



Positioning a City for Success

Editor's Note: Economic development works best when the entire community is involved. Quick Start has been a part of Georgia's team working with the citizens and businesses of LaGrange for many years, and has been impressed by their dedication and commitment. For this edition of Partner's Perspective, we asked Jane Fryer, LaGrange-Troup County Chamber of Commerce and the Development Authority of LaGrange president, to share the story of how one community came together to prepare itself for business success in the 21st century.

LaGrange has been successful in attracting businesses to our community since the turn of the 20th century when it was known for the textile plants of Callaway Mills and West Point Pepperell, which employed more than 6,000. When Callaway Mills was sold to Deering Milliken in 1969, employment was cut in half and approximately 2,500 people who had never worked anywhere else and had no education were out of work with no prospects of employment.

Compounding the problem was the fact that high school graduates were leaving LaGrange to continue their education, but not coming back to work. In 1973, the city took action and created the Development Authority of LaGrange and staffed it with volunteers. Immediately they went to work talking to experts at the Georgia Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism, CSX, the utility companies and developers seeking advice about how to attract industry. They also went to local banks to finance the purchase of approximately 350 acres for industrial

parks, using as collateral 150 acres donated by the city and county. Once the land was purchased and infrastructure in place — roads, water, sewer, gas — the Development Authority let the world know LaGrange was ready for business.

Today, the Authority owns two industrial parks, the 1,600-acre LaGrange Industrial Park, which is nearly filled to capacity, and the 650-acre Jim Hamilton Industrial Park (named for the Development Authority's first chairman), which has approximately 500 acres remaining. LaGrange is home to such corporate giants as Exxon-Mobil, Kimberly-Clark, Duracell, Dow Jones, Caterpillar and a Wal-Mart distribution center, as well as many Japanese and German companies.

In the '90s when telecommunications technology exploded, LaGrange proactively formed a committee to explore how LaGrange could position itself to become a high-tech leader. First, the technology committee asked consultants at Federal Engineering of Fairfax, Va., to conduct a study determining the needs and desires of LaGrange citizens. Then in 1998, based on the results of the study, the city funded a \$9.6 million bond issue to purchase and upgrade cable transmission lines, then lease them back to Charter Communications with enough capacity to serve the city with cable services.

Because of the city's initiative, LaGrange beat out New York, London, Toronto and Chicago to be named the "Intelligent City of the Year" for 2000 by the World Teleport Association. LaGrange also contracted with Mercer University to provide corporate education shows on local cable channels and,



Jane Fryer, LaGrange-Troup County Chamber of Commerce and the Development Authority of LaGrange president. With approximately 26,000 residents, LaGrange is the seat of Troup County and home to more Fortune 500 companies per capita than any other city its size. Its fiber-optic cables stretch over 200 miles.

through SONET, help local businesses access video and data. These services help our industries, businesses, hospital and local government.

Our pro-business attitude and telecommunications savvy have attracted such businesses as American Home Shield to locate in LaGrange (see *Home in LaGrange*, page 8). Georgia Quick Start has been a significant asset in attracting business and jobs to LaGrange as well, helping such companies as T-Mobile, Caterpillar, Wal-Mart and Goody Products. With the help of Georgia Quick Start and the city's leadership, LaGrange is poised to usher in a new century of growth and prosperity. 

For more information about LaGrange, visit the city's Web site, www.lagrange-ga.org, or visit the Chamber of Commerce Web site, www.lagrangechamber.com.