PARA ANNOUNCES GRAND MARSHALS OF THE 50th ANNUAL WEST ALABAMA CHRISTMAS PARADE

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. –Tuscaloosa County Park & Recreation Authority (PARA), announces the selection of four individuals to serve as Grand Marshals of the 50th Annual West Alabama Christmas Parade. The Parade is the largest of its kind in the state of Alabama and is scheduled for Monday, December 7, in downtown Tuscaloosa.

Criteria for Grand Marshal(s) nominations is as follows:

- Significant community contributions
- Lifetime achievements with a lasting community impact
- Career accomplishments

A Grand Marshal Selection Committee, comprised of community leaders, carefully reviewed all nominations and is pleased to announce the individuals selected posthumously as Grand Marshals for the 2026 West Alabama Christmas Parade. Their families and friends have graciously agreed to accept this honor and represent them during this year's parade.

“The Grand Marshals selected for the 2026 West Alabama Christmas Parade are Kip Tyner, Brion Hardin, and Gary Nicols,” said Amber Pope, parade chairperson. “Each of these individuals left behind a unique legacy of service and dedication to our community. Their lasting contributions to education and recreation throughout Tuscaloosa County are a testament to the impact one person can make, and their influence will continue to be felt for generations to come.”

Kip Tyner

Kip Tyner was a lifelong native of Tuscaloosa whose heart, dedication, and service were deeply rooted in the community he loved.
First elected to the Tuscaloosa City Council, Kip served for nearly three decades, becoming one of Alabama’s longest serving and most consistently re-elected public officials. He also served two terms as City Council President, a position he held until his passing.
Throughout his years of public service, Kip made a lasting impact on Tuscaloosa. He played a leading role in the recovery and rebuilding of Alberta following the devastating tornado of April 27, 2011. He also championed numerous community projects and initiatives, including the

Tuscaloosa Tennis Center, the University Boulevard East Improvement Projects, Gateway, and SWJ Technology.

Kip's love for Tuscaloosa extended well beyond city government. He was a tremendous supporter of the arts and performed in numerous Theater Tuscaloosa musicals, often taking the lead role. His enthusiasm for the performing arts reflected his outgoing personality and his belief in the importance of bringing people together through creativity and entertainment.

He was equally passionate about animal welfare. Kip personally rescued many animals and devoted his time to advocating for those without a voice. He served as President of the Metro Animal Shelter Advisory Board, a position he held until his passing.

Before his years of public service became his defining legacy, Kip built a career in broadcasting. He was a broadcaster, News Director, and weatherman at WCFT-33, where he helped give many aspiring broadcasters their start in the industry. At the time of his passing, he was still sharing his love for the community through his longtime television program, *Great Day Tuscaloosa*. The weekly community show highlighted local organizations, the arts, wellness education, and the many individuals making a positive difference throughout West Alabama.

Kip had a special love for Christmas and all the joy, warmth, and fellowship the season brings. He believed in community, celebrated the people who made it special, and spent his life giving back to the place he called home.

It is fitting that Kip Tyner be honored as Grand Marshal of the 2026 West Alabama Christmas Parade. Although he is no longer with us, his legacy lives on in the community he helped build, the lives he touched, the causes he championed, and the countless people who were fortunate enough to know him.

This honor celebrates a life of service, a love for Tuscaloosa, and a legacy that will continue to shine for generations to come.

Brion Hardin

Brion was a proud member of Old Waverly, an active member of the PARA Board of Directors, and a founder of the Mossy Oak Golf Club. He translated his love for golf into a way of giving back. He was a passionate supporter of junior golf at Old Waverly. He established The First Tee Organization, now the Tuscaloosa Junior Golf Academy, at Ol' Colony to bring kids from all walks of life into the sport of golf. He played a key role in making it possible for Ol' Colony to host competitive events such as the Epson Tour and NCAA Regionals. Brion was a true self-made man who lived the American Dream in its purest form. He started with nothing but with determination and the belief that hard work and honesty still meant something. He didn't just build a company; he built a future. From modest beginnings, he created something lasting through persistence, integrity, long days, tough decisions, and an unwavering commitment to doing right by people. Hardin Construction stands today not just as a business, but as a testament to what hard work, loyalty, and faith in others can accomplish. Brion believed in giving people opportunities, treating every employee like family, and making sure that everyone who wore the Hardin name could be proud of their work.

