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# Georgia Trend

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COUNTY

*Lanier Technical College*



*Downtown Flowery Branch*



*Northeast Georgia Inland Port*



## Gainesville-Hall County, GA

- FASTEST GROWING METRO AREA IN GEORGIA
- REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS FOR FIVE-HOSPITAL HEALTH SYSTEM
- BEST SMALL CITIES FOR BUSINESS
- NATIONWIDE TOP 10/ SMALL METRO FOR JOB CREATION & INVESTMENT
- HOME TO LAKE LANIER, ONE OF AMERICA'S MOST-POPULAR LAKES

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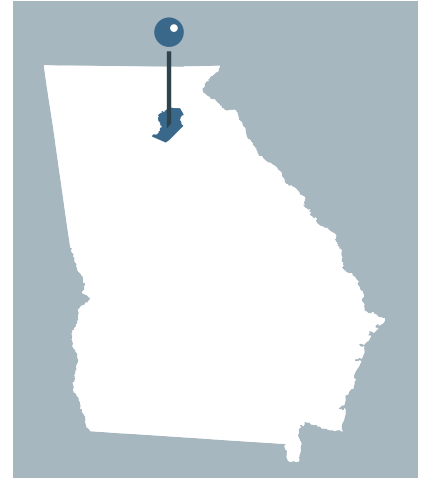


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GAINESVILLE

HALL COUNTY



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“Gainesville-Hall County is very resilient because of the diverse economic drivers in advanced manufacturing [nearly 30% of employment], healthcare [15% of employment] and education services that fuel the economy and allow it to keep more dollars locally,” says Tim Evans, senior vice president of the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce. “The breadth of the advanced manufacturing sector, from pharmaceutical and food to agricultural equipment, helps ensure that the largest economic base for Hall County’s employment outlook can withstand the headwinds of a national or global recession.”

### Connections and Opportunities

Gainesville-Hall County is home to more than 330 manufacturing and processing facilities and 60 international companies from 21 foreign countries, according to the chamber. The area can leverage all of the logistical advantages that Atlanta enjoys and will soon have the port coming right to its doorstep.

The planned Northeast Georgia Inland Port, a transport center project that received National Environmental Policy Act approval in May, will be a huge addition to the Gainesville-Hall County area, where 9,682 jobs are supported by port activity. The Geor-

**Strong and Resilient:**

Tim Evans, senior vice president of the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce, at Boot Barn Hall



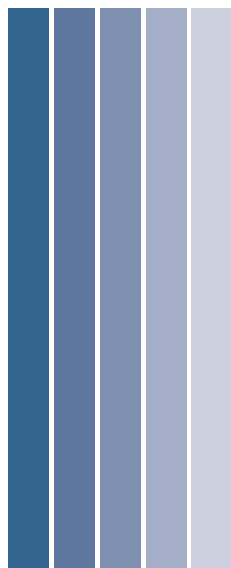
# Crowd Favorite

## Healthcare, manufacturing and small business

[ By Brian Lee ]

**H**all County is striking and liking a special balance, from big business and development to personal advancement and family fun. It’s as impactful as the burgeoning manufacturing sector and a multi-billion-dollar health system and as refreshing as the breeze coming off Lake Lanier. The effect is both far and wide, including high-volume connections to Georgia’s ports and the groundbreakings of global companies, and centralized with a revitalized downtown where one can get everything from a premium coffee to a degree in psychology.

Job growth in Gainesville and Hall County, specifically in healthcare, advanced manufacturing and small business, has driven residential growth and home price appreciation to such levels that it was named the No. 1 housing market nationally in Bankrate.com’s Housing Heat Index at the start of the summer. The high-growth city also was ranked in the top eight Best Performing Small Cities in the country in



## SNAPSHOT



### POPULATION

(2022)

Hall County	212,692
Gainesville	45,282

### PER CAPITA INCOME

(2022)

Hall County	\$33,209
Gainesville	\$30,115
Georgia	\$34,516

### UNEMPLOYMENT

(July 2023)

County	2.4%
Gainesville	2.7%
Georgia	3.1%

### SOURCES

+ U.S. Census Bureau  
+ Georgia Department of Labor



**Huge Addition:** Rendering of planned Northeast Georgia Inland Port

gia Ports Authority (GPA) anticipates the rail hub will open with volumes of 60,000 containers per year after its 2026 completion, serving a key area for the production of heavy equipment, food and forest products. It will be addition by subtraction – reducing the toll on Georgia highways and the carbon footprint of approximately 36 million truck miles in the terminal's first year of operation.

