Background - "Whatever you are, be a good one." - Abraham Lincoln

Just as Abe admonished, Mike Bearden really is a “good one”. To begin with, Mike has had a credentialed career. From Georgia Tech he holds a Civil Engineering degree and completed graduate work in Environmental Engineering. From Georgia State he holds an MBA in Finance. Mike retired in 2008 as the Senior Vice President of land planning for Gresham, Smith, and Partners. During his working career he worked with many of the big Fortune 500 companies such as Georgia Power, Kroger, Coca Cola, Boeing Aircraft, Eclipse Aviation, Mitsubishi and many others, honing a skill set that he has launched into a commitment to almost “constant service to the community” of Bartow County. Mike’s interest in the environment often places him in programs that include Keep Bartow Beautiful. He is a member of Bartow’s longstanding “Greenspace Committee” whose meetings are coordinated by Keep Bartow Beautiful. He is also a founding member of the Lake Allatoona Association (2010). LAA took on management of the Great Lake Allatoona Cleanup in 2012, personally logging, despite a health crisis, a documented 278 volunteer hours in 2018 alone. Keep Bartow Beautiful is on the Great Lake Allatoona Cleanup Committee and educational partners in the annual cleanup largely because of Mike Bearden. He has fished, paddled by kayak, jet-skied, and boated the lake, and all its tributaries. He has hiked all its greenspaces and developed a deep love of nature and its resources. He has shared his love of the water and trails for decades with anyone who would listen, educating at every opportunity about the tremendous resources we need to protect and treasure as stewards of Lake Allatoona and the still “green” spaces of Bartow County. For all that he has done and continues to do for Bartow County, Mike Bearden is the Keep Bartow Beautiful nomination for the Steve Reynolds Man of the Year Award. And, by all accounts, you can ask anyone, he is a “good one”. 
Leadership - "A leader is not an administrator who loves to run others, but someone who carries water for his people so that they can get on with their jobs.” -- Robert Townsend

True leaders don’t often reflect on the fact that they are leading. True leaders simply share their power and status in order that others might benefit. Nothing that benefits others is beneath them. This can certainly be said of Mike Bearden who never comes home empty handed. He picks up trash everywhere, including the dozens of national parks he has visited across the United States and in other countries. His volunteerism has taken many forms. He volunteered for over 10 years with the Presbyterian Church’s Tuesday night meal ministry “The Friendship Table” for Bartow County’s disadvantaged and indigent population where, naturally, he brought in others to work alongside him. He volunteered for 2 years with the “PROMISE Family” program where homeless families spend the night out of the weather and in safety at the church. Naturally, Mike also spent the night there taking care of their needs. During the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey in Houston, Texas, Mike worked for a week with “Samaritan's Purse” on demolition and trash removal for the devastated residents. He cut trees after the tornado in Adairsville. In 1996 Mike and two of his children participated in the Opening Ceremonies of the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. He worked full time for over 6 weeks serving as the “host” for the Envoy of the full delegation from the country of Oman living with them in the Olympic Village.

Mike has certainly affected lives but he has also saved them. In 2006 Mike saved the lives of a mother and a nine month old child. While on vacation in Alaska, driving on a lonely road, Mike and his wife Jan came upon several cars pulled to the side of the road that boarded an icy bog. Bystanders yelled that a car had overturned with two people
inside. As the car was sinking Mike led a charge into the icy water where he and two other men were able to miraculously flip the car, pulling the mother out and finally wrestling the little girl from her car seat. The little girl had drowned but was saved by CPR. Mike, along with other individuals there that day, was honored during a “Real Heroes Breakfast” and given the American Red Cross of Alaska “Good Samaritan Award” in 2007.

**Achievements** - “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, “What are you doing for others?”” - Martin Luther King, Jr.

This year, on October 5th, the Great Lake Allatoona Cleanup will be celebrating its 34th year. As of 2018, this long running program with a focus on conservation, stewardship and environmental education, has brought a value to the tri county area (Bartow, Cherokee and Cobb) of over 7 million dollars. This milestone is something that might not have happened without Mike Bearden. The cleanup started as a program run by the Allatoona Lake Corps of Engineers in 1985 with one Corps employee dedicating at least 75% of their time toward coordinating the event. With financial restraints and staff reductions in 2011 the fate of the successful environmental event was in jeopardy. The Lake Allatoona Association signed a memorandum to take over the administration of this initiative that same year. The Lake Allatoona Association (LAA) was newly formed in 2010 with Mike Bearden as a founding member receiving its 501c3 status listing Mike Bearden as a Principal Officer. Since the Association took over, the event has continued to engage and educate volunteers, netting in the last seven years a documented value to the government of $1,663,209.55 or an average of $237,601.36 annually. Mike has held the positions of Director and Secretary. He now serves as Chairman and Treasurer.
Community and Environmental Action – “You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.” Woodrow Wilson

Mike has always been interested in leaving the world a better, cleaner place. In the early 70’s he served as CEO of a waste management company, an endeavor that might have centered Mike’s attention on his life’s “errand” and the seriousness of getting litter and debris placed properly. In the 80’s Mike led a grass roots campaign to reduce Hartsfield Airport noise pollution for communities that lived within the airport flight paths. In the 90’s he led a campaign to raise the Lake Allatoona pool levels resulting in higher drinking water reserves while also reducing erosion and lake settlement. In 2007, Mike helped Keep Bartow Beautiful, or KBB helped Mike, remove a 40,000 pound piece of construction equipment that had spoiled the view for all traffic along Georgia State 20 for many, many years.

Since 2001 he has been working to grow the Great Lake Allatoona Cleanup, to strengthen the Lake Allatoona Association and to bring to fruition his vision of Parks Allatoona (a series of trails connecting a combination of Corps owned property to Bartow County Greenspaces called Parks Allatoona). Many sites located within this area have significant historical value (old mills, stack stone furnaces etc.). The entire area represents an extremely sensitive habitat full of flora and fauna, not to mention its significance as a watershed through which waters are filtered and flow into Lake Allatoona. Mike served as a major resource when Bartow County Government submitted an application for an Outdoor Recreation Legacy Grant in 2014 recognizing that preservation of this area was crucial. This application serves as documentation of Bartow County’s vision for the future. And, whether with volunteer groups of boy scouts or
alone, he has been busy creating 35 miles of trails that connect greenspace or park parcels belonging to Bartow County Government and the property that buffers Lake Allatoona owned by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Mike created this concept, called Parks Allatoona Trail System, to help others enjoy what he knows to be important; the many historical, natural, recreational and cultural sites that are located within its boundaries. Because of this work, Mike was asked personally by Commissioner Steve Taylor to represent Bartow County as a member of the Georgia Outdoor Recreation Coalition.

**Summation** - “What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others.” – Pericles

Mike Bearden will think very little of this award on his own behalf, but in that it may bring attention to what he loves, he may then tolerate it. In an attempt to earn as much of his tolerance as possible we will quote his son. “Because of his (my Dad’s) leadership and vision, Lake Allatoona has a great environmental foundation for future generations; An enduring legacy that will yield results for Lake Allatoona, Northwest Georgia and the State of Georgia long past his life here on earth. His leadership and vision will have generational impacts for Georgians for many years into the future.”

Mike Bearden is not the type to look for awards or monuments, he is too much too busy weaving his passion for conservation and education into the lives of all those he meets. Keep Bartow Beautiful does however seek to nominate him for this honor because as we mentioned before he’s a “good one”.