

Deep in the Heart of Dublin

Dublin has always been a stopover for travelers going between Atlanta and Savannah. But now visitors can get much more than just a hamburger. Dublin is a growing, vibrant city with an excellent location in the middle of the state and near to the major arteries of transportation.

A new welcome center is being built at the intersection of 441 and I-16 at exit 51, which the chamber will manage and oversee. "This is in an effort to document tourism and encourage people to get to know our area better. We have so much to offer!" says Willie Paulk, president of the Dublin-Laurens County Chamber of Commerce and executive director of the development authority.

"With the shrinking of the job market in textiles, we realized we needed to diversify our manufacturing economy. We are now home to several large corporations' plant facilities. Among them are New Holland, YKK, Rockwell, Bassett, Flexsteel, Victor-Forstman, Mohawk Carpet, and SP Newsprint. And virtually all of these industries have been served in some way by Quick Start."

"In my mind, Quick Start is one of our state's best incentives. As far as I know, there are no other states that have this kind of comprehensive training system that can follow through with clients as they get established or expand," says Paulk.

Other economic partners Paulk includes who have been vital to the Dublin-Laurens County economy are Heart of Georgia Technical College; Oglethorpe and Georgia Power companies; Department of Industry, Trade & Tourism; Department of Community Affairs; Department of Labor; and, of course, elected officials. Paulk points to leaders like Terry Coleman, DuBose Porter, and Hugh Gillis, to name a few.

"I think one of the most important 'pulls' comes from the established industries themselves. These people can really sell Dublin because they are here and can witness to our support and the facilities we have to offer. Prospective clients

like to look to them for their professional business opinion," says Paulk.

The labor pool the community draws from has an approximate radius of 45 miles. Paulk explains that people also come to Dublin for recreational, medical, and educational reasons, as well as for jobs. The unemployment rate sits at just below 3.8 percent.

"The biggest boost we've had in

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PRESIDENT, DUBLIN-LAURENS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

recent history, however, was Best Buy's decision to open its distribution center here. That was the most exciting news we had had in a long time," explains Paulk.

The decision was based largely on availability of physical space (both the site location on a four-lane state highway and its proximity to I-16) and the area's ability to supply the workforce needed to grow. Dublin-Laurens County also could guarantee full support in getting the facility up and running in less than nine months, no small task for a building that boasts more than

Willie Paulk, president, Chamber of Commerce and executive director of the Dublin-Laurens County Development Authority.

700,000 square feet. Eventually, the building will incorporate 1.3 million square feet.

Looking to the future, the Dublin-Laurens County Development Authority is enthusiastic about pursuing high-tech companies. The city is in the process of installing fiber optics in a five-mile ring around its center, hoping to encourage Internet service providers and other computer-based services to make Dublin home.

A regional airport also serves as a draw for potential clients, as does the 60,000 square-foot DuBose Porter Regional Business and Industry Training Center at HGTC. Dublin and HGTC very proudly hosted the Georgia Chamber of Commerce Congressional Luncheon, which drew 1,200 attendees in this facility last year.

Many of the area's long-range plans will be shaped by the findings of a major study just conducted by the consulting firm Semaradek-Butler. An in-depth community audit, along with the new census figures, should ensure that the Dublin-Laurens County community will continue to grow at a steady, healthy rate. **OS**

