

A man in a dark grey suit, white shirt, and red patterned tie stands with his hands in his pockets in front of the Infinite Energy building. The building has large glass windows and a prominent sign that reads "Infinite Energy" in blue and green letters. The sky is blue with some wispy clouds.

# Infinite Energy

STAN  
HALL

CHIEF  
OPERATING  
OFFICER

GWINNETT  
CONVENTION  
& VISITORS  
BUREAU



EXPLORE GWINNETT'S COO STAN HALL

# THE QUEST TO CREATE *the ultimate entertainment destination*

**CONTINUITY AND COMMUNITY.** There's something to be said for those words, for living in one area your entire life. Going away to college for a time perhaps, but then returning to contribute in significant ways to the place where you grew up, where you learned to become an adult, a leader. For the Gwinnett Convention and Visitors Bureau (GCVB) Chief Operating Officer Stan Hall, multiply that by six. Raised in Gwinnett between Loganville and Snellville, Hall is a sixth generation Gwinnettian.

In a community that's quickly being transformed into a burgeoning region of explosive growth where most folks seem to be from someplace else, Hall is a rare exception. The story of his personal development, professional career path, and the mentors who've influenced and informed his life's arc is quietly compelling.

Just recently, on the day after Christmas, Hall was back in his office at the Infinite Energy Center campus casting his mind back 15 years. "I remember my daughter was probably about eight or nine years old," Hall says, smiling with a faraway look in his eyes, "and I wanted to take her over to [the Dacula-Harbins area], just to let her see where her ancestors were from. And so I was pointing these things out to her and I said, 'You know, this is Berry Hall Road. That's your great, great grandfather.' And then we went down Hall Road and I took her over by Ebenezer Church where most of the Halls were buried."

At the time, his daughter sat quietly absorbing all of the Hall family history as they drove around, her father pointing out one ancestral connection after another until she finally spoke up. "Dad? Doggone it, are we famous?" Hall lets out a huge laugh before relating his response to her question. "I said, 'No, but if your family hangs around long enough, they will name a road after you.'"

Hall has a full plate these days as COO of the GCVB, which oversees Infinite Energy Center (Arena, Forum, Theater), Explore Gwinnett (the marketing brand for the GCVB), the Gwinnett Sports Commission, and the PGA TOUR Champions Mitsubishi Electric Classic. The GCVB also oversees the annual maintenance and capital projects of Coolray Field where the Gwinnett Stripers, the AAA affiliate of the Atlanta Braves, play their home games.

Prior to the COO appointment, Hall served as the Executive Director of the Gwinnett Sports Commission and the Mitsubishi Electric Classic golf tournament for eight years, and was instrumental in bringing the tournament to Gwinnett. His career in public service spans more than three decades, including time as a Senior Director for the District Attorney of Gwinnett County. Hall is also a graduate of the prestigious FBI National Academy.

It's a full plate indeed, but Hall has been preparing for this challenge for decades, without really being aware of it, even though he's previously held only three jobs in his entire life. Again, continuity. ▶





## EARLY CAREER

Hall began his professional life as a uniformed police officer in Snellville, not that it was a job he'd ever dreamed he would have, much less one he would come to love. It was his father, a police officer himself, who first put the idea into his son's head. "I had no interest in it, quite honestly," says Hall. "I actually thought I wanted to be a teacher. I talk to my dad every morning on my way to work, but I truly remember as a little boy when my dad would leave and come home with that uniform on and the badge, I thought he looked like Superman."

Hall was impressed by his father's physical appearance then, but it wasn't until he was in his early 20s that he considered law enforcement as a career when his father suggested he should talk to Snellville Chief of Police John Hewatt and see what he thought about the job. The next day Hall met with Hewatt, and in a matter of hours, Hall joined up. "He said I might like it," Hall recalls of Hewatt, "said I might be surprised. And golly, I loved my career."

So it was in Snellville that Hall would learn those first important lessons about leadership and morality from Hewatt. "He was probably one of the greatest leaders I've ever seen," Hall says. "I learned so much from him in a leadership perspective. He was a guy at a time where a lot of police officers, even though they preached ethics and morality pretty heavily, didn't always live up to that standard. Chief Hewatt not only preached it, he lived it."