GPA President and CEO Griff Lynch notes that the inland port will be nestled in the heart of the I-85 manufacturing and logistics corridor and benefit from rail connections to Norfolk Southern as well as proximity to the the National Highway Freight Network. "It's going to deliver more economical supply chain alternatives, extend Georgia's rail advantage and reduce demands on state roads," he says.

Hall County Commission Chair Richard Higgins says, "The inland port will cement Hall County's legacy as a leading manufacturing hub for the state and region. Most importantly, it will provide jobs and an overall boost to the local economy, showing once again that our county is a great place to do business."

The 1,300-acre Gainesville 85 Business Park continues to see major activity, with a sixth lot pending sale in late summer. It has been in demand since its inception; car hauler manufacturer Cottrell bought two of the 20 total lots, which are sized from 14 to 112 acres for industry and office, before the

park's groundbreaking in April 2021.

"We're creating a business park with a community environment that encourages creativity, interaction and innovation, centered around the preservation and use of the property's natural features," says Bryan Lackey, city manager for Gainesville, which has partnered with the Gainesville-Hall County Development Authority. "Environmental design has been incorporated into the park featuring nature trails and existing youth sports facilities."

In November, Swiss firm medmix will start production at a new 300,000-square-foot facility in Flowery Branch. Using high-tech injection molding and assembly, the company will manufacture devices used during surgery and dental procedures, as well as EpiPen-like drug delivery.

"We will bring highly competitive wages, climate-controlled environments and clean working conditions to over 250 employees as the buildout progresses," says James Kirk, president and site lead for medmix Healthcare U.S., who added that the plant will expand through five phases over the next 10 years.

Medmix, a Swiss health-care manufacturing compa-



CONTRIBUTED

**Medmix Moves In:** Girts Cimermans, CEO, James Kirk, site lead in Flowery Branch; Jennifer Dean, chief financial officer, Xavier Schops, general counsel and Levi Quinn, chief operating officer



ny that is more than a century old, made the decision to expand into the United States and specifically Flowery Branch for increased production capacity and expanded customer service. With its proximity to Atlanta and the world's busiest airport, the Port of Savannah and the region's interstate system, medmix loved the logistics of the region. And Flowery Branch has just enough separation from the major metro to yield savings on the cost of doing business.

"We looked at the available trades workforce and recognized this area of Georgia and specifically Hall County as a rapidly growing region," Kirk says. "We believe that the location near universities like Kennesaw State, Georgia Tech, UGA and several others gives us an advantage on acquiring talent. Medmix has started conversations with the area colleges to bring



**Economic Boost:** Hall County Commission Chair Richard Higgins

an injection molding European-style apprenticeship to the local education system to encourage more trade skills in our area."

### Downtown Development

Gainesville, once billed the "Poultry Capital of the World," has a lot to crow about. The town whose history includes both a massive fire and a gold rush – and which thankfully long ago rebranded from its former name Mule Camp Springs – is quite hot and definitely on the money. Nearly 1,200 new housing units are being developed on or near the Midtown Greenway in the walkable downtown, according to the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce.

The National, the approximately \$80 million redevelopment of an entire vacant block in downtown Gainesville by Capstone Property Group (CPG), has delivered a 130-room hotel, a 154-unit apartment tower, "eatertainment" and other restaurant concepts, and conference/event space.

The Courtyard by Marriott includes a pedestrian plaza connecting to the Class A residential community.

"We consider this hotel to be one of the nicest Courtyards in the country and anticipate it to influence tourism in Gainesville," says Jeff Payne, chair of Gainesville-based Capstone. "The mixed-use development has great walkability to neighboring restaurants, offices and shops in downtown."

