



JOANN VITELLI

Atlanta Botanical Garden Gainesville, which opened five years ago, offers a system of trails, gardens, annual beds, a greenhouse, and pond and stream features.

Variety of attractions, parks draw tourism to county

BY TONYA LAYMAN
Contributing Writer

Whether you are seeking fun in the sun, culture, nature or sports, Hall County has a variety of recreational offerings. Because of this, tourism has become big business for the city of Gainesville and Hall County.

The economic impact of Hall County's

tourism industry reached a record high of \$330 million, according to a report released in 2018 by the **Georgia Department of Economic Development** and **U.S. Travel Association**.

Located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains and about 55 miles northeast of Atlanta, the area's attractions are popular throughout the state of Georgia.

The 38,000-acre **Lake Lanier** and the

1,500-acre Lanier Islands is the most visited lakeside resort area in Georgia, and offers amenities for both families and corporate groups.

"Obviously the biggest draw we have in the area is Lake Lanier," said **Grier Todd**, chief operating officer of Lanier Islands. "The economic impact of the lake is unbelievable – it is the most visited [U.S. Army] Corps of Engineers lake in the country, and

the good news is that we have a full lake this summer."

"There are only two companies in the area that want it to be 100 degrees in the summer," Todd joked. "Us and Georgia Power."

Last year, **Margaritaville** teamed up with Lanier Islands to develop and run

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GAINESVILLE-HALL COUNTY MARKET REPORT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1C

the resort and entertainment complex, which includes Blue Ridge and Shoal Creek campgrounds, the beach and harbor and water park. This year, Margaritaville RV Resort will open with 52 concrete pads with full electric hookups and sewer at each site, wi-fi and upscale restrooms, shower and laundry facilities. Future plans include the addition of an in-ground pool, playground and cabana, Todd said.

“This is going to be state-of-the-art, top-of-the-line camping, and every pad has a view of the lake,” he added. “Margaritaville came in last year and got their feet wet and they are really getting into it this year with new offerings and programming.”

There also will be more covered boat slips in the marina, including more courtesy docks for those boating in to enjoy the water park and restaurant. The water park is also getting a new feature, the Aquaglide Sky Rocket, providing thrill-seekers a new way to swing or launch themselves over the water.

On the north end of the lake, the 1,500-acre Don Carter State Park provides visitors with a large swimming beach with bathhouse, boat ramps and multi-use trails. Last summer, Lanier added 12 miles of horse trails. The park offers several choices for overnight getaways including two-bedroom cabins, an RV campground and a camping area for tents and hammocks.

“Lake Lanier is 45 minutes away from Atlanta but it is really a world away,” Todd said. “You never have to get back in your car when you get to the island and there is something for everyone.”

For sports fans, the **Atlanta Falcons’** 50-acre headquarters and training facility in Flowery Branch is open to the public for training camp, giving fans a first glimpse of the team before its official season begins. Also, **Road Atlanta**, a 2.54-mile International Grand Prix course, attracts 320,000 visitors annually. In October of 2018, the venue hosted 150,000 visitors for the 21st Petit Le Mans and will be hosting the 2019 race as well.

Atlanta Botanical Garden Gainesville is another popular attraction in Hall County looking forward to new offerings this tourism season, said **Mildred Fockele**, the venue’s director.

Opened five years ago and part of the Atlanta Botanical Garden, the Gainesville installation offers a system of maintained trails through the forest in addition to its display garden, annual beds, pond and stream features, and a four-acre, 5,000-square-foot greenhouse. Like its Midtown counterpart, the Gainesville location offers special exhibits, docent-led tours, family-friendly performances and weekly story times. A children’s garden is planned as part of the garden’s second phase of development, slated for completion this fall, Fockele said.

From May to October, Atlanta Botanical Garden Gainesville hosts Wine in the Woodlands on the last Thursday of every month. This summer, the garden will host artists such as Corey Smith and Marc



Lake Lanier recently opened a new boat dock area.

JOANN VITELLI



Margaritaville RV Resort opens this year at Lake Lanier.

JOANN VITELLI

Broussard and The Mavericks for its Concerts Under the Stars series in its 2,000-seat Ivester Amphitheater.

“The garden changes character in the evening,” Fockele said, “and it is such a great time of day to visit.”

