

First Quarter 2026 Newsletter



Welcome to the first quarter report from Mayor Dennis Nelson.

Wow! What a great start to 2026!

But before that, in reflection of 2025 we said goodbye to Mayor Rick Roberts. After 37 years serving the citizens of Ball Ground, including 35 years as Mayor, Rick decided it was time to put away his gavel and truly enjoy retirement with his family. Thank you, Rick and Elaine, for your sacrifices for our great city.

But what was going on in the world in 1988 when Mayor Roberts was elected? The population of the city was just under 900. It was a pivotal year in world history defined by the beginning of the end of the Cold War and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. George H.W. Bush was elected President of the United States. Major events included the Pan Am Flight 103 bombing, the Calgary Winter Olympics, the Seoul Summer Olympics, and the devastating Armenian earthquake. And the movies, Who Framed Roger Rabbit and Rain Man were hot in the box office. And if I might add, for me personally, my wife Dawn and me were in our first year of dating.



Flash forward to January 15, 2026, and I am sworn in as mayor with Dawn by my side, the same as she has done through my 46 years in law enforcement. We also welcomed Tony Stancil as our newest council member. I hit the ground running, eager and ready for this new challenge in my life and deeply appreciative of the support I received from our citizens and ever mindful of the trust they have placed in me.

I have found that in addition to conducting work sessions and regular meetings, there are many meetings, ceremonies and events the mayor should attend to represent Ball Ground. The first official event was held on January 19, 2026. Dawn and I attended the Martin Luther King, Jr. Unity Breakfast at the Cherokee County Conference Center along with members of

the Cherokee County Board of Commissioners and three of the other four mayors in the county.



also planted numerous Crepe Myrtle trees along the Robert's Lake walking trail. This event marks 36 years of Ball Ground as a Tree City USA city – the very first in Cherokee County. Thank you, Mayor Roberts, for getting our first award and keeping us consistent these past 35 years.

Other events included the Ball Ground Arbor Day event on February 21, 2026, where the City of Ball Ground planted three beautiful Royal Star Magnolia trees at Calvin Farmer Park. This event was attended by former Mayor Roberts, Councilmembers Barnes, Homiller and Stancil, and representatives from the Ball Ground Garden Club. The city



Other events included attending ribbon cuttings at new businesses including the Heritage at Farmer's Crossing John Weiland Collection town houses on Groover Street and All About Pest Solutions on Gilmer Ferry Road. Council members Rogers, Benefield, Barnes and Homiller were also present at the Heritage event and Council members Barnes and Homiller were also present at the All About Pest Solutions ribbon cutting event.



Communication is key in Cherokee County. Commissioner Harry Johnston, Mayor Bill Grant of Canton, Mayor Michael Caldwell of Woodstock, Mayor Ryan Shirley of Holly Springs and myself meet every month to discuss the cities we represent as it relates to growth in the county and to share information. These meetings are invaluable.

There is no doubt that the greatest assets of the City of Ball Ground are our hard-working employees. Day in and day out you will find them working inside and outside of city hall serving the great citizens of our community. Oftentimes, this includes working after hours, nights and weekends.



Kudos to Donna and Darlene in our Finance Department for 19 continuous years receiving the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting awarded by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada.

It was my honor to recognize three local veteran heroes in our Veteran of the Month Program. Our January Veteran was Adam Chapman, United States Army, our February Veteran was Dr. William Paschal, United States Navy, and our March Veteran was James Green, United States Army. On behalf of the City of Ball Ground, we thank them all for their dedication, service and sacrifices protecting the freedom we all enjoy today.



Paschal (January)



Chapman (February)



Green (March)

The Ball Ground Veteran of the Month Program is always seeking nominations. If you are a veteran living in Ball Ground, or the owner of a business in the city, you qualify. If you know a qualified veteran, please nominate him or her. Nominations can be made by downloading the form at the bottom of the webpage at www.cityofballground.com.

Some of the changes we made this past January include moving our department operational reports to our work sessions conducted on the first Thursday of each month at 6:00 PM. This allows us to develop and discuss items in detail that will be presented at the regular council meetings conducted on the second Thursday of each month at 7:00 PM. Our regular council meetings are conducted more smoothly and allow us time for proclamations, presentations and other ceremonies. But, if you happen to miss a work session, don't worry; the information discussed and the department presentations are readily available on our city's webpage. Very soon, in addition to our regular council meetings we will soon be live streaming our work sessions.

I am currently working on a project, or perhaps it is more of a quest. I am looking for (preferably) portrait photographs of our past mayors. We have some that we have now mounted on the wall just outside the council chambers; however, we are looking for several missing photographs of mayors. If you are a family member of or know where I can get a copy of any of our missing mayors, please let me know. They deserve to be recognized for their service to our city.

The missing photographs are:

Mayor J.K. Echols - Mayor W.H. Anderson - Mayor D.C. Stripling - Mayor W.C. Darby

Mayor W.C. Hardin - Mayor Lester Barrett - Mayor L.L. Spence - Mayor L.R. Thomason

Mayor H.P. McCollum - Mayor H. Roy Cobb – Mayor R.M. Thompson – Mayor Frank Homiller

Mayor Charles H. Watkins

And finally, one of the greatest challenges we face this year is planning for the upcoming retirement of our city manager, Eric Wilmarth. Eric has faithfully served the city for 26 years and leaves us some very big shoes to fill. There is literally no job in this city that he hasn't done himself at times. Throughout the course of a normal day, you may find him in his office, meeting with business owners, contractors, elected officials, working in a sewer manhole, or even in the middle of the Calvin Park pond fixing the fountain. Eric absolutely loves Ball Ground and is a huge part of the successful growth of our city. His knowledge and experience have saved the taxpayers of this city hundreds of thousands of dollars. We will bid farewell to Eric the end of June this year, but he plans to remain a resident of Ball Ground so he won't be far away in case we need him....and we probably will at times.

If I can ever be of assistance to any of our residents, please do not hesitate to contact me. Until our next quarterly report, Ball Ground Rocks!

Dennis