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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 26, 2025

DeKalb CEO Lorraine Cochran-Johnson Pledges \$250,000 To Lyon Farm Revitalization

During "Celebrating Preservation, Conservation and Interpretation at Lyon Farm," CEO Cochran-Johnson and Super District 7 County Commissioner LaDena Bolton announced more than a quarter-million in county funds to turn DeKalb's only plantation home into a premier historical site.

STONECREST, GA – On August 14, from 9:30am-12pm, the staff of the [Arabia Alliance](#) threw "Celebrating Preservation, Conservation and Interpretation at Lyon Farm" for its largest-ever public-private partnership. This is the last remaining plantation site in DeKalb County and one of only a handful in the whole Atlanta metro area. The Lyon Family is one of the oldest in the county, having inhabited the land from around 1820 until 2007, when they relinquished the property to DeKalb, having sold it to the county in 2003 for the Pole Bridge Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant. Before the Civil War and Emancipation, the Lyon family enslaved 13 adults and children according to the 1850 slave census and 17 from the 1860 census. After Emancipation, most of these formerly enslaved people took the surname Lyons (with an "s") and became instrumental in the founding of Flat Rock, one of Georgia's oldest continually inhabited Black communities.

Last Thursday, on August 14, more than 130 attendees from across Metro Atlanta congregated in front of the historic structure, including several descendants of the those who were enslaved at the plantation, to officially celebrate the preservation, conservation and interpretation work of DeKalb's only plantation home by the Arabia Alliance, the nonprofit that manages the 40,000-acre Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area.

Starting at 9am, DeKalb County CEO Lorraine Cochran-Johnson, US Congressman Hank Johnson, DeKalb County Commissioners, Lithonia and Stonecrest Mayors, DeKalb County Department of Watershed Management and staff from the Arabia Alliance and Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve all came together under a tent in front of the historic farmhouse for an official commemoration of this game-changing preservation project. August 14 was the public's first chance to celebrate the completed restoration and interpretation work.

"The work [here] is not only about preserving walls and wood, it's about telling a full truth," said CEO Cochran-Johnson. "It is about including the stories of 17 enslaved individuals that were here in 1860 and their descendants who built thriving communities that we now know as Flat Rock and Lithonia. This is more than a historic preservation project. It is a commitment to truth. It is a commitment to history. And it is also a commitment to a legacy and a partnership for generations to come."

Some of those Lyons descendants were sitting front row during CEO Cochran-Johnson's speech when the CEO pledged \$250,000 from the County to help elevate Lyon Farm and transform it into one of Atlanta's top heritage sites. Following Cochran-Johnson's lead, Super District 7 DeKalb County Commissioner LaDena Bolton further committed \$50,000 to this effort. Although [stabilized back in 2019](#), the inside of the historic structure looks very much like it did when the last Lyon family members lived there in the 2000s and is in need of revitalization.

“This has been in the making for over 20 years,” said Commissioner Bolton. “We spend a lot of time talking about Stone Mountain and what it means to our history. We would go up and down advocating in support of telling the real story and not just the legacy they want us to think, but *this* is where we should’ve been.”

After the official remarks, visitors were invited to experience the newly developed historical tour of the grounds and the house. Cochran-Johnson and Bolton’s funds will help support Phase 3 of the Lyon Farm revitalization, which will include deepening the historical interpretation and amplifying the stories from this historic site and the people who lived there, especially doing more research on the formerly enslaved descendants who took the surname Lyons (with an “S”) and who went on to become influential members of Flat Rock and Lithonia. Phase 3 of the revitalization will also include physical plant improvements, grounds conservation, and historical research for deeper interpretation.

“It feels like the preservation is bigger than the physical house,” said Arabia Alliance Program Manager Jennifer Dickie. “Preserving Lyon Farm was a chance to save an example of a rural Antebellum life with not only a house, but outbuildings, terracing, and the only extant slave quarters in DeKalb County. We are telling the story of a way of life, not just a home.”

Celebrating Preservation, Conservation and Interpretation at Lyon Farm also served as a kick-off for new monthly tours of the historic plantation that will begin later this year. It’s the goal of the Arabia Alliance and DeKalb County to transform this site into one of Atlanta’s premier heritage destinations to get authentic and well-researched historical interpretation of life for Black and White folks during the Antebellum, Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras.

The Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance works to protect, connect, and share the ecological and cultural assets of the 40,000-acre Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area just east of Atlanta, Georgia. With a focus on inclusive storytelling and equitable access to nature, the Alliance brings to life the region’s rich history and biodiversity through community events, interpretive programs, and land stewardship across three counties: DeKalb, Rockdale and Henry. More info at arabiaalliance.org.