

making a difference

By Submitted by Ardsley Resident **Jason Gallegos**



SUPPORTING THE SALVATION ARMY

When you're twenty-something, living and working in North Carolina, and your boss says "we need you in Savannah on Monday and pack your bags to stay awhile," you might not ask how long "awhile" means, but for sure you get up and go! For Jason Gallegos, it's been 20 years since he received his instructions to pick up and move--and he's been happy and thankful ever since that he did so. While Jason concedes that living in Savannah for 20 years still doesn't make him a "native," he laughs and says: "I feel like I've put in the work to make Savannah my home—so, I AM a local!" As Jason humbly shared his genuine love for the Hostess City, and his many years of passionate dedication to several local, nonprofit organizations, there was not one doubt as to the legitimacy of his local-status-claim!

Jason is actually a native of Washington, DC and a graduate of Salisbury University in Maryland. After college, he worked for three and a half years with a marketing firm in Wilmington, NC, before moving to Savannah and renting a home on the 300 block of 57th Street. He quickly fell in love with the area and has remained in Ardsley Park ever since. He and his wife, Ashley, now live in a house on 50th Street, where they're ecstatic to be in the final "cosmetic" stages of renovation on their "forever home!" "We especially love the fact that we have many friends within walking distance. We spend a lot of quality time with people in Ardsley. There's always a nice excuse for an evening walk--looking at the architecture or landscaping is one of our favorite things to do." They sometimes glean a few great ideas for their own home during their evening

strolls. "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery!" Jason laughs. "Ardsley is very alive; I like the constant feel of community with no gates around it. There are a lot of children running and playing in the parks. When the sound of children's laughter kind of permeates the air, it's hard not to have that bring a smile to your face," he says, smiling at the thought.

As is often noted by Ardsley Park residents, the couple greatly appreciates the tremendous convenience living there affords them. Ashley owns a small engineering company, AIG Consultants, which she operates from home. Doing so enables her to easily pick up Ashton, a fourth grader, at the nearby Habersham School. The couple will soon be welcoming a second son, due in early January. Jason's birthday also falls in early January. "It's going to be a great birthday present!"

Jason is a Financial Advisor with Northwest Mutual, working in offensive and defensive financial planning--offering clients risk products such as insurance, growth products as in investments, as well as legacy solutions--and he loves his job. "One of the greatest opportunities of the career is meeting interesting people." He was the treasurer for the Savannah Children's Choir's board of directors for six years and presently serves as treasurer on the founding board of the up and coming Savannah Exploratory School. This K-5th grade charter academy, set to open in 2020, will offer students a "project-based learning" curriculum.

For the last two years, Jason has served on the Public Relations and Development Committee of The Salvation Army's advisory board. When asked how he came to be involved with The Salvation Army (TSA), he laughed and said, "Well, like all good stories, it starts with an elevator!" And, so it did. While on his way to a Savannah Downtown Business Association luncheon, Jason shared an elevator ride and conversation with Larry Haskell, who he discovered was serving as the Director of the Development for TSA. When Jason told Larry about a seminar he was facilitating for nonprofits, regarding important new tax laws, Larry readily accepted an invitation to attend. Subsequently, Larry recruited Jason to join the Salvation Army's advisory board. From the start, it was the people that most impressed Jason about TSA. Particularly, Jason cited former chairman of the board, Chuck Beck, a beloved man who passed away suddenly just one day after his chairmanship term ended. "He was one of the most thoughtful and genuine people I've ever met," Jason recalls.

Jason asked me what I knew know about the mission of The Salvation Army. I had to admit I basically knew about the homeless shelter, after-school program and, of course, the Christmas bell-ringers. Smiling graciously, he explained that most people really don't know about all the things TSA does in and for the community, because they do so much. He then proceeded to enthusiastically educate me! "The Salvation Army has the region's largest homeless shelter; they provide the majority of free meals offered daily in the area (approximately 80,000 per year); they have a disaster relief team that treats first responders; they have an in-house alcohol and drug rehabilitation program (CSRC), which graduates approximately 25 beneficiaries per quarter and a new program which I'm probably most excited about--Pathway of Hope! It's an active program, working every step of the way with low income families to break generational poverty." WOW.

