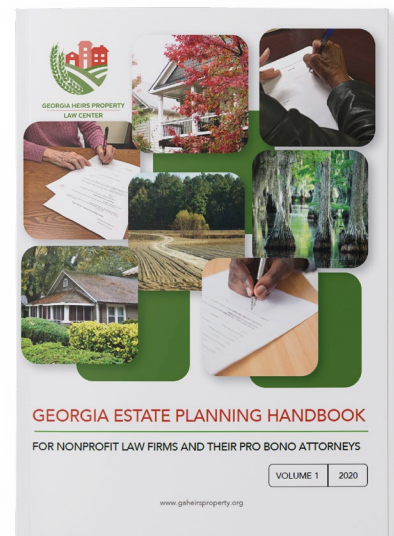
An integral part of this is the updating of the mission and tagline to reflect the future of the Center:

MISSION: The Georgia Heirs Property Law Center increases generational wealth, economic value, and community stability by securing and preserving property rights of low- and moderate-income Georgians.

TAG LINE: Growing Georgia's Economy through Property Rights

NEW WAYS TO REACH CLIENTS

The Center's staff has witnessed first-hand, during the COVID-19 outbreak, the need for the Center's estate planning services and innovative ways to connect with clients. Social distancing and mandated court closures have not stopped the work. Instead, it has meant using the technology available to continue providing the legal tools and education necessary during these unprecedented times. The Center has created protocols for virtual estate plan executions using video conferencing and other online or mobile software. These protocols were included in the Georgia Estate Planning Handbook for Non-Profit Law Firms and their Pro Bono Attorneys and distributed to our non-profit partners.





Provided legal services for and **CLOSED 418 MATTERS:**

- 154 title clearing matters
- 90 title search/audits
- 174 estate planning matters

Properties in 12 counties **VALUED AT APPROXIMATELY \$3.87 MILLION** were resolved -

via title clearing, deeds or corrective instruments, probate, formation of LLCs and removals of liens



Reviewed titles for **250 TRACTS OF LAND** involving properties in 48 counties collectively **VALUED AT \$17.89 MILLION**



Conducted **9 WILLS CLINICS** at which 76 simple last will and testaments or full estate plans were completed for participants



Completed estate plans for **102 CLIENTS**

GEORGIA HEIRS PROPERTY LAW CENTER EST. 2015

Provided information and educational materials to **11,941+ INDIVIDUALS**



Completed **307 COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAMS**, trainings and stakeholder meetings in 47 counties

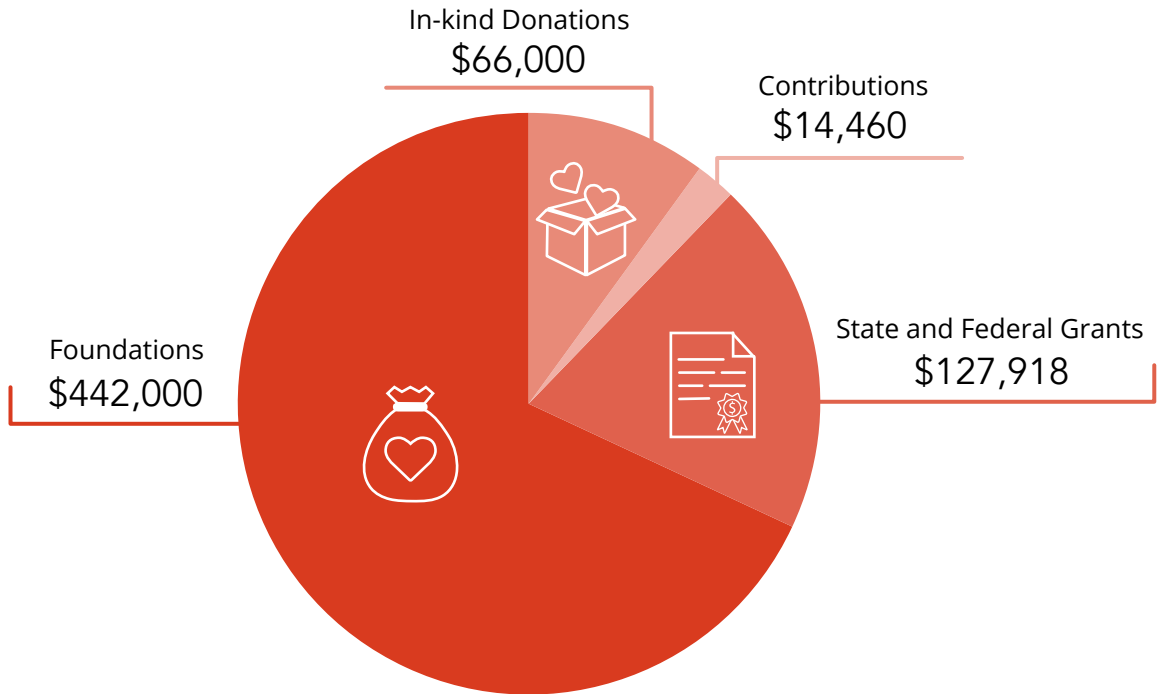
- 165 in the metro Atlanta area; and
- 142 in Central and Southern Georgia