The adjacent historic Walton-Jackson Building has been renovated into meeting



**Amazing Growth:** Jeff Payne, chair of Gainesville-based Capstone Property Group, at the Courtyard by Marriott



KEVIN GARRETT

**Encouraging Innovation:** Bryan Lackey, Gainesville city manager

and restaurant space, including Decoy, the eatertainment venue where customers can bowl or play tech-infused mini-golf or their favorite golf course in simulator bays. The Alley, an outdoor bar, and North Georgia BBQ will round out the space.

"Gainesville has seen amazing growth in recent years, and we are incredibly thrilled to be a part of that growth," Payne says. "We believe our additions will complement other redevelopment projects, such as the Gainesville Renaissance building."

Just five blocks away, facing the square in downtown Gainesville, the three-story mixed-use Gainesville Renaissance development is opening many doors. All of the first-floor retail space has been leased; Taqueria Tsunami, Onward Reserve, Boarding Pass Coffee, WDUN Media, Kilwins Ice Cream, Monkees Women's Clothing and Cotto Modern Italian Restaurant now call the prime space home. Scheduled for completion this fall, the \$25 million Roddy Properties development houses Brenau University's Lynn J. Darby School of Psychology and Adolescent Counseling on the second floor and eight residential units on the top floor.

"It is truly a renaissance in the downtown area of Gainesville," says Fred Roddy, CEO of Roddy Properties, of the full block development's classic style with wood-frame brick, limestone and cast-iron railings. "As the name implies, we set out to build a project that would raise the tide for the downtown area, a project that would look like it had always been there."

A rapidly growing entertainment company chose Gainesville for its second-ever U.S. location. In July, Notes Live opened Boot Barn Hall, the first large-scale music

venue in Gainesville, which is certainly music to the ears of fans and surrounding businesses.

"We target cities where there's a thriving local scene and community feel, but where residents typically have to drive to the closest big city to get world-class live music experiences," says Notes Live CEO J.W. Roth. "Gainesville is the perfect place for our second operating venue: a town with excellent theatre, food and even ballet performances, but no major indoor venue for national touring musicians. And its residents provide stout demand – people who work in all kinds of industries, from poultry to the Northeast Georgia Health System, or study at Brenau University and University of North Georgia. It's a positive feedback loop between our business and the growing population."

The 14,500-square-foot music venue includes an additional 3,575 square feet of mezzanine seating with 15 private suites and a \$1.5 million audio and visual system. The Bourbon Brothers Smokehouse and Tavern restaurant completes the entertainment campus.

Flowery Branch's downtown is blossoming anew. Completed in May, the first approximately \$6 million phase of the revitalization of "Olde Town" delivered a renovated streetscape and a totally redeveloped Main Street block, as well as a new farmer's market and amphitheater.

"This project has transformed our quaint downtown, which has become a beautiful area our citizens can be proud of," says Tonya Parrish, Flowery Branch's city manager. "A historic downtown, with an interesting mix of old and new, coupled with city-sponsored events and easy access to Lake Lanier make Flowery Branch a desirable destination."

## Healthy Hall

Hall County is also known for its growing medical facilities. Northeast Georgia Health System, a five-hospital system headquartered in the county, is investing nearly \$1.2 billion in new beds and services at Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) Gainesville and NGMC Braselton. In Gainesville, the 663,000-square-foot, 11-story hospital expansion, which will include 150 rooms, emergency and cardiology services, topped out in the summer with the \$544 million project





CONTRIBUTED

**Classic Beauty:** The mixed-use Gainesville Renaissance development

scheduled for completion in early 2025.

"I'm incredibly proud of the way everyone across the system works together to make sure we are always better tomorrow than we are today – and that includes improving the health of the economy in the communities we serve," says Carol Burrell, president and CEO of Northeast Georgia Health System. "We're fortunate to be able to improve our facilities and bring new services to our communities when so many other hospitals are facing layoffs or even closure."

NGMC Braselton is undergoing a 235,000-square-foot, three-story expansion to its existing tower and 31,000 square feet of clinical renovation, which includes an expansion to the emergency department and surgery suite. Additionally, the 55,000-square-foot Medical Plaza 2, home to the outpatient Braselton Surgery Center, is set to open this fall. Braselton's newest cancer center opened on the campus in June.