Hall spent eight years on the force and paid attention when people said only positive things about Hewatt's character and ethics, absorbing all he could from his boss and mentor before leaving the force to work for the county's district attorney's office. It was there that Hall would meet two more people, as different from each other as night and day, who would monumentally influence and affect his life: Tom Lawler and Danny Porter (the current Gwinnett County District Attorney).

"Tom was the D.A. who hired me. Tom is probably the best manager that I've ever worked with. He was extremely talented at trying cases, but his greatest strength was in management. And then Danny and I started in the office within about the same two week period, and worked together that whole time. Danny is the best trial lawyer I have ever seen in my life, ever. And I've seen a bunch of them over my time. He is a magician in the courtroom. So between those two I got the best of both worlds as far as the management side of it, and then the logistics of it: Here's what we need to do, but here's how you really do it."

## EARLY MARRIED LIFE AND THE FBI

It's the late 1980s, and a young Venezuelan-American woman from Maracaibo on the Colombian border is attending college in Atlanta and working part time at a fitness center. Stan Hall, then a young man working within the judicial system, stops by one day to visit his friend who owns the business. They chat for a while, but the young Hall is distracted by the young part-timer who continually catches his eye. He asks about her, and his friend says her name's Janell and she's just a part-timer who goes to school here.

Hall relates the story with a boyish grin. Sitting there in his blue blazer, red Mitsubishi golf shirt and tan khakis, surrounded by handwritten notes and agendas, all the accoutrements of a busy executive, he seems almost giddy. "I immediately decided that day I was going to meet that person. I didn't have any clue it was going to go anywhere — and I am completely biased about my wife, but Venezuelan women are beautiful and she was no exception. So I decided I was going to meet her, and we just started talking and she had already graduated but was spending the summer here, but her plans were to go back to Venezuela."

They talked, went on a few dates, and steadily more and more dates. Janell then got a job in Atlanta in the apparel industry, which to Hall's delight kept her here a few more years. "The next thing I know, we're engaged. We've been married 31 years now. So, yeah." Hall's smile speaks volumes.

In 1996, their daughter was born. By then Hall was working at the DA's office when Danny Porter suggested that someone on staff attend the FBI National Academy in Quantico, VA. Porter considered the training important for the department's continued success. He tapped Hall for the academy, and the training would last nine months. Their daughter was only four months old when Hall broke the news to Janell. "She said, 'Wait a minute, you'll be gone how long?!'"

Hall lived in Quantico the entire time. With a wife and new daughter at home, he would leave the academy on Friday afternoons, fly back to Atlanta to be with them on Friday night and all day Saturday, and then take the last flight out on Sunday night. By the time he arrived back at his dorm room in Quantico, it would be after 3 a.m. with his first class at 6 a.m. "It was either that or get a divorce," Hall says of the ordeal. "I chose lack of sleep."

The training was brutal but rewarding, the same training that an FBI agent goes through. Hall trained

with police professionals in the United States and from Australia, Europe and the Middle East. "To sit down with those guys and talk about criminal justice from a global perspective rather than your small little funnel of how you think it should be done, it was one of the most fascinating things I've ever been a part of. Talk about management and leadership, right? I learned so much up there. And you either learn it there or they'll send you home. A third of my class didn't make it through."

## BASEBALL AND DEVELOPMENT

Hall was a catcher for his high school baseball team, but winces noticeably now at the mere mention of it. "I still have knee issues because of that." An avid fan of the game, he came to the GCVB from the Gwinnett Sports Commission as its executive director, and served in that role until recently. During his tenure there, he oversaw operations at Coolray Field with the Gwinnett Braves and then the Stripers.