She added that the garden is just one of many cultural offerings in the area, including the **Quinlan Visual Arts Center**, the **Northeast Georgia History Center**, **Gainesville Theater Alliance**

and **Interactive Neighborhood for Kids (INK)**, which hosted 70,000 guests in 2017 at its 24,000-square-foot Gainesville location, according to the **Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce**.

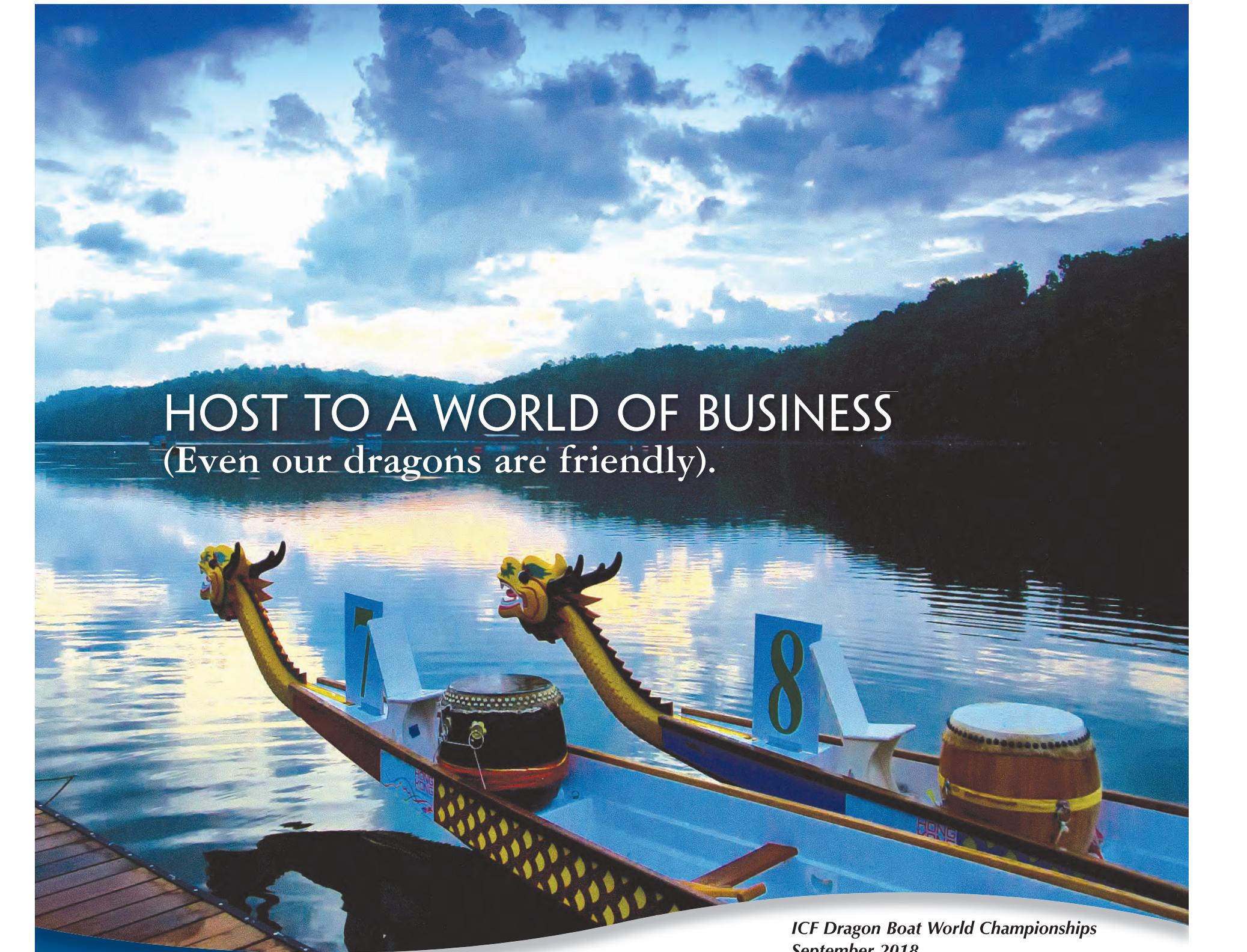
Additionally, the chamber reports that Chicopee Woods Park, a 1,500-acre nature preserve with 13 miles of hiking trails, a plant and animal sanctuary, and interactive museum, is home to more than 21 miles of mountain bike trails.



