

George's Coffee Club continues legacy of The Woodlands' founder, George Mitchell

By Jane Stueckemann, Staff writer 11:25 am CDT, Friday, September 6, 2019



Photo: Betty Tichich, HC Staff / Houston Chronicle

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03/11/1993 - (L-R) Roger L. Galatas, president and chief operating officer of The Woodlands Corp., Donald R. Andrus, Foley's chairman, Richard Welcome, executive vice president of Homart Development and George

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Once per month, no more than 55 community members and leaders gather

together for two things— first, for coffee; then, to spend some time reflecting on the legacy of [The Woodlands' founder George Mitchell](#).

An oil tycoon and real estate developer, Mitchell is often the figure credited for The Woodlands' success. When Mitchell saw the potential of the area to be a master-planned community, he brought others on-board such as Tom Cox, Jeff Harris and Roger Galatas to make it happen.

Although Mitchell died in 2013, the three other men formed the invitation-only George's Coffee Club in 2016 as a way to honor, respect and communicate George Mitchell's vision for The Woodlands as a place to "live, work, play and learn".

The nonprofit organization hosts monthly meetings revolving around all things in The Woodlands community: development, politics, business and education chief among them. A different speaker, who is often a leader from a local entity, presents at each meeting.

Jeff Harris, who arrived in The Woodlands in October of 1979 and later served as the senior vice president of administration for The Woodlands Corporation, said the club's purpose is to carry on Mitchell's vision through communication.

"It gives us an opportunity to have dialogue with people in leadership positions," Harris said.

In his opinion, The Woodlands has retained the same spirit and vision Mitchell set out to create.

"The truth of it is it's not the pathways, parks and trees: it's the people who make a difference. It's neighbors looking out for neighbors, caring about the arts and entertainment and good schools...I think that has kept the spirit,"

Harris said.

And while commercial development and corporate business has brought more than 115,000 residents to the area, Harris said that by-and-large, community members appreciate living in The Woodlands.

Another club founder, Galatas, who died last week at 83 years old, was a champion of The Woodlands much like Mitchell.

Related: [Roger Galatas, key figure in Woodlands history, dies](#)

Joining the team in 1979, Galatas eventually served as president and CEO of The Woodlands Development Corp. for 20 years in addition to having a hand in creating The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion and The John Cooper School.

Galatas attended and led the coffee club's latest meeting in mid-August. Harris shared a quote that Galatas used to pass along to everyone: "One of the great tragedies in life occurs when a person is not adequately prepared to be able to accept an extraordinary opportunity".

"(Roger) Said that because he wanted us to always be preparing for the next event. He wanted us to continue our education and think outside of work...think about our families and the community at large," Harris said of Galatas. "He will be greatly missed."

While Harris said George's Coffee Club won't grow for the sake of growth, it has evolved and will continue to as members come and go. Although the three men who founded the club worked closely with Mitchell and started the club by inviting the "pioneers" of the area to join, new members are being invited who weren't involved with Mitchell but are carrying out his vision with their current work.

"As lives change, we replace members with others who've taken leadership roles in the community. We're not dependent on old-timers to look out for the good of The Woodlands. There are a lot of young minds interested in keeping this a great place to live," Harris said.

Member Nelda Luce Blair, a local attorney, the first chairperson the history of The Woodlands Township Board of Directors and president of the Conroe ISD Education Foundation, said the meetings are all about informing and educating the community. That can include talking about current issues, such as the [Conroe ISD bond referendum](#), but the group remains nonpartisan throughout the discussions.

"The job here is to remind people of the impact George Mitchell had on The Woodlands...making it a unique community. He worked with the school district and the county, so it's appropriate for us to talk about (those issues)," Blair said. "(Mitchell) was the root of all of that. We want to educate people to know details about him instead of just his name."

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