Cancer Wellness Newsletter

This newsletter is made possible by the Thomas J. & Sara Cooney Endowment.



What You Need to Know About Vaping and Your Health

Save the Dates for Cookies and Cocoa with Santa and our Holiday Open House!

...and more, inside!

November/December 2026

Piedmont ONCOLOGY

Loran Smith
Center for Cancer Support

What's Happening
at the Loran Smith Center

Sandy Pyle, BSN, RN, ONN-CG

As we head into fall, we are still working out details of a Music Therapy program with our friends at UGA, however we have been working with a young woman on starting a sound bath program after the first of the year. A sound bath is a guided relaxation session that immerses you in a layer of resonant sound. You listen to singing bowls, gongs, chimes, etc., to provide rest, relaxation, and nervous system regulation. Sessions have been proven to reduce stress and anxiety, lower heart rate and cortisol levels, and shift brainwaves toward a calmer alpha, theta, or delta state. This is not a medical intervention, and no water is involved. To learn more, join us with practitioner Angela Urso, Thursday November 19, for a November Lunch and Learn at 11:30 a.m. Call the Center at 706.475.4900 to RSVP for this program.

We will bid farewell to our MSW intern Kaitny at the end of November. I'm excited about another bright young professional taking their place in the world! I will miss her bright smile but can't wait to see what's in store for her.

The holidays are fast approaching and our holiday lights are being installed as I write this. Cookies and Cocoa with Santa is Thursday, December 3 from 4 to 6 p.m. Our annual Open House is Wednesday, December 9 from 12 to 2 p.m. Join us at the Open House for some cider and treats and tie a ribbon on our tree in honor or memory of someone you know has faced cancer.

While the holidays can be a stressful time, we hope that you will take some time for yourself, stop by the Center for one of our programs, or challenge yourself by trying something new!

Wishing you All The Best!

With Peace and Love,

Sandy

For more information about the LSCCS programs or to register for a class, please email **loransmithcenter@piedmont.org** or call **706.475.4900**.