"Pathway of Hope," he went on to explain, "offers assistance with job training, transportation to and from jobs, subsidized housing, groceries, and daycare for young children. The goal is to graduate participants into higher levels of independence. Ultimately, clients will live independently, secure their own home and become responsible for their finances. The Salvation Army is here to help clients remove barriers, sometimes it's as simple as helping people get the right documents so that they can apply for employment. They've had eight graduates so far, which is excellent for such an ambitious, rigorous program!

Exciting things are on the horizon for The Salvation Army--including plans for expanding programs. Kyle McCann, Chief Operating Officer for St. Joseph Candler, is the new chairman of TSA board and is dedicated to advancing TSA's mission. In fact, Jason said that, after asking themselves, "Does our mission align with our vision?" Salvation Army recently decided to update their mission statement to better reflect their vision: "to be the leader among area human service delivery organizations." The new mission statement affirms: "Through the love of Jesus, we restore hope by feeding the hungry, providing shelter to the homeless, setting addicts free and ministering to spiritual, intellectual and physical needs daily and in times of crisis."

Jason also notes how terrific it is to have the fresh perspective and ideas of the Corps Officers of TSA, Majors Paul and Karen Egan. "They're awesome people who do a great job of encapsulating the command there. With their energy and enthusiasm--they really see the big picture!"

When asked for some specific ways Ardsley residents could get involved, he immediately responded: "We need volunteer Bell Ringers!" It's never too late to become a volunteer bell ringer this holiday season. Jason suggests you introduce yourself to bell ringers, ask them what their role is with TSA

(when they're not ringing bells), ask them if they've been personally affected by the work of TSA. Ask them to tell you their story. "Don't be afraid to make conversation with the people ringing those bells!" Jason encourages. "And, don't be afraid to donate! They're out to help the community we all live in."

There are many additional volunteer opportunities with The Salvation Army, including donating to this year's Angel Tree," a program which provides Christmas gifts for local families in need of assistance. Volunteers are needed to help staff the TSA mobile Canteen during disasters, assist as tutors with our after school and summer camp programs. With four Family Thrift Stores there are always opportunities to help with their operations. TSA volunteer coordinator, Kayla Lentz, will be happy to speak with anyone interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities.

"The Salvation Army is such a great organization and, like other great organizations, their mission speaks to a lot of people," Jason enthuses. "There are a number of people in Ardsley who believe in the same mission as TSA." He hopes his wonderful Ardsley friends and neighbors will take the opportunity to do so now. For more information about The Salvation Army, please visit: <https://salvation-armygeorgia.org/savannah>.



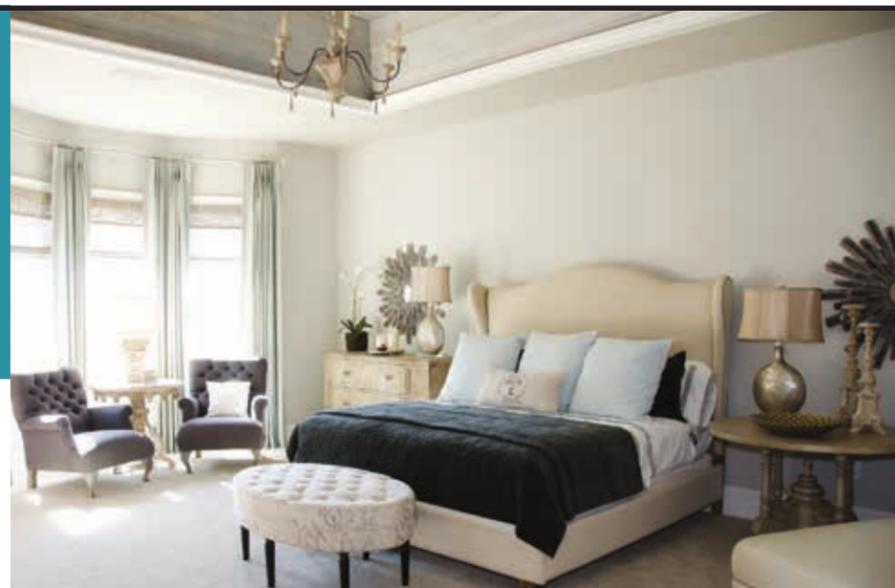
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