

## Greater Hall Chamber drives business of all shapes, sizes and languages

by Perry Barnett

We enjoy a strong economy in Hall County, much of it due to initiatives led by the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce.

Three of the Chamber's primary focus areas are economic development, small business support, and international businesses recruitment.

### Economic Development

Communities are only as strong economically as their educated and skilled workforces. In the Gainesville area, the population surges from 38,000 at night to more than 100,000 during weekday working hours – evidence of the impact of a strong labor force that ripples through our local economy.

Our Greater Hall Chamber has developed a Workforce Development Task Force and is proactive in networking with other communities to stay on the leading edge of training skill-specific employees for area businesses. The task force members come from varied backgrounds, but everyone is pulling toward the same goal with workforce development initiatives that encourage a high level of education and skills training. One example is our local apprenticeship program where high school students can work with a company as they decide their career path.

Across various sectors within our community, we constantly work to get everyone on the same page. Recently, the Chamber coordinated an annual meeting where manufacturers, local school systems, local governments, universities and technical colleges came



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together to discuss better ways to support economic development. Our local businesses also have been very generous in contributing to our ongoing HALLmark fundraising campaign to support the Chamber's economic development programs.

### Small Business

Equally important as skilled labor is the health of small businesses in Gainesville-Hall County, another key focus area of our Chamber's initiatives.

The Greater Hall Chamber recognizes that small business is the heart of our economy and a key source of job creation. In fact, over 85 percent of the Chamber's membership is composed of small businesses. Accordingly, the Chamber provides a wide range of services and networking opportunities to small business owners and potential entrepreneurs such as a popular series of seminars ranging from topics on

healthcare and marketing to accounting, legal, and employee benefits.

The Chamber staff also is in regular contact with existing businesses throughout the year. Our staff is outstanding at connecting a business owner with a peer who may have faced a similar challenge within their company. This connection allows businesses to share ideas and work together toward viable solutions.

We are proud that others recognize our pro-business efforts -- Forbes Magazine has rated Gainesville-Hall County among "Best Small Places for Business & Careers" for the last three years.

### International Business

In Gainesville-Hall County, we are blessed with a nationally recognized healthcare system, strong public and private schools, a thriving arts community, Lake Lanier recreation and housing. These are all important contributors in our ability to recruit international businesses – another key facet of our enviable local economy.

Currently, there are 49 international companies from 19 countries in Gainesville-Hall County, employing 8,700 workers. One-third of goods-producing employees here work at foreign-owned firms.

In most cases, the large international companies that have chosen Hall County as their home encourage their suppliers to relocate to our area. Just one example is Tatsumi Intermodal USA, which has been based in Hall County since 2000 to provide export logistics services to another Japanese company, tractor manufacturer Kubota.

Tatsumi recently announced its fourth expansion here with a new logistics facility in our community.

We recently welcomed economic representatives from 11 world markets, but we don't just roll out the welcome mat and wait for international companies to visit. Periodically, Chamber staff and a local business contingent will travel abroad to meet directly with companies interested in doing business in Gainesville-Hall County as well as with those who already operate here.

During these visits, we often hear feedback from our international business partners who cite the talent, technical skills training and business leadership of Gainesville-Hall County and Georgia as key reasons for choosing and expanding their company operations here.

### Vision 2030

As part of our effort to invest in workforce development, attract new industries, and support small businesses, the Chamber has led a long-term plan that pulls all these job-producing efforts together into a single vision and direction: Vision 2030.

Vision 2030 began in 2005 with a year-long community planning process where hundreds of citizens were asked to share ideas for how they want to live, work, and play in Gainesville-Hall County over the next 25 years. The end product was a set of long-term goals and plans for Gainesville-Hall County that the vast majority of citizens recognize as their own and support wholeheartedly.



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