Farewell from Kaitny

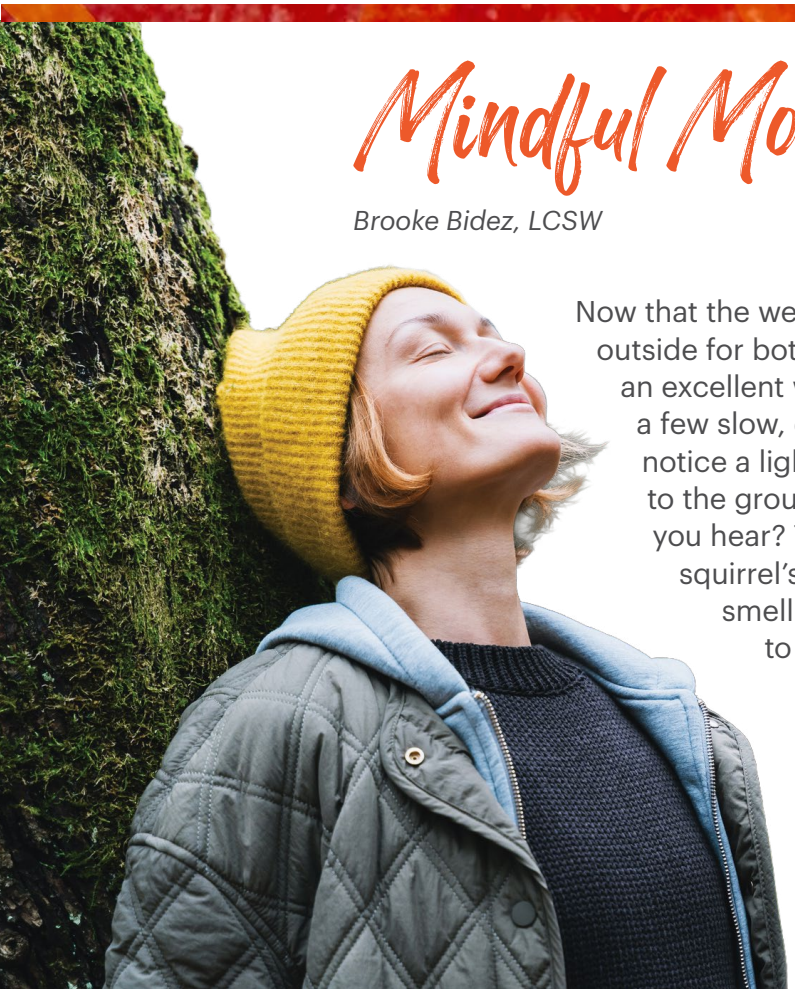
Kaitny Stroman, MSW/MPH UGA Intern



As my time in Athens comes to an end, I want to thank all of you for creating one of the best learning experiences I could have asked for. As a dual degree student, the Loran Smith Center has blended public health and social work together and deepened my passion for community support, mental well-being, and cancer awareness.

Since May, I have enjoyed hearing about the experiences many of you have shared about this program. Your attendance at support groups, physical activities, and mindfulness programs truly displays the importance of creating and valuing community. I appreciate you all for welcoming me and being willing to share your journeys with me. You all continue to inspire me, and I will treasure this experience throughout my career.

My heart is so full of gratitude for the team at the Loran Smith Center. Sandy, Fay, and Robin, thank you for sharing your years of wisdom, grand personalities, and overall support throughout my time here. Brooke, Lauren, and Mattee, thank you all for being inspiring examples of what it means to be a social worker. I genuinely appreciate your mentorship and encouragement throughout my journey. While I am still exploring what comes next, I am happy to share that I will be furthering my career in the Carolinas. I will carry this experience and my gratitude for all of you with me wherever my career takes me.



Mindful Movement Meditation

Brooke Bidez, LCSW

Now that the weather is finally cooling down, it's a great time to go outside for both your physical and emotional health. This can be an excellent way to ground ourselves and calm our minds. Take a few slow, deep breaths and notice what you see. Perhaps you notice a light breeze rustling the leaves from the branches down to the ground, or sunlight peeking through the trees. What can you hear? The dry leaves on the ground make it easier to hear a squirrel's small footsteps or a bird searching for food. Do you smell the woody scent of leaves and soil? Take a moment to feel the bark or leaves of a tree.

A positive thing about this activity is that it can take as little or as long as you like. Afterward, notice how you feel. Has your breathing slowed? Do you feel more at ease? Remember, you can revisit these senses anytime you go outside.

What You Need to Know About

Vaping and Your Health

Lauren Liverman, LCSW

November is Lung Cancer Awareness month, and while data from the American Lung Association have shown a decrease in the number of individuals diagnosed with the disease since peaking in 1984 (men) and 1998 (women) due to significant decline in cigarette smoking, there exists a newer threat to lung health.* This younger adversary is perhaps more pernicious than the original villain, given its range of candy-like flavors, designer "rigs" in flashy, eye-catching colors, and the vast disinformation about the product it dispenses. Of course, I am talking about vaping.

I was inspired to explore the science of vaping when I recently walked by two individuals standing outside the hospital entrance near the USPS blue box. As I approached, I noticed that both were holding vape rigs; hers was particularly attractive, a glossy metallic pink device. There was a hint of sweetness in the air, as if Skittles had been vaporized in the area. We nodded a greeting to each other, and as I walked on, I thought about how very appealing this sensory experience would be to a variety of people, including my 8-year-old, which sent a shiver down my spine. In my youth it was the popular Joe Camel character we had to worry about; how are young adults competing against today's seductive offer? What would I as a parent say to my kid should he one day approach me with this dilemma?

To understand more about the impact of vaping on lung health, I turned to a trusted medical professional, who as luck would have it also happens to be my brother-in-law. Tufik Assad, M.D., MSCI, is a pulmonologist and critical care physician practicing in Franklin, Tennessee, and he graciously agreed to answer some questions about the impact of vaping on lung health.

What effects of vaping are you seeing in the patients you treat?