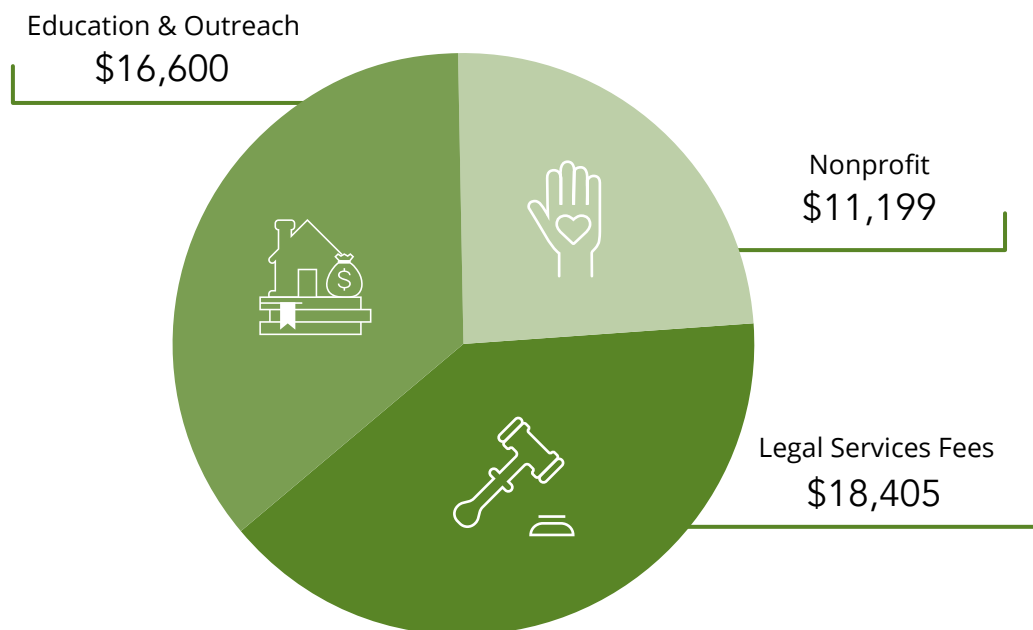
FINANCIALS

As of June 30, 2020

PUBLIC SUPPORT

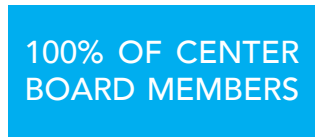


REVENUE



DONORS

As of June 30, 2020



INDIVIDUAL DONORS



WILLIAMS FAMILY FOUNDATION OF GEORGIA



SYNOVUS

THOMAS M. AND IRENE B. KIRBO FAMILY FOUNDATION



ADVOCATES FOR BETTER COMMUNITIES



EVERSHEDS SUTHERLAND



GRANT SPECIALISTS OF GEORGIA



PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS & ORGANIZATIONS

As of June 30, 2020

ALSTON & BIRD

Cassandra Johnson
Margaret Scott
Cheryl Naja
Sean Bedford
Mary Benton
Mike Stevens



Dina French
Hilary Leland
Stacy Reynolds
Cari Hipp
Steve Crumm
Charles Bliss
John Warchol
J. Rachel Scott



David Kelly



Pearson Beardsley



Bert King



Amanda Calloway



Jessica Haygood



Stephen Weyer



Shelly Donaldson

Coleman | Talley

Richard Coleman
Ryan Pulver
Richard Bauer
Pam Brosemer
Bart Davis
Russ Henry
Brett McNeill



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Jasmin Serverino



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Clayton Walts



Sarah Bangs



Brian Galison
Rick Herzog
Christie Jones



Theresa Clark
Lauren Foster
Antoine Gary



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Zachary Zimmerman
Keenan Tyler



SMITH, HAWKINS, HOLLINGSWORTH & REEVES, LLP

John Reeves



Michael Stephens



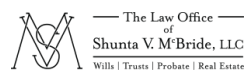
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Emma Barry
Kristen Lewis



Mauricia Allen
Marianna Faircloth
Meredith Shaughnessy



Crystallace Fenn
Shunta McBride



Nithya Amaraneni
Constance Brewster
Michael Wall
Alan Bakowski
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Leslie Secret



Blake Melton



Raquel Crump



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Ty Wilson
Sandip Kothari
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Giovanna Roberts
Sandra Saka

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

as of June 30, 2020

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-
Commissioner of Georgia
Department of Agriculture

GARY WHITE

-
Interim Commissioner of Georgia
Forestry Commission

CHRISTOPHER NUNN

-
Commissioner of Georgia
Department of Community Affairs

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as of June 30, 2020

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Principal, Beardsley, P.C.

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ESQ.**

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NICK DJURIC, ESQ.

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Partner, Djuric Spratt P.A.

