



Staghorn Plantation Estates  
Homeowners Association  
P.O. Box 267  
Nicholson, GA 30565

## YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION NEWS

January 2026

### HONORING FALLEN AMERICANS

Staghorn Plantation Estates is pleased to welcome home Tristan Smith, the son of Jesse and Kristin Swart. Tristan recently returned to Nicholson after serving as Staff Sargeant at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia.



*Sgt. Tristan Smith at Tomb of Unknown Soldier*

Tristan is now completing a 16-week training course focused on GA laws, patrol car driving skills and much more as he prepares to serve as a member of the Athens Clark County police department in 2026.

### TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery is a monument and symbolic grave for unidentified U.S. service members who died in service, honoring their sacrifice and representing all missing or unidentified fallen soldiers.

It currently holds the remains of unknowns from World War I, World War II, and the Korean War, guarded 24/7 by the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard).

The monument reads "Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God," The monument itself, a white marble sarcophagus features carvings of Peace, Victory, and Valor on its east face, with wreaths on the sides, symbolizing the sacrifice of these unknown heroes.

### ROLE OF THE TOMB GUARDS

The sacred duty of the Sentinels is to serve with perfection, dignity and perseverance as they walk their 21-steps, symbolizing a 21-gun salute, in humble reverence, honoring their fallen comrades.

Every hour during the winter and every 30 minutes during the summer, a choreographed change of the guard occurs. The guards walk: 21 steps; turn and face the Tomb for 21 seconds; about face, shift arms and hold for 21 seconds; 21 steps back to the starting point.

## INTERVIEW OF TRISTAN SMITH

I recently interviewed Tristan to learn more about his role as a Guard Staff Sergeant.

Tristan served from August 2022 to September of 2025 after passing a series of tests that very few applicants who apply survive. From there he went on to be honored for his performance and promoted to a staff sergeant grade.

While fulfilling this role he walked his 21-steps past many dignitaries including President Trump, Vice President Vance, world dignitaries such as the Prime Minister of Japan and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.



*Tristan Smith to the rear next to Usha Vance*

I asked Tristan how he dealt with severe weather while wearing his neatly pressed uniform and mirror finish shoes.

Tristan explained that maintaining his uniform was totally his responsibility. He hemmed, pressed and sewed pleats to ensure the uniform's form fit. All ribbons and patches were individually made. Holsters and scabbards were hand made from leather.

Weather was always a challenge. During cold winter days, he wore thermal pajamas. During the summer when his wool uniform was extremely hot there wasn't much he could do.

Tristan said, "It was like standing in a sauna for 30 minutes straight." Rain conditions meant letting his shoes dry for 6 hours before again, polishing them. Dealing with lightning was a fact of life and snow was always a problem. When there was snow or freezing rain it was like ice skating when you walked the 21 steps.

Tristan explained that every day except Sunday there were as many as 30 burials at Arlington National Cemetery. Guards honored these fallen soldiers through stone rubbing. Guards using cloth or paper would rub Yankee Wax over a soldier headstone in the middle of the night. It commemorated a rite of passage or a successful test completed by a Sentinel thus remembering the soldier.

Tristan always kept a picture of a fallen service member in his locker to never forget the importance of honoring all those buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

## BEST DEAL IN JACKSON COUNTY

Rent the Staghorn Recreation Center. It offers convenience and plenty of indoor and outdoor space for weddings, birthdays, graduation parties and other social events.

Go to the Staghorn Plantation Estates website <https://staghornplantationestates.com> and go to Recreation Center Rental to see available dates and take advantage of the opportunity to rent our Recreation Center. Contact **Robert (Bob) Hutchinson** at [webpicsbob@yahoo.com](mailto:webpicsbob@yahoo.com) or 845-866-2421.

Just pay \$50 with an additional \$75 security deposit. This is for members who are up to date on their \$300 annual homeowners' dues. The party room can be decorated, and the facility is equipped with a complete kitchen including stove, microwave and refrigerator.

Craig Gieler, SPEHOA Secretary