

Childersburg: A Community Rooted in History and Built for Excellence

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Located in the southwestern part of Talladega County, Childersburg, Alabama holds a unique and fascinating history. Tucked into the center of Alabama between U.S. Highways 280 and 231, this city of 4,800 residents is grounded in historical significance. Incorporated in 1889, Childersburg has always stood as an important industrial and transportation center in our state. Its location, history and people have helped shape a community that continues to honor where it has been, making it this magazine edition's Alabama Communities of Excellence spotlight story.

Heritage and History

Though the city is centered between several larger cities and continues to grow in population, it strives to preserve its small-town charm and cultural heritage. Childersburg is recognized as one of the oldest continuously occupied settlements in the United States. It traces its origins back to before European influence and was home to the Coosa Native Americans, whose territory encompassed present-day eastern portions of Alabama and extends along the Coosa River.

The oldest recording of Childersburg dates back to 1540 when Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto and his expedition visited a Coosa Native American village that once occupied the Childersburg area. That rich past remains an important part of the city's identity today, giving residents and visitors alike a deeper appreciation for the land, cultures, stories and traditions that continue to define the community.

Additionally, during World War II, the Alabama Army ammunition plant near Childersburg played a major role in the nation's defensive efforts, bringing rapid growth and economic



development to the community. The plant's presence left a lasting imprint on the area's economy, infrastructure and sense of service during a defining period in American history.

Excellence of Leadership

Wanting to further demonstrate its commitment to strategic growth, leadership and community development, Childersburg started on its ACE journey in 2008 before earning the ACE Community designation in 2012.

ACE was created in 2002 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to provide small communities, in the 2,000 to 18,000 population range, resources and knowledge that focus on the importance of planning, leadership development and broad-based community engagement. The program uses the collective expertise of partner organizations, including state agencies, associations, banks, utilities, universities and other technical specialists to help communities focus on their specific assets and long-term economic success. ACE provides community leaders with training and workshops to develop a vision and implementation strategies for their city. The program is designed to walk communities through a three-phased approach, which consists of assessing a community's strengths and weaknesses, developing a strategic plan and implementing it. ★



Childersburg's participation in ACE started under the leadership of Mayor Billy Joe Meeks who had a vision for a stronger, more vibrant Childersburg. Through strategic planning, Mayor Meeks laid the foundation for many of the improvements seen in the city today during his tenure from 1987 to 2014. His leadership helped set a tone of intentional planning, public service and community pride that has influenced Childersburg long after the city first began its ACE journey.

Deciding to seek someone who knew the importance of local leadership and the community's standing in historical distinction, Mayor Meeks asked Howard Smith, assistant general manager of the Childersburg utility department, to serve as the city's ACE local coordinator in 2008. The local coordinator plays a central role in the ACE process by spearheading efforts locally and serving as the liaison between the community and the ACE team.

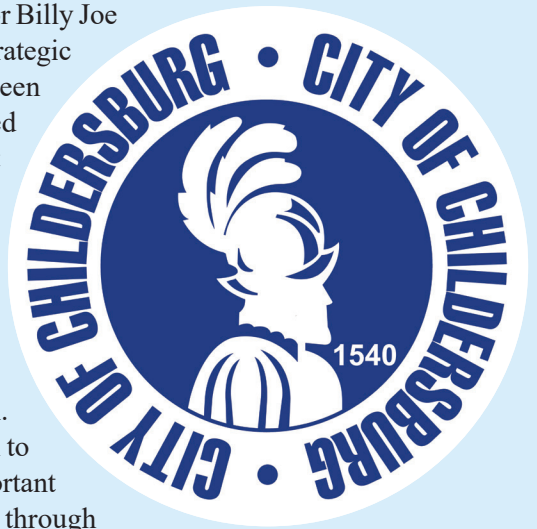
A lifelong member of the Childersburg community, Smith's connection to the community and understanding of municipal operations made him an important part of the city's effort to turn long-term goals into visible improvements through the ACE program.

Though Mayor Meeks passed away in 2014 before he could see several of his visions fully realized, his commitment to the city's future continued through the election of Mayor Pro Tem Jimmy Payne, who assumed office in 2015.

Mayor Pro Tem Payne carried that momentum of merit and community development until current Mayor Ken Wesson took office in 2016. Mayor Wesson continued the vision established by Mayor Meeks and Mayor Payne while introducing new initiatives that further improved Childersburg.

"Mayor Meeks loved the city of Childersburg. In his tenure as mayor, he laid the foundation for growth for our city using our historical significance and resources," Smith said. "Part of that vision was to participate in the ACE program to utilize their resources as well."

Under consistently imaginative leadership, the city has remained focused on practical improvements that support residents and reinforce the value of planning for the future.



Products of Commitment

In the final phase of the program, communities shift their focus from planning to implementation, turning their strategic plan into reality. For Childersburg, being a part of the ACE program laid the foundation for the city to start and complete many renovations to enhance its quality of life. Its parks and recreation department built the RS Limbaugh Community Center, which offers an activity room, several meeting rooms and a gymnasium. The department also renovated its old John Cox Football Stadium to improve the enjoyment of its sporting events.



In its follow-through of the city's strategic plan, Childersburg has also completed several upgrades to the BJ Meeks Sports Complex, adding pickleball courts and new batting cages. It also finished phase one of its downtown sidewalk replacement project, all to enhance public services, infrastructure and quality of life for Childersburg residents.

"We have made much-needed improvements to our recreation department, police department, judicial building and utility department. These upgrades have provided our citizens with safe, clean and modern spaces they can be proud of," Smith said. "Our next major improvements will focus on the fire department and street department."

Each project demonstrates how the city has taken steady, meaningful steps in the ACE program to improve everyday services while also making public spaces more accessible and welcoming.

Continuous Residential Growth

Along with significant structural and economic development, Childersburg has also experienced residential growth that expanded available housing opportunities through the development of new subdivisions like College Park and Griffin Creek, which created more than 70 new homes and exemplifies the city's commitment to building a strong, forward-looking community. As more families look for places that offer both convenience of location and a close-knit community atmosphere, Childersburg has positioned itself as a place where people can live, work, play and invest in the future.

Both Mayor Wesson and Coordinator Smith share a deep assurance to its continuous growth and success through strategic planning, infrastructure improvements, housing development and community-focused leadership and reflects a willingness to prepare Childersburg for the next generation. That continued commitment reflects one of ACE's central principles: communities are strongest when local leaders, residents and stakeholders work together to create and carry out a successful strategic plan. Today, nearly 15 years after the city joined the program, Childersburg has exemplified what it means to be a part of ACE and the impact it can have when there are clear goals and strategic planning.

Today, Childersburg maintains the excellence of a community rooted in heritage, natural beauty and civic pride. Its story is one of history, leadership and progress which is a reminder that even the oldest communities can keep growing when its people remain committed to a shared vision for the future.

If your municipality needs assistance with updating your strategic plan or is interested in becoming an ACE community, contact Mary Jackson Pollard at mpollard@almonline.org. ACE program applications will close September 15, 2026. ■

Scan the QR code for more information about the ACE Program.