Lake Lanier’s new RV park features upscale new restrooms.

JOANN VITELLI

“People are just not aware that we have that many cultural institutions up here. We have a lot more to offer than just the lake, Road Atlanta and **Chateau Elan**,” said Fockele. “Part of it has been a bit of a secret, but more and more people are starting to see what we have to offer, and it is nice to have options for visitors. The more options you have, the more people you will attract.”



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Gainesville-Hall County
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GAINESVILLE-HALL COUNTY MARKET REPORT



Auto Metal Direct distributes auto body panels and trim.

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Manufacturing booming industry in Hall County

BY GARY MCKILLIPS
Contributing Writer

According to **Tim Evans**, vice president of economic development for the **Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce**, the manufacturing and processing industries are real “sweet spots” in the county’s economic development.

First touted as a regional center for textiles and poultry, the Gainesville-Hall County area has evolved into a location with companies that have found it ideal not only for manufacturing operations, but for corporate headquarters, and research and development as well.

According to Evans, there are 320 manufacturers and processors in Gainesville-Hall County, making up about one-third of the county’s workforce. Among them are poultry processor **Fieldale Farms Corporation**, tractor and RTV utility vehicle manufacturer **Kubota**, automotive technology firm **ZF Gainesville LLC**, chewing gum giant **Mars Wrigley** and commercial baker **King’s Hawaiian**. In addition, **Fox Factory Holding Corp.**, a manufacturer of performance shock absorbers and racing suspension products, is moving its corporate headquarters from Scotts Valley, Calif., to Hall County. The \$50 million investment and 800 new jobs will also accommodate growth in the company’s Powered Vehicle Group.

Another new addition to the area will be **Geveko Markings**, a world leader in road and pavement markings, which will initially employ 50 to 75 people at a new 20-acre site in the Gainesville Business Park, said Evans.

Hall County started as a textile center in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It evolved as a poultry processing hub

▶ MANUFACTURING/ PROCESSING IN HALL COUNTY

- ▶ **Total Companies:** 320
- ▶ **International companies:** 48
- ▶ **Countries represented:** 15
- ▶ **New and expanded industries:** 141 (2013-2018) (5400 jobs)
- ▶ **Industries represented:** Automotive, plastics, food processing, life sciences, among others
- ▶ **Largest employers year-end 2018:** Fieldale Farms, 2550 (employees); Victory Processing, 1730; Kubota Manufacturing of America, 1695; Pilgrims, 1380; Gold Creek Foods, 1300
- ▶ **Recently-announced:** Fox Factory Holdings, 800; Geveko Markings, 50-75

Source: Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce

after World War II and then moved into metal fabrication, initially done by poultry equipment manufacturers. “The Gainesville-Hall County area now has one of the largest concentrations of metal fabrication, welding, cutting and brazing skills in the nation,” said Evans, “something rare in a metropolitan area that is not an oil and gas or ship-building community.”

Kubota Manufacturing of America serves as a prime example of how and why a company makes Hall County its home. Established in 1988, Kubota’s Gainesville facility was first used to manufacture loaders for small tractors made in Japan. The loaders and small-engine (40 horse power or less) tractors proved to be ideal for smaller acreage farms, such as those found in the

Southeast. According to **Phil Sutton**, vice president of administration for Kubota Manufacturing of America, the firm then added lawn and garden tractors in response to dealers’ desires for equipment to compete with **John Deere** and other manufacturers.

“We began with 60,000 square feet and 38 people, and today have five manufacturing plants, 2,700 people and 2.5 million square feet in Hall and Jackson Counties,” said Sutton, adding that in Hall County alone, the company has over 1.5 million square feet of space, five buildings and 1,700 employees.

As to why Kubota chose the area, Sutton said the city of Gainesville and Hall County have “done a good job of keeping the residential and the business areas in a situation where they work together and are not competing.” He also praised the Chamber’s business and industry group for its support of existing businesses.

Many of Kubota’s employees live in Gainesville-Hall County, but the company draws employees from 11 surrounding counties, Sutton added. The firm has agreements with area high schools and colleges for apprenticeship and intern programs, some of which guarantee employment after graduation.