Beyond the team's first two years at Coolray, low attendance was always an issue, perhaps prompting the team's transformation from Braves to Stripers, resulting in a spike in merchandise sales and attendance. Having a minor league team playing so close to their major league counterparts has its ups and downs, and not everyone understands the real function of minor league baseball. "I think true baseball people would probably disagree with me on this, but the role of a minor league baseball team, even up to the AAA level, really isn't about winning and losing, it's about development. That's fine as far as the big team is concerned, but I don't think anyone wants to go watch a team that loses every game either. We've had some years out here where they were truly not a great team."

The nature of the game at this level is to develop talent for the big leagues. It can be a tough sell much of the time, but for some seasons things just fall into place. "Last year they had a fantastic team, made it to the playoffs, had the best record in the International League. Unfortunately, they lost in the first round of playoffs, but they had good talent, which made a good team." Weathering those ups and downs at Coolray Field got the attention of Preston Williams, the GCVB CEO.

"I became really involved with Preston and began assisting him with some of the things that he was involved in, and one day he calls me in to let me know that our board had promoted me to COO of this organization. This meant the world to me. Our



Board is made up of so many influential members who have done so much for our county. We are fortunate to have each and every one of them involved in our organization. Then in June, I gave up the sports commission and we promoted someone from within to take over that. So now all I'm doing is—well, I don't mean to say all I'm doing because it's more than I wish I was doing some days—but I'm working directly with our CEO, whether it's Explore Gwinnett or the sports commission.” In addition to overseeing Coolray Field and the convention center, Hall is also involved in picking up the pieces of the paused “Revel” project surrounding the Infinite Energy Center campus. Last December it was announced that North American Properties, the project's developer, had dropped out of the sprawling 118-acre development planned for the area. Hall isn't deterred; in fact, he's enthusiastic and buoyantly optimistic.

“I think sooner rather than later we're going to be able to announce something that's going to really bring a positive spin back to that,” says Hall. “Our first concern was the reaction to the Westin Hotel going in. The hotel is a huge part of the whole development. The Westin folks have kept a ‘We're in’ attitude the whole time. They break ground the 27th of January. That will probably be the biggest game changer for us and this whole development. We will now have a headquarters hotel on site to attract conventions that we've never been able to attract before. Our current expansion is the largest public-private partnership in Gwinnett's history, and it is going to position the Infinite Energy Center as one of Georgia's premier live-work-play destinations.”

“That whole Revel concept came after the hotel,” Hall adds, “which has always been our prime target. Even with the fallout from North American backing out of it, that hasn't really been bad at all. We've been slammed with developers calling us saying they'd like to step into that role, which is great. Also, the hotel making the statement ‘We're in,’ that says a lot about what they think of the area.”

With plans in place for the hotel, renovation and expansion of the Infinite Energy Center, and the mixed-use projects in place, the inevitable increase in traffic is an issue, but one the GCVB is aware of and has been planning for. Gwinnett County and the Department of Transportation have been intimately involved in the project since it was scratched out on paper nearly ten years ago. The county has added new traffic signals, and by the end of 2020 Sugarloaf Parkway will be widened by two lanes, and new turn

lanes will be added to the intersection at Satellite Boulevard.

Still, Hall expects there will be some traffic issues, but with the county's help there will also be a control center within the Infinite Energy Center campus to manipulate traffic signals, a system similar to the one in place at the Battery at SunTrust Park in Marietta.

Hall has a hand in everything going on, and he prides himself on his ability to relate to everyone on the project and within the Infinite Energy Center itself, to have meaningful conversations with the CEO as well as with ticket-takers at concerts in the arena. Hall credits his father with teaching him to communicate openly and honestly with everyone, no matter their background or title. “I grew up watching him. He was one of the first 10 or 15 police officers hired in Gwinnett County when they formed their police department. After that, he was the mayor of Loganville for a long time. He was the mayor, but he also worked with the water department. It was not unusual to see my dad out there in a hole helping them fix water pipes. He was so respected by the employees down there, and I thought that's the way it should be. You should be the leader of everyone, not just a small group. And I really have tried to do that throughout my career and that's exactly the way I'll do it here. Our entire staff has worked tirelessly to maintain our business model throughout this construction phase. The ability for us to do that is entirely based on their efforts and they are to be credited for that.”

