



Exceptional Living

Editor's note: *Exceptional Living* appears exclusively in the *Medical Examiner* each month, addressing issues that all of us can benefit from involving people with special — let's call them exceptional — needs.

by Naomi D. Williams, MPH, CHES, IC®

Sometimes we don't realize what we have until it's gone. Other times we don't know what we have because we haven't been exposed to it. There was a time in my life when I thought the most exciting thing about living in Augusta was the fact that I lived near I-20 and could get out of town. I had many desirable options: one hour from Columbia, two hours from Charlotte, two hours

from Atlanta, two and a half hours from Charleston, Macon, and Savannah, four to five hours from Florida... you get my point.

In essence I wasn't happy about living in Augusta, but fond of being able to visit other areas relatively quickly and easily. And although I still can't say that Augusta is my top-ranked, first-choice city to live in I have found some true "diamonds" in Augusta. The sparkle of these diamonds appeared to me in some of my darkest

hours and didn't truly reveal themselves until I needed them and was looking for them.

Christ Community Health Services is a rare gem in the Garden City. During a time when I was unemployed, uninsured, exhausted, depressed, homeless (my idea of homeless: bouncing from parent to parent), and in need of medical attention I heard about the low cost clinic downtown. To my surprise, I fell in love with this clinic, not the building

but the people. I absolutely love the care and attention that is provided by the staff especially Rebecca Lyle, (nurse practitioner) and those in the lab. What a wonderful feeling to go to the doctor and have confidence that your concerns are being heard and addressed regardless of your socioeconomic status.

MCG Children's Medical Center (now known as Georgia Health Sciences GHS CMC) is another jewel of the CSRA community and for me personally. I knew of the CMC but I didn't really learn the value of having a children's hospital in the area at my immediate disposal until my son was born. In a recent presentation I teased that I need to become an "ologist" of some sort due to the number of specialists that we see (neurologists, pulmonologists, gastroenterologists, ophthalmologists, etc), so I now refer to myself as a momologist!

In any event most parents, let alone adults, never have to work with a specialist or are concerned with long term hospital stays. My family along with others (both local and many who live hours away) have had the privilege of reaping the benefits of the only facility in the area dedicated exclusively to children being cared for in a Level III-D (the highest level) neonatal intensive care unit and most importantly, being able to drive a mere 11 miles for our specialist appointments.

As we spent weeks in the NICU I met many families who lived hours away and weren't able to spend days at a time with their fragile infant. I'm thankful everyday that I was able to be at my child's bedside, every day, all day if I chose. Even now with our slew of "ologist" appointments, I consider myself so lucky to not have to take the whole day off from work to drive two and a half hours, then sit an hour in traffic for a 20 minute to an hour appointment.

D.W. Oellerich Memorial Park located in Appling, Georgia, is another jewel to the CSRA. This facility is used primarily by East Central Regional Hospital. The neat thing about the park is that it was designed and accommodates those with developmental as well as physical disabilities, differently-abled persons. From the garden for the visually impaired to the boat ramp for those in wheelchairs, there is something for everyone. I learned of this wonderful facility due to the adult Sunday school class at Kiokee Baptist Church holding their second annual Special Needs Day at the lake. It was a wonderful experience to take the kids out on boats, kayaks, tubes and more. A special twelve year-old diamond named Tanner Haywood made our experience all the more enjoyable.

I'm running out of article space but not out of diamonds in the CSRA. I would be remiss if I did not include PSA Healthcare as a diamond in our city. PSA is a day treatment facility that takes care of medically fragile children 5 years old and younger. There are roughly 50 centers in the United States, five in Georgia and only one in our wonderful city. PSA makes it possible for many parents, me included, to go to work without worrying if their child is being cared for properly, especially in a medical emergency. Staffed with Certified Nursing Assistants, Licensed Practical Nurses, Registered Nurses and therapists, PSA lets me focus on my work and not let worries over my child's care consume my thoughts.

I hope I have enlightened you to some gems in the city in which you live. I challenge you to explore the area around you and discover your own "diamonds" in Augusta. ☺

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