“Diverse, Forward-Thinking Economy” Work Group Explores Innovation in Whitfield County

In January, Archway Executive Committee member Don Cope and community volunteer David Aft teamed up to interview 10 local business and professional leaders to determine what innovation is currently occurring in the community. At a meeting with their issue work group on February 2, 2011, Don and David gave an exciting review of the interviews they have completed.

David Aft reported at the meeting that the duo’s findings went “far beyond what I expected to find.” While acknowledging the importance of the carpet industry, David noted that Dalton-Whitfield’s real story is its wealth of creativity and applied technologies. He reported, “We could be called the cutting edge manufacturing capital... or the innovation and applied technology capital of the world.”

Below are some of the highlights from the team’s interviews:

- Most wind turbines manufactured in the US are given a protective coating invented here in Dalton and produced locally. The protective sealers increase efficiency and the longevity of generating equipment.

- Dalton is home to a company that designs and builds industrial robotic equipment.

- Dalton-Whitfield is home to a testing laboratory that rivals Underwriters’ Laboratory. This facility connects Dalton to many businesses outside of the floor covering industry.

- The Carpet and Rug Institute has partnered with NASA and key floor covering companies to test and use space age, non-carbon lubricants and fuel additives. NASA has developed several key technologies to improve the functioning of space and extra-planetary equipment including non-hydrocarbon, water based lubrication technologies. These lubricants and special fuel additives are being tested by key local manufacturers. Results to date have demonstrated 10%-20% gains in mechanical efficiency – reducing power use and the economic shelf life of machinery. Fuel additives have shown to reduce wear and increase MPG in diesel engines – extending the life of tested engines while reducing fuel consumption.

- With a water shortage in most of Georgia, Dalton is the envy of the remainder of the state. Forward-thinking leaders have reduced the amount of water needed in carpet production.

- The “state-of-the-art” Dalton Utilities’ OptiLink fiber optics network is built throughout Dalton and is available to all industry, business, and residents.

- Dalton Utilities and Georgia Power have partnered for additional nuclear energy. Georgia’s largest solar panel generating project is under construction on Dalton Utilities’ land application site. This helps to make DU a “living laboratory” for green technology.
• Less publicized green initiatives locally include turning carpet into 2 x 4s and producing energy from waste.

• Technology in the carpet industry has led to more productivity with fewer employees. Don Cope noted at the meeting that this means better paying jobs for those who are willing and able to adapt. Young people can get a good education and find higher paying jobs right here.

• Our education systems have worked together to provide a better workforce. Our local school systems are working with Dalton State College and Georgia Northwestern Technical College and have created a partnership in concert with local industries to produce the necessary technically trained workforce needed into the community. Don Cope noted at the meeting that “[t]he capabilities of a local workforce to think critically, problem solve, and work with the latest in technology will help improve existing industries efficiency and support developing new advanced manufacturing businesses.”

• Hamilton Medical Center is one of the top hospitals in the region and is one of the few with an advanced stroke center. It is one of a select group of hospitals to use the da Vinci Surgical Robotic System. Robotic surgery benefits the patient by allowing smaller incisions, less pain, less blood loss and shorter recovery time. Hamilton’s surgical robot is the only one in the region to feature the latest in high definition 3-D imaging. Hamilton’s Neonatal Intensive Care Unit was established in 2010. It is designed to provide the best care for premature, ill, or low birth-weight babies.

The group hopes to use information like the highlights noted above to market the community to outsiders as an innovative place of business. In addition, the group hopes to submit the information to the University System of Georgia for assistance in determining how our current initiatives can be a launching pad for diversification. The group’s goal is to find ways to better our community’s economic status without interfering with or revealing confidential, proprietary information.

Those present at the February 2nd meeting were divided into two-person groups. Each pair was given the assignment of interviewing additional local leaders in order to continue the research needed to complete the project. The duos are:

Carolyn Smith and Wayne Hise; Dustin Coker and Alex Stall; Elyse Cochran and Larry Johnson; David Aft and Don Cope; and Rand Riedrich and Bob Beavers.

The group’s next scheduled meeting has been set for 4 p.m. on Monday, February 28th in Dalton Utilities’ auditorium. Anyone interested in contributing to this initiative is invited to attend and participate.

