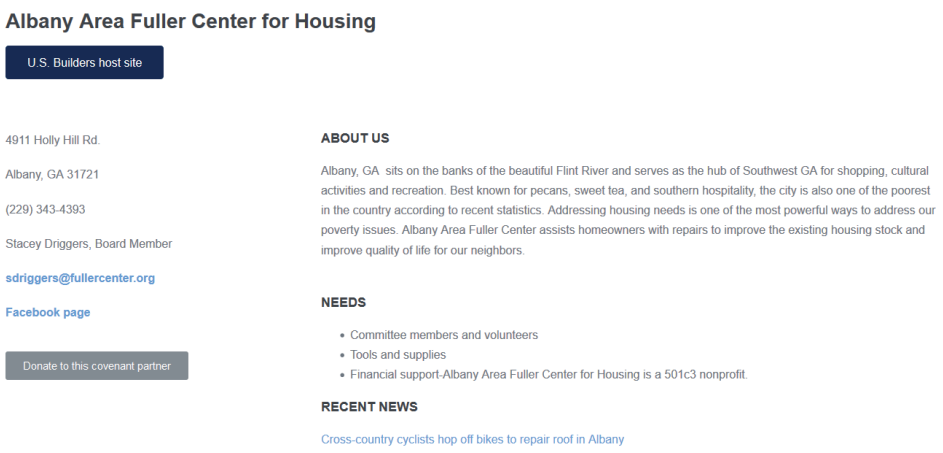
Website advice and best practices

Chris Johnson, Vice-President of Communications

1. First and foremost, do you really need a website? Are you willing to commit the time — not just now but in the years to come — to maintain a website? Many covenant partners have launched websites with excitement only to have them go stagnant. While their work may be thriving in the field, when people visit their website they might get the wrong impression that the covenant partner must be defunct. If you cannot be certain this will be a consistently managed site, don't do it. Remember that you can accomplish much of what you would use a website for through other channels — such as free social media pages like Facebook (where you can collect donations) and your dedicated webpage at Fuller Center.org, where your contact information, recent links and a donate button are available.



Covenant partners get a simple webpage with basic information and a donation button on our website. Coupled with strategic social media, this may eliminate the need to have a website.

2. Do it yourself — really, you can! If you determine a website is needed, know that they are not nearly as complicated to start or maintain as they were 10 or even 5 years ago. I've had zero training in this area, yet I manage and design our site. Thanks to simple, user-friendly platforms like WordPress (used by FullerCenter.org, FullerCenterBikeAdventure.org) and remote server host services like SiteGround (pictured), you no longer need an expert in coding and html. Such experts are expensive to retain. Neither The Fuller Center nor the Bike Adventure have even a part-timer or someone on retainer to provide web support because WordPress is so easy to use and because our server hosts at SiteGround have provided outstanding technical support. When we have had issues that at first glance scared the pants off of me, they were able to resolve it in minutes. (And, no, I don't get paid to endorse SiteGround.) There are similar services, but I've had nothing but great experiences with them.

3. Have a minimum of two, preferably at least three people with access and admin privileges. I've gotten this call too many times: "Hey, we need to update our website, but the person who set it up is gone/dead/we can't remember who set it up years ago." "Um, sorry." Same goes for social media. Make sure at least 2-3 people have rights to work on your site/page and know all login and password info. I regularly share such information with others at The Fuller Center in what I call my "In Case I Hit A Tree On The Way Home" list. Always have a backup!

4. Lastly, keep it simple. In case I wasn't clear ... KEEP IT SIMPLE! There was a time when fancy websites were all the rage — flashing items, pop-ups everywhere, videos automatically starting and all kinds of bells and whistles that seem exciting to designers and page owners but leave visitors doing three things:

