



22nd Charles L. Weltner Freedom of Information Celebration

honoring

Sally Sierer Bethea for leveraging Sunshine Laws and the power of the people & the press to create positive environmental change

Oct. 21, 2024 | Emory Conference Center | Atlanta

CLEAN WATER STARTS WITH TRANSPARENCY.

Congratulations to Sally Bethea,
founding director of Chattahoochee Riverkeeper
and recipient of 2024's Charles L. Weltner Freedom
of Information Award. We salute her and the
Georgia First Amendment Foundation for their
work in protecting access to public information.

**The Atlanta
Journal-Constitution**

Acknowledgments

The Georgia First Amendment Foundation thanks the following sponsors for their support of tonight's banquet and our mission:

Platinum Sponsors

Atlanta Journal-Constitution

CNN

Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP

Gold Sponsor

Griffiths Family Fund

Silver Sponsors

Caplan Cobb LLP

LexisNexis

UGA Department of Journalism

Bronze Sponsors

Georgia Recorder

Ramsingh Legal

Rough Draft Atlanta

Welcome and Recognition of Special Guests

*Richard T. Griffiths, President Emeritus,
Georgia First Amendment Foundation*

Dinner

GFAF 30th Anniversary Video

*Created by Julianna Russ,
Georgia First Amendment Foundation Intern*

Free Expression & Open Government in Georgia and Beyond

*Jonathan Peters, President,
Georgia First Amendment Foundation*

Video Tribute to Weltner Award Honoree

*Created by Midtown High School Students
and GFAF Board Member Dale Russell*

Introduction of Sally Sierer Bethea

Gov. Roy Barnes

Keeping the Chatthoochee

Sally Sierer Bethea, Weltner Award Honoree

Presentation of 2024 Weltner Freedom of Information Award

Closing

Richard T. Griffiths

Thank you to our Weltner Banquet Chair **John Mack Freeman** and to **Eli Arnold, Kathy Brister, Peter Canfield, Silvia Eaddy, Mike Luckovich, Julia Mayi, DuBose Porter, Thaddeus Roberts, Julianna Russ, Dale Russell, Stella St. Clair** and **Nydia Tisdale** for their contributions to the success of our banquet. GFAF board members contribute to the foundation's success and advancement of our mission year round; meet them at <https://gfaf.org/about/leadership/>.



About the Weltner Freedom of Information Award

Our award is named for **Charles L. Weltner**, a former chief justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia who championed freedom of information and ethics in state government. Our Weltner Banquet provides financial support for the foundation's transparency-focused and essential mission: fighting for free speech, freedom of the press and access to public meetings, proceedings and records in Georgia. Learn more at <https://gfaf.org/events/weltner-awards/>.

CNN IS PROUD
TO SUPPORT THE

GEORGIA FIRST AMENDMENT FOUNDATION



Sally Sierer Bethea, our 2024 Weltner Award recipient, is the retired founding director of Chattahoochee Riverkeeper. One of the first women in America to serve as riverkeeper, Bethea fought for the right to clean water, took on powerful polluters, pushed for stronger environmental policies, educated children on the natural bounty flowing through their cities, and led the effort to restore an endangered river after a century of misuse. Her 2023 memoir, *Keeping the Chattahoochee*, chronicles her two decades defending the river. Bethea continues to serve as a senior advisor to Chattahoochee Riverkeeper. She also writes “Above the Waterline,” a column on environmental and civic issues published by Rough Draft Atlanta.

Gov. Roy Barnes’ career of public service took him to the Georgia Senate, House of Representatives and governor’s office. In the statehouse, he held leadership positions in the judiciary committees of both chambers and chaired the Select Committee on Constitutional Revision, which rewrote the state constitution. In 1998, Barnes was elected Georgia’s 80th governor, prioritizing education, manageable growth and health care reform. He created the Georgia Cancer Coalition during his term. Barnes’ efforts to change the Georgia flag earned a John F. Kennedy Library Foundation Profile in Courage Award in 2003. He was GFAF’s Weltner Award honoree in 2004.

Richard T. Griffiths, GFAF president emeritus, serves as a distinguished industry fellow at the University of Georgia and the University of North Carolina. For 20 years, he oversaw editorial quality control at CNN. Before that, he worked at CBS News and in local news in Texas, Missouri and North Carolina. As a GFAF board member, Griffiths teaches about the importance of open government, community trust-building and local journalism.

Jonathan Peters, GFAF president, heads the University of Georgia’s Department of Journalism and serves on the School of Law faculty. He teaches and researches media law and policy. He is also an affiliate scholar of the Center for Information, Technology, and Public Life at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Peters serves on the Panel of Experts on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

2024 Charles L. Weltner Freedom Award Banquet

CAPLAN | COBB

Caplan Cobb is proud to celebrate the
Georgia First Amendment Foundation
 and joins in honoring Sally Bethea for her work
 on behalf of the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper.

