



Communities of Opportunity: Rural Spaces and Places

June 2010

ONEGEORGIA AWARDS GRANT TO TOOMBS COUNTY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

By: Nancy Cobb, Executive Director



A \$1 million EDGE grant from the OneGeorgia Authority to the Toombs County Development Authority provided assistance with building improvements to assist in the location to Georgia of a manufacturing and distribution facility for Tri-Union Seafoods, LLC d.b.a. Chicken of the Sea International, one of the top producers of canned/pouched tuna capturing 25 percent of the US market share.

Chicken of the Sea located in an existing 212,000 SF industrial building previously occupied by Simonton Building Products, Inc. In addition, COS constructed a 13,968 square-foot freezer facility connected to the existing building needed for its tuna canning operation. The facility is situated on a 27.02-acre site in the Toombs Corporate Center on US Hwy 1 north of Lyons.

Tri-Union Seafoods, LLC (TUS) is a subsidiary of Thai Union International, Inc. (TUI) which is based in San Diego. This processing and canning operation for TUS is the first in Georgia. Chicken of the Sea will invest \$20,000,000 in the facility and create 310 new jobs within four years. The raw tuna is shipped straight from the Port of Savannah to process into shelf stable canned tuna, and then shipped throughout the United States.

The EDGE Fund, a specialized incentive tool, is used to enhance Georgia's competitiveness in attracting significant economic development projects. It is a program providing "deal-closing" funds when one rural Georgia community competes for a business location or expansion with another state or country.

- Required elements: a recommendation for funding from a state agency; private investment commitment and job creation commitment from the beneficiary business.
- Benefits must exceed costs.
- Clawback provisions require partial repayment in the event job-creation or private-investment commitments are not met.

Who Can Apply?

Eligible applicants for EDGE funding are general-purpose local governments, local-government authorities, joint or multi-county development authorities in any of the directly eligible counties or conditionally eligible counties. Eligible sub-recipients are legally established business entities.

How Much Money is Available?

EDGE Funds are not limited in amount. Grant and/or Loan amounts are recommended by the Georgia Department of Economic Development and are based on economic impact and demonstrated need.

How Can the Funding be Utilized?

EDGE funds may be used for the purchase of publicly owned assets such as land and site development; infrastructure improvements; and publicly owned/ privately leased assets, such as land, buildings & machinery and equipment. Demonstration that relocation or expansion will enhance the overall economic security of the county is an important consideration. Applicants are encouraged to seek the advice of the Authority prior to submitting an application.

Here's How it Works:

Applications are online at www.onegeorgia.org and are accepted on an ongoing basis. Funding is used only when the industry is actively considering a location in another state.

BUTTS COUNTY – STRENGTHENING THE SCHOOLS AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY

By: Dr. Donna O'Neal – Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education

A successful school system educates workers who support a strong economy and attract businesses which spur economic growth. A strong economic environment supports and funds quality schools. Those were the key messages more than 100 members of the Butts County community heard when they met March 11 to discuss the "Economics of Education." Concerned about the vitality of the local economy, Butts County leaders met in a day-long "Summit" to discuss the interdependence of education and the economy.



The Summit was sponsored by the Butts County Chamber of Commerce, the Butts County Board of Education and Butts County Partners for Smart Growth (PSG). "Our investment in public education is the most effective strategy we can use to guarantee the economic success of our communities and the lifetime opportunities of our citizens," stated Larry Morgan, director of the PSG and co-chair of the Summit. The goal of the event was to increase awareness and involvement in the connection between the local economy and the school system.

Lynda White, Superintendent of the Butts County Schools began the day with a "State of the Schools" address, indicating the many successes of the school system. "We still have far to go, however," said White.

Butts County, located in middle Georgia has 3,531 students in three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. It has 500 employees.

Steve Dolinger, president of the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, spoke to the leaders about research that clearly proves increasing the graduation rate would impact the community by increasing the buying power and tax revenues and decreasing dependence of low income families. "High school dropouts have a negative impact on the local economy," said Dolinger.

The Partnership recently released a report on 15 successful high schools indicating that "...rigor, relevance, and relationships..." are key in increasing student learning.