While the area is home to some well-known companies, others with less-widely recognized products also reside there. **Elastron** is a manufacturer of thermoplastic elastomers. Thermoplastic material is a moldable, recyclable substance used to replace rubber for applications such as hoses and gaskets, handles on toothbrushes and tools, and seals on door and windows. According to **Zev Gurion**, general manager of Elas-

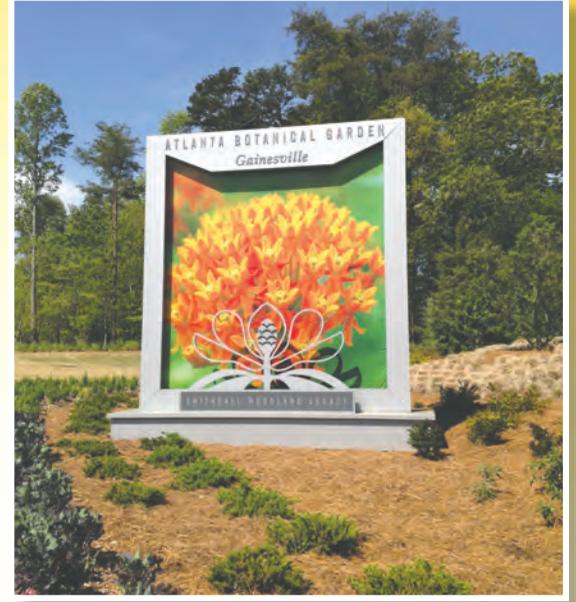
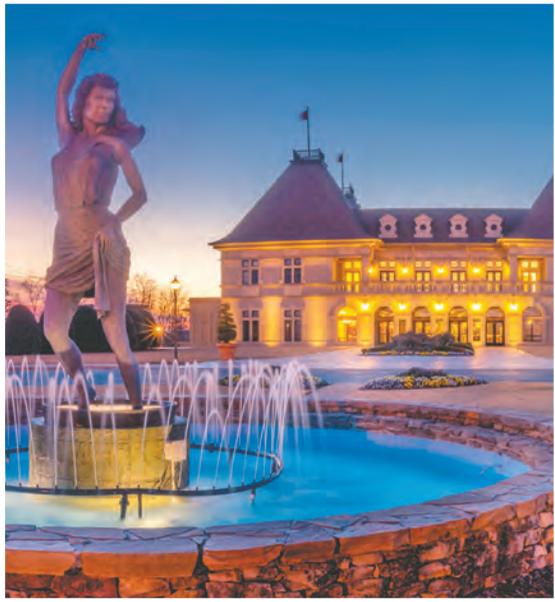
tron USA, the company first opened a sales office in Gainesville in 2012. After assessing the market, the Turkish-based firm decided last year to create a manufacturing facility in Hall County, its first such facility outside of Turkey. From its Gainesville plant, the company will supply product to North America, South America and eventually Asia, Gurion said.

Company leaders chose Gainesville-Hall County for its facility, Gurion added, because “the area is centrally located, with easy access to most of our customer base. We also have very good support from the Chamber and access to a good workforce.”

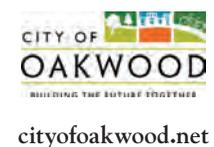
Auto Metal Direct is a worldwide distributor of auto body panels and trim for classic cars and trucks. Founded in Hall County in 2007 by **Mark Hedrick**, the firm is building a new 318,000-square-foot distribution and fulfillment facility in the Gateway Industrial Center. Upon completion, the \$15 million development will bring 40 jobs to Hall County. Hedrick said the county is very “business friendly,” which is one of the reasons he decided to expand there. Another reason is the area’s access to the new **Northeast Georgia Inland Port Terminal**. The new cargo terminal will benefit all manufacturers in Hall County and beyond, Hedrick said.

Set to be located in the Gateway Center off GA 365, the terminal will serve the I-85 region of Georgia, said Evans. **Norfolk Southern Railroad** will have a direct rail route to the **Port of Savannah’s** Garden City Terminal. The new port, scheduled to open in 2021, will not only make hauling cargo easier and more efficient but will cut down on congestion by reducing the number of trucks on the road, he said.

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GAINESVILLE-HALL COUNTY MARKET REPORT

SCHOOLS TO STARTUPS

Workforce development starts early in Hall County

BY RANDY SOUTHERLAND
Contributing Writer

Workforce development is a team effort in Hall County. An alliance of educators, civic leaders and employers have developed a multi-pronged approach to developing skilled employees that begins in middle school and extends all the way to entrepreneurs and startups.

