



Key to the City Recognition

Dr. John and Mary Helen McGruder

Mary Helen McGruder was born to James and Louise Mashburn in 1947 at Emory Hospital in Atlanta but resided in a house located where the parking lot of the present Cumming City Hall is located, behind the old Mary Alice Hospital on the Cumming Square. Mary Helen was raised in that house until 1952, when her family moved to a house located at what is now 515 Pilgrim Mill Road. She attended Forsyth County High School and graduated from North Georgia College (now known as University of North Georgia) in 1968.

Dr. John McGruder was born to W. W. and Verneal McGruder in 1941 in the town of Naylor, Missouri, south of present-day Poplar Bluff, Missouri. Dr. McGruder's mother and father bought woodlands near the Little Black River in 1944 and Dr. McGruder, along with his parents and nine brothers and sisters, cleared the land and built a home, turned forested land into pasture and fields, and made other improvements over the next couple of decades. John McGruder graduated from Poplar Bluff High School in 1959 and from Arkansas State College (now known as Arkansas State University) in 1964. Pursuant to Dr. McGruder's ROTC commitment during college, he enrolled in the United States Army in 1964, graduating from the Army's Ranger School that same year. He served with the 82nd Airborne Division in the Dominican Republic in 1965, and as an advisor to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (also known as the South Vietnamese Army) during the Vietnam War in 1966 and 1967.

Following Dr. McGruder's service in Vietnam, he returned to the United States and was an instructor at the Mountain Phase (Camp Merrill) of the Army's Ranger School near Dahunega while Mrs. McGruder was attending college. Dr. and Mrs. McGruder first met at the Tastee-Freez in Dahunega in 1967. They were married in 1968 and moved to Columbia, Missouri, where Dr. McGruder enrolled at the University of Missouri School of Veterinary Medicine. After John graduated from veterinary school in 1973, the couple lived in Missouri, Tennessee, and Iowa before moving to Cumming in 1983. In 1984, Dr. McGruder opened Crestview Animal Hospital on Pilgrim Mill Road, which is still operating in the same location and in which Dr. McGruder still works.

In September of 2023, Dr. and Mrs. McGruder will have been married 55 years. They have two children, Paul (married to Amy) and Louisa (married to John Ritsick), and five grandchildren: Case, Smith and Zane McGruder, and James and Neale Ritsick.

Dr. and Mrs. McGruder have attended the Cumming First United Methodist Church since moving to Cumming in 1983, which Mrs. McGruder attended while growing up in Cumming. Each has served in various leadership roles and on several committees within the church since 1983.

Mary Helen was the founding president of the United Way of Forsyth County, as well as the Sawnee Woman's Club. She has served as a member of the Georgia Mountain Regional Development Committee, representing the City of Cumming. She is a past chairman and current member of the Board of Directors of the Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce, and is a current member of the Board of Trustees of the Forsyth County Library, representing District One which includes the City of Cumming. Since 2006, Mrs. McGruder has served as a member of the Board of Trustees of the University of North Georgia Foundation, and from 2016 to 2018 was chairman of the Board of Trustees. Additionally, she is chairman of the Forsyth County Community Foundation Advisory Board of the North Georgia Community Foundation.

Dr. McGruder was a founder of The Citizens Bank of Georgia (formerly The Citizens Bank of Forsyth County) and currently serves on the Board of Directors and chairs the Executive Committee for the bank. He also serves as chairman of the Animal Control Board of Forsyth County. Additionally, Dr. McGruder has served as a member of the board of the Cumming Development Authority in the past.

Additionally, Dr. and Mrs. McGruder were instrumental in the formation of the Sawnee Mountain Foundation and the preservation of Sawnee Mountain as a part of the Forsyth County Parks and Recreation Department.

Thank you Dr. John and Mary Helen McGruder for all you do for our community!