Preston Williams has said that Hall's appointment as COO will bolster the leadership of the organization, helping it to evolve into one of the leading entertainment destinations in the state. Williams also said Hall is “the ideal person to lead our current endeavors into a bright and successful future.”

Hall is visibly touched at the mention of the quote. “Preston Williams is the best true leader that I've ever seen. And he's very soft spoken. You know, I talk all the time. But when he talks it's truly worth quieting down and hearing what he's got to say because it's typically well worth hearing. And so for him to make that comment, it means a lot to me.”

## COMPLETING THE CIRCLES

It's late in 2011 and there's a retirement party for Hall and a few others in the Gwinnett County District Attorney's office. After three decades of work, Hall has cleaned out his office, enjoyed the

party, and now sits in the office of his best friend and colleague Danny Porter. Both men are sad about the change, but they know it's not goodbye because the two will always remain lifelong friends. The conversation comes to a lull and Hall stands up to leave. He gets to the door, turns back and asks, "Danny, do you think I'm making a mistake?" Porter replies, "Oh, hell yes. It's a terrible mistake. I'll see you later."

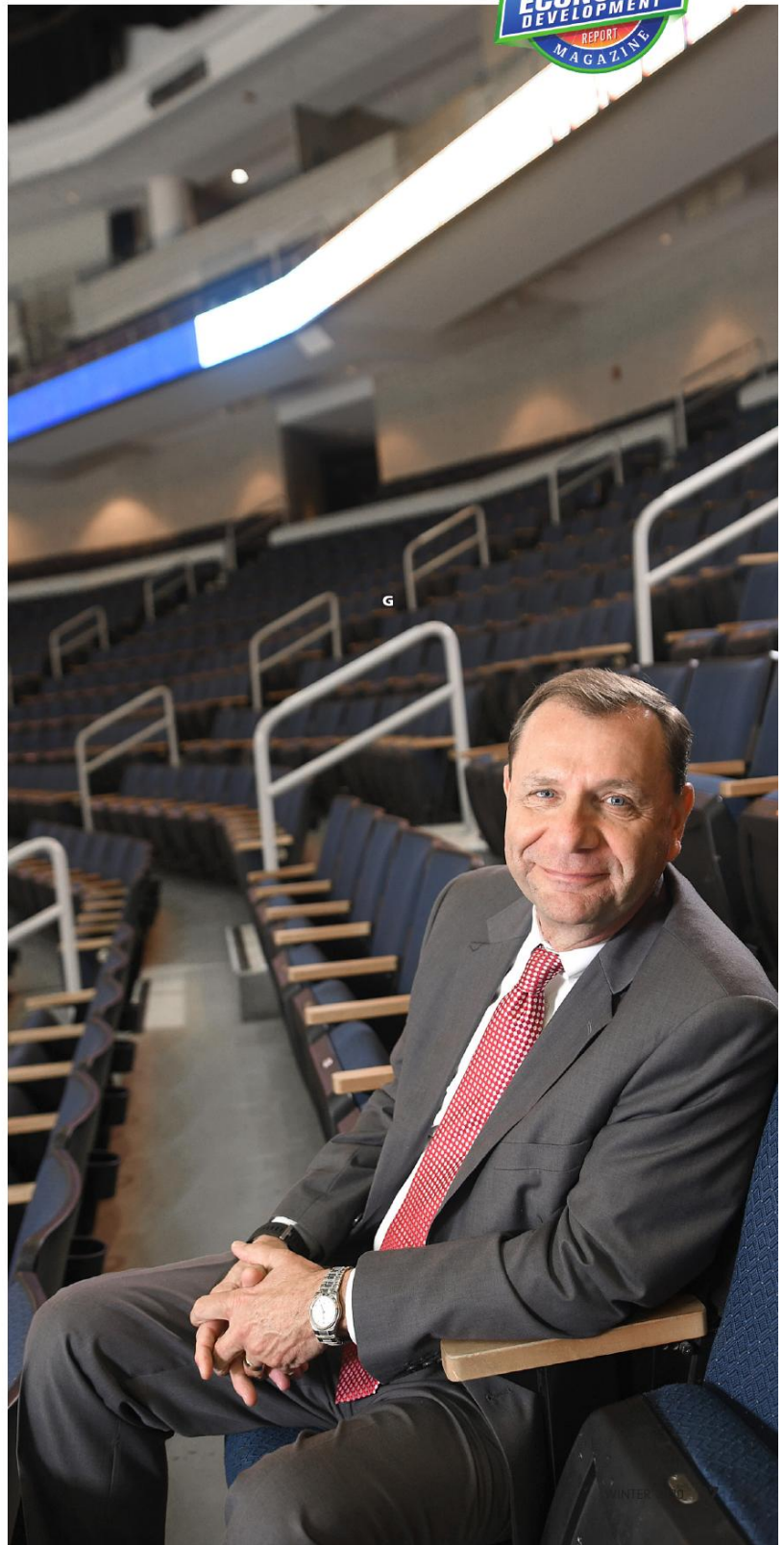
Hall laughs heartily this morning, reflecting on his friend's playful jab way back then. "So when I left the office, I was thinking maybe it was a mistake. But obviously, thank God, it wasn't. I never dreaded going to work. It was never boring to me because every day is a different day in that business. And you know, toward the end I worked with Danny on every death penalty case he worked on. Probably the last year and a half, two years, I felt like it was affecting me in a way that I had never seen before. I feel like I had always been able to separate myself personally from some of the cases that came through Gwinnett. Whatever major case Danny was involved in, I was involved in it."

