

## **Matt Poyner**

### **Linking His Past with the City's Future**

Southerners take great joy in tracing their ancestral connection to a particular town or historical event-linking their lives with those that have gone before. Matt Poyner, executive director of the Development Authority of Milledgeville and Baldwin County (DAMBC), beams with pride when he discusses his family's generational bonds with our city.

According to Poyner, his ancestor Major Edward White, built the oldest, still-standing house in Milledgeville in 1806, located on Clarke Street. His son, Dr. Benjamin Aspinwall White co-founded the Georgia Asylum (Central State Hospital) along with Dr. Tomlinson Fort. Dr. White's daughter, Rosa White Clendinen delivered her first child, Benjamin White Clendinen, in Major White's house. Benjamin Clendinen's daughter, Marie Clendinen Jones, gave birth to Poyner's grandmother, Nell Jones Poyner.

"My grandmother's son is my father James Alexander Poyner, Jr.," stated Poyner. "My parents purchased Major White's home in 2013, where they presently reside. The house is now owned by the decedents of Major White-my 5<sup>th</sup> great-grandfather."

Poyner confirms his grandfather as a true patriot that served in the Revolutionary War as a military aide to General Marquis de Lafayette. He fought in the Battle of Lexington and Concord-all the way to the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. Buried in Milledgeville's most historic cemetery, Memory Hill, his headstone notes him as the CSA Surgeon General Georgia Troops.

## **Experience Has Its Benefits**

Poyner's status as a University of Georgia (UGA) alumnus is quite clear by his extensive memorabilia collection in his DAMBC office. "My wife Laura and I are UGA alumni and enjoy going to football games as a family," said Poyner.

Poyner met Laura at UGA when he was studying at the prestigious College of Environment and Design. He holds a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture with a concentration in large scale master planned community development and downtown streetscape designs (urban planning). He is a Registered Landscape Architect (RLA) in the state of Georgia.

The reason for getting into this particular field, according to Poyner, was so he could use his innovative design skills. "Landscape Architecture is a very creative profession and provides a great deal of latitude in what your main focus can be," he added. "I like the idea of working in a discipline where I wouldn't be behind a desk all day, and I could use my talents to create spaces that people could enjoy."

Milledgeville celebrates its role as the Antebellum Capital of Georgia while moving forward into the modern era. Poyner is a perfect fit for the city with his experience in both historic preservation and creating new public spaces. Previous work has provided him with the foundation of knowing how to work through project challenges-bringing old and new together seamlessly.

He remarks: “Understanding that I was working as a RLA to make a place better for a community that I would not be a part of every day, gave me a certain respect to know that my fingerprints on a project would last longer than I will be around to enjoy them.”

Poyner has crucial insight to how past experiences have shaped his view on current projects. “My job was to leave that environment a better place than when I began working on it and to listen to what the goals needed to be for it to succeed. It’s the same with recruiting businesses to this community, we must ensure that it is going to be the right fit for generations to come and our strengths as a community measure up to the expectations of the new industry that is locating here.”

### **Attracting Prospective Industry**

The DAMBC serves as the primary agency to recruit business and industry to our community. Three years ago, Poyner was the chosen candidate to take over as executive director of the Authority, and since that time has dedicated many hours to attracting jobs back to Milledgeville.

Explaining that new or expanding industry looks at the availability and quality of the workforce, along with town amenities, Poyner says he can guarantee Milledgeville has outstanding assets to offer any business.

“With the post-secondary education options located within 2 ½ miles of each other, a downtown going through a renaissance, and the cultural amenities and recreation opportunities that make up this community, it is hard to find areas that don’t promote positive impacts,” he said.

To re-enforce this assertion, he gives an example of a local company that represents the workforce base located in our town. “This community is home to the state of Georgia’s Large Manufacturer of the Year-Triumph Aerostructures,” said Poyner. “This award that Triumph earned this year has been won in the past by Gulfstream, Frito-Lay, and Boeing, to name a few.”

Poyner stresses: “We have been shortlisted on multiple projects to where we are the last community representing the state of Georgia against another community in another state or another part of the world. I am very proud of where this community is going, and I’m extremely proud to be a part of the team that is helping move those efforts forward.”

### **Strengthening the Community through Collaboration**

Although Milledgeville went through difficult times with the economic downturn a few years back, the city is recovering with the hard work and dedication of both the DAMBC and Milledgeville Main Street (MMS). Both offices are set in the beautifully renovated former Elks Lodge located at 105 East Hancock Street, allowing the organizations easy access to collaborate on projects.

“The renovation was a huge undertaking that has now reaped many benefits to the community,” states Carlee Schulte, MMS executive director. “The building is large enough to house the majority of all City Economic Development activities to provide the ‘one-stop shop’ design that is growing in popularity.”

Schulte adds that both the DAMBC and MMS are in the business of creating and developing economic opportunities for our community. “Matt and I work together when needed to host

prospects or gather data, among other things. It is important for our two entities to be flexible and assist each other for the greater economic growth of our community, and I think we both work well to do just that.”

### **Working Toward a Brighter Future**

Poyner is very modest when speaking of the recent DAMBC accomplishments including the revamped marketing program and a new web presence. He is eager to give credit to the guidance provided by his board of directors, but his passion for Milledgeville and his work shines through his humility.

“The future for this community is bright. Project activity is at an all-time high with companies from around the globe showing interest here,” said Poyner. “While the goal of the Authority is to continue to recruit new businesses here, we must look towards the future and understand what the next steps are for us all.”

For more information log onto the website <http://developmilledgeville.com/>.

Or contact the DAMBC at:

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