In the afternoon the leaders met in five groups to focus discussion on the following topics:

Learning Readiness,
Successful Elementary and Middle Schools,
Preparing Students for High Schools,
Preparing for the World of Work and Postsecondary Opportunities, and
Quality of Life for the Citizenry

Each group began an action plan to address specific concerns. The groups will meet quarterly to re-plan and update their work.

"We have an excellent school system here in Butts County but we realize that there are areas where we can do better," stated Cheryl Hildebrand, co-chair of the event. "This Economics of Education Summit helped us identify ways the community can be involved in our children's education."

GEORGIA TECH PARTNERS WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS, EDUCATORS AND EMPLOYERS IN SOUTHWEST GEORGIA

By: Nancy Fullbright

The ongoing development of knowledge and skills related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) is crucial for competing in the global economy and requires collaboration among educators, employers and economic developers. To help support this collaboration, Georgia Tech's Enterprise Innovation Institute (EI²) and partners have launched an innovative program in southwest Georgia to encourage students in their understanding and appreciation of STEM and related fields.



ABOUT ENTERPRISE INNOVATION INSTITUTE:

The Georgia Tech Enterprise Innovation Institute helps companies, entrepreneurs, economic developers and communities improve their competitiveness through the application of science, technology and innovation. It is one of the most comprehensive university-based programs of business and industry assistance, technology commercialization and economic development in the nation.

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In partnership with Albany Technical College and the Southwest Georgia Agribusiness Consortium, this effort is working to support the future workforce development needs of biotechnology and agribusiness companies through Georgia's Career Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) program.

"STEM and CTAE compliment each other by providing the mechanism to solve real world real problems," said Patricia Jackson, CTAE Director-Dougherty County. "In the area of agriculture alone, STEM components are enhanced and made relevant through growing fish in the aquaculture lab, greenhouse management, landscape design, maintenance and management. It is like CTAE was waiting for STEM to happen!"

During the first four months of 2010, EI² coordinated a number of supportive activities, including a collaborative web-based SharePoint site to facilitate information sharing, the 2010 Young Engineers' Day Engineering Challenge, plant tours to agricultural research and food processing centers and STEM community outreach efforts. Hortense Jackson of Georgia Tech's EI² serves as director for the project.

The effort is part of a broader initiative for Southwest Georgia to become a designated "Georgia Work Ready" region, sponsored by the Governor's Office of Workforce Development. Successful regions are able to create industry-driven regional solutions to improve the high school graduation rate, engage at-risk and out-of-school youth, support high school and middle school career coaches, retrain dislocated workers, increase post-secondary graduation rates and upgrade the skills of the existing workforce. The regional initiative is comprised of a consortium of 15 counties – Baker, Calhoun, Clay, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Grady, Lee, Mitchell, Miller, Quitman, Randolph, Seminole, Terrell and Thomas – that are each working toward the "Georgia Work Ready" designation by improving the talent pool for the region's agribusiness and biotechnology industries.

"The ongoing development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills is important for businesses to successfully compete," said Hortense Jackson, project director at Georgia Tech's Enterprise Innovation Institute. "We are excited about supporting this effort among educators, employers and economic developers as they work to expose their students to the needs of industry and excite their interest in areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics."

ECONOMIC SUMMIT HELD IN SOUTHWEST GEORGIA

Leaders from a nine county region in Southwest Georgia – including Calhoun, Clay, Early, Quitman, Randolph, Stewart, Sumter, Terrell and Webster – recently worked together on a new project with UGA and Congressman Sanford Bishop's office. The project has three components: (1) a content analysis of previous research studies seeking common recommendations and findings in the areas of affordable housing, workforce development and economic development; (2) a pilot community-based workforce housing initiative in Americus; and (3) a pilot economic summit in 2010 for the nine county region, which took place April 1.