Brion took pride in what he built, but even more in what it allowed him to give. He used his success to take care of others quietly, consistently, and without asking for recognition. If someone needed a hand, a second chance, or a place to stand, Brion was there. He supported families, neighbors, friends, and even strangers, always preferring to help behind the scenes rather than be applauded for it. He had a gift for making people feel included, valued, and understood. To Brion, family wasn't defined by blood, but by loyalty and love. Those who spent time with him became part of something larger, welcomed with generosity and support. His legacy is not only in the company he built, but in the relationships, he nurtured and the countless lives he strengthened simply by being who he was, a friend to all.

Gary Nicols

Walter Gary Nichols had more than 52 years of industrial experience. He was a true example of "working your way up the corporate ladder." In 1967, Gary moved to Tuscaloosa from Phenix City, Alabama to attend The University of Alabama and quickly made the community his home. As a college student, he began a summer job with McAbee Construction as a laborer, digging ditches. After graduating from the University with a degree in Mathematics and a minor in Chemistry, Gary accepted a full-time position with the company and over the years was promoted to the positions of Project Estimator, Fabrication Manager, and later to Vice President of Fabrication. In 1998, he was promoted to President and COO of McAbee, a position he held until 2021 when he was named President Emeritus.

Throughout the years, he continuously used his success as a platform to strengthen the community of Tuscaloosa by serving on numerous community boards, often taking leadership roles. He served as the Chairman of the Board of Junior Achievement (JA) of Tuscaloosa County for more than ten years. In 2018, Gary received Junior Achievement's Bronze Leadership Award, which honors volunteer excellence. The award is presented in recognition of participation and leadership in supporting and expanding JA's student impact, increasing resources and/or operational excellence and sustainability.

His additional board involvement included The Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama (Vice-Chair of Education and Workforce Development), Go Build Alabama (ex-officio), The University of Alabama College of Engineering Leadership Board, Parks and Recreation Authority (Facilities Committee), Regions Bank Advisory Board, Tuscaloosa City and County Schools Advisory Committees, Hospice of West Alabama, The DCH Foundation Board, The Shelton State Foundation Board and the Tuscaloosa County Economic Development Authority.

As Chairman of West Alabama Works, Region Three Workforce Development Council, Gary was heavily involved in workforce readiness, which targets eighth graders and high school students with trade skills awareness messaging, adding to their career choices.

Gary's efforts and involvement with West Alabama Works workforce development outreach brought much attention to Tuscaloosa County and the other eight counties which comprise

Region Three in the statewide workforce development program. In recent years, Region Three has become the most active workforce development region in the state and has developed programs that are now models for other areas.

In addition to his service positions, Gary supported many community organizations, and leading by example, encouraged his friends, colleagues, and employees to take an active role as well. His involvement included his participation with Adopt-A-School (Oakdale Elementary and TCTA), American Heart Association, United Way, March of Dimes, The Junior League of Tuscaloosa, and the Druid City Garden Project.

In 2017, the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama recognized Gary for his accomplishments, involvement, and volunteerism by naming him the Charles H. Land Member of the Year, the highest award given to an individual each year.

Gary was also recognized in 2017 as a Community Pillar by The Community Foundation of West Alabama. The annual award honors dedicated individuals whose impact and influence have made a significant and lasting difference in the development and quality of life in West Alabama.

PARA invites the community to kick off of the holiday season with flair by attending the 50th Annual West Alabama Christmas Parade on Monday, December 7. The Tree Lighting on the steps of the Tuscaloosa County Courthouse begins at 5:15p.m. and the Parade begins at 6:30 p.m. in downtown Tuscaloosa.