Vaping can cause a wide range of symptoms, but when patients seek medical attention from vaping it's usually due to increase cough, chest tightness, and wheezing associated with it. This is more prominent in patients with underlying lung disease (like asthma or COPD) but can occur in anyone. There are a few rare, but serious, lung diseases that we see in patients who vape, specifically EVALI (electronic cigarette or vaping associated lung injury). First seen in 2019, exclusively in patients who vaped, it led to significant illness and occasionally death. It was first associated with vitamin E additives, typically used as a thickener with illicit THC vaping devices. Once this was recognized and vitamin E was no longer used, we've seen far fewer cases, but it does occasionally occur as a profound pulmonary inflammatory reaction to vaping.

Are there any distinct differences between damage from smoking cigarettes compared to vaping?

There's no doubt that vaping and smoking cigarettes affect your lungs differently. Smoking cigarettes leads to the inhalation of smoke from burning whatever dried leaves you're smoking (tobacco, marijuana, etc.). During combustion, thousands of other toxic byproducts are formed and inhaled into the lungs, such as carbon monoxide, tar, formaldehyde, and heavy metals. The smoke and byproducts coat your bronchial tubes and enter your alveoli (air sacs), leading to chronic cough, airway irritation, and lung destruction. When you inhale from an electronic cigarette, you're not burning a dried leaf, but rather taking a liquid (typically a mixture of glycerin and propylene glycol), often mixed with flavoring and nicotine, through a metal heating element and creating an aerosol or vapor. Like smoking a cigarette, you create a slew of byproducts in the heating process, some of which are like cigarettes (such as formaldehyde and heavy metals). We know less about the actual damage caused by vaping, but we suspect that inhaling the aerosol mixed with all these byproducts can lead to lung inflammation and trigger bronchial hyperreactivity, but I suspect it's less damaging than the known risks of cigarettes.

How are vaping related illnesses treated, and are there unique challenges to treating vape related lung damage?

Like all exposure-related illnesses, the most important treatment is avoidance. This is very difficult for heavy users as they often have developed significant nicotine addiction and dependency. In some diseases, specifically EVALI, oral or IV corticosteroids are often required to reduce lung inflammation.

What other health considerations vape users should be aware of that might involve care from your colleagues in other medical specialties?

Vaping is an extremely efficient way to get nicotine into your system. You can easily "overdose" on nicotine, which has negative effects at very high doses including nausea, dizziness, headaches, high blood pressure, and fast heart rate. Conversely, with regular vaping, patients often develop a profound nicotine addiction or dependency. This is why cigarettes, and vaping, are so hard to quit, because patients become so dependent on nicotine (i.e. they crave the next cigarette or vape because they're trying to stave off the near constant and uncomfortable nicotine withdrawal). In addition, there are long term cardiovascular effects of chronic nicotine exposure, such as insomnia, hypertension, peripheral vascular disease, and congestive heart failure.

What would you say to a patient who switches to vaping believing that it is safer compared to smoking cigarettes?

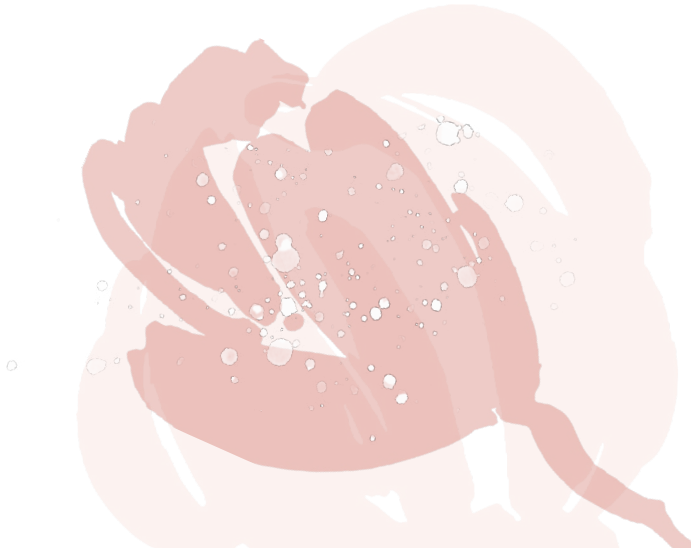
This is a tricky question and does depend on the circumstance. Electronic cigarettes were first developed and promoted to help long-term smokers quit smoking cigarettes. If a long-time cigarette smoker wants to quit smoking, then vaping, along with other forms of nicotine replacement therapy such as nicotine patches and nicotine gum or lozenges, can be an effective strategy. Would I prefer a patient to quit cigarettes without vaping? Of course, however, there is something very powerful about the oral fixation that smokers have, and vaping does help in that department. That said, I still approach it as a temporary solution to help them quit smoking altogether. My bigger concern is the next question, i.e. people taking up vaping who never smoked.

