Monthly Key Accomplishments – May 2011

Diverse, Forward-Thinking Economy Issue Work Group Explores Incubators, Investor Networks, and Innovation

Group Explores Possibility of a Local Investor Network

In addition to exploring the possibility of a business incubator, the Diverse, Forward Thinking Economy Issue Work Group is also considering how to assist innovators and potential start-ups in need of unconventional financing. Issue Work Group members Dawn Sanders, Community Banking Relationship Manager and City President for the Dalton market of Regions Bank; Robert Varner, Senior Vice President and Business Services Officer at BB&T; and Rand Riedrich Northwest Area Director for the University of Georgia Small Business Development Center, are currently working together to identify the criteria that potential investors might require of applicants. As this group’s work progresses, the Small Business Development Center can assist candidates with developing a business plan, and provide information on financing. Ultimately, this group will need the expertise of attorneys and CPAs as it attempts to work with due diligence issues.

Successful, Sustainable Industries Issue Work Group Explores Local Perceptions of Floorcovering Industry

Over the last two months, UGA Masters in Business Administration (MBA) student, Charles Simpson, has worked under the direction of the Successful, Sustainable Industries Issue Work Group to articulate the difficulties that our local industries face in attracting a qualified workforce, and to begin to develop a marketing campaign to address those difficulties. To date, Charles has interviewed many vice presidents, human resources directors, and plant managers in the floorcovering industry. In addition, he has conducted a focus group of Operations Management trainees, toured a local research and development facility, and attended a communications and marketing conference with the purpose of bringing back new strategies to impact our local industries.

Higher Education Issue Work Group Explores Opportunities for Internships

The Higher Education Issue Work Group recognizes that there are not enough co-ops/internships for high school and college students in the community. A team is currently working with the schools to determine the needs and areas of concentration for these “hands-on” educational opportunities. In addition, a survey was distributed to community and business leaders in an effort to identify possible career and workplace opportunities that might be available and to determine factors influencing those opportunities. Members of the group continue to research and collect data that will enhance understanding of issues around learning support for students entering higher education, and offer suggestions for reducing the number of students who require this additional assistance.
The Higher Education Issue Work Group is following the work of the MBA student that is assisting the Successful, Sustainable Industry Issue Group to bolster the image of technical jobs, particularly those in the floorcovering industry, as an avenue for recruiting more students into technical education. Additionally, members of the work group and others from our community will traveled to Newnan, GA, for a tour of the Central Education Center on May 4. The Central Education Center is well-known for its strong partnership with local industry and for its exceptional technical/career readiness programs.

**Downtown Dalton Issue Work Group Visits with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs**

Members of the Vibrant Downtown Issue Work Group met on March 14, 2011, with Leamon Scott and Billy Parish from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to request assistance with several needs related to the “top 3” priorities: (1) Developing North Hamilton Street, (2) Revitalizing Planet of the Grapes building; and (3) Developing Crawford Street based on streetscape designs. DCA has identified numerous resources that are available to assist with the efforts and will begin gathering specific information regarding best practices across the state.

Two students from the UGA Terry College of Business are currently working on three informational components needed by the Issue Work Group. First, the students are researching the specific businesses/types of businesses that can be financially feasible and successful in a downtown area, and identifying how similar communities have recruited those businesses. Second, the students are comparing our downtown to others in terms to identify potential obstacles to recruitment, such as zoning restrictions and operational policies. Third, the students are studying how successful non-chain businesses can be maintained in downtowns. A report of these findings and recommendations is expected in early May.