The **Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce** took the lead in organizing a Workforce Development Taskforce. Launched in 2014, the group is comprised of educators, private industry representatives, local government officials and other community leaders, according to **Greg Vitek**, former president of **IMS Gear Georgia Inc.** and the taskforce's chair.

"Our role is to provide a sustainable flow of skilled people to local employers," said Vitek. "We think about it as a pipeline that starts early and is for the long term. It's not just following the business cycle up and down."

A top goal of the task force is "changing mindsets" about what workforce education is, said Vitek. For example, schools and colleges needed to move fast and be flexible in crafting programs that meet the skill needs of industries, and employers have to become proactive in finding and training workers, rather than hiring them away from other companies, Vitek added.

"Employers are not only looking at [training programs] as an act of good will and being a part of the community but are serious about it being a recruitment tool for their future sustainable workforce," said **Shelley Davis**, the chamber's vice president for existing industry.

Workforce development starts early. In programs in middle school in Hall County and Gainesville, students begin exploring possible career paths and meeting potential employers to get a first-hand look at specific industries and jobs.

Hall County and Gainesville 7th- and 8th-graders recently participated in a two-day career fair on the campuses of the **University of North Georgia (UNG)** and **Lanier Technical College**. More than 1,200 students met with nearly 50 employers representing a variety of industries and job types.

"Each student got to visit with an actual employer or person in that job representing the career path that they may choose when they get to high school," said Davis.

"The businesses represented all our career pathways," said **Kim Guy**, a career specialist with Lanier College and Career Academy, adding that companies provided learning opportunities at the events. **Georgia Poultry Labs** provided a simulation of how a scientist takes cultures from poultry, she said "We are intentional on connecting the aptitudes and the interests and the curriculum with what our students do in regard to careers."



Liz Bachmann, senior at University of North Georgia, interns at Georgia Public Broadcasting.

JOANN VITELLI

In Gainesville, students are encouraged to pick a career pathway in the 8th grade. Once in high school, they can access a variety of classes in programs including engineering, welding, culinary arts and business. They also get a dose of the "soft skills" needed for success on the job, such as professional behavior and dress, as well as team work and communications, according to **Helen Perry**, work-based learning coordinator at **Gainesville High School**.

In Hall County Schools, 70.74 percent of students are enrolled in at least one career tech course during the 2018-2019 school year. Once students reach their junior year of high school, they can enter work-based learning programs, which include both in-class and on-the-job training. The goal is to connect classroom learning with worksite application to enable a smooth transition into the work force.

Through this program, students discover both their career and even, at times, their employer. Perry said one Gainesville High student in work-based learning discovered a passion for construction management after working at **Carroll Daniel Construction**, a Gainesville-based commercial contractor.

Colleges in Gainesville and Hall County also offer majors and degrees in high-demand programs in the area. For example, UNG has five campuses to provide education to the 30-county region.

"It's a very diverse region," said **Bonita Jacobs**, UNG president, "so we know that it's important that we partner with education [and] with business community organizations first, to enhance college access and degree attainment."

The university has launched the Center for Cyber Education in partnership with the U.S. government and private industry. It fills critical staffing and leadership demands not only for Georgia companies, but for the **Georgia National Guard**, the **U.S. Army** and other federal agencies, said Jacobs.

Graduates in geo-spatial technology, and more traditional programs such as teaching and nursing, provide a steady stream of graduates for the area's schools and health systems. They also provide students with opportunities for internships and fulfilling clinical requirements, according to Jacobs.

Business students have interned with **Syfan Logistics** during its annual holiday shipping project and during summer breaks. The company is also working with the university to develop a curriculum for a bachelor of business administration (BBA) degree with a concentration in supply chain management and logistics.

UNG senior finance major **Kondwani Kapembwa** interned at Syfan Logistics for 10 weeks. She credits the experience with helping her land a permanent position with a capital investment firm in Virginia after graduation.

"During the internship, I was learning all their operations and what they do day-to-day," said Kapembwa. "I also had a chance to shadow their finance analysts and see what they do and all that goes into pricing everything that they do."

Through the internship, she discovered the role that finance plays in many different companies "that I wouldn't have even looked at before," she said.