What would you want an individual who is considering taking up vaping to know before they try it?

Vaping is on the rise amongst children and young adults, while cigarette smoking is at an all-time low. This is not entirely coincidental. Smoking cigarettes has achieved a level of stigma in our society. Vaping, on the other hand, is increasingly common in people who have never smoked cigarettes. They come in flavors that often resemble candy flavors which appeal to children and young adults, with a level of acceptance in public that I believe is greater than smoking cigarettes. If you've never smoked anything before, I'd really advise you to consider if you want to jeopardize your health with an unsafe, expensive, and highly addictive habit. Once you start, it's very hard to quit.

*Lung Cancer Prevalence and Incidence - Lung Cancer Trends Brief | American Lung Association





Cocoa & Cookies with Santa

Santa and his helpers will be at the Healing Lodge
with cocoa, cookies, music, and photos!
Wear your favorite festive holiday pj's!

All are welcome to join the fun!



Thursday, December 3, 2026 • 4 to 6 p.m.

240 Talmadge Drive • Athens, Georgia

Pancreatic Cancer

Robin Black, RN



Pancreatic cancer affects the pancreas, which is the organ that aids in digestion and regulates blood sugar. This type of cancer is the 3rd deadliest form with lung and colorectal cancers being the front runners. Survival rate is low, approximately only 3% for stage IV and an overall 13% for a 5-year survival rate. Regrettably, about 70-80% of patients are diagnosed at stage III or IV. There are certain factors that make a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer difficult. Mainly, the pancreas sits deep within the abdomen behind the stomach and colon. Early small tumors do not usually cause pain, and physicians cannot see or feel early-stage tumors during routine physical exams. Pancreatic cancer cells can be in the body for 10-20 years because early mutations develop slowly and hide without clear signs.

The cancer itself has a specific method of expressing sugars (sialic acid) which the immune system interprets as healthy cells. Also, screenings, such as an endoscopic ultrasound, are expensive and invasive for the general public. Symptoms include jaundice (best noted in the sclera or whites of the eyes), pain in the upper abdomen (often being described as the feeling of being squeezed), lower back pain, unintentional weight loss, feeling of being prematurely satiated, loss of appetite, nausea, and foul smelling or oily stools. Also, fatigue and sudden onset diabetes without known risk factors are important to note. Risk factors associated with pancreatic cancer include smoking, obesity, diabetes, family history (10% genetic disposition), age – usually after 55 years of age and chronic pancreatitis. This diagnosis is slightly more common in men than women although recent studies show that cases are increasing in women younger than 55 compared to men in the same age group.

While the diagnosis of stage IV pancreatic cancer is extremely bleak, researchers have developed a treatment medication, daraxonrasib, that nearly doubles survival rate. Researchers recruited 500 people with this diagnosis in North America, Europe, and Asia. These participants had previously received chemotherapy for metastatic pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma. After approximately 8 months, the drug group displayed an overall survival rate of 13.2 months, and the chemotherapy group alone survived 6.6 to 6.7 months. With this breakthrough, a glimmer of hope appears to be on the horizon.

Annual Holiday Open House & Tree Trimming

Stop by and tie a ribbon on the Leyland Cyprus donated graciously by Greg Smith and join us for a cup of cider. We look forward to seeing old and new friends as we honor those that have experienced cancer.

Please join us!

Wednesday,
December 9, 2026
12 to 2 p.m.

Loran Smith Center for Cancer Support

240 Talmadge Drive
Athens, Georgia



Programs

Please keep in mind that all of our program dates and locations are subject to change.

At Piedmont Athens Regional, we treat the patient—not just the disease. Because cancer treatment involves more than medical care, free programs such as yoga, cooking demos, expressive art classes, and counseling are available to anyone affected by cancer at any phase in his or her journey. The Loran Smith Center for Cancer Support at Piedmont Athens Regional serves anyone regardless of where they received treatment.