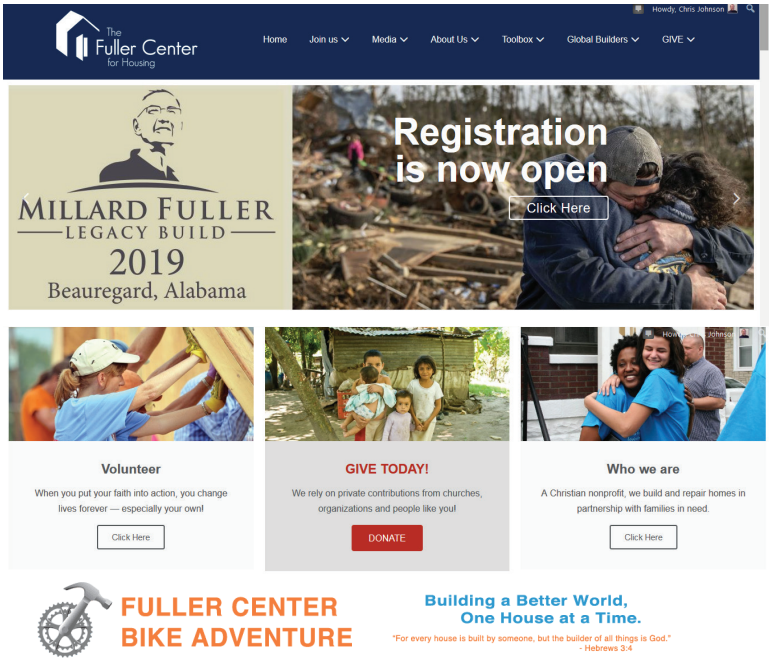
- Looking for the red "X" boxes to get out of pop-ups
- Asking, "Where is that music coming from?!"
- Fleeing your site ASAP.

Websites are no longer novelty items. No one goes to a website to have an "experience." They are looking for information, wanting to register for an event or wanting to buy something. They want to do it quickly. They don't want detours and surprises. They want simplicity and clarity, not mystery and confusion.

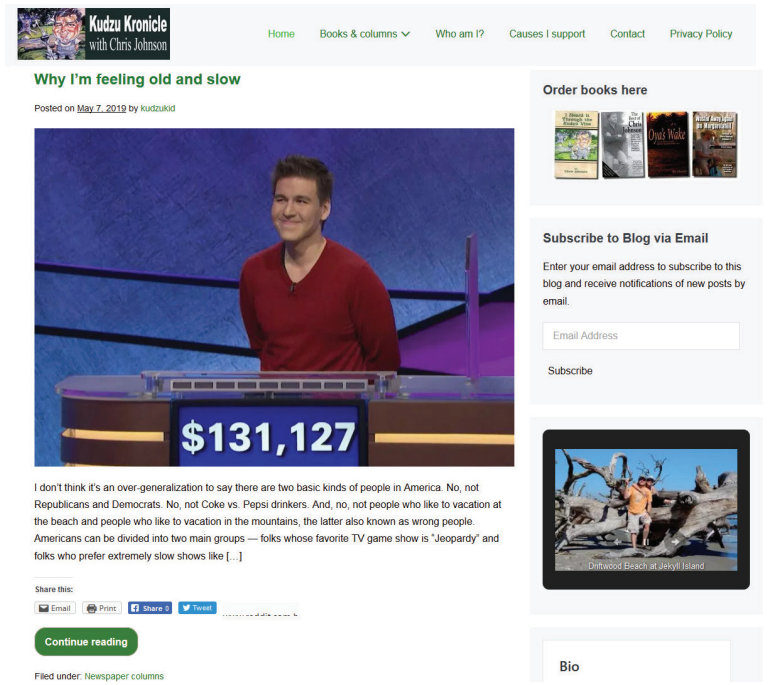
We've worked hard and taken advantage of WordPress-related technology and advancements to simplify our FullerCenter.org site as much as possible. There's no way to perfect a site so that no one ever takes a wrong turn, but we've put our three main issues — volunteering, donating and who we are — front and center. If they decide to hang out and look around a while, great. Otherwise, it's easier than ever for visitors to get in, do their business and get out without being hassled or distracted. Not only is the home page simpler, but our main inside pages are now simpler, cleaner and more compact.

WordPress offers many, many bells and whistles that may be fun to play with, but visitors are unlikely to be impressed. If you want to impress a website visitor, make them think, "Well, that was easy!"

Chris Johnson can be reached by email at cjohnson@fullercenter.org or call 229-514-4731.



FullerCenter.org (top) and FullerCenterBikeAdventure.org are Go Geek-level SiteGround hosting plans with paid WordPress templates & a few paid WordPress plugins ... the templates and plugins run $29-$99 each usually.



My personal website — kudzukid.com — uses a free WordPress template and costs just $179 a year for the SiteGround Start-Up plan, domain name & annual renewal, and malware monitoring. It's simple, cheap and works!