Liz Bachmann, a senior UNG film major, found her way to an internship

with **Georgia Public Broadcasting**.

"I realized that I hadn't really done anything to make any connections outside of UNG," she said. "I knew I would have to start meeting with professionals to take it further."

Through the program, she made connections with GPB, as well as other media companies such as **Turner Broadcasting**.

At the Business Incubator at **Brenau University**, entrepreneurs are developing skills they need to build successful companies. Since it opened in 2007, the Incubator has helped launch 48 new companies, and 97.3 percent of these enterprises have been a success, said **Carroll Turner**, the facility's executive director. The program also has contributed 21 patents, 21 trademarks and 11 copyrights, Turner said.

There are currently 13 start-ups in residence at the incubator. Most sprung up to serve the health care field, although other industries are also represented in the group, Turner added.

In January, Lanier Technical College held the first classes at a new campus in Gainesville. On 95 acres, its six buildings offer some 335,000 square feet of classroom and other space. The campus can house up to 5,000 students with room to expand, said Lanier Tech president **Dr. Ray Perren**.

The college currently has 4,100 students, with 3,000 at the new campus. It offers new programs such as diesel mechanics, marine technology, construction management, plumbing, electrical programs, culinary arts and truck driving, all areas in high demand that employers throughout the region are seeking to hire, said Perren.

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GAINESVILLE-HALL COUNTY MARKET REPORT

VIEWPOINT

Gainesville revitalizing its downtown for future growth

Every city has a downtown. What are you doing to make yours stand out?

In today's competitive economy, the city of Gainesville is working hard to attract new jobs and housing to our central business district.

We can't take credit for all of the success Gainesville has enjoyed in redeveloping the downtown area. The picturesque historic square, lakeside setting with mountain views, and easy interstate access are existing advantages. However, we have added a few innovative tools to our economic development toolbox that have changed the direction of downtown.

A Tax Allocation District (TAD) provides an incentive for investment in downtown properties that might otherwise be too expensive to redevelop. Tax increment financing has attracted game-changing projects such as Carroll Daniel Construction's five-story corporate headquarters on Main Street and Knight Real Estate's high-rise condos overlooking the Downtown Square. The TAD also enabled the demolition of dilapidated buildings that have now been replaced with brand new businesses, bringing more jobs downtown.



Danny Dunagan is the mayor of the city of Gainesville.

The city also strategically invested in key properties downtown, some through partnerships with the private sector. The iconic pedestrian bridge that stretches across Jesse Jewell Parkway, connecting historic downtown and midtown, was built through such a partnership. We are requesting proposals to develop remaining parcels to match the vision established by the Downtown Gainesville Renaissance Strategic Vision and Plan, created in 2015 with the help of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at University of Georgia and extensive community participation.

We continue to join forces with local, state and federal partners to revitalize downtown. The Hall County-Gainesville Land Bank Authority was recently created to revitalize blighted areas, taking abandoned property and turning it into homes that benefit the surrounding neighborhood. State and federal Opportunity Zones drive long-term private investment into low-income communities, and Gainesville is fortunate to have both types of Opportunity Zones.

A successful downtown has a healthy ecosystem, with all the parts working in synergy. New businesses bring employees who need a place to eat lunch, who shop at nearby retailers and who might want to live close to work. The city has expanded parking, built wider sidewalks and improved landscaping to make downtown more pedestrian friendly. The final connection of the Highlands to Islands Trail is under construction, which will create a seamless greenway through downtown from Lake Lanier to the Midtown Greenway and beyond to the Chicopee Mill area. The trail will connect intown residents with the places where they work and play.

Beyond the physical connection, there is an intangible connection that

is important to a downtown ecosystem. It's the welcome, excited feeling that you get when you enter a place where you "belong." A truly innovative economic development tool known as "place-making" is the creation of environments where people want to invest their time. Gainesville is proud to be one of three Georgia cities selected for the Place-making Collaborative pilot program by the Georgia Municipal Association and UGA's Carl Vision Institute. We are learning how to transform overlooked areas, like an unsightly downtown alley, into a functional space that expresses the uniqueness of the community.

Downtown is the heart of any city, pumping economic health throughout the community. There's no doubt that Gainesville's economy is booming. Once again, Gainesville was ranked No. 3 among America's Best-Performing Small Metropolitan Areas by the Milken Institute, an economic think tank in Santa Monica, Calif. That means Gainesville has one of the best economies in the United States based on job creation, wage gains and technology growth. We are fortunate to have strong community partners that will continue to foster Gainesville's economic prosperity.