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Program Manager, UGA Carl Vinson Institute

NEIL KINNEBREW, ESQ.

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Assistant General Counsel,
Synovus Financial Corp.

SHUNTA MCBRIDE, ESQ.

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Principal, The Vincent McBride Law Firm

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-
Senior Vice President, General Counsel
Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta

LESLIE FULLER SECREST, ESQ.

-
Retired Partner,
Troutman Sanders, LLP

SKIPPER G. STIPEMAAS, ESQ.

-
Executive Director,
Georgia Heirs Property Law Center, Inc.

THE CENTER STAFF

as of June 30, 2020

SKIPPER G. STIPEMAAS

-
Executive Director

GENTRY E. MANDER

-
Staff Attorney

JIM DAVIS

-
Consulting Attorney

DELENE PORTER

-
Chief Operating Officer

WANDA MILTON-STRICKLAND

-
Staff Attorney

LIBBY SUMMERALL

-
Paralegal



Georgia Heirs Property Law Center is a not-for-profit law firm that helps heirs property owners, nonprofits, and local governments remediate fractured title, increase equity, and transfer wealth to the next generation through title clearing, wills creation, estate planning, and facilitating access to government, private sector, and nonprofit land management or home improvement programs.

APPLYING FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE WITH HEIRS PROPERTY ISSUES

Who Does the Center Serve?

The Center works throughout Georgia but, due to limited resources, cannot accept every case. The Center gives priority to potential clients with properties located in Atlanta and South Georgia. The Center's services are either free or discounted depending on a client's qualifications.

How Do I Apply for Assistance?

To apply for assistance, contact the Center at (706) 424-7557, Ext. 1 for a free initial telephone interview. To fully evaluate your case for representation and best serve you, these documents may be needed:

- Copies of any deeds for the property, including the deed where the family acquired the property and the last recorded deed (if different);
- An heirs determination packet, filled out to the best of your ability, beginning with the original owner, and showing the names of all living and deceased heirs and their spouses (if presently known), how they are related, and whether any are deceased. All biological and adopted children must be included regardless of whether born within a marriage or not;
- Death certificate for the original owner and any of his or her deceased heir(s);
- Obituary for the original owner and any of his or her deceased heir(s);
- Copies of wills or probate documents for the original owner and any of his or her deceased heirs;
- Copies of written agreements among family members or with third parties regarding the property;
- Copies of any legal notices relating to the property, such as tax sale, foreclosure, pending or threatened lawsuits, and code violation notices;

Upon receiving all requested information and documents, the Center will review your matter and determine whether your case can be accepted on a "pending" basis. If you are accepted on a "pending basis," you will be required to provide the Center's income worksheet and complete a detailed heirs determination packet. Upon receipt of your income worksheet and heirs determination materials, the Center will make a determination regarding whether you are eligible for services and what legal fees, if any, you would be required to pay.

Please bear in mind throughout the process that the Center has not yet agreed to represent you and has not established an attorney-client relationship with you. You will only become a client if the Center formally accepts your matter and you sign an engagement agreement.



Georgia Heirs Property Law Center is a not-for-profit law firm that helps heirs property owners, nonprofits, and local governments remediate fractured title, increase equity and transfer wealth to the next generation through title clearing, wills creation, estate planning and facilitating access to government, private sector, and nonprofit land management or home improvement programs.

Building Generational Wealth and Strengthening Communities by Securing and Preserving Property Rights.

WHAT WE DO



LEGAL SUPPORT

Georgia Heirs Property Law Center provides legal support for families, individuals, nonprofits and municipalities. Title-clearing services include title audits, family meetings, probate, quiet title actions, and legal tools like management agreements; powers of attorneys; consolidation of title into single ownership, LLC, or trust.



LAND LOSS PREVENTION

Georgia Heirs Property Law Center develops estate plans and prepares last wills and testaments for individuals to foster generational wealth transfer and prevent land loss. Services may include advanced directive for healthcare, financial power of attorney, and establishing a trust or LLC. In addition, the Center provides educational materials for nonprofits through its Estate Planning Forms Project.



ASSET EDUCATION

Georgia Heirs Property Law Center provides financial education on home and land ownership to grow assets for the next generation. The Center engages nonprofit and governmental partners to help clients develop land/timber management plans, qualify for USDA programs, and access home repair, Disaster Recovery and Resilience programs.

WHO WE ARE



Center attorneys, support staff, and a network of pro bono volunteers and grassroots organizational partners



Statewide work with geographic outreach in Atlanta and South Georgia



Serving families, individuals, nonprofits, and municipalities with legal support, prevention, and asset education services.



Offices in Atlanta, Athens, Fitzgerald, and Valdosta.

Heirs Property is the hidden story behind blight and generational poverty in Georgia.

Heirs property refers to a home or land that passes from generation to generation without a legally designated owner resulting in ownership divided among all living descendants in a family. This unstable form of ownership limits a family's ability to build generational wealth and hampers the efforts of nonprofits and cities to revitalize neighborhoods.

CONTACT US

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