GEORGIA RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL PARTICIPATES IN SOUTHERN REGIONAL CONVENING

The Georgia Rural Development Council, along with USDA RD State Director Shirley Sherrod, and nearly 110 State Rural Development Council colleagues throughout USDA's Southern Region convened in Charlotte, North Carolina, May 11 - 12, 2010 to focus on USDA's key priority areas and critical issues facing the region, especially Energy, Broadband, Workforce Development and Rural Economic Development. The goal of the meeting was to address these issues with a local and regional strategy that (1) promotes the creation of new partnerships and regional collaboration, (2) enables regions to share "best practices", and (3) focuses on using regional partnerships to enhance rural program delivery and shape rural economic development policy. The purpose of the Southern Region Convening – which was funded through a Cooperative Agreement with USDA-Rural Development and the Partners for Rural America – was to establish stronger partnerships with key participants across state and regional levels and to encourage communities to work together at the regional level.

FOUR MORE COMMUNITIES DESIGNATED AS COMMUNITIES OF OPPORTUNITY

Thanks to the River Valley Regional Commission, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs designated Dooly, Sumter, Taylor and Webster Counties as Co-Op communities at the Commission's May Board meeting. Over the past year, the local elected officials, the local champion, and their respective implementation teams have worked closely with DCA staff in creating their community improvement strategies.



As participants of Co-Op, each community is required to choose 2-3 goals that can be addressed in a two year period that directly tackles persistent poverty.

As one of several benefits of the Initiative, over the next two years, Dooly, Sumter, Taylor and Webster Counties will continue to work closely with DCA staff and other state agencies in receiving technical assistance to help address the goals listed in their community improvement strategies. Additionally, these communities are now eligible to receive GEFA and Downtown Development Revolving Loans at a reduced rate, a \$5,000 matching grant, and the ability to apply for CDBG funding for two consecutive years. For more information on the Communities of Opportunity Initiative or to review the community improvement strategies, please visit DCA's website or contact Program Coordinator Patrice R. Williams at 770-968-6584 or patrice.williams@dca.ga.gov.

PLANS UNDERWAY FOR 2010 GEORGIA YOUTH SUMMIT

By: Jeff Buckley, Extension 4-H Faculty

The 5th Biennial Georgia Youth Summit will be held on September 11th-13th, 2010 at the Rock Eagle 4-H Center in Eatonton. The Summit will provide county teams of youth and adults with educational opportunities designed to increase awareness of state and local issues, enhance youth-adult partnerships on the local level and equip youth to become active locally in the betterment of their community. The Department of Community Affairs (DCA) provides funding for the Summit as a project of the Georgia Rural Development Council's (GRDC) Youth Leadership Initiative. In order to make the Summit accessible to all, scholarships are provided for four youth and one adult from every county.



This year's Summit Planning Committee has chosen an Olympic theme, "Take Up the Torch: Our Community, Our Future, Our Leaders." Crystal Hardy, a torch bearer for the 2010 Olympics in Calgary, and a Georgia youth who co-founded the Laurens County Green Team, will serve as guest speaker. She'll tell how she started a recycling project in Dublin Georgia and inspire participants to make a difference in their communities. Before attending the Summit, county teams will meet and complete pre-conference work assignments which require them to research issues affecting their communities. At the Summit, participants will hear experts speak on issues related to Economic Development, Education, Health and Safety. County teams will then meet with other county teams from their Service Delivery Area to discuss the issues most relevant to them. Participants will receive Youth and Adult Partnership training, in which youth learn to effectively communicate their opinions and adult leaders learn to listen to youths' ideas and provide them the opportunity to make meaningful decisions.

Once teams have identified their issue they'll decide what they plan to do about it. Volunteers with knowledge of government and awareness of available resources will help connect them with potential collaborators in their areas as they develop their action plan. Using a planning toolkit, they will state the problem, propose solutions, set clear objectives and develop a timeline for program implementation. The Summit culminates with county teams presenting their plans to resource specialists in town hall style meetings. Participants are then challenged to take what they've learned back to their communities and engage peers and community partners. County teams will have the opportunity to apply for mini-grants provided by the GRDC to help get their project started. For information on the 2010 Georgia Youth Summit, contact your County Extension Office at 1-800-ASK-UGA1 or contact 4-H Specialist, Jeff Buckley at 706-542-4H4H, jbuckley@uga.edu or www.georgiayouthsummit.org.