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GAINESVILLE-HALL COUNTY MARKET REPORT

CHAMBER CHAIR

Health care, transportation areas of growth in Hall County

BY MELANIE LASOFF LEVS
mlevs@bizjournals.com

Carol Burrell, president and CEO of Northeast Georgia Health System, is preparing in July to pass the baton of chair of the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce to Brian Rochester of Rochester & Associates. She shared with Atlanta Business Chronicle her thoughts on the region's growth and some initiatives of note during her tenure as chair. The conversation has been edited for space and clarity.



Carol Burrell

boost to the community. In addition to education, the facilities there are fantastic. It's given us the opportunity for a number of community events using that space [including a commercial kitchen to offer space for community culinary classes].

What goals have you achieved as chair of the chamber? The new chair will be coming in in July. Under my watch, with unemployment being at an all-time low, we have been working on how we can enhance workforce development, even going back starting in the schools. We have 40 work-based high school students working in different industries here. Some students are not looking to go to college and there are companies here that the chamber has partnered with bringing in those work-study programs, training and providing education to those students. In addition, we just had our second annual 7th-grade career path

[program] with 50 businesses coming in and over 1,200 7th-grade students hearing about future career opportunities. A big boost to the community is the Northeast Georgia Health System establishing its graduate medical education (GME) program. We'll be receiving our first residents in July; they'll be 20 in internal medicine and six surgical residents. Over the course of the next five years, that program will grow upwards to 180 residents. It's certainly a boost from a health care standpoint and an economic boost to the community, as these folks and their families are moving in. Our goal is once they complete their residency, that this will be a place they want to live and work. There's a lot to putting it together. We hired and brought on board experienced faculty that have developed and led other GME programs. We've made a number of facility enhancements that are requirements to becoming an accredited program. For example, this is not just residents coming in but we've had to educate our own staff on what it's like to have residents here and how we'll integrate them into our work and our culture. We are educating our community, our

patients, that there are going to be young physicians that will be attending and learning under the existing medical staff. We strongly believe that it will help us all to learn and be better and more advanced, with those young, inquisitive minds coming in and challenging us.

What are some of the challenges Hall County is facing and how is the Chamber working to overcome them? One challenge I mentioned is workforce. That continues to be an effort we focus on. With growth in this area, certainly transportation is a key component. We've got a number of initiatives within the county and I-985 is part of that. We are looking at bridge replacements, street widening and trying to improve transportation throughout the region. While we experience growth and are excited about that, we have residents looking to come to this area because it's a great community, with recreational activities, health care, quality of life. And with that comes those opportunities [to discuss] how you develop infrastructure, transportation and housing to accommodate that.

Q&A **What have been some of the highlights of the year for the chamber so far?** We had over 1,200 new jobs this past year, so we've seen significant growth with small industry, which is 99 percent of what makes Hall County successful. We are excited about what the Northeast Georgia Inland Port Terminal will bring to the area. It's going to offer a direct rail connection to the terminal in Savannah and will also create jobs. We've had a number of initiatives of note. Lanier Tech opened and has already been a real

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GAINESVILLE-HALL COUNTY MARKET REPORT

COUNTY INVESTMENT

Growth and development focus of NE Georgia region

BY FRAN M. PUTNEY
Contributing Writer

Home to a diverse array of U.S., and international businesses and manufacturing companies, Gainesville-Hall County is enjoying large economic growth. During 2018, it added 14 new and expanded businesses, nearly 1,200 jobs and experienced an 80 percent increase in capital investment from 2017, to \$310 million in 2018, according to the **Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce**.

The area is attractive to businesses for its skilled workforce and proximity to Atlanta's international airport, as well as recreational areas like Lake Lanier and North Georgia mountains, said **Tim Evans**, vice president of economic development for the chamber.

The strength of the area lies in the employers who look for qualified staff "but also want to have a place where executives have a better quality of life and want to move their families," he added.

Pattillo Industrial Real Estate, for example, is developing its third industrial park in 20 years in Hall County. "It's a wonderful place for business and a wonderful community," said **Ben Stafford**,



Ben
Stafford

Pattillo vice president. "It's hitting on all cylinders and has been for quite some time."