KNOWLEDGE

Hormone Therapy Class

For women on hormone therapy for estrogen receptor positive breast cancer (Tamoxifen, Arimidex, Aromasin, Femara, etc). In this class you will learn the science behind the treatment and discuss methods for managing side effects.
RSVP required. Call 706.475.4900.

Upcoming classes: February 22, April 12, June 14, August 16 and October 11, 2027 • 4 to 5:30 p.m.

Lunch and Learn - Sound Bathing

Join us for a guided relaxation session and learn of the many benefits you can acquire from this experience. Not a medical intervention and no water required.
Registration required. Call 706.475.4900.
RSVP no later than noon on Tuesday, November 17

November 19, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

MOVEMENT

Tuesday Tai Chi: Deepen Your Practice

Warm up with qigong exercises and practice forms from the Tai Chi for Health Institute. Forms are gentle but include some longer sequences with more complicated movements and direction changes.

Contact Katie at katherine.calkin@piedmont.org or 706.475.5633 for more information.

Drop-ins welcome, but some prior experience with tai chi suggested for best experience.

Tuesdays, 11 to 11:45 a.m. *(No class 11/24 or 12/22)*

Wednesday Beginner Tai Chi: Keep it Simple

Warm up with gentle qigong exercises and practice forms from the Tai Chi for Health Institute. Classes include plenty of review and cues for short forms with no direction changes.

Drop-ins welcome, no tai chi experience necessary.

Wednesdays, 11 to 11:30 a.m. *(No class 11/25 or 12/23)*

Strength Training

Using 2-8 lb dumbells (provided), and your own body weight, we will focus on upper body, legs, core, and back with emphasis on gaining endurance, improving balance and flexibility, and increasing strength. Feel free to bring your own weights.

Mondays and Thursdays, 2:30 to 3:15 p.m.
(No class 12/24 or 12/31)

PEACE

Healing Touch and Reiki

Individual sessions that focus on the energy system of the body to promote relaxation, reduce stress, and minimize side effects.

By appointment only, 706.475.4900

Hypnotherapy

Facilitated by Melissa Yonce-Hayes

A safe, non-invasive process that helps individuals tap into their inner strength to navigate the challenges of cancer treatment and recovery. It is designed to reduce stress, manage pain, improve sleep and boost emotional resilience. Each 90-minute session includes an introduction and time to discuss your experience

Thursdays, 10 to 11:30 a.m. *(No class 12/24 or 12/31)*
(No entry allowed after 10:05 a.m.)

Virtual connection link - Join Zoom Meeting:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89261390260?pwd=vEmabq2iD7Rimcj5y2nyL9W6tVi5wZ.1

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (Online)

Facilitated by Mike Healy, Ed.D.

Learn ways to reduce stress, lessen physical and emotional pain and cope better with everyday demands.

Call Mike at 706.248.8918 for more information.

Second Friday of every month

SUPPORT

Breast Cancer Support Groups

Facilitated by Sandy Pyle, RN, BSN, ONN-CG, and Robin Black, RN Nurse Navigator

A group for women with a diagnosis of breast cancer to share information, resources, and experiences.

Second Thursday, 5:30 p.m.

Women's Cancer Support Group

Facilitated by Robin Black, RN Nurse Navigator and Brooke Bidez, LMSW

A group for any woman with any type of cancer diagnosis. A group to discuss treatments, side-effects, coping, stress reduction and survivorship in a safe, confidential setting.

Second Tuesday, 1 to 2:30 p.m.

Illness Adjustment Counseling

Individual sessions to address issues such as stress, anxiety, treatment decisions, and family communication.

By appointment only, 706.475.4900

Grief Support

Individual and group support for grieving adults.

By appointment only, 706.475.4900

Grateful Patient

"Being here for the groups and coming to your programs has *helped me more than you will ever know!*"

Thank you to our donors!

Gifts in support of Loran Smith Center for Cancer Support guide patients and their families through their cancer journey. To make a donation and help continue to make these programs possible, checks may be made out to The Loran Smith Center for Cancer Support or visit **give.piedmont.org/lsccs**.

