



Economic Development 2023 Year-End Report

The Greater Hall Chamber Economic Development Council (EDC) reports 2023 year-end results of **nine new and expanding developments which will add 500 new jobs and \$323 million in new capital investment** to Gainesville-Hall County. Since January 1, 2022, a total of 24 new capital investments have been announced with more than 1,700 new jobs and nearly \$1.1 billion in new capital investment. The fundamental economic drivers to the local economy indicate that 2024 will feature **better than average economic performance** for Gainesville-Hall County when compared to other metro areas in Georgia and the nation.

Georgia has earned the #1 ranking for its business environment for an unprecedented tenth consecutive year. During that time, **Gainesville-Hall County has been the Top Job producing Metropolitan Area in the State**. In 2023, *Area Development* magazine and *Site Selection* magazine named Gainesville-Hall County one of the Top Small Metros in the Nation for Job Creation and Investment. Similarly, *Forbes* magazine has rated Gainesville-Hall County as one of the “Best Small Places for Business & Careers” for the last nine years. Since 2015, the Chamber’s economic development program has assisted **155 new and expanding businesses, which have announced 8,800 jobs and \$2.7 billion in new capital investment**.

Most of the jobs and capital investment announced during 2023 are a direct result of the Chamber’s cornerstone effort to support existing business and industry. **Existing industry expansions** announced during the year include expansions at Corporate Storage, CMS, Hydro, Mars Wrigley, Eskimo Cold Storage and Big Creek Foods. Investments in new automation technologies and localizing the supply chain continue to be a trend in the existing industry investments.

New corporate facilities announced in 2023 included facilities for CJ Foodville and RL Cold Logistics. These new facility locations will be under construction in 2024. Additionally, many expansions announced in 2022 were under construction in 2023, including Kubota, King’s Hawaiian, Cottrell, Mar-Jac Poultry and Agile Cold Storage. All of these projects are on a timeline to complete construction and begin operations in the year ahead.

At its December 2023 board meeting, The **Georgia Ports Authority** Board approved a \$127 million contract to construct the new **Blue Ridge Connector (BRC)** in the first quarter of 2024. The new inland port terminal, located north of Gainesville on Highway 365, will shorten the supply chain for container shipments between Northeast Georgia and global markets via a new rail connection to the Port of Savannah. Local contractors and subcontractors will play a leading role in the BRC’s construction throughout 2024 and 2025, adding to the economic impact in the Gainesville-Hall County business community over the next two years. The Georgia Ports Authority estimates the BRC will begin operations in early 2026.

Food and food-related businesses were heavily featured in the recent expansions, including King’s Hawaiian, CJ Foodville, Mars-Wrigley, RL Cold Storage, Big Creek Foods, Mar-Jac Poultry and Agile Cold Storage. Hall County is the top contributor to economic value and employment related to agriculture in Georgia, with an estimated \$4.4 billion in agricultural value production and 17,643 jobs related to agricultural production and food processing. Gainesville-Hall County has one of the nation’s highest concentrations of food processing per capita, and it is one

of the contributing factors to Hall County's economic resiliency. Hall County's Jaemor Farms is a top commodity producer and one of the largest Agritourism destinations in Georgia, with over one million visitors in 2023.

Major commercial developments that opened in 2023 include Capstone Property Group's mixed-use Courtyard Marriott hotel and The National apartment development, the Gainesville Solis II apartments in downtown Gainesville, Bourbon Brothers, NoFo Brewing, the Midland Housing Development, and the new Jekyll Brewing.

Additional downtown developments are in the works for 2024, including the Interactive Neighborhood for Kids' planned development in Oakwood and additional Downtown Flowery Branch investments.

The new year will begin with **approximately 3 million square feet of new industrial speculative building developments** in Gainesville, Oakwood, Flowery Branch and Buford available for occupancy in 2024. The region's largest industrial developers are actively building and leasing new space in Hall County, including Pattillo Industrial Real Estate, Logistics Property Company, Crow Holdings, CA Ventures, FD Stonewater, Adams Properties and PB Properties. New industrial investments underway in Hall County will total more than \$200 million in real property improvements. Many local firms are employed in the construction of these new industrial developments, and business activity for these firms is forecasted to remain strong well into the new year. The new industrial space will offer opportunities for new and expanding businesses to grow, add jobs, make new investments, and add to bottom-line business growth.