Georgia needs more nurses. The state trails only Utah for the lowest nurse-to-population ratio in the country, according to

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- One of the nation's most visited lakes
- Tourist traffic to the Blue Ridge Mountains
- Local governments that support business expansion



[braselton.net](http://braselton.net)



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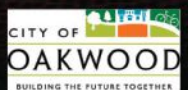
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**Timely Response:** A partnership between Northeast Georgia Health System and University of North Georgia addresses the nursing shortage through an accelerated bachelor of science in nursing program (ABSN). Abigail Gibson and Ronny Wilson are students in the first ABSN cohort.

Nurse.org, and the federal Bureau of Health Workforce projects the state's nursing shortage will be the sixth worst in the country by 2030. A partnership between the University of North Georgia (UNG) and the Northeast Georgia Health System aims to do something about it with an accelerated bachelor of science in nursing (ABSN) track that launched in January 2023.

"This is a timely response to the significant nursing shortage that continues to impact our local healthcare systems," says Heather Harris, DNP, head of the nursing department at UNG. "These future nurses on UNG's ABSN track are trained to provide holistic care and meet community healthcare needs."

Students with a bachelor's or master's degree in another subject can enroll and earn their degree in only 15 months, enabling them to quickly enter the nursing field. The ABSN program is expected to prepare 280 nurses over five years, in addition to the approximately 200 BSN graduates UNG already produces annually.

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happening around the state.



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**Leader for Change:** Brenau University President Anne A. Skleder

Meanwhile, by moving the Darby School of Psychology and Adolescent Counseling to its new downtown location in 2022, Brenau was able to expand its counseling clinic and academic programs, including a doctor of psychology degree that launched this fall. Brenau credits an emphasis on health sciences programs for the 75% increase in masters and doctoral program enrollment in Gainesville over the previous decade.

“Georgia ranks near the bottom nationally in access to quality mental [healthcare], and Brenau seeks to be a leader in changing that situation for the better,” says Brenau University President Anne A. Skleder. “Brenau is pleased to be part of the revitalization of downtown Gainesville.”

### Mixing Pleasure with Business

Even Hall County’s natural assets are getting a makeover. Lanier Islands has drawn countless vacationers to its outdoor recreational offerings over decades, and a new development chapter will ramp up the economic activity at the more than 1,200-acre resort and beyond. When completed in 2026, the Pine Isle relaunch will feature a second hotel and conference center offering more than 200 rooms, 35,000 square feet of meeting space, a waterfront salt-water pool with a bar and grill and one of the best waterfront views on all of Lake Sidney Lanier.

“Our newest hotel and conference center will provide an economic boon to Hall County and all of Northeast Georgia, bringing additional

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**Indoor Fun:** Game Changer, a new family entertainment center at Lanier Islands Resort, opened in February.

jobs, economic development, tourism and financial prosperity to the region,” says Matthew Bowling, vice president at Lanier Islands Resort. “By doubling the amount of meeting space and hotel rooms at Lanier Islands, larger companies will continue

to be attracted to Northeast Georgia as Hall County continues to experience unprecedented growth.”

In February, the first phase of Lanier Islands’ relaunch kicked off with the opening of Game Changer, a new family entertainment center. The 30,000-square-foot indoor fun center offers virtual sports suites, axe throwing, an escape room, an indoor putting course, billiards and arcade games, as well as plenty of dining and two full bars.

“Hall County and Gainesville are communities constantly focused on empowering economic growth and progress, without forgetting their local community principles,” Bowling says. “We share the same characteristics at Lanier Islands. While constantly striving to become a world-class resort destination, we are quick to remember our local families and companies who have helped shape us into who we are as a company.”

Just one more reason for Hall County’s growing popularity.