Pattillo recently signed Dutch manufacturer **VDL Groep** to fill a 150,000-square-foot speculative building in the Oakwood South Business Park. VDL Groep adds 110 jobs and an investment of \$17 million in Hall County. Pattillo currently is seeking interest for a



Mincey Marble built a manufacturing plant and corporate offices.

SPECIAL



Gainesville Business Park is the new home to Mincey Marble.

SPECIAL

► GAINESVILLE-HALL COUNTY AT A GLANCE

- 300-plus manufacturing and processing concerns
- 48 international company locations representing 15 foreign countries
- 30 percent of employment related to manufacturing
- Added 3,794 jobs from Oct. 2017 to Oct. 2018, a 3.9 percent increase for the 12-month period
- Population of county grew by 12.5 percent from 2010 to 2018. (2018 population: 202,221; 2030 projected population: 245,00)
- City of Gainesville population: 42,000 (2030 projected population: 65,000)
- Gainesville-Hall County identified by U.S. Census Bureau among the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the United States.

Source: *Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Report 2019*; Bryan Lackey, city manager of Gainesville

300,000-square-foot industrial speculative building that will be ready by summer, Stafford said.

When leaders at **Mincey Marble**, a 42-year-old manufacturer of cast marble bath products sold primarily to the hotel industry, knew it was time to move on from its two aging buildings, they chose to stay in Hall County because of its established workforce: 210 plant workers and 40 service/office employees, according to **Donna Mincey**, president and CEO of the company.

It built a 347,000-square-foot manufacturing plant with an additional 30,000 square feet for corporate offices on 80 acres in the Gainesville Business Park. The new facility enabled the

installation of efficient production equipment, which allows Mincey Marble to better compete with manufacturing in countries like Mexico and China without needing to add workers, she added.

"I'm proud of the new facility and I



Donna
Mincey

think our employees are too," Mincey said. "I was nervous about moving but I'm so thrilled to see the business is still expanding in 2019, and it looks good for 2020. I'm pleased we made

the move in an economy that supports the financial outlay."

The **Northeast Georgia Inland Port**, set to open in 2021, will be a catalyst for even greater economic growth, providing high-speed rail connecting Gainesville to the **Port of Savannah**. It is being developed on 104 acres in the Gateway Industrial Centre near Highway 365, and will be operated by the **Georgia Ports Authority** and served by **Norfolk Southern**.

"It's a significant capital investment," said Evans. "That's a piece of infrastructure that will benefit all our existing industries in providing a new trade route option for container traffic that will be both inbound – parts and components, and outbound – exported finished goods."

The port will serve companies throughout the region, according to Evans, including: **Fox Factory Holding Corp.**, which is investing upwards of \$47 million and creating up to 800 jobs, and **Auto Metal Direct**, which is planning a 300,000-square-foot facility for its U.S., headquarters, sales and fulfillment center. Both companies plan to use local construction and engineering firms.

Kubota also is making a \$220 million investment in a new 502,000-square-foot facility in the Gateway Industrial Centre, adding 580 jobs.

Geveko Markings, a Swedish road and pavement markings materials maker, has acquired 20 acres in the Gainesville Business Park for a new 80,000-square-foot manufacturing center and North American headquarters that will employ 50 to 75 people within the first year.

Other firms growing their North American businesses in Gainesville-Hall County include: **King's Hawaiian**; **Zebra Technologies**; **Etori**; **Bitzer US**; **Mars Wrigley Confectionery**; **Milliken & Co**; **Performance Foodservice** and **ZF**.

The city of Gainesville is also undergoing growth and development. Gainesville City Manager **Bryan Lackey** said the city will be its own first tenant in its seventh business park, when it relocates the Gainesville department of water and sewer and public works maintenance facilities to the new Gainesville 85 Business Park when it opens in early 2020.

In downtown Gainesville, \$53 million in private investment will add three new multi-use buildings, including much-anticipated residential and retail facilities. A new **Northeast Georgia Health Systems** resident program will bring more than 100 doctors in the next five years, and **Brenau University's** expanding graduate program will further drive the need for downtown Gainesville housing, Lackey said.

In anticipation of Gainesville's growth, the city is also investing in infrastructure improvements and forming a new Tax Allocation District (TAD) for its west side, to revitalize and drive newer retail into an aging area.

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