"The Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce's Economic Development results are a reflection of the commitment from business and elected leaders to work together to achieve remarkable things," said **Glenn Barnes**, Area Manager for Georgia Power and 2023-24 Chair of the Chamber's Economic Development Council. "Gainesville-Hall County's long-term success in economic development is a product of community leadership working together on infrastructure planning and investment to support business growth."

In 2024, infrastructure development on Highway 365, the Athens Highway corridor and the **new 1,300-acre Gainesville 85 Business Park** will be important to developing a future place to grow for expanding existing industries and new businesses. Planned infrastructure investments in 2024 include major investments in roads, water, sewer, gas, and electric distribution, expanding broadband access and investments in Hall County and Gainesville City Schools.

In the most recent 12-month data, the Georgia Department of Labor reports the Gainesville-Hall Metropolitan Area is finishing the year with an **unemployment rate at 2.7%**. The Gainesville-Hall County labor force is at an all-time high of 110,579 as of October 2023. More than 80 employers have job openings posted on the Greater Hall Chamber's website seeking full and part-time employees.

"The Chamber provides a forum for the business community, educators and elected officials to work together on the issues that impact existing industries, small businesses, healthcare, retail and professional services," said **Tim Evans**, Sr. Vice President of Economic Development.

The Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce hosted two job fairs in 2023 and will host a **Spring Job Fair & Career Expo at the Gainesville Civic Center on April 11, 2024**. The job fairs have proven to be beneficial to both employers and those seeking employment. The Fall 2023 Job Fair had some 1,000 job seekers in attendance.

With a growing demand for talent and low unemployment in the Gainesville-Hall County Metropolitan Area, the Greater Hall Chamber, business leaders and educators **remain focused on Work Based Learning and Apprenticeships** for high-skilled career paths in demand by area businesses. During 2023, **Lanier Technical College reached a record enrollment of more than 6,100 students** at the Gainesville campus. Highly skilled talent is much sought-after and Lanier Technical College has a 100% job placement rate for its graduates. The Chamber's Workforce Development Task Force is a partnership with Lanier Technical College, Hall County Schools, Gainesville

City Schools, Brenau University, the University of North Georgia, and private businesses. The mission is to ensure businesses can acquire the talent and skills they need for sustainable growth and to replace highly skilled workers as they retire.

Healthcare Services in Gainesville-Hall County enhance quality of life and provide a direct economic impact for an estimated **1.8 million Georgia residents in the 18-county service area**. A 2023 study by the Greater Hall Chamber determined there are **483 regional healthcare providers located in Gainesville-Hall County** that **employ 16,120** and **provide \$1.26 billion in annual wages** in the community. The region's largest healthcare provider, Northeast Georgia Health System (NGHS), is headquartered in Hall County and employs more than 11,000 throughout the region as part of a five-hospital system. NGHS is constructing a **major \$560 million campus expansion** for the Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) Gainesville and an expansion to the NGMC Braselton campus estimated at \$200 million. NGMC's Graduate Medical Education (GME) Program, in its fifth year, has earned accreditation in Family Medicine, General Surgery, Internal Medicine, OB/GYN, Emergency Medicine, Psychiatry, Cardiovascular Disease and Hospice and Palliative Medicine. Adding to the growing healthcare education programs, Brenau University recently added a Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies.

Some 99% percent of the 5,326 business establishments in Hall County are small businesses, using the U.S. Small Business Administration's definition of fewer than 500 employees. Approximately 93% of all businesses employ fewer than 50 people. Participation in the Chamber's monthly Small Business Seminars has grown in 2023 through virtual and hybrid meetings featuring programs on small business finance, hiring personnel, marketing and other topics important to small business. In its sixth year, the Chamber's "**Certified Small Business Partner**" recognition will be conferred to **20 small business owners** for participating in at least six Small Business Seminars.

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About Gainesville-Hall County

Gainesville-Hall County, Georgia is a vibrant and growing community located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Surrounded by beautiful Lake Sidney Lanier, the area offers an unparalleled quality of life and a sound economic future for business and industry. Gainesville-Hall County is home to 47 Fortune 500 firms, more than 330 manufacturing and processing concerns, and more than sixty international companies representing twenty-one foreign countries.

For more information on the Chamber's Economic Development Division, contact:

Tim Evans, Sr. Vice President – tim@ghcc.com

Nikki Chandler, Vice President of Existing Industry – nchandler@ghcc.com

Ryan Jackson, Project Manager – rjackson@ghcc.com

Sarah Nolan, Project Manager – snolan@ghcc.com

Kit Dunlap, President & CEO – kit@ghcc.com

770-532-6206

www.greaterhallchamber.com

December 28, 2023