## Learn to *Lead* here.

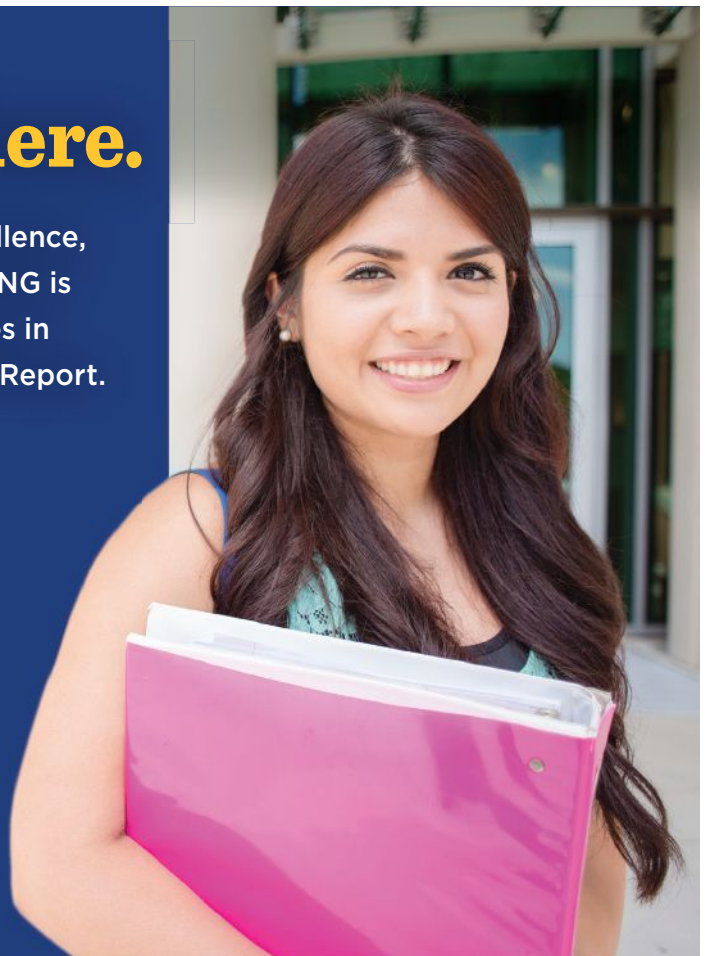
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## LOCAL FLAVOR



### Growing Connections:

Drew Echols, co-owner of Jaemor Farms, and Carli Echols Jones, agritourism and marketing coordinator

## Giving From the Heart

**THE FARMING LIFE CAN SEEM A PASTORAL PARADOX:** solitary days contrasted with critical connections to things much larger than self, including the land and community. Jaemor Farms, which recently opened The Eatery in northeast Hall County, takes connection to a whole other level.

It all started 40-plus years ago with founder Jimmy Echols' focus on "service to humanity," where making meals, memories and a difference are all baked into the family-style approach. Whether sponsoring a table at the food bank's annual fundraiser or organizing a Hometown Heroes benefit weekend, the farm continues to be guided by its owners' priorities – children, churches and community – in helping others. Co-owner Drew Echols and the team support Extra Special People (ESP), an organization for people of all abilities, and its Java Joy program, a mobile coffee cart that employs adults with disabilities.

Jaemor Farms knows how to satisfy an appetite – the homemade chicken salad and pimiento cheese sandwich topped with pepper jelly and fresh bacon are fan favorites at The Eatery – but it also is quite adept at feeding the soul. Customers share special moments and create lasting memories on the farm, including Ashley announcing to her family in a sunflower patch at the farm's U-Pick Flower Days that a baby was on the way and Sawyer saying yes to her husband-to-be in the farm's idyllic apple orchard. One Florida family has four generations, from age 85 down to newborn great-grandchildren, that visit Jaemor's roadside market when traveling north.

But perhaps the most special memories come from the family who started the farm.

"My grandparents would close the store on a Sunday, invite our whole family and just about the entire community to join them for a late spring picnic at the covered gazebo located on the hilltop that overlooks the whole farm," Carli Echols Jones says. "Some years there could be over 100 people there. We'd spend the whole afternoon eating, sharing stories and exploring the farm. Time didn't exist out there."

The connections keep growing at Jaemor Farms, where the founders' grandchildren have met their significant others, gotten engaged in the zinnia field or peach orchard and tied the knot.

"I grew up knowing that we are called to be good stewards of the land and the produce, and I believe that this service to humanity goes one step further," says Echols. "I believe that we are here to serve, but also to be a sustainable, profitable business that generations of our family can enjoy." – *Brian Lee* 📷