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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DeKalb CEO And Commissioner Celebrate "Gen Z Day" At Historic Lyon Farm

Partnering with the Arabia Alliance, Commissioner Mereda Davis Johnson spearheaded Gen Z Day, which brought together Congressman Hank Johnson, DeKalb CEO Lorraine Cochran-Johnson, and several dozen DeKalb public schoolchildren to celebrate and talk about the future of Generation Z while also reflecting on the past at Lyon Farm, DeKalb's only extant plantation home.

STONECREST, GA – DeKalb County made sure to shine a big light on Generation Z this last weekend. Held at Stonecrest's Lyon Farm on Saturday, August 15, Gen Z Day was a duel back-to-school event and celebration of the youngest generation to start entering colleges and the workforce. Attendees enjoyed music from a DJ, a live marching band from Martin Luther King, Jr. High School, a voter registration booth, Italian ice flavors with sizzling hotdogs from Skip's, and tents representing the City of Stonecrest and the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area, which manages historic Lyon Farm, DeKalb's only plantation home.

"The Alliance welcomes opportunities to showcase the rich history of the Heritage Area, and GenZ Day was a perfect way to engage young minds and explore the impacts of slavery in a safe space," said Revonda Cosby, Executive Director of the Arabia Alliance, the nonprofit organization that manages the 40,000-acre National Heritage Area just a half-hour east of Atlanta. "Investments from DeKalb County CEO Cochran-Johnson and longtime supporter/historian Commissioner Mereda Davis Johnson are paving the way for students county-wide to have access to Lyon Farm. Commissioner LaDena Bolton's generous support has also helped the Alliance continue its mission to preserve and protect this 100-acre green space."

In addition to engaging with vendors and activities, attendees also listened to statements from Commissioner Johnson, CEO Cochran-Johnson, and Congressmen Hank Johnson, as well as from members of the Arabia Alliance staff. An important part of the event was a moderated panel discussion and audience Q&A with descendants from the Black Lyons family (the formerly enslaved) and the White Lyon family (the former enslavers). "The descendants of these families are a critical part of understanding local history and the way it's interpreted and authentically told," said Cosby. Afterward, visitors were invited to explore the grounds and read the permanent signs that interpret the history of Lyon Farm. Historic structures, including the slave quarters and the smokehouse, which are usually only open for tours, were also open for the day.

"Hosting Gen-Z Day at Lyon Farm in the National Heritage Area was truly a highlight for the Alliance," said Brigette Jones, the Arabia Alliance's assistant executive director and resident historian with a focus on chattel slavery throughout the plantation South. "Not only were we able to meet our community at the intersection of nature, culture, and history, but also to be an example of the continued importance of healthy public-private partnerships. Our panel conversation with Lyons descendants, Carol and Cathy Mabry, and Lyon descendant, Eli Foster, offered visitors a conversation rooted in the promise that our children are our future despite the

horrors of our pasts. The entire day was a joy, and we look forward to what future opportunities for collaboration look like."

The event was the brainchild of DeKalb County District 5 Commissioner Mereda Davis Johnson. The commissioner selected Lyon Farm as the location for its historical ties to nearby Flat Rock, the oldest continually inhabited Black community in the County. According to 1860 Census records, the Lyon Family enslaved 17 Black individuals, most of them children, including Hill Lyons, who would go on to be a one of the founding church trustees for Flat Rock Methodist Episcopal Church. Hosting the day at Lyon Farm highlights the continuing work of reconciliation, and the ways that African American communities have not just survived but thrived as Gen Z teens step up as the next generation of leaders.

Lyon Farm was sold to DeKalb County Watershed Management in 2003 and stabilized, and its grounds revitalized, in 2019. It is the hope of the Arabia Alliance and Commissioner Johnson to also revitalize the interior of the Lyon home into a museum space about Antebellum slavery and the descendants of the Black Lyons and White Lyon families.

About the Arabia Alliance

The Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance is dedicated to protecting, connecting and sharing the unique history, rich culture and engaging landscapes of the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area (AMNHA) for the benefit and enjoyment of all. The staff and volunteer board of the Arabia Alliance work with partners across AMNHA to ensure that everyone can benefit from the cultural and natural resources of the National Heritage Area. For more information, visit www.arabiaalliance.org.