“Successful, Sustainable Industries” Issue Work Group Launches Initiative to Assist Floorcovering Industry in Attracting Bright, Qualified Workforce

When speaking about the future of Dalton-Whitfield County during the Archway visioning process, residents constantly noted their desire to support and enhance existing industries. After many conversations
with local business leaders, it became evident that one key way the community can support local industries is by assisting them in creating, attracting, and retaining a bright, talented workforce that can fill sophisticated jobs.

To this end, the “Successful, Sustainable Industries” Issue Work Group is partnering with the floorcovering industry to revamp its image in the minds of tomorrow’s workforce. The challenge for this work group is steep. Despite the advanced nature of the industry and the jobs currently available, local high school students still view the industry as antiquated and low-tech. In a recent study conducted by the current Leadership Dalton-Whitfield class, 87.2 percent of 164 Dalton High School student respondents indicated that they would not like to work in the carpet/flooring industry in Dalton following graduation from high school/college. Not surprisingly, 84.2% of these students equated the carpet/flooring industry with plant/mill work, and only 10.1% of these students considered the carpet/flooring industry to be “high tech.” Consistent with students’ comments in a panel presentation, only 14.1% of survey respondents believed the industry to have a modern/bright future.

To assist the industry in combating these negative perceptions, the issue work group has asked University of Georgia Masters in Business Administration student Charles Simpson to assist it in developing the plan for a public relations/rebranding campaign. Charles brings with him nine years of professional experience, during which he served as a strategy associate for a B2B Magazine top-125 business-to-business marketing and sales communications agency, a regulatory consultant for a safety consulting firm, a political consultant for a consulting firm, and a research analyst for a media watchdog group and think tank.

On Friday, February 4, 2011, Charles met with issue work group leaders to discuss the team’s initial strategy. The group agreed that, over the next three months, Charles will dedicate his time to conducting interviews of industry leaders to better understand the challenges the industry faces; analyzing quantitative data on industry trends and competitors through online media outlets, academic journals, and trade publications; analyzing human resource materials (print and web) to determine what message the industry is currently sending to the labor market; performing a competitive audit of the floorcovering industry in relation to relevant industries in other communities; and performing an online “reputation audit” of the Dalton-Whitfield community.

Over the next month, Charles will focus primarily on conducting interviews of industry leaders. The issue work group will formally convene again on March 7, 2011 at 1:00 PM in the Dalton-Whitfield Chamber of Commerce boardroom to meet with Charles and discuss next steps. All interested community and business members are invited to participate.

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**Birth-to-Work Education Initiative Moves Forward**

On January 18, 2011, approximately 40 community members interested in education issues convened to continue their discussion about the top strengths and weaknesses in the birth to work continuum. Following an introductory session in which the group reviewed a video about changing paradigms of public education (see the video at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpI4U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpI4U)), the group split into work teams focused on prenatal to pre-kindergarten, kindergarten through high school, and higher education.

Using a list of strengths and weaknesses that the work teams developed at the November education meeting, participants were charged with narrowing the identified weaknesses down to the top 2-4 that the community can impact in some way. The following weaknesses were identified:

**Prenatal to Pre-Kindergarten**
Lack of awareness about early brain development and nutrition. The group acknowledged that Dalton-Whitfield has many educators/providers of services, but that it is very difficult to get parents and caregivers to internalize the information available. The group discussed the need to get parents to collaborate and share best practices. The group noted that we need to work on building a community of parents and find ways to engage parents in active learning.

Lack of appreciation among business and government leaders of the economic realities of failing with this age group.

Inadequate mental health services and providers for parents of children.

Lack of participation in community efforts from our churches, diverse populations, etc.

**Kindergarten through 12th Grade**

- We have an outdated mental model of how we do school: The way that we have done school over the past several generations is no longer the best/most relevant way in this “digital age.” We need to reconsider the role of administrators, teachers, and students. Is there a new mental model that we need to be creating?
- We have outdated curriculum: What knowledge has value in today’s society? Better yet, what knowledge will have value in tomorrow’s society?
- We are underutilizing technology: For the most part, we are using technology in our education system to do the same old thing. Primarily, it is a teaching tool and not a learning tool. How can we better utilize the technology that we have?
- We have disconnected families: As education evolves and family make-ups change, we need to reconsider the role of the family in education. It is no longer appropriate for the family to simply drop their child off at the school house door.