During those last years Hall felt as though he couldn't get his mind off those cases. He told Janell that maybe he needed to start re-evaluating his career because it was starting to have a personal effect on him like never before. In that line of work, you have to separate work life from personal life or it will drive you nuts.

"So, the more I thought about it, I knew it was time to let somebody else do that for a while. Thirty years is a long career."

After leaving the DA's office, Hall returned to sports, his early passion growing up in Gwinnett where he played baseball, football and basketball in high school. It was in those early days that Hall met and became friends with a coach named Richard Tucker. Hall even considered becoming a teacher or coach because of Tucker, but never pursued it. The two lost touch for nearly 25 years before reconnecting. Tucker worked in real estate and then later became the president of the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce, while Hall pursued his law enforcement career. The building where Hall now works is named after Tucker, and the two still get together to talk. "Now he's the chairman of my board," Hall says, smiling. "He and I made a full circle after literally losing contact for many years. He is such a well-respected figure in Gwinnett County and has

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been a great asset to me for a long time. He's still on the Gwinnett County Public School Student Leadership Advisory Board.

"Our entire board, particularly former county commissioner Tommy Hughes, who is a member of our Executive Board, and a long time standing stalwart of our board and overall organization, has been essential in our overall success. Our board and the support that we receive from Commission Chairperson Charlotte Nash and the complete Board of Commissioners, is a cohesive partnership that has provided so much success to our organization. I have been given a wonderful opportunity and I am so appreciative for those who have put their confidence in me."

As for Infinite Energy Center's current expansion, the largest public-private partnership in Gwinnett's history, putting it in position to be one of Georgia's premier live-work-play destinations, Hall has been following the area's growth even when he was with the DA's office. Knowing that it was originally Preston Williams' vision and has been in the works

for a decade, Hall is thrilled to know it's really happening. "Preston has been such a visionary concerning the mixed use development. I hope that this project will become his legacy as he is truly deserving of such an honor," says Hall.

The county's growth hits close to home as well. "My daughter and her fiancé just bought a house in Duluth. I said, 'Why Duluth?' And she said they can walk right out of their backyard and into the downtown area. There are restaurants there, bars, a brewery, green space."

Again, Hall is amazed at this narrative arc, another in a series of full circles his life has taken. He and his brother were both born at Joan Glancy Hospital (now part of the Northside Hospital) in Duluth, because it was the closest hospital at the time to where they lived. "I've never lived in Duluth," Hall says, "but that's where we started our life. All these years later, my daughter circles back and guess where she picks to live: Duluth! Isn't it funny how life circles can repeat themselves in such a pleasant way?"



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