



Rally Countryside



Georgians gather for educational forum on preserving and enhancing the rural way of life

How can rural communities prosper economically while maintaining their pastoral ethos? How can small-town businesses get access to capital? How can run-down strip centers be transformed into revitalized village centers?

These and other questions provided fuel for conversation, debate and plans of action at the third biennial Celebrating Rural Georgia Conference, held Aug. 26-28 in Dublin. Aimed at anyone interested in rural community development, the conference was attended by local government officials, planners, farmers and historic preservationists, as well as representatives from the arts, private industry, nonprofit agencies, and family and juvenile services.

The plenary session of more than 700 was on hand for the final

session showcasing state programs that have benefited development in rural Georgia. Several state policy-makers joined in a panel discussion to explain what their respective state departments are bringing to the table. Moderated by **State Rep. Bob Hanner**, the panel featured:

Jackie Rohosky, DTAE assistant commissioner for economic development programs and head of Quick Start. Rohosky reported that over 50 percent of last year's 315 Quick Start projects were in rural Georgia and over 73 percent were outside the metro Atlanta area — statistics that elicited an enthusiastic round of applause.

Nancy Cobb, OneGeorgia Authority executive director. Cobb noted that economic development is a process, not a destination. "We can build an infrastructure with bricks and mortar," she said, "but if we don't have a trained workforce, the economy won't move."

Janis Cannon, GDITT deputy commissioner of tourism. Cannon extolled the beauty of tourism as a



State Rep. DuBose Porter stands in the DuBose Porter Center with Willie Paulk, Dublin-Laurens County Chamber president. Paulk, who was instrumental in securing the Heart of Georgia Technical College venue to host the conference, received flowers for her efforts in serving as liaison between the conference organizing committee and the city and county.

clean industry. The state's second largest industry, tourism yielded \$16.1 billion in FY01 and employs 200,000 Georgians.

Jeff McCord, Georgia Technology Authority director of intergovernmental relations. "Workforce development is so important," he said. "A community with a well-educated, technology-literate population will be much more likely to attract and sustain business than one that's not."

Marta Rosen, DOT planning administrator. Rosen reported that the Governor's Road Improvement Program had completed 2,591 miles of road since 1986. "Accessibility to all parts of rural Georgia will make it easier for economic development," she said.

Attendees were clearly encouraged by these state initiatives, such as Quick Start delivering workforce training and OneGeorgia Authority funding local projects like the Plains Inn renovation.

"I hope participants gained an awareness that more resources are available now for rural Georgia than ever before," said Willie Paulk, president of the Dublin-Laurens County Chamber of Commerce and Development Authority.



Billed as "saving the best for last" by conference organizers, the final session on state initiatives featured, from left, State Rep. Bob Hanner (moderator), Marta Rosen from DOT, Jeff McCord from Georgia Technology Authority, Jackie Rohosky from Quick Start, Nancy Cobb from OneGeorgia Authority and Janis Cannon from GDITT.