**Higher Education (encompasses any education after high school)**

- Negative image of technical jobs/technical skills.
- Too many students entering Dalton State College require learning support.
- There are not enough co-ops/internships for students.

Over the next month, members of these subgroups will meet to further explore these weaknesses and how the Dalton-Whitfield community can begin to impact them. On February 22, 2011, the prenatal to pre-Kindergarten group and the higher education group will meet at 6:00 PM at Dalton State College’s Brown Center. The Kindergarten through 12th grade group will not meet at that time due to conflicts with both school systems. The entire group will reconvene on March 15, 2011, at 6:00 PM in the Brown Center.

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**Leaders from local education institutions meet to discuss how to better integrate K-12 with higher education opportunities**

On February 4, 2011, representatives from Whitfield County Schools, Dalton City Schools, Dalton State College, Georgia Northwestern Technical College, the Dalton-Whitfield Chamber of Commerce, and local industry met to begin a conversation about how to better integrate our K-12 systems with our
higher education resources. The group brainstormed about ways to expose high school and middle school students to the higher education options available to them in this community. In addition, the group discussed different tactics for easing the transition between high school and post-secondary education. Representatives from each of the institutions agreed to continue to meet to discuss how they can work together towards these objectives.

**Downtown Dalton Issue Work Group Explores High-Tech Economic Development Tools; Business Plans**

In January, the Downtown Dalton Issue Work Group hosted faculty members Mike Perkins and Jimmy Nolan from the University of Georgia’s Information Technology Outreach Services Office to discuss the possibility of creating and implementing a web-based mapping program that can be used as an economic development tool. At the meeting, Mike and Jimmy shared technological capabilities that they can provide to the community and solicited suggestions and requests from the group regarding what they would like a potential mapping program to include. A meeting of community stakeholders is currently being planned to follow up on Mike and Jimmy’s visit and discuss options.

Also in January, the Downtown Dalton Issue Work Group’s request for assistance with a downtown business plan was selected as a class project by a strategic consulting class in the University of Georgia’s Masters in Business Administration program. Working under the direction of instructor David Sutherland, founder and managing director of international strategic innovation firm Launch Institute, students Jerrad Cox and Shubham Sethi will spend the next several months working on the following initiatives:

1. Researching the specific businesses/types of businesses that our Downtown Dalton Development Authority (DDDA) wants to recruit and determining how communities with similar populations have recruited those businesses/types of businesses.
2. Comparing our downtown to Chattanooga and Rome’s downtown to determine what strategic advantages those locations have over ours. Specifically, the students will examine our zoning restrictions and policies to analyze how they impact our ability to recruit businesses.
3. Researching and making recommendations on how communities and downtown development associations can ensure that mom and pop shops succeed in downtown areas. Specifically, the students will research what classes, certifications, or other requirements communities may be able to impose to ensure that all parties maximize their investments.

Jerrad and Shubham will begin reaching out to local stakeholders in the near future to begin their work.

**Arts & Culture Issue Work Group Begins to Compile Inventory of Existing Opportunities**

In January, the Arts & Culture Issue Work Group hosted their first meeting. At the meeting, the group began to develop an inventory of the arts and culture opportunities that Dalton-Whitfield currently offers. Community volunteer David Aft and Archway Executive Committee member Linda Blackman worked to compile the inventory over the month of January. Group members will soon have an opportunity to comment on the list and fill in the gaps on the inventory. The work group hopes to use the list to market the opportunities currently available and determine the gaps that exist in services and opportunities. Anyone interested in influencing the direction of arts and culture in the community is encouraged to contact Linda Blackman at lblackman@optilink.us to become part of this new group.
“Inviting Interstate Destination” Issue Work Group Begins to Explore Options

Issue Work Group leader David Gregg met with Archway Executive Committee members Brian Anderson and Elyse Cochran and local community members to discuss plans for further developing and promoting our interstate exits. The group submitted a request to the University of Georgia’s College of Environment and Design to have student interns draw designs and concepts for these exits in summer 2011.