Delena C. Brockmann
Dr. and Mrs. Thomas J. Cooney
Lynne K. Schmidt
Kristina Schultz Tanner
University Cancer & Blood Center LLC
Estate of Verna J. West
Dr. and Mrs. Benjamin Wilson
Ellen Munday

November 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2 Healing Touch, by appt. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m.	3 Healing Touch, by appt. Tai Chi, 11 a.m.	4 Tai Chi Beginner Series, 11 a.m. Grief Group, 3 p.m.	5 Mindfulness Hypnotherapy, 10:30 a.m. Healing Touch, by appt. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m.	6	7 Mindfulness Practice Group, 8:30 a.m.
8	9 Healing Touch, by appt. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m.	10 Healing Touch, by appt. Tai Chi, 11 a.m. Women's Cancer Support Group, 1 p.m.	11 Tai Chi Beginner Series, 11 a.m. Grief Group, 3 p.m.	12 Mindfulness Hypnotherapy, 10:30 a.m. Healing Touch, by appt. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m. Breast Cancer Support, 5:30 p.m.	13	14 Mindfulness Practice Group, 8:30 a.m.
15	16 Healing Touch, by appt. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m.	17 Healing Touch, by appt. Tai Chi, 11 a.m.	18 Tai Chi Beginner Series, 11 a.m. Grief Group, 3 p.m.	19 Mindfulness Hypnotherapy, 10:30 a.m. Lunch & Learn, 11:30 a.m. Healing Touch, by appt. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m.	20	21 Mindfulness Practice Group, 8:30 a.m.
22	23 Healing Touch, by appt. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m.	24 Healing Touch, by appt.	25	26 Happy Thanksgiving *Center closed*	27 *Center closed*	28 Mindfulness Practice Group, 8:30 a.m.
29	30 Healing Touch, by appt. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m.					



December 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 Healing Touch, by appt. Tai Chi, 11 a.m.	2 Tai Chi Beginner Series, 11 a.m.	3 Mindfulness Hypnotherapy, 10:30 a.m. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m. Healing Touch, by appt. *Cookies & Cocoa with Santa,* 4 p.m.	4	5 Mindfulness Practice Group, 8:30 a.m.
6	7 Healing Touch, by appt. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m.	8 Healing Touch, by appt. Tai Chi, 11 a.m. Women's Cancer Support Group, 1 p.m.	9 Tai Chi Beginner Series, 11 a.m. *Holiday Open House,* 12 p.m.	10 Mindfulness Hypnotherapy, 10:30 a.m. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m. Healing Touch, by appt. Breast Cancer Support, 5:30 p.m.	11	12 Mindfulness Practice Group, 8:30 a.m.
13	14 Healing Touch, by appt. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m.	15 Healing Touch, by appt. Tai Chi, 11 a.m.	16 Tai Chi Beginner Series, 11 a.m. Grief Group, 3 p.m.	17 Mindfulness Hypnotherapy, 10:30 a.m. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m. Healing Touch, by appt.	18	19 Mindfulness Practice Group, 8:30 a.m.
20	21 Healing Touch, by appt. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m.	22 Healing Touch, by appt.	23	24	25 *Merry Christmas* *Center closed*	26 Mindfulness Practice Group, 8:30 a.m.
27	28 Healing Touch, by appt. Strength Training, 2:30 p.m.	29 Healing Touch, by appt. Tai Chi, 11 a.m.	30 Tai Chi Beginner Series, 11 a.m.	31		



Piedmont
ATHENS REGIONAL

Loran Smith Center for Cancer Support
1199 Prince Avenue
Athens, Georgia 30606

"Hope and encouragement through support and information"






BEAUTIFUL YOU BOUTIQUE

Beautiful You *is a cancer wellness boutique specializing in products for women who have had or are going to have breast surgery.*

For more information and to learn more about all that we offer, please visit our website!

piedmont.org

706.475.4811

Piedmont Athens Regional
Medical Services Building

BeautifulYou@piedmont.org

Piedmont
ATHENS REGIONAL

For more information about the LSCCS programs or to register for a class, please email **loransmithcenter@piedmont.org** or call **706. 475.4900**.