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**Community Spotlight: South Cobb County**

## **Mableton is a major find**

**Forget town's lowly image: It offers bargains, beauty and excellent accessibility.**

By H.M. Cauley

For the Journal-Constitution

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At the first mention of Mableton, many buyers conjure up an image of Vinings' poorer relation to the west. Yet this south side of Cobb County has enjoyed a renaissance of residents, homes and businesses largely fueled by its proximity to I-285 and Buckhead; lower taxes than Atlanta and Fulton County; and neighborhoods with more elbow room and lower prices than Vinings and Smyrna.

Buyers such as Jay Evans are bolstering the area's image, though he admits his first thoughts of Mableton weren't quite so positive.

"When we found this lot in Mableton, my first thought was, 'Well, forget that,' " said Evans, who built a home off Buckner Road a year ago. "My first thought was low-end area and diminished house values. But then I came over here and saw what's been going on. It's really changed."

The first thing Evans noted was the accessibility. "It's actually better than Vinings," he said. "From Vinings, there are only a few egress points and they're packed. From Mableton, you can go to I-20, to South Atlanta Road and have more options."

Location was a selling point as far back as 20 years ago, when Derek Nowatzki found a house

there with his wife, Amy. They now live in their second Mableton home, which backs up to the Silver Comet Trail and is close to Heritage Park along Nickajack Creek.

“At the time, I was flying a lot and this area was close to the airport,” Nowatzki said. “In fact, it’s still our little family joke that everything is only 30 minutes away from here.”

The construction of the East-West Connector has made getting around Mableton much easier and has also drawn a number of shopping centers to support the residential base. Home Depot, Wal-Mart, restaurants and other outlets are now in the neighborhood.

“When the connector was finished in the mid-’90s, it really changed the retail landscape here,” Nowatzki said.

And it’s helped bring people back, he added.

“During the housing boom in the early 1980s, a lot of my neighbors moved up to Acworth, Kennesaw and Marietta, but things are now swinging back in our favor,” Nowatzki said. “There are lots of new developments that are bringing people out this way.”

Among the new communities are Cobblestone Creek, a gated community of single-family, cluster and townhouses with skyline views of Atlanta, a swimming pool and walking trails with prices from \$210,000 to \$320,000; Walden Crossing, 48 single-family homes from \$214,400 to \$232,900; and Kingsbridge Point, a 79-home community with a pool and playground, with homes starting in the \$290,000s.

“You can find just about anything you’re looking for, whether it’s an older ranch home in the \$100,000s up to a \$2.5 million estate,” said Dan Petersen of Petersen Partners, a Prudential Georgia Realty affiliate. “The new construction includes not just single-family homes but a good number of townhouses as well.”

The small-town feel and accessibility brought Petersen and his wife, Jill, to Mableton almost 10 years ago.

“The location and price points are still key,” Petersen said. “We’re in the same spot Smyrna was 10 years ago, when you could get a lot of space and home for the money and still be close to downtown, the airport and Buckhead. You can still get a home at a good price in a great location.”

One of the features that contributes to Mableton’s sense of community is the South Cobb Arts Alliance, located in the historic 1843 Mable House on Floyd Road. Since 1972, the nonprofit organization has been a cultural hub, hosting gallery shows, free concerts, fairs and performances at the Mable House Barnes Amphitheatre.

“Our purpose is to provide avenues for people to express themselves artistically and to enjoy what art can bring to families,” alliance president Ann Cummings said. “We offer county-sponsored art classes from pottery to cartooning; theater classes that stage various productions; a storytelling festival in the fall; and a holiday crafts fair. In this past year, we served about 35,000 people, and

as the area grows, I think there's going to be more of a demand for reaching out to the community in the future."

Tracey Waddell is one of the area's active residents working to improve Mableton as it grows. The six-year resident and mom helped launch the International Academy of Mableton and is a member of the Mableton Improvement Coalition. She's also busy in the Mableton Moms Club and has re-energized her gardening group.

"The county gave us a piece of property at Nickajack Park for a garden, and the county cooperative put up a fence for us," said Waddell. "We're in our third planting season now, and it's become a great community thing that's fun to be a part of. I'm also a part of the improvement coalition that speaks out on what kinds of businesses and zoning we want in the community. Our members go to hearings and have a strong, united voice for protecting the community."

Waddell, whose house in the Glenleigh subdivision was built in the late 1980s, said it's the residents who make Mableton a great place to live.

"I have wonderful neighbors, and we have so many ways to connect," she said. "One of the best things we have is the Mable House, where you can come to concerts and events and see all your neighbors' faces. There's no doubt — I am very Mableton proud!"

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