CAPLANCOBB.COM

Environmental advocate Sally Bethea honored with 2024 Weltner Award

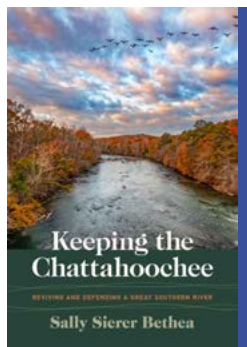
Freedom of information is at the heart of Sally Bethea's environmental advocacy. As the first Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, she relied on government records, meetings and proceedings in her fight to make the river cleaner, safer and more enjoyable for Georgians

Sunshine Laws enabled Bethea to keep tabs on what government agencies at all levels were doing about pollution. She galvanized citizens, calling on them to speak out about the health of their river. And, with a keen understanding of the power of the press, Bethea brought journalists to the Chattahoochee, explained the problems there, proposed solutions and encouraged them to let Georgians know what was going on.

Her success at leveraging open government laws and the collective power of the people and press to create positive environmental change is the reason the Georgia First Amendment Foundation is honoring Bethea with our 2024 Charles L. Weltner Freedom of Information Award.

"Our work to protect the Chattahoochee River for people and wildlife depends on openness and transparency at local, state and federal government levels, enhanced by the work of a free press," Bethea said. "Journalists play a pivotal role in helping advocates seek justice for the environment and for communities."

For more than two decades as riverkeeper, Bethea led efforts to restore the Chattahoochee for the people, animals and plants that rely on its waters. She now advises a new generation of river advocates and continues to engage Georgians in fighting for their right to clean water and safe recreation.



We're grateful to generous donors whose contributions made possible tonight's gift of *Keeping the Chattahoochee*, Bethea's chronicle of what it takes to save an endangered river. Enjoy your signed copy!

Congratulations, Sally!

RoughDraft atlanta

Read Sally Bethea's "Above the Waterline" column every month in Atlanta Intown.

**Atlanta
Intown**
A RoughDraft Publication

**Reporter
Newspapers**
A RoughDraft Publication

**Proud supporters of the Georgia First
Amendment Foundation**

RoughDraftAtlanta.com/Weltner24



Building A Better Tomorrow

Kilpatrick is proud to join the Georgia First Amendment Foundation in honoring Sally Sierer Bethea as this year's Charles L. Weltner Freedom of Information Award winner. We celebrate Sally Sierer Bethea's leadership and commitment to educating and advocating for clean water in the Chattahoochee River Basin and throughout the country.

We thank the Georgia First Amendment Foundation for its long-standing commitment to free speech, freedom of information, and government transparency in Georgia.



“Those who won our independence believed . . . that public discussion is a political duty, and that this should be a fundamental principle of the American government.”

Justice Louis Brandeis
Whitney vs. California (1927)

“The Government’s power to censor the press was abolished so that the press would remain forever free to censure the Government.”

Justice Hugo Black
New York Times vs. United States (1971)



“Because public men and women are amenable ‘at all times’ to the people, they must conduct the public’s business out in the open.”

Georgia Chief Justice Charles L. Weltner
Davis, et al vs. City of Macon (1992)



Foundation urges appellate court to reaffirm public access to initial police reports

The ability to rebrand a police incident report as a “supplemental” report is allowing police in Georgia to conceal information that should be available to the public, including factual circumstances of an incident. GFAF urges reversal of this secretive practice.

bit.ly/4f4SUnN

Georgia Supreme Court strengthens public access to records

The Supreme Court of Georgia unanimously reaffirmed that Georgians have the right to obtain public records from a government agency’s private contractors. The high court’s Aug. 13, 2024, decision in *Milliron v. Antonakakis* is a victory for open government in our state.

bit.ly/3SOqOVg



Department of Journalism
Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Congratulations to Sally Sierer Bethea!

We embrace your commitment to open government and freedom of the press as we prepare the next generation of journalists.

grady.uga.edu/academics/journalism



GFAF Legislative Watch team defends public's right to know

During the 2024 Georgia General Assembly, GFAF raised alarms about legislative proposals that threatened government transparency and free speech. Fortunately, many of those troubling bills didn't survive. But a few bad bills made it through, and they could come back to haunt lawmakers. In other states with similar laws, taxpayers are footing legal bills to defend them in court.

<https://gfaf.org/news/legislative-watch/>

Protecting reporters' sources and security is critical

Protecting journalist-source confidentiality is essential to a free press. The Georgia First Amendment Foundation has joined more than 100 organizations and individuals in urging members of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, which includes Georgia Sen. Jon Ossoff, to advance the PRESS Act, a bipartisan measure with commonsense exceptions. bit.ly/4dSsaWv



LexisNexis®

**is proud to support the
Georgia First Amendment Foundation
and congratulates
Weltner Award honoree
Sally Sierer Bethea**



GET THE STORY & STAY SAFE

SAFETY & LEGAL TIPS FOR
JOURNALISTS COVERING ELECTIONS

Watch
the video!

bit.ly/ElectionTips



First Amendment Clinic
School of Law
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



GEORGIA FIRST
AMENDMENT
FOUNDATION

RAMSINGH

Public Records

Public Meetings

Appellate Advocacy

*Ramsingh Legal is proud to
support the Georgia First
Amendment Foundation's
work toward a more open,
accountable Georgia*

Macon | RamsinghLegal.com

GEORGIA RECORDER

Photo by Stanley Dunlap of the Georgia Recorder

The Georgia Recorder is proud to
support the important work of the
Georgia First Amendment Foundation
and salutes the 2024 honoree

INTEGRITY. FAIRNESS. INDEPENDENCE.
GEORGIARECORDER.COM

