

## **What Community Newspapers Mean to Me**

### **Georgia Secretary of State Brian P. Kemp**

A wise man once told me, “If it isn’t in the newspaper, it never really happened.” I have found this to be no truer than in politics. Community newspapers are true guardians of the public interest and the absolute best purveyor of accurate local information.

When I first ran for the state Senate a decade ago, I thought that I had a pretty good handle on all of Northeast Georgia. The 46th District was composed of parts of Clarke, Oconee, Jackson and Barrow Counties, and I had lived in Clarke my entire life. I had family and friends across the District.

Well, it didn’t take long for me to learn that I had a lot to learn. Local newspapers were the ultimate “cheat-sheet” for a first time candidate. Farm Bureau meetings, volunteer fire department information, local PTA meetings, church gatherings, and local political and government meetings can all be found in the local newspaper. As valuable as the AJC and WSB Channel 2 are, you are not going to hear about the Statham Sunflower Festival from them.

Events like these are where I gained a true understanding of issues in each individual community. While Northeast Georgia has a lot in common, each community has its own character and its own issues.

Community newspapers helped Brian Kemp the candidate, but they helped Brian Kemp the elected official so much more. When you get down to the Gold Dome, it is very easy to fall into the mindset that Georgia begins and ends at I-285. The focus is on “front-page” issues that affect education, transportation and healthcare. Too often, all the communication on these issues comes from the major metro media. That means hearing about how a change in the QBE formula will affect DeKalb County, what the loss of the GA 400 toll means to transportation funding and what the trauma care formula will mean for Grady Memorial Hospital.

The laws passed in Atlanta govern all 159 counties in Georgia and the staffs at the community newspapers are the ones doing the true research in determining the local impact of legislation. Never is any new law an “apples to apples” when it comes to Georgia because are so diverse from an economic, industrial and physical standpoint.

I have the privilege of representing every single citizen of Georgia as the Secretary of State. Since I took office in 2010, I have visited 153 of 159 counties and will shortly have visited each and every one. Not once have I ever been through a county without contacting the local community newspaper. The reason is simple, “If it isn’t in the newspaper, it never really happened.”